Workplace bullying: Implications for police organisations

A CRITICAL ISSUES IN POLICING PAPER

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WORKPLACE BULLYING:
IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICE ORGANISATIONS

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A critical issues in policing paper
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Executive Summary

It almost goes without saying that negative workplace behaviours inhibit organisations from functioning in a vital, productive and ethical way. Workplace bullying is a negative workplace phenomenon which involves a repeated pattern of inappropriate, aggressive or hostile behaviour that is directed at a particular target person or group of persons, and which is perpetrated by one or more fellow employees. Workplace bullying is generally distinguished from everyday conflicts in that the negative workplace behaviours occur repeatedly over a period of time rather than just being a one-off conflict (Irish Taskforce on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying, 2001).

Despite variation in the definitions of workplace bullying provided across the research literature, numerous overt and covert behaviours have been identified as being symptomatic of bullying in the workplace. Reported behaviours that have been identified as being symptomatic of workplace bullying have included, for example; verbal abuse, persistent and unjustified criticism, inappropriate comments, isolating or excluding targets from the workplace, victimisation, physical assault and constructive dismissal (Namie & Namie, 2000).

The prevalence of workplace bullying in the general working population remains unclear. However, it has been estimated that approximately 25% to 50% of employees in the general working population will experience bullying at some time in their working lives (Beyond Bullying Association, 2001). In the policing context, there is little research either overseas or throughout Australasia to indicate the prevalence of workplace bullying amongst police personnel. However, the few studies that have surveyed police personnel indicate that, like other organisations, police organisations may experience workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying has been revealed to have detrimental consequences for employees, organisations, and bystanders who witness bullying behaviour in their workplace. The reported effects of workplace bullying on persons who are targets of the behaviour are considerable, and have been said to include psychological and physical consequences such as anxiety, sleeplessness, depression, self-destructive behaviours, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, headaches, hypertension and exhaustion. In turn, the purported outcomes of workplace bullying for organisations are also considerable. Negative consequences such as reduced efficiency and productivity, poor morale, adverse publicity, legal costs, increased absenteeism, sick leave and high turnover, have all been associated with workplace bullying (Namie & Namie, 2000; Office of the Employee Ombudsman, 2000; Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001; Randall, 1997; Thomson, 1997).

It is ethically, legally, financially and practically beneficial for organisations to take active steps to encourage workplace environments where bullying is not tolerated. Any organisation that looks to address bullying in their workplace, needs to consider who does what to whom, the consequences bullying has for the individuals involved, and the consequences for the organisation in its entirety. Further, organisations and employees stand to benefit from ensuring that adequate grievance procedures are in place to resolve complaints should they arise, and to limit the potential for bullying situations to escalate into matters that need to be settled via external legal processes.
As with other organisations, police organisations may experience negative workplace behaviours. Overall, therefore, there is a clear need for police organisations throughout Australasia to ensure that they provide working environments where bullying is not tolerated.
Introduction

For many people, the word 'bullying' is something we associate with children in a playground. We picture the stereotype of a bulky, aggressive boy who exerts power over his peers by pulling little girls’ hair, stealing their lunches, and beating up children behind the shelter-shed. It is images like this one, that have perhaps contributed to workplace bullying being swept under the carpet as a serious issue, whilst similar issues such as sexual and racial harassment have come to the fore.

Workplace bullying is a workplace stressor that can lead to numerous, negative outcomes for the individual targets, the bystanders who witness the behaviour and organisations as a whole. It is a specific phenomenon that involves a repeated pattern of inappropriate, aggressive or hostile behaviour that is directed at a particular target person or group of persons. The behaviour escalates over time causing significant psychological distress for the target and can result in stigmatisation and victimisation of the target person or persons.

Whilst workplace bullying is not a new phenomenon, it has certainly become recognised as a significant issue in recent times. The Australian media in particular appear to have taken an enthusiastic interest in the issue of late, and it would appear that no organisation is immune. The Australian Defence Force in particular, has received a very public shaming with numerous newspaper and television reports that have aired allegations of bullying within specific military units. Public awareness has also been augmented through a number of local, State and national media campaigns by unions and community action groups who are working to address the problem.

At the same time, academic literature has also focused on bullying in the workplace in recent years, with a proliferation of studies on definitional issues, prevalence, causal factors, consequences and descriptive dimensions of the workplace bullying experience. Several large-scale surveys suggest that workplace bullying is widespread across industry groups and poses a significant risk in terms of cost to organisations, bullied individuals and the people who surround them. However, one issue highlighted in the literature is the complexity surrounding appropriate avenues for legal redress for targets of workplace bullying. Unlike some other negative forms of workplace behaviour, such as sexual harassment, workplace bullying is presently not explicitly prohibited under anti-discrimination legislation, nor does it attract a criminal penalty, unless the behaviour culminates in the form of physical assault. However, if a target of workplace bullying is dissatisfied with, or unable to resolve a workplace bullying matter through internal workplace processes, there are external legal processes that the target may pursue (Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001).

This then leaves individual organisations with something of a dilemma. Aside from numerous other negative organisational consequences, at common law, an employer has a duty of care towards all employees. An employer is also vicariously liable for the unsafe conduct of other employees arising from that employment. A failure to comply with this obligation may amount to a breach of contract or leave an organisation open to negligence claims (Harbord, 2001; Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001). Whilst it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the legal
implications of this problem, it is acknowledged that individual organisations have a responsibility to implement effective administrative strategies to address the issue of workplace bullying. This ideally should involve developing adequate procedures and policies to deal with complaints of bullying and ensuring that all employees receive appropriate training on how to recognise and deal with bullying in individual workplaces.

Clearly, it is in the best interests of all employees, including employees of police organisations, to work in an environment that is free of bullying and other forms of harassment. At the same time, police organisations stand to benefit from encouraging a ‘bully-free’ environment, as bullying impedes work performance, increases the risk of occupational injuries and has the potential to damage the reputation of police organisations. Further, bullying contributes to increased financial costs incurred through absenteeism, sickness benefits and legal costs associated with compensation claims. Police organisations therefore stand to benefit from ensuring that adequate mechanisms are in place to ensure police personnel are not bullied in the workplace.

The first step in this process is defining the nature of the problem and identifying the key factors that contribute to bullying at work. This paper discusses the issue of workplace bullying as it relates to any organisation by examining its definition, the ways it is manifest, potential causes and costs. Finally, implications for police administrators in terms of how the police organisation, as a whole, should respond to this issue are also examined. The purpose of this paper is not to provide an in-depth analysis of research in the area, but rather to highlight workplace bullying as an emerging issue that is important to the functioning and management of police organisations.
Workplace Bullying

DEFINITIONS FROM THE RESEARCH LITERATURE
In the research literature, defining workplace bullying has proved to be a contentious issue. The reason for this is two-fold. First, definitions of workplace bullying have varied according to the research disciplines that have considered it. The examination of workplace bullying from a diversity of perspectives, including organisational psychology, business, legal and medical disciplines has thus far prevented the establishment of an agreed definition. Second, workplace bullying is a term that has been used to describe a multitude of behaviours and as such, definitions have differed somewhat in terms of which behaviours are included, the terminology used and who is defined as the ‘perpetrator’, as well as the frequency and the duration of the behaviours. In addition, what is defined here as workplace bullying has also been studied under the guise of mobbing, psychological abuse, psychological terror, work harassment, workplace aggression, counterproductive-deviant workplace behaviour, petty tyranny, office politics, incivility, workplace violence, authoritarian personality and bureaupathic individuals (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Ashforth, 1994; Baron & Neuman, 1996; Barron, 1998; Ellis, 1997; Leymann, 1996; Neuman, 2000; Thomson, 1997). A selection of definitions of some of these terms is provided in Table 1 in order to demonstrate the range of approaches taken in the research literature over the years.

