

Survey Report: Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying

Prepared 30th May 2010

by Know Bull! (Australia)

To support 'Workplace Bullying Awareness Month'

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Report on the Know Bull! Survey Findings: Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying

"The serial bully, who in my estimation accounts for about one person in thirty in society, is the single most important threat to the effectiveness of organisations, the profitability of industry, the performance of the economy, and the prosperity of society."

Tim Field (Author 'Bully in Sight'), December 1999

Background

In the latter part of 2008 and early 2009, the team comprising the Australian online anti-bullying resource known as the Know Bull! website, conducted an online survey titled, *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying*. The details of, and the reasons for conducting the survey were as follows:

1. One of the primary goals of the Know Bull! website

The [Know Bull! website](#) was officially launched in May 2008. From the outset, one of the primary goals of Know Bull! was to provide website visitors with statistics and facts about workplace bullying. This goal led to the creation of a ['facts and stats'](#) page within the Know Bull! website.

2. Internet users are seeking workplace bullying statistics

After monitoring website visitor data for some time, it was apparent that this 'facts and stats' page was repeatedly the most visited page on the Know Bull! site. Coincidentally, this same page also ranks very highly in web search results. A 'Google' whole-of-web search on the phrase "workplace bullying statistics" ranks this web page at 2 from a possible 44,400. Additionally, a 'Google' whole-of-web search on the phrase "Australian workplace bullying statistics" ranks this web page at 1 from a possible 17,500.¹ Clearly internet users are seeking statistical information on workplace bullying. The question then became, how could the Know Bull! website further assist these people in their search?

3. Briefly about the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey*

A survey titled, *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying* was posted on a dedicated page within the Know Bull! website late 2008, and visitors to the website were requested to participate.

The survey consisted of 25 questions, and a number of 'sub questions'. Participants were also provided the option of supplying further information by way of comments.

4. Information sought from the Survey

The 'type' of information being sought from the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying* survey was both quantitative and qualitative, and included: a. Do workplace bullies employ 'preferred' tactics; b. What are the predominant health effects of workplace bullying on targets; c. When workplace bullying is brought to the attention of organisations – are they dealing with it effectively; d. Can increasing trends in workplace bullying be identified; e.

¹ 1. Results from 'Google' web search conducted 30th May 2010

Does the information provided by participants in this survey correlate with the key findings of other research into workplace bullying, such as the renowned [Workplace Bullying Institute-Zogby U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey](#) conducted in 2007; and f. What are the implications of the findings of the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying* survey on businesses and organisations in general?

5. Survey response rate

Response rate of survey was N=54 (61.6% Australian respondents, 22.2% International respondents, 11.1% supplied no response to nationality). This fairly small rate is attributed a. the 'depth' of information being sought such as the 'types' of bullying behaviour experienced by targets and the resultant health effects, and b. that the survey was conducted from among the visitors to the [Know Bull! website](#) and not a scientific survey administered by a professional survey company.

Key Findings – The most salient points

1. Workplace bullies are predominantly female

94.5% of survey respondents indicated they had been bullied, with the 'workplace bully' being predominantly female (52.9%), as opposed to a male (47.05%).

2. Workplace bullies don't always act alone

23.5% of those who indicated they had been bullied stated that the bully did not act alone and that accomplices were involved (mobbing).

3. Workplace bully 'targets' experience reduced productivity

52.94% of bully 'targets' stated that as a result of the workplace bullying their productivity was reduced by 50-70%.

4. Workplace bullying 'witnesses' experience reduced productivity

Those who 'witnessed' a workplace-bullying incident in either a former, or current workplace (100% of respondents), also stated their productivity levels were affected, with the majority (66.7%) estimating a 10-40% decrease.

