



The Health and Safety Implications of Workplace Bullying

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Objectives

- Define Workplace Bullying
- Review research on the impact of bullying
 - To persons
 - To organization
- Understand why bullying is framed as an extreme stressor
- Review the health and safety implications of bullying
- Apply the hazard assessment model to bullying

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DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING THE IMPLICATIONS OF BULLYING

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We Have Come a Long Way

- Australia and UK have lead the way
- Since the 1990s a great deal of research has demonstrated the damage to individuals and organizations
- Concept of responsibility for physical and mental health of employees
- High profile cases of workplace murder associated with bullying
- Growing awareness of the health impact of stress
- Quebec introduces psychological harassment law
- Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act amended, new code in effect in 2004
- Introduced new hazards not previously recognized in Alberta Health and Safety Law
 - E.g., harassment, workplace violence, working alone, biological hazards
 - Does not include psychological harm (however, federal jurisdiction does)
 - Currently, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario have "harassment" included in their legislation
 - Extension of liability to prime contractors
 - In Alberta, bullying is addressed through criminal and civil courts at present

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Workplace Bullying Defined

- Harassing, offending, socially excluding, negatively impacting work tasks
- Repeated and regular
- Over time i.e., 6 months
- Escalating
- Person in inferior position
- Different from conflict
- Incidence conservatively estimated at 10% in US and ~30-50% of current plus ever bullied
- Up to 40% in some Canadian studies
- Varies according to profession – nursing, teaching high

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A Progression of Behavior

Banter
Tease/taunt
Malicious gossip

Humiliation
Verbal attack
Nuisance behavior

Sabotage work performance
Denial of professional opportunities
Isolation and exclusion

Cyber abuse
Micromanagement
Mobbing
Retaliation

Damage to property
Physical violence
Murder

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Who Becomes a Target

- Anyone
- Competent workers, high belief in justice, politically unaware
- Anxious and socially inept
- Unassertive avoidant
- Negative
- Over achiever clash with group norms
- Outsider position

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Impact of Bully on Individual

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Obsessions
- Post Traumatic disorders
- Suicidal thinking and suicide
- Loss of self, identity, and beliefs in the world
- Health related concerns such as heart disease
- Financial: loss of career
- Family

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Who Becomes a Bully

- Anyone
- Big but fragile ego
- Lack of social competence
- Micropolitical behavior
- Exposure to culture or superior who models bullying

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Impact on Organization

- Reduced work performance through lower job satisfaction and presenteeism (7x cost of absenteeism)
 - 85% of normal capacity
- Turnover (1.5 x salary)
 - Studies show that 12% leave due to incivility, 18% verbal abuse, 25% due to bullying
 - 46% report intention to leave
- Sickness, absence, disability costs (2 months – 2 years)
 - Risk has been shown to be 1.5x higher
 - In one study, bullied took 7 days more sick days per year
 - UK study estimated that 1/3-1/2 stress related illness due to bullying

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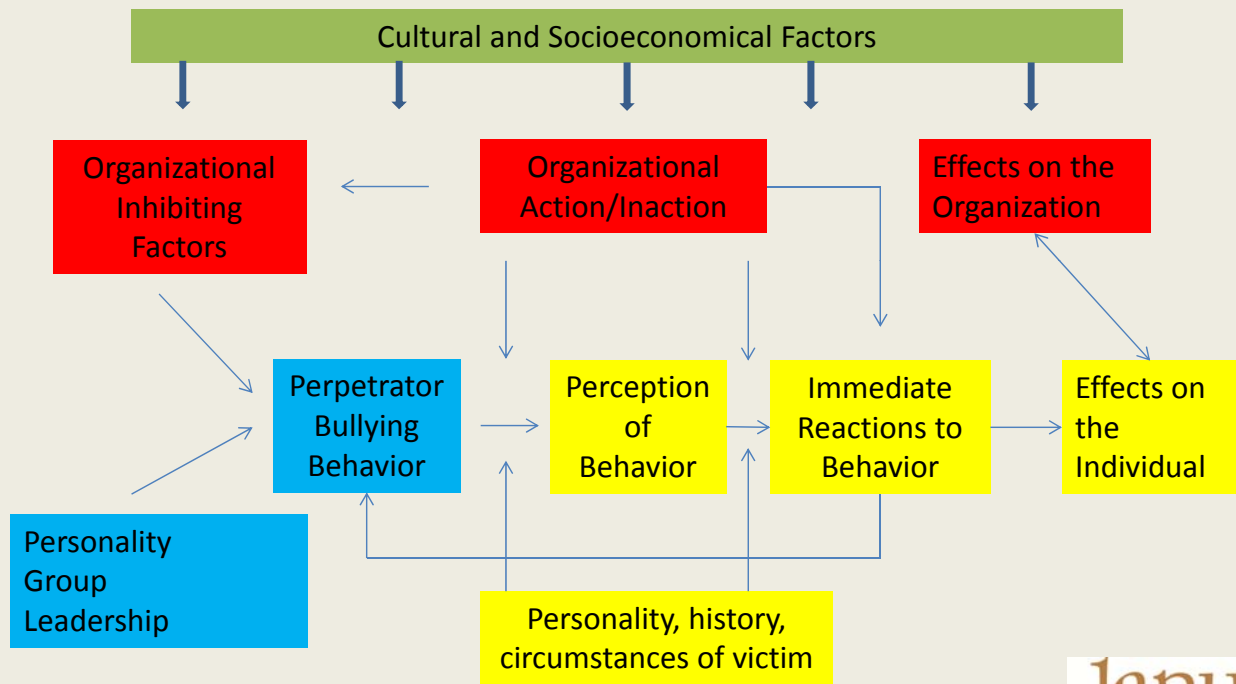