Table 1: Example definitions of workplace bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brodsky (1976)</td>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>Repeated and persistent attempts by a person to torment, wear down, frustrate, or get a reaction from another person; it is treatment which persistently provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates or otherwise causes discomfort in another person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashforth (1994)</td>
<td>Petty tyranny</td>
<td>A leader who lords his power over others through arbitrariness and self-aggrandizement, the belittling of subordinates, showing lack of consideration, using a forceful style of conflict resolution, discouraging initiative and the use of non-contingent punishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keashly, Trott, &amp;</td>
<td>Abusive behaviours</td>
<td>Hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours (excluding physical contact) directed by one or more persons towards another that are aimed at undermining the other to ensure compliance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacLean (1994)</td>
<td>in the workplace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall (1997)</td>
<td>Workplace bullying</td>
<td>The aggressive behaviour arising from the deliberate intent to cause physical or psychological distress to others. Aggressive behaviour does not have to be regular or repeated for it to be bullying behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barron (1998)</td>
<td>Workplace bullying</td>
<td>A repeated pattern of aggressive behaviour that escalates over time and causes victimisation in the subject who is unable to defend himself or herself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the absence of a universal definition, there are a number of common themes or key components to the majority of definitions from the literature. A common theme throughout all definitions of workplace bullying is a reference to some form of internal conflict between employees within an organisation (Barron, 1998). This conflict can be between employees within similar positions, or between managers/supervisors and subordinates. This also implies that the behaviour usually occurs at the place of work and/or in the course of one’s employment.

A further theme is that workplace bullying will involve the infliction of some form of inappropriate or aggressive behaviour. All definitions of workplace bullying will refer to a perpetrator or perpetrators executing some form of negative behaviour on the target person or persons. These behaviours can be verbal or physical in nature, may be perpetrated in either an overt or covert manner, and can vary in their level of severity (Irish Taskforce on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying, 2001; Neuman, 2000). Workplace bullying definitions usually require the negative behaviours to be repetitive in nature and occur over some period of time.

Definitions of workplace bullying usually either assume or explicitly state that before you can label a situation, the target person must perceive himself or herself to be bullied. Whilst the issue of subjectivity in relation to workplace bullying is contentious, most definitions will assume that the target person will recognise that they are being mistreated in some way, and that this will cause some type or level of distress (Irish Taskforce on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying, 2001).

One of the challenges in defining workplace bullying is in distinguishing it from other negative workplace behaviours or stressors. A key issue concerns how to define ‘bullying’ in relation to ‘harassment’ and whether or not the terms refer to the same concept or to different groups of negative behaviours. For example, Namie and Namie (2000) argue that ‘bullying’ includes all types of mistreatment at work and that ‘all harassment is bullying as long as the actions have the effect, intended or not, of hurting the target’ (p. 3).

In Australasian research on workplace bullying, the term ‘harassment’ appears to have been rejected as an appropriate descriptor due to concerns that the behaviour will be too closely associated with sexual and racial harassment (Thomson, 1997). Whilst both terms refer to the ill-treatment of an employee or employees by one or more
other employees, bullying is generally viewed as distinct from harassment as it involves a persistent pattern of behaviour over a period of time. In contrast, behaviour that would be considered sexual harassment for example, need only occur on one occasion to be considered as such (Rayner, 1997b).

Further, harassment is a term that is used in Federal, State and Territory legislation as being linked with specific factors such as sex, race, disability, age or pregnancy. On the other hand, workplace bullying appears to be linked to a broader range of behaviours that may not necessarily relate to a particular quality or character of the target person or persons (Harbord, 2001). While some researchers have argued that sexual and racial harassment may constitute a proportion of the bullying process (Brodsky, 1976), others have argued that naming the behaviour as ‘bullying’ helps to differentiate it from other types of harassment for which there are clear legal remedies through anti-discrimination legislation (Duggan, 2001). Currently in Australia, for example, anti-discrimination legislation does not specifically refer to bullying (Duggan 2001; Harbord, 2001; Thomson, 1997), so unless a target experiences bullying that is linked to a discriminatory attribute, or involves sexual harassment, this particular course of legal redress is unsuitable (Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001).

It is interesting to note, however, that the definitions used by many Australasian police agencies include bullying behaviours as an aspect of harassment (see Appendix for examples of definitions used by Australasian police agencies).

A further point of contention across the broader research literature has been whether or not physically violent behaviours should be included in defining workplace bullying. Barron (2000b) contends that in Australia, there has been a tendency to confuse or misuse the terms workplace bullying and workplace violence. Barron argues that whilst both concepts are concerned with an abuse of power in the work setting, workplace violence concentrates on behaviour that usually has criminal aspects to it, while behaviour that falls within the concept of workplace bullying is less likely to have criminal elements. Barron notes that ‘they are essentially different concepts with respect to the types of behaviour each covers or describes, to the legal options for individuals to seek redress, and to the strategies that can be used for intervention or prevention’ (p. 64).

It is useful to acknowledge however that whilst not all workplace violence constitutes bullying, perpetrators of workplace bullying might use violence in the process of bullying their target. For example, Leymann (1996) argues that perpetrators may on occasion use physical violence, but that bullying is usually characterised by ‘much more sophisticated behaviours such as, for example, socially isolating the victim’ (p. 167). This point is perhaps best illustrated when violence is placed in the context of the full range of behaviours that have been used to describe workplace bullying.

WORKPLACE BULLYING BEHAVIOURS

Workplace bullying can cover a multitude of negative behaviours including overt behaviours such as verbal abuse and hostility, and covert behaviours such as sabotage or undermining a target’s position in the organisation. Typically, however, workplace bullying behaviours involve a target person or persons being treated less favourably in a manner which is beyond normal and appropriate disciplinary action, or appropriate workplace interaction (Rafferty, 2001).
Behaviours that have been identified as symptomatic of workplace bullying include (Barron, 2000c; McCarthy, 1999; McMahon, 2000; Office of the Employee Ombudsman, 2000; Queensland Working Women’s Service, 2000; Thomson, 1997; Victorian WorkCover Authority, 2001):

- Verbal abuse.
- Persistent and unjustified criticism.
- Voicing belittling opinions, or purposely humiliating the target through sarcasm, criticism or insults in front of others.
- Insults or inappropriate comments about a target person’s appearance, life, lifestyle, or family.
- Spreading gossip, false or malicious rumours about a target.
- Isolating target persons from normal work interaction (‘sending to Coventry’).
- Victimisation.
- Blaming a target’s personality for work problems.
- Encouraging workers to 'gang up' on a target person.
- Teasing or regularly being made the brunt of practical jokes.
- Excluding the target from workplace conversations or social gatherings, and/or not speaking to the target at all.
- Impossible deadlines, i.e., overloading the target with work or requiring work to be done without sufficient time, and then criticising the worker for taking too long or not doing the job properly.
- Inconsistent compliance with rules.
- Unnecessary pressure.
- 'Under-work' or creating a feeling of uselessness.
- Interference with a target person’s personal effects or work equipment.
- Meaningless or demeaning tasks.
- Unexplained job changes.
- Undermining work performance.
- Deliberately withholding work-related information or resources, or supplying incorrect information.
- Denial of award conditions.
- Pressuring a target person to leave a union.
- Failure to give credit where due or taking credit for other people’s ideas.
- Unreasonable ‘administrative sanctions’, e.g., undue delay in processing application for training, leave or payment of wages.
- Harassing persons who have put in a WorkCover claim.
- Constructive dismissal.
- Apprentice bastardisation.
- Physical assault or the threat of physical assault.

