

Bullying in the Workplace

In 2004, BPW NZ Immediate Past President Jean Park undertook a survey, through BPW clubs, of bullying in the workplace.

The purpose of the survey was to raise awareness, to provide information and resources, and to assist women who were experiencing bullying in their workplace. Jean's conclusions are summarised here.

Workplace bullying is defined as *"repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment, which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work."*

As yet, New Zealand does not have a National Code of Practice, but workplaces are required to be a safe environment.

The following are some of the effects highlighted by the survey:

- Problems continued over a period of time, and were not isolated incidents.
- People left their workplace, often successively, with appointees to the same position and in short periods of time.
- Loss of self esteem
- Loss of confidence
- Physical illness as a result of stress
- Weight gain or loss
- Inability to concentrate
- Low energy and loss of enthusiasm for work
- Feeling demoralised and humiliated
- Inability to make decisions or doubting one's own judgement
- Working longer hours with fewer resources to try and meet the demands

Some examples of bullying tactics were:

- Information withheld, making the individual look incompetent or lazy
- Public praise, but ridicule and sarcasm in private
- Derogatory remarks when totally inappropriate





Jean received three hundred and twenty two replies to her questionnaire. Some were group responses from clubs, but most were from women who said they were being bullied, and preferred to contact Jean individually.

Of the 322 responses, 34 reported that their place of work did not have policies or protocols in place regarding bullying or harassment. Those with such policies in their workplaces were more aware of them, and of how to access them.

Assistance did not necessarily remove or significantly alter matters in the company, and many women still chose to leave.

Confronting the perpetrator directly was regarded as relatively unsuccessful as it did not change the behaviour, and in fact at times made it worse. If there was denial by the perpetrator that there was such an issue, it was more likely to reflect negatively on the complainant.

The most significant result was the level of reported bullying. 130 had experienced bullying (over 40 %). Jean found the rate of bullying to be higher than she had expected, with a significant number (one third) of these women leaving their place of work to escape or to end the problem at the least cost to themselves, even though experiencing significant financial or personal loss.

The full text of Jean's survey is available through BPW NZ.

Other resources:

www.beyondbullying.co.nz

- Help line 0800 937 628 (0800 ZERO BULLY)*
- Contact the Industrial Nurse, Health and Safety Officers or any other appropriate authority if necessary to achieve a safe working environment.*
- Needham, Andrea W: Workplace Bullying*

Penguin Books 2003

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