5. An 'active' bully in 66.6% of workplaces - and more likely to be a 'boss'

66.6% of all respondents stated that a workplace bully was currently 'active' in their workplace, while 49.9% of these respondents estimated that this bully had been responsible for at least 4 to more than 7 staff leaving their workplaces over the past 1-2 years. Further, this active bully was less likely to be a co-worker (16.6%), and more likely (58.2%) to be a 'boss' such as a Manager, Senior Manager, or CEO/Executive Director. Alarming, 83.3% of these 'boss bullies' don't act alone – preferring to operate as a bully group, or 'mob'.

6. Workplace bully 'actions' have a strong, negative effect on staff morale

100% of respondents who indicated there was an 'active' bully in their workplace, also stated the 'actions' of this person/persons was having a negative effect on staff morale.

7. 1 out of 2 report workplace bullying, but 9 out of 10 say the result isn't good

While 52.9% of bully targets said 'Yes' to having previously reported workplace bullying to a supervisor or manager...88.9% stated that the situation had not been dealt with satisfactorily. Of these, 50% stated that the bully remained, and that nothing was done by their employer to address the workplace bullying.

8. 7 out of 10 leave their job due to workplace bullying

72.2% of all respondents, whether the 'target' of a workplace bully, or a 'witness' stated they had left a job as a direct result of workplace bullying.

9. Workplace bullying increases stress levels at work in 9 out of 10 staff

88.8% of all respondents stated that workplace bullying had 'most definitely' added to their stress levels at work.

10. Workplace bullies exhibit a 'pattern' of identifiable behaviours

83.3% of all respondents stated that 'intimidating behaviour' was the most prevalent behaviour exhibited by workplace bullies. This was closely followed by 'humiliating behaviour' (72.2%); 'public' displays (61.1%); 'decisions constantly undermined' (61.1%); 'threatening behaviour' (55.5%); 'verbal abuse' (55.5%); and, 'mobbing' (55.5%).

11. 4 out of 5 bully targets suffer depression and sleeping problems after bullying

Of those respondents who indicated they had been the target of a workplace bully, 82.5% stated they had suffered or had been diagnosed with both 'sleeping problems', and 'depression' after being targeted by a workplace bully. This was closely followed by 'anxiety' indicated by 76.47% of bully targets, and 'constant fatigue' (58.82%). Of greater concern, is that 5.5%, or (1 in 20) bully targets had 'suicidal thoughts' after having been exposed to workplace bullying.

12. Staff suicide and the workplace bully

16.6% of respondents said that they had known of, or worked with a staff member who, after being targeted by a workplace bully, later committed suicide.

13. Legal accountability for bully effects after failure/refusal to address bullying

94.4% of all respondents agreed that organisations and senior personnel who fail/refuse to address workplace bullying should be held legally responsible i.e. prosecuted for the actions/effect a workplace bully has on other staff.

14. Support for statutory changes regarding 'hostile work environments'

100% of respondents who agreed that organisations and senior personnel should be prosecuted for the effects of workplace bullies resulting from failure/refusal to address bullying in the workplace – also stated they would support the introduction of a 'new' statutory course of action encompassing the notion of 'the deliberate and/or intentional infliction of a hostile work environment', under which organisations, and bullies could be held legally accountable.

15. 'Targets' of workplace bullies have identifiable traits

From a list of work ethic and personality traits, 72.2% of all respondents indicated that the most prevalent traits in 'targets' prior to encountering a bully attack, as being 'skilled' and 'hard working'. These traits were followed closely by 'truthful' (66.6%), 'very competent' (66.6%), 'intelligent' (61.1%), 'professional' (55.5%), and 'ethical' (55.5%).

16. There's a 1 in 2 chance that staff aged 46+ will become a bully 'target'

52.9% of respondents that indicated they had been the target of a workplace bully, were aged 46 years and over.

Discussion – What 'meaning' can we derive from these findings?

1. The 'sisters are doing it for themselves'...

While the survey found a fairly even split on the male to female workplace bully ratio – the females at 52.9% were revealed as the larger portion of workplace bullies. Even though the most often quoted survey in recent times, [Workplace Bullying Institute-Zogby 2007 U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey](#) noted that 40% of bullies are women...it would seem that the girls are starting to make up lost ground.

