
Bullying at Work: A Vicious Circle



A new study reveals workplace bullying sets off a spiral of abuse because victims become anxious and less able to stand up for themselves. This makes them more vulnerable to further harassment. The study titled 'Reciprocal relations between workplace bullying, anxiety and vigour: a two-wave longitudinal study' is published in *Anxiety, Stress & Coping: An International Journal*.

Workplace bullying could include harassing, offending or socially excluding an employee repeatedly over a period of six months. It can lead to poor health since the victim is under extreme stress in these circumstances. Victims can often feel anxiety and a lack of vigour and could become easier targets for even more bullying since they do not have the energy to respond or defend themselves. In addition, because of the "gloomy perception mechanism", bullied employees can also start to view their environment more negatively.

According to Dr. Ana Sanz Vergel from UEA's Norwich Business School, "This study shows that the relationship between workplace bullying and the psychological impact on victims is much more complex than expected."

Dr. Vergel and colleagues from the Complutense University and Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain tested their theory on 348 Spanish employees. All study participants were interviewed about their experiences of workplace bullying and were also assessed for anxiety and vigour.

The findings show that those who were exposed to workplace bullying had deteriorated mental health and decreased well-being. Their anxious behaviour put them in a weaker position making them an easy target for further bullying, thus leading to a spiral of abuse.

The researchers point out that they are not blaming the victims since it is the employees who need to have stronger policies against workplace bullying. They also need to conduct training programs that could help victims learn coping mechanisms so that they are able to break this vicious cycle.

The research highlights the need for employers to not only crack down on workplace bullies but to also help victims gain the skills they need to cope with difficult situations.

Source: University of East Anglia

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