

Workplace behaviours research

The Centre for Research on Workplace Behaviours at the University of Glamorgan Business School (<http://workplacebehaviours.research.glam.ac.uk>), the only centre of its kind in the UK, was officially launched at the House of Lords on 17 September 2008 and then at the Senedd in Cardiff on 7 November 2008.

The new centre will conduct research into the causes and effects of workplace bullying and other behaviours in businesses and organisations throughout the UK and further afield. Areas of expertise within the research centre include bullying in the workplace, conflict and conflict resolution, and equalities and diversity challenges. The centre can also assist with organisational change and development strategies and with bespoke research studies on workplace issues such as emotion at work, group behaviours, partnership behaviours, and corporate socially responsible behaviours.

Professors Duncan Lewis and Michael Sheehan, co-directors of the centre, launched first in London because they are keen to be seen as a UK and global centre of research expertise. The centre conducts pan-UK research and has worked with major organisations and trade unions nationally, particularly in the area of workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying is most often defined as the repeated less favourable treatment of a person by another or others in the workplace, which may be considered unreasonable and inappropriate workplace practice. Unreasonableness or inappropriateness refers to behaviours that are offensive, intimidating, humiliating, or that degrade, ridicule or insult a

person or persons at work. The behaviours often leave those who experience them or those who witness them being perpetrated against others feeling distressed, upset or psychologically traumatised by exposure to such behaviours.

Most often, these behaviours are performed by managers or supervisors against their staff although there is increasing evidence that peer-to-peer bullying, upwards bullying (bullying of senior staff or managers by junior staff) and bullying from outside the organisation towards staff inside the organisation are becoming more widespread.

Professor Michael Sheehan comments: 'Clearly the issue of workplace bullying is a serious matter and has implications not only for those who experience being bullied at work but also for those who witness the inappropriate behaviours and for organisations themselves. Such behaviours do little to contribute to organisational loyalty or commitment. Nor do they enhance productivity, increase job satisfaction, or decrease staff turnover. The centre aims to advance understanding of relationships and behaviours on a local, national and international level.'

A recent study conducted by staff at the centre in conjunction with the Teacher Support Network shows that senior managers, head teachers, and colleagues are also bullying teachers.

The survey asked teachers and lecturers whether they had experienced any of 22 different types of negative behaviour at work including gossip about themselves, being denied access to leave or benefits to which they were entitled, being humiliated or ridiculed, and being ignored or excluded.

Two hundred and twenty-seven people responded to an online survey seeking to establish the nature, extent, prevalence and severity of workplace bullying among teachers. Of that 227, 73 directly stated that they had been bullied at work. Thirty-two stated that it was the head teacher who was the bully. Fifteen stated that it was a member of the senior management team. Eight said it was a head of department and six said it was the deputy head who was the perpetrator. Thirty-eight respondents reported adverse health effects, 24 made references to sick leave, and 17 said they had taken sickness absence.

Another outcome was that some had left the profession or were considering doing so. The intention to leave came from those new to the profession as well as those who had served a considerable amount of time. ■