The WBI-Zogby Survey also found that women appear to prefer their own kind, choosing other women as targets more than 70 percent of the time – which was also reflected in our own statistics, with 66.6% of women preferring to bully other women in the workplace.

While the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* didn't 'query the 'why' of female on female bullying, the following excerpt from *The New York Times* may provide possible explanations, and direction for further research:

ONE reason women choose other women as targets "is probably some idea that they can find a less confrontative person or someone less likely to respond to aggression with aggression," said Gary Namie, research director for the Workplace Bullying Institute, which ordered the study in 2007.

But another dynamic may be at work. After five decades of striving for equality, women make up more than 50 percent of management, professional and related occupations, says Catalyst, the nonprofit research group. And yet, its 2008 census found, only 15.7 percent of Fortune 500 officers and 15.2 percent of directors were women.

Leadership specialists wonder, are women being "overly aggressive" because there are too few opportunities for advancement? Or is it stereotyping and women are only perceived as being overly aggressive? Is there a double standard at work?

[The New York Times, 9 May 2009](#)

While the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* revealed more female than male workplace bullies – the results also revealed males overwhelmingly prefer to 'bully' their own kind (80%) as well.

Bully	Target	Percentage
Female	-	52.9%
Male	-	47.1%
Female	Female	66.6%
Female	Male	33.3%
Male	Female	20%
Male	Male	80%

• Table 1. Ratio of male/female workplace bullies; and gender of bully and target

2. Safety in (bully) numbers, and the direction is top-down...

Almost one quarter of those respondents (23.5%) who indicated they had been bullied, also stated that the bully did *not* act alone.

Further, in those workplaces where an 'active' bully exists (66.6% of all respondents), this bully was less likely to be a co-worker (16.6%), and more likely (58.2%) to be a 'boss' such as a Manager, Senior Manager, or CEO/Executive Director. This finding was also reflected in the [Workplace Bullying Institute-Zogby 2007 U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey](#) which noted that 72% of "bullies are bosses", and that the "bully boss stereotype is real".

The Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* also revealed that 83.3% of these 'bully bosses' don't act alone – preferring to operate as a bully group, or 'mob'. This finding is particularly concerning, and raises a number of serious questions such as: a. the likelihood or not, of workplace bully 'complaints' and subsequent workplace investigations being dealt with in a thorough, fair, and impartial manner, b. the 'type' of content within current management and leadership training modules and courses – is this lacking, and c. the indication of a 'group mindset' to protect other management 'peers' at all costs despite the identification of workplace bullying and potential ramifications on business operations and productivity. This finding (the 'bully boss mob'), may also have a direct bearing on the next finding – that of 'official' bullying complaints not being dealt with satisfactorily in an overwhelming majority of cases.

3. 1 in 2 staff are reporting workplace bullying, but organisations are choosing to ignore their statutory duty to protect their employees...

The *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* found that 52.9% of bully 'targets', and 50% of those who 'witnessed' a workplace bullying reported the incident to a supervisor or manager. However, while bully targets *are* reporting bullying incidents – 9 out of 10 (88.9%) stated that the incident had *not* been dealt with satisfactorily. Of this 88.9%, 1 in 2 (50%) said the bully remained and that no action was taken by their employers to address workplace bullying; 37.5% left their jobs under extended medical/health leave or with a condition such as severe depression; and a further 12.5% said the bully received a promotion.

Consequently, with 50% of employers taking no action, and a further 12.5% actually promoting the workplace bully – it's not unreasonable to suggest that these employers (a total of 62.5%) are simply 'adding' to the 'problem' of workplace bullying. Interestingly, the same conclusion was drawn by the WBI-Zogby Survey, which stated:

Despite losing an estimated 21-28 million workers because of bullying, "In 62 percent of the cases, when made aware of bullying, employers worsen the problem or simply do nothing".