An interesting point to note is the issue of subjectivity in relation to some of the bullying behaviours listed above. It has been argued that, in isolation, some of the behaviours may not constitute what many people might view as bullying. Einarsen and Raknes (1997) argue that an individual’s perceptions of victimisation may relate
more directly to negative outcomes and consequences, rather than to the actual behaviours. This might be a concern when management and subordinates have differing interpretations of managerial actions in relation to performance indicators, performance appraisals or deadlines for example. Unfortunately, little is known about how workplace bullying is perceived and labelled by different individuals, as workplace-bullying studies have not examined both behavioural and subjective indicators of bullying.

Whilst workplace bullying should not be confused with the legitimate exercise of managerial authority, it is possible for organisations to excuse 'procedural' bullying in order to exercise control over, or demean targeted individuals. McMahon (2001) argues that some organisations legitimise and validate bullying as a frontline or fallback strategy for coping with problems faced by the organisation. In this situation, management may facilitate bullying by condoning inefficient organisational practices such as for example, the unreasonable withholding of necessary staff resources, the setting of impossible performance targets, persistent refusal of requests for annual leave or reimbursement of time in lieu.

It is also possible for some bullying behaviours to be somewhat disguised as common social behaviours. For example, 'horseplay' or 'skylarking' can be a form of bullying directed at persistently making somebody the target of jokes and/or the focal point for expected stupidity. Whilst horseplay is often a positive influence on team building and camaraderie, a bully may use horseplay to make fun of a target person's weaknesses or disposition 'at the expense of the person's self-esteem, causing them unnecessary embarrassment and sometimes, alienating them from the rest of the work group' (Killoran, 2001, p. 5).

**DURATION OF WORKPLACE BULLYING PROCESS**

As mentioned earlier, most definitions of workplace bullying require the bullying behaviours to be repetitive in nature, and this is a key issue in distinguishing bullying from other conflicts or forms of harassment. Specifically, the bullying behaviours are repeatedly perpetrated against the target person on a daily or weekly basis for example. The requirement of repetition in the behaviour implies that the behaviours are not a one-off incident, and that bullying occurs over some period of time. Whilst few researchers identify specific time requirements, Zapf (2001) has argued that the duration of bullying is a key criterion in differentiating between everyday conflicts in organisations and bullying, and that negative workplace behaviours cannot be defined as bullying if they are a 'single event'. Both Leymann (1996) and Zapf (2001) have argued that to meet the definition of bullying, the behaviour must occur repeatedly (e.g., at least once a week) for a long period of time (e.g., at least six months).

Surveys examining the duration of the workplace bullying process have reported that rather than occurring as a short episode, bullying evolves by a process of 'wearing down' the target person over an extended period of time. For example, a study conducted by a British union (Rayner, 1997a) found that 14% of those who labelled themselves as targets of bullying, reported that the situation had continued for more than six months, with 34% of these reporting that the bullying had been occurring for three years or more.
SUMMARY

In summary, 'workplace bullying' as it is commonly defined in the research literature, usually refers to some form of internal conflict between employees, involving the infliction of some form of persistent and repeated, inappropriate or aggressive behaviour, over a period of time. Despite the lack of a universal definition, workplace bullying is a specific phenomenon that is discernable from other negative forms of workplace behaviour in that the behaviours are repetitive over a period of time. Further, workplace bullying is distinguished from other forms of workplace harassment in that workplace bullying is not specifically referred to in anti-discrimination legislation.
Prevalence

The extent of workplace bullying in the general working population remains unclear. One of the major reasons for this appears to be that many cases of workplace bullying are not reported by the targets. Many targets of workplace bullying are reluctant to 'dob-in' the perpetrator (Leymann, 1996; Namie & Namie, 2000). The Office of the Employee Ombudsman (2000) cites four main reasons for the non-reporting of workplace bullying including the lack of an appropriate authority to complain to, fear of retribution from the bully, the perception that complaining is a sign of weakness, and the fact that bullying behaviour is, for one reason or another, not recognised as such. Further to 'recognition' problems, it may be that the true prevalence of bullying is obscured within complaints concerning other forms of harassment, where bullying behaviour has constituted only one aspect of the targets’ experience.

Nevertheless, the Office of the Employee Ombudsman (2000) reports that they currently receive more than 500 complaints a year on workplace bullying related issues, and that this figure is on the increase. The Office of the Employee Ombudsman argues that this is probably due to an escalation in the behaviour along with an increased willingness to report it or take action against the perpetrators. Similarly, the Victorian WorkCover Authority (2001) reports that during the 1990s, there was a significant rise in the number of reports of workplace bullying, and that there were a number of court cases which awarded financial compensation to employees who had suffered injuries as a result of workplace bullying.

Rather than directly studying the prevalence of workplace bullying across the general working population throughout Australasia, there has been a tendency to look to international studies to estimate prevalence. However prevalence estimates obtained in this way have varied both between studies conducted in one country, and between countries. The Beyond Bullying Association (2001) has extrapolated from the international literature to estimate that between 400,000 and 2 million Australians will have experienced 'victimisation' at work in 2001. Further, based on international estimates that 25% to 50% of employees will experience bullying at some time in their working lives, they estimate that between 2.5 and 5 million employees in the general working population in Australia will experience bullying some time during their career.

There is evidence that the prevalence of bullying varies substantially in different occupations and industries. For example, a range of studies has reported that there is a higher prevalence of bullying in public administration, health, social work, teaching and prison officers (Irish Taskforce on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying, 2001; Leymann, 1996). However, there is little research either overseas or in Australia to indicate the prevalence of workplace bullying amongst police personnel.

Two studies of workplace bullying amongst police personnel have however, been conducted in the UK. A nation-wide survey of more than 5,300 employees, by Hoel and Cooper (2000) included 483 employees from UK police services. Of these police respondents, 12% reported that they had been bullied during the six months preceding the survey (compared with 10.5% across the sample), while 29% of police
respondents claimed to have been bullied within the previous five years (compared with 24.4% across the sample). Hoel and Cooper reported that police respondents identified a supervisor or manager as the bully in 81% of cases.

Whilst not surveying operational personnel, Rayner (2000) surveyed UK ‘police support staff’ and reported some interesting results. Specifically, 30% of respondents reported experiencing bullying behaviours on a weekly basis during the six months prior to the survey and of these, 30% reported that the bullying had lasted for three years or more. Similar to Hoel and Cooper (2000), Rayner further reported that respondents identified a manager or police officer as the bully in 88% of cases, and that 91% of respondents reported that they thought the bullies could get away with it.

Although the police respondents in Hoel and Cooper’s (2000) study reported a slightly higher prevalence of workplace bullying compared to the average prevalence across the entire sample, it would be premature to conclude on the basis of one study, that police organisations have a higher prevalence of workplace bullying. As workplace bullying definitions and reported prevalence rates vary across the literature, it is not possible to determine what the findings of both Hoel and Cooper (2000) and Rayner (2000) imply about the levels of workplace bullying in police organisations relative to the levels in other public sector organisations. What is concerning however, is that the respondents in both surveys identified managers as being the perpetrators of bullying in their work environments, and that 91% of respondents in Rayner’s survey thought that the bullies could ‘get away with’ perpetrating the behaviours. Also of concern, is that 85% of the currently bullied respondents in Rayner’s survey reported that the bully had bullied others before. Of those who stated that the bully had bullied others before, 80% stated that management knew about the perpetrators’ previous behaviour. These results suggest that bullying may have become part of the management culture in the police organisations where the respondents worked in the UK.

