

Preventing and addressing bullying in vocational education and work

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Bullying in training and on the job - a major problem for disabled people



Scoping the problem

- ▶ UK Equality and Human Rights Commission: 'Bullying' is not strong enough or precise enough - call it *disability harassment or abuse*
- ▶ Four-fifths of disabled people bullied at school
- ▶ Disabled people are twice as likely to report harassment at work
- ▶ Disabled women are four times as likely to report harassment at work
- ▶ However: Most abuse and harassment *not* reported, and most reported harassment and abuse not actioned
- ▶ Bullying / harassment / abuse of disabled people, and the way it is ignored and excused, are aspects of what Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011) have called the 'violence of disablism.'

Impact of the problem

- ▶ Less likely to complete training / vocational qualifications
- ▶ Less likely to find work without completed training / vocational qualifications
- ▶ Less likely to participate fully in education or work - 'fade into the background'
- ▶ Less likely to be promoted or retained at work
- ▶ Lower earnings
- ▶ Social and community withdrawal
- ▶ 45% of all bullying victims experience stress-related health problems, such as anxiety, panic attacks, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (WBI and Zogby International, 2007) - the rate may be higher for disabled people.

What is bullying (harassment/abuse)?

- ▶ The American Psychological Association (2017) has defined workplace bullying as “*A deliberate, repeated, health--endangering mistreatment of an employee by a supervisor or coworker.*”
- ▶ Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological (emotional/social)
- ▶ Social/emotional bullying can include neglecting or ignoring an individual in the workplace as well as aggressive, demeaning or undermining behaviour.
- ▶ It can take place inside the training centre or school, in the workplace, in the community, or remotely (online, by telephone/text, by post).

What factors contribute to bullying of disabled trainees and employees?

- ▶ Stigmatisation of disability (**some more stigmatised than others?**)
- ▶ Placement of disabled people in socially devalued education and work settings
- ▶ Lack of powerful, protective allies (**due to fear of stigma by association?**)
- ▶ Setting/workplace factors: “poor information flow, an authoritative way of settling differences of opinion, lack of mutual conversations about the tasks and goals of the work unit, and insufficient possibilities to influence matters concerning oneself” (Vaarta, 1996)
- ▶ Sometimes, teachers or supervisors are involved in bullying themselves - they may use it to control student/worker behaviour
- ▶ Some adult education settings and workplaces do not take bullying seriously. Lack of response is seen as giving permission.
- ▶ Social factors: “In the age of social media ‘adult bullying’ for want of a better term is on the rise. I think people are finding it more acceptable to harass and insult each other across all sorts of mediums.” - Jenni Richardson, MIND, 2013 (UK)
- ▶

What can be done?

Societal level:

- ▶ Stigma reduction campaigns
- ▶ Governments: Legal protection, advice and support for best practices and improvements
- ▶ General or model codes of conduct, best practices documents (e.g. from unions, employer federations)

Education facility/workplace level:

- ▶ General safety measures (eliminate 'danger spots' for bullying)
- ▶ Clear codes of conduct
- ▶ Improve reporting systems - encourage reporting
- ▶ Be observant
- ▶ Act on reports / observations
- ▶ Skill-building for teachers, supervisors, co-workers with and without disabilities
- ▶ Mentoring
- ▶ Anti-bullying programmes?

What can be done?

Legal remedies

- ▶ Bullying = creating a hostile workplace environment (Von Bergen, Zavaletta and Soper, 2006)

← milder

more severe →

|-----incivility-----bullying-----physical violence-----|

- ▶ Physical violence is almost always legally actionable
- ▶ Bullying is probably actionable when it 'intimidates, humiliates and/or undermines' a specific person

Models:

- ▶ Sweden's 1993 national anti-bullying policy (strong and specific) (effective?)
- ▶ Canada, South Australia
- ▶ European Parliament's Resolution on Harassment in the Workplace (milder)

Barriers to accessing legal remedies

- ▶ Cost - financial, time
- ▶ Difficulty
- ▶ Lack of support
- ▶ Fear of losing training place / job
- ▶ Knowledge of what to do, where to go
- ▶ Access issues regarding forms, tribunals, Courts

Workplace-level actions

Three stages:

- ▶ *primary stage* = prevent bullying
- ▶ *secondary stage* = reverse, reduce or slow the progression of bullying
- ▶ *tertiary stage* = address the impact of bullying

- ▶ Found some good, clear anti-bullying policies
- ▶ Did not find evidence of workplace anti-bullying policies or codes of conduct being evaluated for efficacy.
- ▶ Employers can seek extra training (e.g. from ACAS in UK) but take-up is poor. No evidence available about efficacy.
- ▶ Arbitration may be helpful if arbitrators are disability-aware.
- ▶ Support workers who have been bullied - did not find any research on how adult education or employers do this that evaluated efficacy of measures taken.

Individual-level actions

- ▶ We did not find research that addressed this and that included evaluation of efficacy
- ▶ One trendy current response has been to ‘encourage resiliency’ in people who are bullied or harassed - in other words, give them tools to cope
- ▶ This can essentially be victim-blaming - or can actually be a useful lever for systems change if it looks at all sides (see Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014)
- ▶ Schools or training programmes can add extra support
- ▶ Mentoring may be protective
- ▶ HR responses - moving bullies or bullied worker?
- ▶ Counselling - skill-building focus?

What is mentoring?

Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (2014):

- ▶ A time-limited goal-orientated relationship
- ▶ Supports both personal and vocational learning and development.
- ▶ An experienced person providing guidance and support to another less experienced person.
- ▶ A relationship in which goals and outcomes are directed by the *mentee*.

The role of mentoring

- ▶ Helping with goal-setting and action -prioritisation and time-management
- ▶ Helping with change and transition
- ▶ Helping with challenges in social and personal interactions
- ▶ Developing self-confidence;
- ▶ Providing support in getting to know new environments or procedures
- ▶ Offering advice and guidance
- ▶ Helping explore options for the future
- ▶ Giving (and receiving) constructive feedback.

Conclusion

- ▶ Bullying/harassment/abuse of disabled people in adult education and work is clearly a serious problem with serious consequences.
- ▶ **There is a very large gap in the literature!**
- ▶ Responses at all levels need to be tested and evaluated before they can be recommended on a large-scale basis.
- ▶ Attention is needed to effective measures at all levels of the problem: societal, education setting/workplace, individual.

If we eliminate disability-related bullying (harassment/abuse), what happens?

- ▶ “...social inclusion in the work environment facilitated completions, while social exclusion, particularly harassment and bullying, were significant barriers.” - Cocks and Thoresen, 2013 (Australia)