[Workplace Bullying Institute-Zogby 2007 U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey](#)

Further, despite no action being taken by a number of employers – half of all respondents to the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* stated their workplace had some type of 'anti-bullying' policy in place.

Question 10: Does your workplace have an 'anti-bullying' policy in place?		
Yes	No	Don't know
50%	33.3%	16.6%

• Table 2 Workplaces with 'anti-bullying' policy in place

Since workplace bullying and occupational violence create unsafe working environments and pose a risk to employees' health – employers' obligations under Australian Occupational Health & Safety legislation extend to eliminating or reducing the risk of bullying, harassment, and violence in their workplaces. However, the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* has found that half of the employers where a bullying incident was reported not only chose to take no action in addressing the incident – but in doing so also chose to ignore a specific statutory duty to take 'all reasonably practicable steps' to protect their employees' health, safety and welfare.

"If bullying is occurring in a work environment, it is up to the employer to change the culture of the workplace — or face the consequences. If an employee is too scared to talk to their boss, or their boss' boss about a bullying incident, the employer may be liable...The courts do not look favourably upon any organisation, regardless of size, that has an incident of bullying, but has no policy or procedure in place informing its employees how to deal with and report incidents of bullying or harassment. Similarly, employers must ensure such policies are very clearly understood, and enforced."

Lawyer's Weekly Online, 14 Jun 2007

4. Workplace Bullying affects the *entire* workplace: increased stress levels, lowered productivity in *both* targets and witnesses, decrease in office morale, and staff leaving ...

The majority of all respondents, or 9 out of 10 staff (88.8%), felt that workplace bullying had 'most definitely' added to their stress levels at work; while 1 out of 2 bully 'targets' (52.94%), stated that bullying had led to a 50-70% decrease in their productivity. Further, 66.7% (or 7 out of 10) 'witnesses' of workplace bullying also reported a 10-40% reduction in their productivity as well.

100% of respondents who indicated there was an 'active' bully in their workplace, also stated the 'actions' of this person/persons was having a negative effect on staff morale. The majority of these respondents (58.3%) stated their staff turnover was more than would be considered 'normal', and attributed a number of staff having left the workplace over 12-24 months because of the actions of this workplace bully.

Question 5: Is a workplace bully 'active' in your current workplace?		
Yes	No	No Response
66.6%	22.2%	11.1%

• Table 3. 'Active' bully in workplace

Question 17: With an 'active' bully in the workplace, would you consider the 'turnover' of staff at your workplace to be:				
Low	Average	More than considered 'normal'	High	Very High
0%	0%	58.3%	8.3%	33.3%

• Table 4. Staff turnover

Question 9: In your estimation, how many staff have left your workplace over the past 12-24 months due to the actions of this bully?			
1-3	4-6	7+	No Response
41.6%	8.3%	41.6%	8.3%

• Table 5. Estimation of staff leaving due to actions of workplace bully

In addition, 72.2% of all respondents stated that at some time they had left a job as a direct result of workplace bullying. Of those who left their job, 4 out of 5 (76.92%) were the 'target' of workplace bullying, while 1 in 5 (23.07%) were 'witnesses' to workplace bullying.

The reality, which is supported by a growing body of research and information, clearly reveals that it only takes one serial bully in the workplace for the proverbial 'rot to set in'. And though workplace bully numbers within individual workplaces may be small – their influence is disproportionately large. While workplace bullying behaviour is often dismissed as 'tough management', or a 'personality clash' the true cost manifests in: low morale; poor customer service; reduced productivity; increase in sickness leave; high staff turnover; a 'stifling' of innovation and creativity; and an increase in grievance claims, procedures, payoffs and legal action.

5. Workplace 'bullies' appear to have a 'preferred' list of behaviours they rely on more so than others ...

From a multiple-choice list of possible bullying behaviours 83.3% of all respondents stated that 'intimidating behaviour' was the most prevalent behaviour exhibited by workplace bullies. This was closely followed by 'humiliating behaviour' (72.2%); 'public' displays (61.1%); 'decisions constantly undermined' (61.1%); 'threatening behaviour' (55.5%); 'verbal abuse' (55.5%); and, 'mobbing' (55.5%).