Whilst Australasian police agencies now commonly include definitions of workplace bullying in appropriate policy (see Appendix), the prevalence of bullying in Australasian police agencies is yet to be studied. A survey of problems and issues facing women in policing did, however, ask some exploratory questions on the experience of bullying behaviours in a sample of employees from five Australian police jurisdictions (Boni & Circelli, in press). Both male and female sworn and nonsworn employees were asked if they had either witnessed or been the target of bullying behaviours in the previous two years.

Boni and Circelli (in press) reported that respondents indicated that they had been given unreasonable or impossible tasks (38%), had been prevented from explaining or putting forward their point of view (37%) and had had undesirable rumours spread about them (35%) at least once in the past two years. Further, nearly a third of respondents felt that they had been unreasonably refused requests for training (31%), been subjected to threatening or abusive language or treatment from another employee (30%) or were humiliated in front of fellow workers or members of the public (30%) at least once during the last two years. Finally, 16% of respondents

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1 The survey asked respondents whether they had experienced ‘bullying behaviours’ during the last two years, rather than ‘workplace bullying’ as it is popularly defined in the literature. In addition, the survey did not specify that the behaviours should have occurred more than once over an extended period. In this way, the estimates of bullying may include experiences of individual instances as well as more prolonged bouts of bullying.
reported that they had been subjected to threatening or abusive language or treatment more than five times in the last two years, while 10% of respondents had had undesirable rumours spread about them more than five times in the last two years.

In addition, Boni and Circelli (in press) found significant differences in the bullying experiences of sworn and nonsworn police personnel. Specifically, sworn respondents were more likely than nonsworn respondents to have experienced bullying behaviours such as threatening or abusive language/treatment, having had undesirable rumours spread about them and being provided with unreasonable or impossible tasks. Also of note is the proportion of the sample that had witnessed others being subjected to various bullying behaviours. More than one in five respondents had witnessed others being the subject of undesirable rumours (22%), being subjected to threatening or abusive language or treatment (21%), or being isolated or 'frozen out' at work (14%) more than five times in the last two years.

The findings of Hoel and Cooper (2000), Rayner (2000) and Boni and Circelli (in press) point to the possible prevalence of workplace bullying in Australasian police organisations. Whilst it cannot be concluded from Hoel and Cooper (2000) and Rayner (2000) that UK police personnel are more likely than other employees to experience workplace bullying, the studies confirm that UK police agencies experience this problem. Similarly, on the basis of the Boni and Circelli (in press) findings, it is clear that some Australasian police personnel are experiencing some bullying behaviours in their workplaces.

It is interesting to note that the Boni and Circelli (in press) observation that sworn personnel were more likely to report experiencing bullying behaviours, might be seen to suggest that there is something particular to working in an operational policing environment that may facilitate or exacerbate bullying. However, it must be emphasised that the questions asked in the study were of an exploratory nature only so the findings about rates of bullying in sworn and nonsworn employees must be interpreted with caution. These findings do nevertheless clearly point to the need to establish the prevalence of workplace bullying in Australasian police organisations.
Potential Causes and Associated Factors

If workplace bullying is as widespread as the literature suggests, a central issue is why workplace bullying situations develop in the first place. Research that examines the antecedents of bullying has provided a diverse range of perspectives on what causes bullying in the workplace. The majority of studies have considered the personality of targets and perpetrators, the role of psychosocial factors, or the role of the work environment, and in general there appears to be a growing consensus that workplace bullying has multiple causes that may operate simultaneously (Zapf, 1999). The following section considers some of the major factors that have been associated with bullying in the workplace.

PERPETRATORS

Women and men of all races and ages and in all workplaces, regardless of the size or type of business, can potentially perpetrate workplace bullying. Much of the research into workplace bullying has attempted to categorise the bully or speculate as to common personality traits, with some research tending to characterise the perpetrator as an aggressive ogre who is 'lacking in empathy, [and] who finds joy in seeing his/her victim suffering' (Björkqvist, Österman, & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994, p. 175).

Randall (1997) argues that perpetrators of workplace bullying are not born, but are the product of complex social processes. He suggests that during their childhood, bullies discover that aggressive behaviour can get pay-offs (e.g., the attention of a parent, a fight, or a better position than a sibling). Further, he argues that unlike those who do not bully others, workplace bullies are never successfully discouraged from using bullying in their social interactions, and consequently they continue using these behaviours to get their own way as adults.

Namie and Namie (2000) suggest that people become perpetrators of workplace bullying via at least one of three different paths, namely, through their personality development (the 'Chronic Bully'), by reading social cues in their work environment (the 'Opportunist Bully') or by accident (the 'Accidental Bully'). Namie and Namie (2000) describe Chronic Bullies as malicious and manipulative people who probably commenced bullying others at school and try to dominate and denigrate others in social encounters both at and away from work. Opportunist Bullies meanwhile, are competitive people who thrive in aggressive, political work environments. Opportunist Bullies are able to capitalise on opportunities to move ahead in organisations by bullying persons who they view as competitors or who they view as an obstruction to further success. Finally, Accidental Bullies are 'social fools' who will hurt others with inappropriate comments or actions because they are genuinely unaware of the effect of their actions on the target person.

While some researchers find it useful to categorise bullies, it is perhaps best to remember that any individual can choose to be a bully and can adopt any tactic at any time to accomplish their goal. In this way, workplace bullies are not restricted to neat categories, and it is clear that in an organisational context, all employees, whether they are subordinates or in a position of authority, have the potential to perpetrate the behaviour.
It is interesting to note however, that much of the research to date that has tried to identify the perpetrators of bullying in the general working population, has reported that a perpetrator is more likely to be a manager than any other person in the workplace. For example, in the British Unison public service union study (Rayner, 1997a), 84% of respondents who had been bullied reported that the perpetrator of the bullying was a manager in their organisation. Equivalent findings have been obtained in numerous studies conducted in the UK and Sweden (see Harbord, 2001).

Similar findings have also been reported in Australia. In a survey conducted by the South Australia Working Women's Centre (Thomson, 1997), respondents were almost twice as likely to be bullied by a person in a position of authority (86%), such as a manager, employer or supervisor, than by a co-worker. At the same time, in a survey conducted by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (2000), 78% of respondents reported having experienced bullying perpetrated by a manager or supervisor. These findings obviously have implications for all organisations, and again, police organisations are no exception. As mentioned earlier, the survey of UK police support staff by Rayner (2000) reported that respondents identified bullies who were managers or police officers in 88% of cases.

TARGETS

It is well recognised that perpetrators of workplace bullying do not usually bully everyone and that in any workplace there are individuals who are particularly vulnerable to becoming the targets of bullying. So the question remains, why do perpetrators choose particular people as their targets?

It goes without saying that few people would choose to be the target of bullying. However, some researchers argue that various personality traits in an individual may attract the perpetrator’s attention. Randall (1997) discusses various factors in childhood that may lead to the creation of the ‘victim personality’ where bullying targets learn to be ‘submissive in order to try to avoid further confrontation and rejection from their parents but end up making a habit out of this strategy’ (p. 90). Further, Randall (1997) argues that a bully will actively scan a workplace to locate and target a person who is submissive in this manner.

Namie and Namie (2000) argue that some people are more likely to be targets of bullying than others, and suggest a number of factors that might make a person a more attractive target. Specifically, they suggest that people who are:

• driven by a strong sense of equity, justice and integrity;
• who are genuinely bright, independent, and highly skilled;
• positive and non-confrontational people; and
• who have previously been traumatised by a bully

are more likely to find themselves being the target of a workplace bully.

