

Submission to The Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Workplace Bullying

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The Experience of Victims of Workplace Bullying

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Employed as an Administration Manager in a branch of a large Company, I was the target of ongoing workplace bullying for a period of seven years. Due to the nature of my job, I was considered a pariah and experienced countless episodes of bullying by a number of staff members over that time. These episodes varied in intensity over the first five years, which had seen my job and reputation threatened numerous times and had significant effects on my emotional, physical and psychological health.

In my position, I was in a no win situation. It was a part of my role to ensure compliance with company policy and procedure, but in doing so conflicted with the interests of some staff who were afforded an unwritten but magical protection.

In the last two years the bullying escalated so far out of control and to the point of absurdity, when members of senior management became involved. After believing myself to be going insane, I sought medical attention and in the last seven months sought assistance through a psychologist. I took annual leave and for a period cut down my hours of work, but the bullying escalated.

Through serious ill health, I was forced to leave the workplace, but beforehand, requested a meeting with a senior HR manager. On recounting my experience of the past seven years, the response: "that is a horror story".

It has taken me close to five years to make sufficient sense of not only the events in the workplace, but the following years in the Workcover system, both were forms of torture.

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The experience of living with someone who has been subjected to workplace bullying can be best characterised as living in a nightmare state.

My partner was subjected to nearly seven years of bullying in the workplace while in the employ of a major company from 2001 to 2007

Although only endeavouring to do her job as directed, she was ridiculed, verbally abused and ostracized by work colleagues and managers who were very poorly versed or trained in workplace etiquette. These people were unaccepting of work place changes and viewed anyone who tried to change the status quo as the enemy.

Having worked for 30 years in large corporations I'm well aware of the various work place undesirable cultures and disruptive dynamics that can develop. In my experience, the managers for the best part had the company's best interest at heart and dealt swiftly with workers who didn't adhere to the company mantra. At this company, managers did nothing to support company culture and their behaviour towards my partner was disgraceful. It was thuggery conducted in a closed "boys" club.

As an observer I just couldn't believe how an organization could allow this sort of treatment of an employee by people at all levels (branch management, area managers, HR, etc.) and be prepared to look on, do nothing about it and even contribute to it.

The constant and prolonged mental abuse and bad treatment that my partner endured at work had negative effects on her mental state and negatively impacted on our relationship and family life. She was consumed by these events and was constantly talking about her situation trying to make some sense of it. I felt powerless to offer any consolation except that she might leave that environment by resigning her position. She felt that if she took this course of action it would be a defeat and only allowing such a culture to survive. She lived in hope that things would improve and that anyone following in her footsteps would not be subjected to a similar fate. Of course things didn't improve and the situation went from bad to appalling over a seven year period.

I could see the negative impact that this situation was having on my partner's state of mind. Some might consider that those who experience bullying to be weaklings or maybe even weak of character. In my partner's case this could not be further from the truth. My partner is a person of strong character and had the moral courage to stand alone for what she considered to be right or true. However, this experience over a seven year period had denigrated and reduced her to a state where I lived in constant fear that she may turn to suicide.

I also couldn't see the situation getting any better and often had thoughts of leaving. In the end when she was so badly injured, my partner went on extended sick leave and eventually Workcover. This brought initial relief from the work place torment, but a torment of a different nature was about to begin dealing with the Workcover process which she endured for three years.

In summary, I believe that a lot of lip service has been given to the issue of bullying in the work place over a very long period but nothing of substance has yet materialized. The laws are supposed to help those who for whatever reason are unable to either stand up for their rights or are pounded so far into the dirt through mental abuse that they are rendered incapable of defending themselves. The present Worksafe system identifies and addresses dangerous

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physical work place practices but does very little to monitor or identify the just as dangerous mental abuse and bullying practices.

I have been asked by the author of this submission to confirm the complexities and culture of the business in which we were employed.

I am both a former workplace colleague and a former workplace foe of the author of this submission.

After spending approximately 40 years in the industry in which we were employed, I can confirm that certain matters of company policy and procedure often differed from some members of staff to others.

This was a cause of conflict between myself other members of staff and the author of this submission during her years of employment.

I now understand the implications this had on her health and acknowledge that the culture of our workplace placed her in an impossible position.

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