Even though the 'range' of possible bullying behaviours is virtually limitless - the 'Top 10' behaviours listed below in Table 6 appear to be the preferred 'tactics' that workplace bullies rely on most, according to respondents of the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey*. It's no coincidence these particular 'behaviours' are at the top of the list, and workplace bullying literature and research echo these findings.

The reason for this has to do with *why* workplace bullying occurs on the first place... and that is to 'hide' the 'inadequacy' of the bully in their capacity to fulfil their work role.

Question 13: Tick any amount of those bullying 'behaviours' that you either experienced or witnessed	
Description of workplace bullying behaviour	% of all respondents
Intimidating behaviour	83.8%
Humiliating behaviour	72.2%
'Public' displays of bullying behaviours	61.1%
Decisions constantly undermined	61.1%
Threatening behaviour	55.5%
Verbal abuse	55.5%
'Mobbing' i.e. the coercion of others into a bullying 'gang up'	55.5%
Character assassination	50%
Constant 'nit-picking'	50%
Predominantly 'private' displays of bullying behaviours (behind closed doors)	44.4%
Changes to working conditions i.e. pay drop, removal of privileges	44.4%
Constant criticism of your work/ability to do your job	44.4%
False accusations/lying	44.4%
Malicious gossip, innuendo, or rumours spread	44.4%
Yelling	38.8%
Excluded from work emails and meetings	38.8%
Ridicule	38.8%
Swearing	33.3%
Intimidation, threats, or other behaviour that extends beyond work e.g. home environment	22.2%
Theft of 'credit' i.e. where the bully takes credit for the work of another	22.2%
Interference with ability to perform job e.g. 'sabotage', ensuring failure	22.2%
Undeserved work evaluations	22.2%
Overt threats about ongoing employment	16.6%
Amending/adding work tasks that aren't covered in your job description	16.6%
Invasion of privacy (mail opened, email abuse, office search without prior knowledge/consent)	11.1%
Cancelling of holidays, or denial of leave	11.1%

• Table 6. Hierarchical ranking of common bullying behaviours

Workplace bullying is no more than a 'smokescreen' – plain and simple. And in order to hide their inadequacy, workplace bullies select a 'target' and direct the organisational focus on this target by means of distorted or fabricated allegations of underperformance. Tactics and behaviour similar to these 'Top 10' are predominantly employed because they are *the* most effective tools in achieving this 'shift' in organisational focus, while simultaneously shielding the workplace bully's inadequacy.

"Why do people bully? The purpose of bullying is to hide inadequacy. Bullying has nothing to do with managing etc; good managers manage, bad managers bully. Management is managing; bullying is not managing. Therefore, anyone who chooses to bully is admitting their inadequacy, and the extent to which a person bullies is a measure of their inadequacy."

Tim Field, <http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/bully.htm>

At this point we *must* emphasise that workplace bully tactics/actions/behaviours – don't just 'happen'. They are deliberate, they are planned, and they are used with extreme

effectiveness to bring about the primary ‘goal’ of the workplace bully i.e. to hide their inadequacy for the role they occupy. Workplace bullies – just like their workplace counterparts – have free choice over the behaviour they choose to display in the workplace. While most staff will choose behaviours that result in positive interactions with their colleagues, workplace bullies on the other hand choose behaviours that result in negative interactions.

When a workplace bully is called on to explain their actions they invariably use a variety of strategies to evade accountability such as: feigning victim hood, counterattack, and denial – by either flat out refusing to admit to their behaviour, or stating they didn’t know what they were doing. However, workplace bullies *also* excel at deception, compulsive lying, and manipulation. They have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong – they just choose *not* to conform to socially acceptable standards of behaviour. Workplace bullies *don’t* bully simply because they don’t know what they’re doing, or worse – just ‘doing their job’. Bullying is behaviour...and behaviour is choice. It’s no different to the molester who *chooses* to molest, the abuser who *chooses* to abuse, or the rapist who *chooses* to rape. Bullies bully, because they *choose* to bully.