On the other hand, Leymann (1996) argues very strongly against the personality traits of a target being considered as a cause of workplace bullying, instead defining the victim merely as the person in the bullying situation who has lost his or her ‘coping resources’. In this way, the target is not clearly identifiable until one party in the conflict gains the upper hand. Leymann maintains that a further argument against the view that an individual’s personality is a cause of bullying, lies in the consequences that workplace bullying can have on a target’s mental health. Leymann argues that
many targets will go on to experience psychological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after experiencing workplace bullying. Leymann adds that in such cases, ‘even psychiatrists lacking modern knowledge about PTSD as a typical victim disorder misunderstood these symptoms as being what the individual brought into the company in the first place’ (p. 179), rather than as a consequence of experiencing bullying. Many researchers have adopted Leymann’s position that the personality characteristics of the target person should not be the focus of bullying research. Rather, it appears that the quality of the work environment is a more probable cause of workplace bullying.

**WORK ENVIRONMENT**

Many researchers maintain that the quality of the work environment, or the work organisation itself, is a primary factor in workplace bullying. For example, Leymann (1996) notes that analyses of case studies have demonstrated that for those organisations where bullying is evident, there is ‘an almost stereotypic pattern … [involving] extremely poorly organized production and/or working methods and an almost helpless or uninterested management’ (p. 177). Leymann continues to argue that poor conflict management is a secondary factor in workplace bullying when managerial performance, which includes poor conflict management, entails either ‘getting involved in the group dynamics on an equal basis and thereby heating it up further’ or ‘denying that a conflict exists’ (p. 178).

Much of the literature has identified negative work environment factors that might be influential in creating an environment where bullying may thrive. These environmental factors include (Division of Workplace Health and Safety (Qld), 1998; Irish Taskforce on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying, 2001; McCarthy, 1999; Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001; Victorian WorkCover Authority, 2001):

- Poor people management, practices and skills.
- Organisational change variables, such as restructuring and downsizing, the introduction of a new manager or supervisor, or the introduction of new technology.
- Management style or lack of supervision.
- A 'culture of bullying' and initiation practices.
- Competitive work environments.
- Job insecurity.
- Workplaces with high levels of job dissatisfaction.
- Overwork.
- Role conflict.
- Role ambiguity.
- Poor consultation processes.
- Unreasonable performance expectations.
- Work flows and reporting procedures.
- Work location or isolation.
- The composition of the workforce.
- The level and nature of training.
Namie and Namie (2000) argue that companies and agencies whose main characteristic is denial of any problems, fail to address bullying issues because as with any problem, they deny that any conflict exists. Namie and Namie liken this type of organisation to people who are addicted to drugs, and claim that the organisation is characterised by denial, confusion, dishonesty, perfectionism, communication difficulties, poor thinking, a deterioration in ethics, a false illusion of control and domination by scarce resources. They argue that in such organisations, an opportunistic bully could engage in bullying behaviours without calling attention to him or herself. In this situation, the company then becomes the bully’s accomplice and plays a fundamental role in ‘sustaining, even if not directly contributing to, the bullying’ (p. 35).

Likewise, Killoran (2001) and McMahon (2001) assert that the workplace is an ideal setting for a perpetrator of bullying and can indeed nurture the behaviour. McMahon argues that in many organisations, a perpetrator of bullying can exercise their positional power to demean subordinates through an abuse of powers and the misadministration of procedures. Further, McMahon argues that in stress-prevalent situations or periods, some organisations legitimise and validate bullying as a frontline or fallback strategy for coping with problems faced by the organisation.

Further, Einarsen, Raknes, and Matthiesen (1994) found that the occurrence of bullying and harassment was significantly correlated with seven measures of the work environment. In particular, a high degree of bullying was associated with: low satisfaction with work-load; work control; social climate; leadership; and a high degree of role conflict and role ambiguity. Similarly, Rayner (1997a) noted that 92% of respondents reported that they thought employees being overworked caused bullying.

In considering how the work environment might influence the prevalence of workplace bullying, the very nature of human interaction itself cannot be ignored. Whilst it is not argued that the role of the work environment and human interaction are mutually exclusive, it is useful to highlight how social processes may independently ignite or exacerbate bullying amongst colleagues. Perpetrators of workplace bullying will often rely on influencing individuals in the workplace other than the target to sustain or exacerbate the bullying situation. For example, co-workers who witness bullying frequently do not take action to inhibit the perpetrator’s behaviour. This might be because they simply choose not to take action, they feel powerless or they are influenced by the perpetrator’s behaviour (Namie & Namie, 2000).

The term ‘personality conflict’ is often used to describe conflicts between workers that eventually escalate into bullying. Whilst it is true that employees often encounter persons in their workplace environment whom they dislike, there is a general expectation that workers will still treat fellow workers with dignity, respect and professionalism when an instance of conflict occurs. Noting the dangers of confusing the workplace with other social settings, Leymann (1996) contends that the workplace is regulated by behavioural rules that dictate that when conflicts arise, they must always be effectively settled. Further, he argues that when a supervisor fails to effectively manage a conflict situation between workers, this promotes the escalation of the conflict toward a workplace bullying situation.
Whilst we can only really speculate as to whether work environment and cultural factors might result in police organisations being susceptible to bullying, the findings of Rayner (2000) provide some support for this suggestion. In her survey of UK police support staff, respondents were asked to rate how important they felt a number of environmental factors were in causing bullying. The majority of respondents reported that they saw factors such as poor management, the perception that bullies can get away with it, fear of reporting the bully, inadequate training for managers, excessive workloads, stressed managers and police force culture as either being ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important causes of workplace bullying.

In this context, it seems possible that many aspects of the police work environment might make police organisations vulnerable to workplace bullying. Policing has traditionally been regarded as a high stress occupation involving such stressors as (Brown & Campbell, 1994; McNeill, 1996; Shanahan, 1992):

- The behaviour of the public, e.g., verbal abuse, physical danger etc.
- Negative policing-community relations.
- A hierarchical workplace environment.
- An environment dominated by rules and procedures.
- A high level of role conflict.
- A perception that laws are too lenient.
- Shift work.
- Court appearances.
- Internal investigations.
- Shortages in staffing levels.
- Long working hours.
- Work-family conflict.
- The perception (real or imagined) of a lack of support from senior officers.
- Rapid structural or organisational change.

In light of the findings from other organisations summarised above, it seems likely that these aspects of police work may lead to a work environment that facilitates bullying amongst employees.

Further, the police culture might also lead to the hypothesis that police work environments might be conducive to bullying. The idea that police possess a distinctive occupational subculture is central to much of the literature that theorises about policing and police work (Waddington, 1999). Whilst the existence of some form of distinctive homogeneous police culture is contentious (Waddington 1999), the idea that there are some strong unifying features of police work that lead to common values, beliefs, procedures and dispositions, cannot be ignored. Specifically, it has been argued that the police culture is characterised by social isolation, clique formation, codes of silence, resistance to change, informal practices, and a ‘cult of masculinity’ (Brown & Campbell, 1994; Crank, 1998). Again, it is possible that the distinctive aspects of this culture, in addition to the distinctive nature of police work environments, might contribute to police organisations being vulnerable to bullying amongst employees.
SUMMARY
Research that examines the antecedents of bullying has provided a diverse range of perspectives on what causes bullying in the workplace. Research concerning characteristics of perpetrators, targets and work environments has led to a growing consensus that workplace bullying has multiple causes that may operate simultaneously. On the basis of the research reviewed here it would appear that police organisations are no less susceptible to workplace bullying than other organisations.
Consequences

The consequences of workplace bullying can range from outcomes that are an inconvenience for the target, through to outcomes that can be described as horrific. These consequences not only impact on the target of the bullying, but can also produce negative outcomes for the target’s family, co-workers who witness the behaviour, and the organisations in which the bullying takes place. In the following section, the consequences of workplace bullying for the target, the organisation and bystanders are discussed in turn.

