

# Inside Trauma



## A Word from the Editor

It is important for a person delivering services in a corporate field to be able to deliver immediate critical incident response. The levels of trauma that an event can cause the individual or group that witnessed the trauma can range depending on their interpretation of the event and the aftermath. Critical incidents may trigger a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms, including increased heart rate, high blood pressure and anxiety. The initial action of a counsellor or psychologist is to calm staff members following a critical incident and to ensure that their immediate needs are met.



It is important to respond immediately to reduce the risks of post-traumatic stress disorder and other associated stress which may affect well-being and reduce normal functioning. One way that many businesses act in doing so is providing Employee Assistance Programs to their employees.

There are benefits in businesses having an Employee Assistance Program. Some of these benefits are:

- These programs form part of an overall Occupational Health and Safety program and culture.
- The business recognises that the mental health of their employees is important to performance and workforce productivity.
- The program is seen as a benefit to staff in aiding the retuning and recruitment of high quality personnel.

This newsletter will highlight workplace bullying, critical incident response and ways to reduce the affects of stress at work on a person's mental wellbeing.

*Elizabeth Lourenco*  
*Provisional Psychologist*

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Barta

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## A Useful Definition

A definition used by Melbourne-based health psychologist Toni Mellington is the one that provides some useful guidelines of what constitutes bullying. That is, workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed toward an employee, or group of employees, that creates a risk to health and safety. "However, across differing workplace bullying definitions, there remain four key elements: workplace bullying is a workplace conflict; it is enduring and repeated in nature; it is inappropriate and possibly aggressive; and it results in a level of (physical and/or psychological) distress."



On an individual level, Mellington said: "Workplace bullying can impact on a person from (creating) mild annoyance through to severe psychological, social and economic trauma. Previous research has indicated impacts such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, decreased self-confidence, panic attacks, fatigue, eating disorders, post traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation." Mellington's research looked predominately at the health impact of workplace bullying and she has identified three key findings:

"There is a direct negative relationship between workplace bullying and health. Workers who indicated that they had been bullied reported poorer health. And, breaking that down even further, the severity of the perceived impact of the bullying was significantly correlated with poorer health."

As a side note there are other variables that need to be taken into consideration both in terms of pre existing physical and psychological conditions and the psycho social context in which a person operates outside of their workplace.

**Peter Barta**  
**Psychologist**

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## The Cost of Workplace Bullying and Taking the First Step Toward Developing a Policy

Cost of workplace bullying can have catastrophic consequences, from suicide to poor productivity. Griffith University research in 2013, found that financial costs to businesses is between 6 and 13 billion dollars a year which includes decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, staff turnover and poor morale.

While the workplace can offer a fulfilling and rewarding part of our life, the opposite is often the case because workplaces have covert or overt bullying which can lead to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and suicide. Perhaps before anything is done we need to have a think, take a moment and reflect. Ask yourself, have I been bullied in the workplace? You will most likely rely on a definition that you have developed or come across. Perhaps some following guidelines may help to crystallize the components of bullying. The term workplace bullying incorporates 3 distinct areas.

- Violence
- Harassment
- Bullying

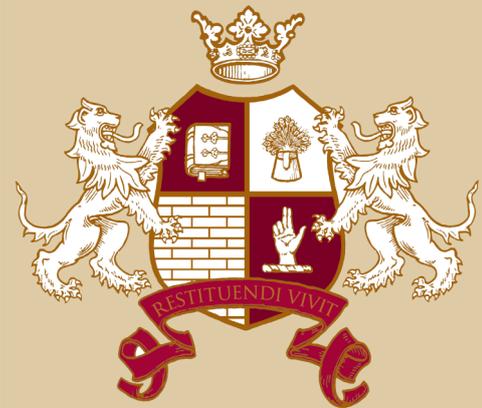


The human rights commission reference to workplace bullying must be interpreted in context. Therefore the definition must include the following:

*'Workplace bullying is verbal, physical, social or psychological abuse by your employer (or manager), another person or group of people at work. Workplace bullying can happen in any type of workplace, from offices to shops, cafes, restaurants, workshops, community groups and government organisations. Workplace bullying can happen to volunteers, work experience students, interns, apprentices, casual and permanent employees. Some types of workplace bullying are criminal offences.'*

Every workplace needs to formulate a definition that makes sense for it's organisation, even a code or a set of acceptable behaviours will suffice. Perhaps your workplace has not yet developed these; it may like to consider what bullying in the work place looks like.

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for more information.



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Consider the following:

- Repeated hurtful remarks, or making fun of your work or you as a person (including your family, sex, sexuality, gender identity, race or culture, educations or economic background)
- Sexual harassment, particularly behaviour such as unwelcome touching, sexually explicit comments and requests that make you uncomfortable.
- Excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in activities that relates to your work
- Playing mind games, ganging up on you, or other types of psychological harassment
- Intimidation (making you feel less important and undervalued)
- Giving you pointless or demeaning tasks that have nothing to do with your job.
- Giving you impossible jobs that can't be done in the given time or with the resources provided
- Deliberately changing your work hours or schedule to make it difficult for you
- Deliberately holding back information you need for getting your work done properly
- Pushing, shoving, tripping, grabbing you in the workplace
- Attacking or threatening with equipment, knives, guns, clubs or any other type of object that can be turned into a weapon
- Initiation or hazing – where you are made to do humiliating or inappropriate things in order to be accepted as part of the team.



Careful consideration should incorporate the above, but also reflect the culture of the workplace before a draft prototype policy is created. After that it becomes a work in progress.

Getting help:

- Trauma Centre of Australia 03 9205 9488
- Human Rights Commission 1300 656 419
- A psychologist
- Workplace Victoria can provide advice and help if you are experiencing workplace bullying.

**Peter Horton**  
**Psychologist**

## Trauma and Psychology Interest Group Seminar

CPT: practice for the treatment of PTSD.

The topic for our Melbourne event is Cognitive Processing Therapy. The seminar will be based on the model of CPT (the difference between CPT and exposure therapy), evidence for CPT (the difference between CPT and exposure therapy), evidence for CPT (20+ years of research) and CPT in practice (how it works).

Proudly presented by Dr. Jon Finch.

### Where:

The Melbourne Multicultural Hub  
506 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne,  
VIC, 3000

### When:

April 20th 2015  
6.00pm-8.30pm

### Cost:

Student: \$15.00

APS Member: \$25.00

Non-APS Member: \$30.00