6. ‘Targets’ like workplace ‘bullies’, appear to have a identifiable ‘traits’...

Respondents to the Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* were asked to describe, from a multiple-choice list, the work ethic and personality traits of the ‘target’ prior to being targeted. 72.2% of all survey respondents indicated that the most prevalent traits in ‘targets’ prior to encountering a bully attack, as being ‘skilled’ and ‘hard working’. These traits were followed closely by ‘truthful’ (66.6%), ‘very competent’ (66.6%), ‘intelligent’ (61.1%), ‘professional’ (55.5%), and ‘ethical’ (55.5%).

Question 21: How would you describe the work ethic and personality traits of the ‘target’ <i>prior</i> to being targeted?	
Description/traits of ‘target’ prior to workplace bullying	% of all respondents
Skilled	72.2%
Hard working	72.2%
Truthful	66.6%
Very competent	66.6%
Intelligent	61.1%
Professional	55.5%
Ethical	55.5%
Independent	50.0%
Shy and/or very quiet	44.4%
Very friendly	38.8%
Fair/just	33.3%
Well respected	27.7%
Admired	27.7%
Strong	22.2%
Self assured	22.2%
A loner	11.1%
The office ‘nerd’	5.5%
Other: including helpful, kind, thoughtful	5.5%
Unprofessional	0.0%
Loathed by others	0.0%
Tardy	0.0%
Incompetent	0.0%
Unfriendly	0.0%
Dishonest	0.0%

• Table 7. Hierarchical ranking of ‘target’ work ethic & personality traits prior to being targeted

'Targets' of workplace bullies go to work – to work. They are *not* unprofessional, incompetent, or dishonest. And far from the misperceptions and stereotypes that sometimes paint bully 'targets' as office 'nerds' or 'loners'...respondents to the Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey*, provided information that adds to the growing literature recognising that bully 'targets' possess work and personality traits that bullies both envy, and despise in others. What we're essentially witnessing in workplaces across the globe is the most 'incompetent' of staff i.e. workplace bullies, targeting the most 'competent' of staff.

Perhaps the two most compelling questions workplace bully 'targets' ask is: "why me?" and "how did this happen?"

The first question is relatively easy to answer. In order to become a potential bully 'target' a person needs to possess those work ethic and personality traits that bullies envy. As Table 7 indicates, these include attributes such as: hard working; ethical; professional; well respected; truthful; independent, and very competent. If a bully exists in the workplace they will, over the course of time, 'identify' staff displaying these traits. Regrettably, workplace bullies don't stop at vilifying just one 'target'. While they may be concentrating all their efforts on a single target – they will in fact, have a mental 'list' with the names of those staff members that fit their preferred profile. And because the actions of workplace bullies are deliberate and planned – they systematically work their way through their 'list' as each target is eliminated – either through leaving the organisation of their own volition, or being forced out. Coincidentally, being a hard-working, competent professional – means that this staff member will also have an uncanny 'ability' to spot a fake, inadequate, fraudster who is abusing their power within the workplace (the workplace bully). However, the workplace bully *also* has the 'ability' to spot those who can see right through them. And according to data accumulated by Know Bull! to date – the one thing that workplace bullies fear most – is that their incompetence and inadequacy may be exposed. Workplace bullies are motivated by envy and jealousy. They have no integrity, nor do they respect other people's values. So, if someone displays certain admirable, work and personality traits – without a doubt they'll make it onto the workplace bully's 'list'.

As for the second question, "how did this happen?" although a little more complex – the question is still answerable. Certain 'factors' need to be in 'play' so to speak, for workplace bullying to take place.

The starting point – is the organisation. Meaning the organisation requires a culture that fosters/supports workplace bullying. One of the findings of the Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey*, being the existence of 'bully boss mobbings', is one example of a workplace that supports workplace bullying. So too, is the workplace that has anti-bullying policies, that are neither promoted, nor policed, and organisations going through poorly designed and managed restructures.