Impact On Organization

- Management time invested
- Accidents and near misses
- Legal costs – estimated £150,000 in UK/case
- Culture of bullying – costs to bystanders
- Recruitment/reputation – inability to hire
- Study in UK estimated £2 billion cost to business at national level
- Australian estimates \$6-13 billion every year

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A Framework for Understanding the Complexity of Bullying



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UNDERSTANDING THE BODY AND BRAIN RESPONSE TO BULLYING

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Social Stress

Why Does it Hurt So Much?

- Social connection is viewed as a need without which humans experience pain
- Evidence that social rejection/separation follows same pathways as physical pain and thus needs time to heal
- Greater response to social rejection resulted in greater inflammatory activity
- Increases in inflammatory activity are part of our immune system's natural response to potentially harmful situations however there is evidence that frequent or chronic activation of the system may increase risk for a variety of disorders such as asthma, depression, heart disease

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Brain on Stress

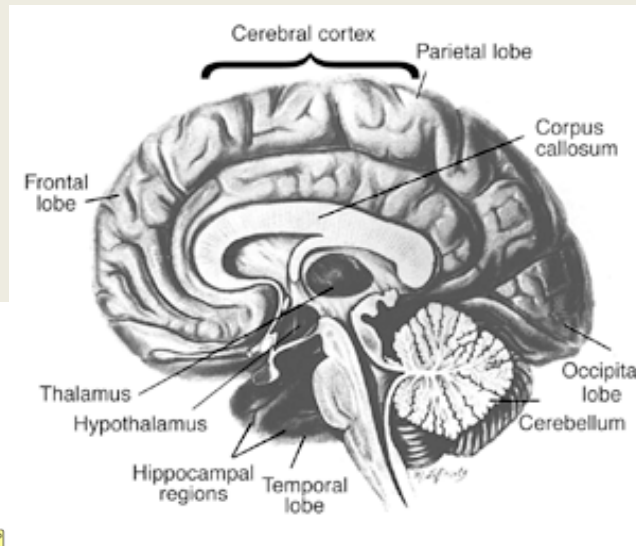
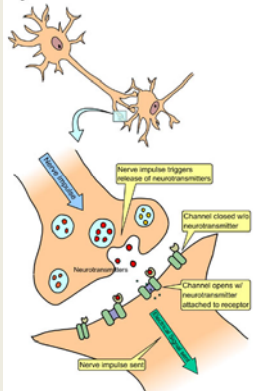


Figure D-2: Neurotransmitters

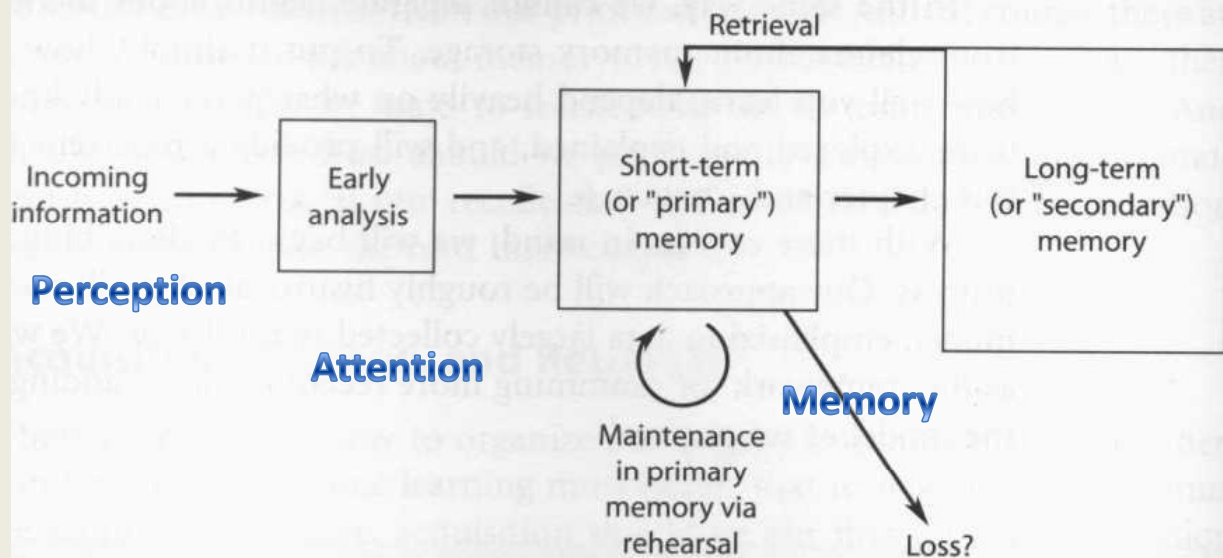


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Human Information Processing

AN INFORMATION-PROCESSING VIEW OF MEMORY



In this view, the boxes represent separate events, processes, or storage spaces; arrows represent the flow of information from one process to another.