Targets

The social groups employees form with their colleagues provide important social networks for adults. Indeed it has been argued that a person’s self-image is significantly influenced by how they are treated by fellow employees (Björkqvist et al., 1994). With this in mind, common sense would suggest that spending time in an environment where one is repeatedly exposed to bullying might have a negative impact on a person’s emotional and physical well-being. Indeed, the growing body of stress research indicates that extended periods of stress, such as that caused by working in such an environment, can have a significant negative impact on an individual (see Ellis, 1997, for a review).

There are now many studies that quantify the effect of workplace bullying on the target individuals. In particular, the reported effects of workplace bullying for the target include (Division of Workplace Health and Safety (Qld), 1998; Leymann, 1996; Namie & Namie, 2000; Office of the Employee Ombudsman, 2000; Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001; Randall, 1997; Thomson, 1997):

• Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem.
• Extreme stress (including stress-related symptoms such as poor sleep, headaches, physical exhaustion, high blood pressure, skin rash, nausea, diarrhoea, weight loss).
• Feelings of helplessness.
• Poor concentration.
• Mood swings.
• Hyper-vigilance (e.g., always anticipating the next attack).
• Loss of morale.
• Higher absenteeism.
• Loss of productivity and efficiency.
• Resignation or early retirement.
• Depression, anxiety and emotional distress.
• Nightmares.
• Self-destructive habits (e.g., substance abuse).
• Nervous breakdown.
• PTSD.
• Suicide or thoughts about suicide.
• Violence or aggression towards others.
• Expulsion from the workplace (resignation or termination).

In his observations of clients at a specialised clinic for victims of workplace bullying, Leymann (1996) reported numerous negative consequences for targets. Specifically, Leymann observed that bullying had effects on the target's possibilities to communicate adequately, the target's possibilities to maintain social contacts and maintain his or her personal reputation, the target's occupational situation and the target's physical health. Further, Leymann noted that targets sometimes develop serious illnesses that cause them to seek medical or psychological help, and are often incorrectly diagnosed. Leymann (n.d.) argued that professionals very often lack sufficient training in workplace trauma and will misinterpret the situation, sometimes resulting in an incorrect diagnosis such as paranoia, manic-depressive illness, or personality disorder, rather than the consequences of workplace bullying.

In addition to debunking some of the popular misdiagnoses that have been used to discredit the targets of workplace bullying, Leymann has actively campaigned to raise awareness of some of the serious illnesses that targets may experience as a result of workplace bullying. Leymann reported a high prevalence of PTSD amongst clients in his workplace bullying clinic. Further, he hypothesised that PTSD can develop more severely in a victim of bullying than in other victims because instead of experiencing an acute trauma incident, their trauma-creating situation is constantly renewed and prolonged (Leymann, n.d.). Perhaps more controversially, Leymann (1990) also argues that the trauma of workplace bullying can lead to suicide. Indeed, he estimated that about 10%-15% of the total number of suicides in Sweden each year are in some part the result of workplace bullying.

The effects of workplace bullying on the target person have also been documented in Australia. The South Australia Working Women's Centre found that respondents reported that they had suffered a 'multiplicity of mental and physical effects' (Thomson, 1997, p. 10). These effects included for example, decreased self-confidence, emotional withdrawal, general nervousness, fatigue, anger, feelings of helplessness, fears of management and co-workers, and of returning to work. Of note, 76% reported experiencing crying or emotional upset that was moderate or severe, and 75% reported nightmares or sleep disorders that were again, moderate or severe. Consistent findings have also been reported in a range of other studies. In a British study of Unison public service union workers, three quarters of those who were being bullied (76%) reported some damage to their health, with stress, depression and lowered self-confidence the most common non-physical complaints experienced (Rayner, 1997a). At the same time, Björkqvist et al. (1994) found that victims of workplace bullying reported experiencing more aggression, anxiety and depression than employees who had not been bullied. Similarly, Einarsen and Raknes (1997) found strong correlations between psychological health and the experience of being personally derogated.

In light of the very serious consequences that workplace bullying can have for the individual target, it is not surprising that these very consequences can in turn influence the overall well-being of partners and family members of the target. For example, the South Australia Working Women's Centre survey found that 69% of respondents believed that their family and personal relationships had been affected to a moderate or severe degree (Thomson, 1997).
Similarly, Namie and Namie (2000) argue that workplace bullying influences the family home primarily through disconcerting verbal or non-verbal messages that the target communicates to his or her family. For example, sleep disruption, anxiety and depression that the target may experience may be observed by family members and cause them significant distress. Alternatively, the target may inadvertently become less supportive of family members as a result of becoming preoccupied with their work problems outside of work hours. Further, Namie and Namie argue that in extreme cases, workplace bullying may result in the target expressing his or her distress and frustration in the form of domestic violence. In such a scenario, the target may physically and emotionally abuse his/her spouse and child(ren) as a result of displaced feelings of frustration, aggression and hopelessness associated with bullying at work.

In focusing on the effects of workplace bullying on the health and family life of targets, it is important not to overlook the effects that being bullied can also have on the work performance of the target person. Stress, negative feelings, feelings of injustice and fear associated with being the target of bullying can influence both the quality and quantity of the work produced, and can damage future employment if performance is not up to required levels and standards (Killoran, 2001). Further, targets may fear a lack of support from both colleagues and higher management should they make a complaint, which may in turn lead to negative consequences such as decreased confidence and morale, and absenteeism. Ultimately, workplace bullying can lead to the target being compelled to take time away from work or to resign from their job. This can result in a loss of income for the target person, but also has negative consequences for the organisation (Randall, 1997).

THE ORGANISATION
Given the effect of workplace bullying on the target person, it is not surprising that workplace bullying would also have a considerable negative impact on the functioning and vitality of an organisation. Previous research suggests that workplace bullying is a major source of lost business productivity and high turnover of staff (Irish Taskforce on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying, 2001; Rayner, 1997a; Thomson, 1997). Costs of workplace bullying for the organisation may include (Division of Workplace Health & Safety (Qld), 1998; Einarsen et al., 1994; Namie & Namie, 2000; Neuman, 2000; Office of the Employee Ombudsman, 2000; Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001; Randall, 1997; Rayner, 1997b; Thomson, 1997):

- Reduced efficiency and deterioration in work quality.
- Reduced productivity and subsequent profitability.
- Decreased quality of service to the community/client base.
- Poor morale and disgruntled employees.
- Erosion of worker loyalty and commitment.
- Increased absenteeism and sick leave.
- High turnover.
- Costs associated with the recruitment and training of new staff.
- Wastage of management resources when trying to resolve the problem.
- Costs associated with counselling, employee assistance programs and mediation.
• Workers compensation claims, and the potential rise in premiums and/or rehabilitation costs.
• Costs resulting from failure to meet legislative provisions, civil action or criminal action.
• Adverse publicity resulting in a poor public image and becoming known as a 'difficult workplace environment'.

Numerous studies have reported links between workplace bullying and both job satisfaction and turnover. For example, Einarsen and Raknes (1997) found significant correlations between exposure to 'non-violent harassment and bullying' and low job satisfaction. In particular, respondents in their study who had experienced such behaviours reported lowered overall job satisfaction, lowered satisfaction with a wide range of specific aspects of their job, dissatisfaction with supervisors and leaders, and dissatisfaction with co-worker interaction.

