

Preface

Workplace bullying often flies under the radar and is an insidious, toxic, isolating, and shameful practice which frequently leaves those targeted with long-term psychological scarring. Productivity and performance, morale, and employee relations as well as retention rates amongst employees and absences from work being seriously counterproductive, it will gravely compromise organisational strength and health within a company when bullying becomes a reality

For the individual caught in the bullying drama the impact and consequences of working life will be to their personal and professional cost. Psychologically the person will ultimately, after suffering a considerable time of exposure to bullying and harassing behaviour at work, become vulnerable in their grief and isolation. They feel their confidence in self is waning, questioning themselves in their judgment of what is happening at work, unable to understand the behaviour of the bully as it feels to them to be well removed from reality. The person will start to feel alienated from work colleagues and feel their loyalty to the job questioned. The impact on their mental health will eventually be significant as stress, anxiety, low mood, depression, disturbed sleep patterns, panic attacks, paranoia, and at times suicidal thoughts, evolve out of this situation. In some instances, the bullied person may give in to their suicidal thoughts and decide to end their life, with all the dramatic and deeply unsettling consequences thereby. The physical symptoms after a prolonged period of being exposed to bullying behaviour are well documented, and may present as, for instance, chronic headaches, stomach aches, back aches, insomnia, palpitations, irregular heartbeat, nausea, increased perspiration, anxiety, exhaustion.

This book has been written to give a short exploration of the most relevant points of a bullying situation, including legislation pertaining to workplace bullying and harassment to support counselling practitioners and others to provide some focussed background information about the difficult inter-personal and intra-personal relationships of the bullying drama when clients arrive at their therapy session disclosing a possible bullying situation. The bullying dynamic is complex and multifaceted, and it would therefore be prudent to be familiar with some of the various aspects the bullying phenomenon poses.

Since the voices of the bullied are seldom heard emphasis has been placed on the narratives of individuals who were willing to share their experiences of workplace bullying to give the practitioner an idea of what to expect when welcoming the prospective client. Although the participants' full and often meticulous accounts are evidential of the impact bullying episodes have had on them and that even after many years, it is still "alive" in detail, it does not necessarily touch on the complexities involved in workplace bullying. A person's personality, perceptions and behaviour may have had an impact on the bullying situation as there are multiple players involved, each needing to be considered, and how they impact on each other separately and collectively.

In literature on workplace bullying, the term "victim" is used more frequently than the term

“target”, and although both terms are used intermittently throughout the book it should be kept in mind that there is a distinct difference between the two

Target – The bully has chosen someone as their next “person of interest”, their target.

In acknowledging you are the chosen target it opens the door to become objective and generalize the bully’s behaviour, thereby reducing the impact on physical and psychological health.

Victim – Feeling helpless, powerless, and fearful will invoke the victim mode. Physical and psychological consequences are most likely to follow.

A target still has preserved their power but sadly a victim has lost their power.