APPLYING THE RISK MANAGEMENT HAZARD MODEL TO BULLYING

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Risk Assessment by British Standards Organization

Likelihood of Harm	Severity of Harm		
	Slight Harm	Moderate Harm	Extreme harm
Very Unlikely	Very low risk	Very low risk	High risk
Unlikely	Very low risk	Medium risk	Very high risk
Likely	Low risk	High risk	Very high risk
Very Likely	Low risk	Very high risk	Very high risk

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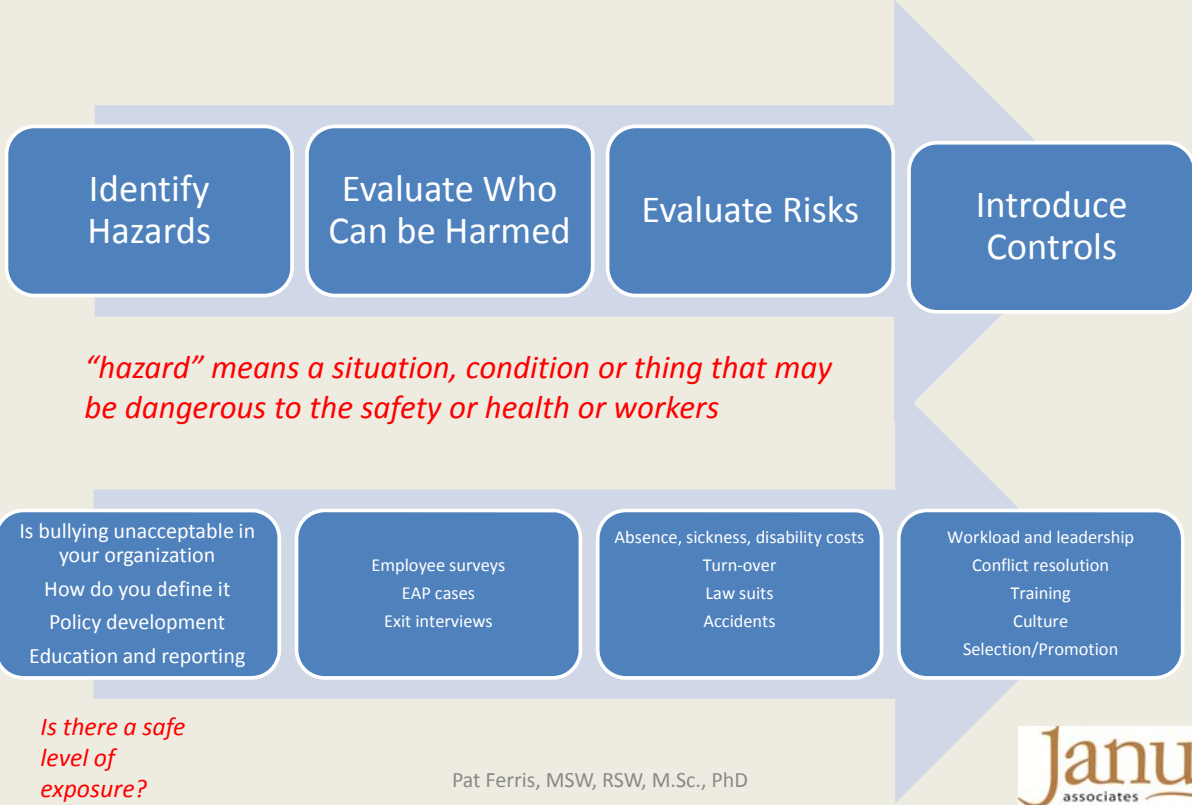
What is the Priority for Controlling Bullying

Hazard Priority Setting				
	Very Likely – could happen at any time	Likely- could happen sometime	Unlikely-could happen but very rarely	Very unlikely-could happen but probably never will
Kill or Cause permanent disability or ill health	1	1	2	3
Long term illness or serious injury	1	2	3	4
Medical attention and several days off work	2	3	4	5
First aid needed	3	4	5	6

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A Safety Hazard Model of Bullying



Conclusions

- Workplace bullying is a significant health and safety risk that presents financial, reputational, and production risks to the organization
- Workplace bullying can maim and kill
- Workplace bullying can be minimized through appropriate identification and controls but ...
- Only if it is an organizational priority

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Thank-You

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