Secondly, there exists a 'need' for 'targets' to become known – i.e. hard-working and competent employees that are liked and admired. They either transfer into the organisation – and then become 'known' for their stellar work ethics and personality traits...or they already reside within the workplace when a bully moves into the organisation. Either way, it's only a matter of time before they're included on the workplace bully's mental 'list'. Additionally, the potential target needs to have type of 'vulnerability' – which is usually 'financial' i.e. they have children to feed, clothe and educate; a mortgage; or debts to pay. Other vulnerabilities could include: working in a remote area where jobs are scarce; being an older worker with few opportunities available outside their present employment; or a 'shrinking' job market – as in a recession. [As an aside, being an 'older' worker can increase the odds of being subjected to workplace bullying, with the Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* finding there's a 1 in 2 (52.9%) chance that staff aged 46+ will become a bully 'target'].

Lastly, in order for the 'target' to move *from* the 'list' and *into* the workplace bully's 'cross hairs' – there needs to be a 'trigger' event. This can be as simple as the previous 'target' leaving the organisation. Workplace bullies are predatory. And while people exist on their

mental 'list' – the workplace bully's 'need' to eliminate these people from the organisation will also exist. Of course, decent, hard-working and competent staff are constantly arriving, and subsequently eliminated from organisations – so the workplace bully never really gets to the end of this 'list'. Also of interest, is that a workplace bully will take a very brief 'resting period' between the 'current' target leaving the organisation – and the bullying behaviours being exacted on the 'new' target. Data collected by Know Bull! reveals this resting period, on average, is around 15 days. As for additional examples of 'trigger' events these can include such things as: an organisational re-structure; mergers, or downsizing; or as simple as a staff member receiving 'public' recognition for their work efforts – especially when it draws attention to the bully by 'comparison'.

As previously mentioned, the primary goal of workplace bullies is to conceal their inadequacy – they neither want, nor will tolerate being compared to 'high-achievers' with a good work ethic. Further, workplace bullies can, and often 'drop' their current 'target' and shift their attention to a new 'target' – especially in cases where they deem the newer target to be more of an immediate 'threat' i.e. if the newer target draws favourable attention from senior staff and/or peers.

As for misperceptions that workplace bully 'targets' are 'weak' overly 'sensitive', or in some way 'invite the bullying' – once again research and literature reveals the opposite.

Between January 2009 to October 2009, Know Bull! conducted a website poll titled: *"How many times have you been the 'target' of a workplace bully"?* (See Table 8). This poll was viewed 2360 times, and revealed workplace bully 'targets' are subjected to, and withstand many months to years of daily verbal, emotional and psychological abuse. 2 out of 3 poll respondents (63.1%) indicated they had been 'bullied' from 6 months to 24+ months duration. At the time of the poll, the strongest response (32.6%) was from those respondents who had been bullied over an 18-24+ month period.

Prior to workplace bullying exposure, 'targets' are self-reliant and self-motivated. They are skilled, professional, ethical, and intelligent people – who nearly always 'go the extra distance' in their work roles. These are not the traits of 'weak' individuals.

[How many times have you been the 'target' of a workplace bully?](#)

Answer	Votes	Chart
Once in the past year	2.2%	
Twice in the past year	2.2%	
More than twice in the past year	15.2%	
Once in the past 2 years	0.0%	
Twice in the past 2 years	0.0%	
More than twice in the past 2 years	2.2%	
Once in the past 5 years	6.5%	
Twice in the past 5 years	2.2%	
More than twice in the past 5 years	6.5%	
I have been 'bullied' over the past 6-12 months	19.6%	
I have been 'bullied' over the past 12-18 months	10.9%	
I have been 'bullied' over the past 18-24+ months	32.6%	

• Table 8. Results of Know Bull! online poll conducted Jan-Oct 2009

With regard to spurious claims of bully 'targets' being overly 'sensitive' – these are often the assertions of workplace bullies when called to account for their actions. The Know Bull! archives contain many instances where claims like this are supported by HR departments, and organisations attempting to evade their 'duty of care' owed to every employee within the workplace, and any subsequent 'vicarious liability' actions likely to arise as a result of the workplace bully's behaviour. In the eyes of many workplace bullies, HR departments and organisations – labelling the 'target' as 'overly sensitive' means the behaviour of the

workplace bully can be ‘justified’ as ‘normal’. We have also found that labels such as this are the precursors to workplace bully ‘targets’ being forced from the organisation.