At the same time, Rayner (1997a) found that 26% of respondents who had been bullied had left their jobs because of the bullying. Targets taking long periods of time off work due to bullying are also a common theme in the literature. For example, Thomson (1997) reported that a total of 70% of respondents indicated that they had taken time off work as a result of being bullied. Of these, 75% used sick leave to take time off while 28% used leave under workers compensation.

There are obvious financial costs associated with high turnover, absenteeism and a workplace that does not function effectively. However, due to the number of hidden and flow-on costs associated with workplace bullying, and given the ambiguity surrounding prevalence rates, these costs are very difficult to quantify. In Australia, Sheehan, McCarthy, Barker, and Henderson (2001) have developed an impact and cost assessment model to enable them to form a 'guesstimate' of the overall cost of workplace bullying, including hidden and lost-opportunity costs. They estimate that workplace bullying costs Australian employers alone between $6 and $13 billion every year (using a conservative prevalence estimate of 3.5% of Australian employees experiencing bullying at any one time). It was further estimated that this cost could extend up to between $17 and $36 billion per year when a somewhat higher prevalence estimate is applied (i.e., 15% of Australian employees being bullied at any one time).

A further cost arises from the potential legal ramifications for organisations that do not take reasonable steps to implement and promote anti-workplace bullying policies, procedures and grievance procedures. At the present time, workplace bullying is not specifically addressed by legislation, and the legal system does not provide a clear and comprehensive avenue for the resolution of workplace bullying complaints (Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001). However, there are a number of options that a target of workplace bullying may pursue, should they be unable to access or be dissatisfied with internal grievance procedures within their organisation. Whilst available legal processes depend on both the individual circumstances of a bullying complaint, and the legislation applicable within a particular State, targets may for example, be able to access a remedy via the Industrial Relations Commission, WorkCover, Workplace Health and Safety, the Employment Ombudsman, the Anti-Discrimination Commission Common Law, or via the criminal code (if there has been a physical assault) (See Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001, for a summary of these alternatives). In a claim of bullying, a plaintiff's rights would be governed by the contract of employment, relevant workplace legislation and/or
common law. Failure to adequately protect employees from workplace bullying has resulted in cases where employees have sued for negligence, with substantial judgements in favour of plaintiffs being recorded to date in Australia (Duggan, 2001; Harbord, 2001). Should the cycle of claim and counter claim in such a case run for several years, the potential for this to compound into an enormous cost (not to mention compound the suffering for individuals who have already experienced the trauma) is considerable (McCarthy & Rylance, 2001).

**Bystanders**

There are usually a number of other workers who witness workplace bullying, but are not direct targets themselves (Namie & Namie, 2000; Thomson, 1997). Bystanders to workplace bullying behaviours may also experience consequences from being a witness to the ongoing conflict, although this may be much less than the consequences for the actual target (Rayner, 1997b). For example, respondents in some surveys have reported that their stress levels have increased due to witnessing bullying (Rayner, 2000). The Office of the Employee Ombudsman (2000) has suggested that bystanders may be affected by workplace bullying through fear that they might be the next victim, anger and resentment at having been intimidated by the bully, guilt, withdrawal and intimidation.

In addition there is evidence that being a bystander to workplace bullying can also lead to becoming a target. Perpetrators of workplace bullying often target individuals but also target people in small groups (Rayner, 1997a). In the South Australia Working Women’s Centre survey (Thomson, 1997), over four-fifths of all respondents (82%) reported that during the period that they were bullied, co-workers at their workplace were also bullied.

**Summary**

The consequences of workplace bullying are wide-ranging and vary in severity. In addition to numerous negative outcomes for the targets of bullying, and bystanders who witness the behaviour, the research literature suggests that workplace bullying may also have a considerable negative impact on the functioning and vitality of organisations. In addition to the behaviour’s impact on productivity, efficiency and morale, workplace bullying presents likely financial costs to organisations in the form of high turnover, absenteeism and potential legal costs.
Implications for Police Organisations

It is clear that workplace bullying can generate considerable costs for both employees and organisations. This is as true for police organisations as for any others. Indeed, it may be that due to the nature of police organisations they have the potential to incur even greater consequences from workplace bullying than do other organisations. Workplace bullying can have a negative impact on work performance, which in turn may potentially influence the quality of service police organisations provide to the community. Police have a high risk job compared to many other professions, and face a range of physical and psychological risks in their operational duties (Mayhew, 2001). It is well recognised that stress levels within police agencies play a significant role in absenteeism and wastage through early retirement (Brown & Campbell, 1994). In light of the risks for police personnel already inherent in the execution of their employment, the risk of further psychological and physical trauma from workplace bullying seems an even greater organisational issue.

It is possible that many aspects of police work, such as work environment factors and aspects of police culture, might make police organisations vulnerable to workplace bullying. Whilst there is insufficient evidence to establish the prevalence of workplace bullying in Australasian police organisations, the findings of Boni and Circelli (in press), Hoel and Cooper (2000) and Rayner (2000) suggest that it is an issue that should be pursued. Indeed, these findings point to the need to establish both the level of bullying currently occurring in police organisations and the nature of such bullying.

It is clear that all employees have a right to a working environment that is free from discrimination, harassment and bullying. Whilst the legal system does not presently provide targets with a clear and comprehensive avenue for the resolution of complaints of workplace bullying (Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001), from an organisational perspective, the potential legal consequences of ignoring workplace bullying cannot be underestimated. Both in Australia and overseas, common law cases are setting precedents for workplace bullying to be dealt with under contract and personal injury claims (Duggan, 2001). Some cases have resulted in significant compensation payments for employees who have experienced bullying (see Barron, 2000a; Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001). Like all organisations, police agencies may be subject to such claims. Accordingly, police organisations stand to benefit from ensuring that adequate mechanisms exist in police grievance procedures to resolve complaints and limit the potential for bullying situations to escalate into matters that need to be settled via external legal processes and workers compensation claims.

Whilst workplace bullying is not specifically prohibited by legislation in Australia (Harbord, 2001), police organisations have legal obligations, under common law, and under workplace health and safety legislation for example, to ensure the health and safety of all workers. With bullying becoming recognised as a significant threat to the health and safety of employees, police organisations are obliged to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to prohibit and prevent it occurring in their organisation. Individual police personnel also have an obligation to follow instructions given by their employer relating to the health and safety aspects of workplace bullying.
Whilst, in general, Australasian police agencies have now included definitions of workplace bullying in relevant policy, police organisations also need to ensure that they promote a climate where bullying is not tolerated. This includes providing employees with guidelines as to what is and is not appropriate workplace behaviour and ensuring for example, that the boundary between management prerogative and bullying is clearly defined. When a bullying situation is identified, management need to take firm action and ensure that it is investigated promptly, impartially and in such a way that it respects the rights of all the involved parties. Further, managers and supervisors must ensure that both alleged targets and witnesses of workplace bullying are not victimised when a complaint is made (Randall, 1997).

In the development of policies and procedures to address bullying, it is important to acknowledge the need for management to investigate both sides of the perpetrator-target situation (Randall, 1997). Whilst ignorance is not an appropriate excuse for bullying, management must recognise that not all cases of workplace bullying are clear-cut and therefore, it is important to ensure that in helping alleged targets, natural justice is not denied to accused perpetrators.

Education and training of police employees is an essential element of any strategy to address workplace bullying (Division of Workplace Health and Safety (Qld), 1998; McCarthy, 1999; Queensland Workplace Bullying Taskforce, 2001). Executive management have a responsibility to ensure that all police employees receive training on matters related to bullying as one aspect of training in relation to other forms of discrimination and harassment, and to ensure that managers and supervisors are aware of their responsibility to resolve grievances. Supervisors must be capable of reading the first signs of a developing bullying situation in order to be able to intervene early (Leymann, 1996). Improving employee awareness of both the problem and the avenues available to address it might also empower employees to take appropriate and effective action in the event that they are bullied at work. In addition, education and training provide the opportunity for all police employees to see the debilitating outcomes bullying can have for both target persons and the organisation. Further, it allows for a demonstration of the fact that reducing bullying in the workplace improves the work environment for all employees. It also allows for discussion of the fact that anti-bullying initiatives are an opportunity to ensure the personal well-being of all employees, rather than an initiative to punish camaraderie (Randall, 1997).

Finally, it must be acknowledged that simply incorporating anti-bullying policies into existing equity and diversity policies is unlikely to result in an overnight cessation of any bullying that might be present in police organisations. Accordingly, executive management have a responsibility to regularly monitor the effectiveness of workplace equity and diversity policies and procedures in relation to workplace bullying with a view to ensuring maximal effectiveness.
Conclusion

Workplace bullying has been shown to have detrimental consequences for both employees and organisations. It is inappropriate in any work environment as it undermines the individual’s right to dignity at work. Further, it can lead to numerous negative outcomes for both individual employees and the organisation.

It is therefore imperative for police organisations to examine the extent and characteristics of bullying amongst police personnel, and ensure that sensible and effective mechanisms are in place to minimise the associated risks. Police organisations need to clearly state which behaviours are acceptable in the workplace and which are unacceptable. In this way police organisations must promote a climate where bullying is not tolerated. Further, police organisations must ensure that mechanisms are in place to address the problem in an effective, fair and timely way.
References


Appendix – Example Definitions from Australasian Police Agency Policy

A range of example definitions from jurisdiction policy covering workplace bullying.

AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE
Excerpt from the AFP National Guideline on Workplace Harassment

What is harassment?
Workplace harassment is behaviour which is offensive, abusive, threatening or belittling, directed at an individual or group of workers because of some perceived or real attribute. Such attributes may include race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, sex, sexual preference, marital status, pregnancy, age, or physical or mental disability.

Harassment is behaviour that is unwelcome, unsolicited, unreciprocated and usually (although not always) repeated. It makes the workplace unpleasant, humiliating or intimidating for the person or group targeted by this behaviour.

Workplace harassment is a form of workplace discrimination, and as such, is unlawful. Discrimination generally operates in an environment in which the balance of power is unequal. Harassment occurs when that power is improperly exercised to the detriment of a person or group of people. It is the way that some people go about exerting power over other people, or making themselves feel good by making someone else feel miserable.

There are many consequences of harassment at work, both at individual and organisation levels:

• For individuals, these can include lack of self-esteem or confidence in carrying out tasks, to actual or potential disadvantage in individual’s opportunities for appointment, promotion or transfer.

• For an organisation, it often results in loss of productivity and of effective work practices.

Workplace harassment should not be confused with legitimate comment and advice, including negative comment or feedback, from managers and supervisors on the work performance of an individual or group.

Examples of Workplace Harassment
Some examples of the forms that harassment at work can take include:

• Offensive physical contact or coercive behaviour which is intended to be derogatory or intimidating

• Interference with an employee’s workplace, work materials, equipment or property, apart from that which is necessary for the ongoing work of the organisation
• Continual unjustified and unnecessary comments about an employee’s work or capacity for work
• Pictures, posters, graffiti or written material which is offensive or obscene
• Phone calls, letters or electronic mail messages on computer networks which are threatening, offensive or abusive – directed either to home or work
• Persistent following or stalking within the workplace, or to and from work
• Dismissive treatment or material expressive of prejudice or stereotyped assumptions about the group to which an employee may belong, e.g. about religious or food preferences, social or cultural customs
• Trivialising issues which relate to the status of ethnic groups, either sex or in relation to homosexuality
• Continual exclusion of an employee from normal conversation, work assignments, work related social activities and networks in the workplace
• Telling sexually oriented jokes, engaging in unwanted sexual teasing, subjecting another employee to pressure for dates, sexual advances or unwelcome touching
• Comments about a person’s physical shape, appearance, age (either young or old)
• Sexual assault or rape. Note – that these are criminal offences and unlike the other behaviours above, should always be treated formally.

QUEENSLAND POLICE
Excerpt from the Queensland Police Human Resources Management Manual

Workplace Harassment
‘Workplace Harassment’ means the less favourable treatment of a person by another in the workplace, beyond which may be considered reasonable and appropriate workplace behaviour. It includes any behaviour in the workplace where a ‘reasonable person’ in receipt of the facts of a matter would have anticipated the possibility that the other person would feel offended, victimized, humiliated or intimidated by the conduct. It is not, and must not be confused with, legitimate comment and advice (including negative comment and feedback given appropriately) by managers and supervisors.

NEW SOUTH WALES POLICE
Definition from NSW Police Internal Grievance Procedures

Harassment
Harassment is any unwanted ongoing behaviour, targeted by one party towards another. Harassment may include any form of:
• Intimidation, bullying, victimisation, humiliation or vilification.
• Sexist, homophobic or racist comments/jokes.
• Unwanted sexual advances/attention/communication.

Any harassment is unacceptable to the NSW Police. It is also unlawful on the same grounds as discrimination – see below. At the very least, it is inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour.
TASMANIA POLICE
Extract from Tasmania Police Access & Equity Policy

Harassment/Prohibited Conduct
Under the banner of Prohibited Conduct, harassment is described by the Act as any conduct or behaviour which offends, humiliates, intimidates, insults or ridicules another person. [The Prohibited Conduct (Section 17) provision covers the attributes of: gender, marital status, pregnancy, breastfeeding, parental status and family responsibilities].

The test applied to harassment is if a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated that the other person would have been offended, humiliated, intimidated, insulted or ridiculed.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA POLICE
Excerpt from South Australia Police Equity and Diversity Employee Management Manual

Bullying is a form of harassment. It is behaviour that unreasonably interferes with the personal comfort, respect, or dignity of others because of the actions of others, usually in positions of authority or power. Bullying occurs where a person inappropriately takes action to:

• coerce
• intimidate
• oppress
• persecute

others physically or morally by threat or physical force.

It is not constituted by isolated outbursts of anger or frustration, or by ordinary differences in personality styles.

Bullying contributes to stress-related injuries. SAPOL’s occupational health, safety and welfare policy aims to eliminate stress-related injuries.

Bullying behaviours may include:
• Verbal abuse;
• Snide remarks and constant put-downs which are humiliating;
• Ostracising and isolating individuals;
• Inappropriate comments on a person’s physical appearance.

Example:
Within a workplace there is a strong requirement to ‘fit in’ and an individual is ostracised and isolated because they do not share the dominant group’s interests.

Encouraging and supporting bullying by others is also unacceptable.
Bullying behaviours do not include:

- Reasonable and justifiable demands for performance;
- Justifiable, reasoned, and constructive criticism related to work performance;
- Reasonable administrative action taken in a reasonable manner.

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA POLICE**

Draft definition being utilised in the formulation of WA Police ‘Workplace Bullying Policy’

‘Bullying’ – is unwelcome and aggressive behaviour that intimidates, humiliates and/or undermines a person or group. Bullying involves a persistent pattern of behaviour over a period of time and may include verbal abuse, physical assault, unjustified criticism, sarcasm, insults, spreading false or malicious rumours about someone, isolating or ignoring a person, putting people under unnecessary pressure with overwork or impossible deadlines, and sabotaging someone’s work or their ability to do their job by not providing them with vital information and resources.