Finally, as for the misperception that workplace bully ‘targets’ must in some way, ‘invite the bullying’ – this is the same as saying, “women who experience domestic violence must in some way...invite the violence”, or that “children who are abused by paedophiles must in some way...invite the paedophilia”. All of these misperceptions are not only flawed – they downright offensive and show a distinct lack of awareness and education.

7. After being subjected to workplace bullying, 4 out of 5 ‘targets’ suffer from depression and a range of other health-related problems, while 1 in 5 worked with, or knew of someone in the workplace who committed suicide after being ‘targeted’ by a workplace bully...

The ‘health-harming’ effects of workplace bullying has been well documented over the years, and the Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* adds to this increasing body of information. Of those respondents who indicated they had been the ‘target’ of a workplace bully, 82.5% stated they had suffered or had been diagnosed with both ‘sleeping problems’, and ‘depression’. This was closely followed by ‘anxiety’ indicated by 76.47% of bully targets, and ‘constant fatigue’ (58.82%). Of greater concern, is that a number of respondents 5.5%, or (1 in 20) bully targets expressed that they had ‘suicidal thoughts’ after having been exposed to workplace bullying; while 1 in 5 (17.64%) had been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). And perhaps the most damning ‘health-harming’ effect of workplace bullying that the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* revealed, is that 1 in 5 (or 16.6%) of respondents said that they had known of, or worked with a staff member who, after being targeted by a workplace bully, later committed suicide.

Question 14: Have you ever been diagnosed or experienced any of the following after having been singled out as a bully ‘target’? Tick options that apply:	
Health-related problems after being singled out as a bully ‘target’	% of all respondents
Depression	82.35%
Sleeping problems	82.35%
Anxiety	76.47%
Constant fatigue	58.82%
Migraines/headaches	35.29%
Skin disorders (e.g. unexplained rashes)	35.29%
Stomach/digestive disorders	29.41%
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	17.64%
Hypertension	11.76%
Other: Suicidal thoughts	5.5%

• Table 9. Hierarchical ranking of ‘health-related’ effects after being singled out as a bully ‘target’

For ‘targets’ of workplace bullies, the effect of prolonged negative stress from the relentless onslaught of bullying behaviours exacted on them for many months and even years – will cumulatively result in ‘psychiatric injury’.

By this we don’t mean the ‘target’ will suffer from some type of ‘mental illness’ – as mental illness is quite distinct from psychiatric injury:

"Despite superficial similarity...there are many distinct differences between psychiatric injury and mental illness including:

- a) mental illness is assumed to be inherent (internal) whereas psychiatric injury is caused by something or someone else (external) - who is liable;
- b) an injury is likely to get better;
- c) the person suffering mental illness exhibits a range of symptoms associated with mental illness (paranoia, schizophrenia, delusions, etc) but not with psychiatric injury, whereas the person suffering psychiatric injury will typically exhibit a range of symptoms (eg hypervigilance, hypersensitivity, obsessiveness, irritability, fatigue, sleeplessness) associated with psychiatric injury but not with mental illness."

<http://www.bullyonline.org>

By the time a workplace bully 'target' is outwardly showing symptoms of the effects of prolonged negative stress such as depression, many workplace bullies *will* 'label' the 'target' as 'mentally ill'. Workplace bullies go to extraordinary lengths to evade accountability for the consequences of their actions on others, and will even 'blame' the 'target' for their own deterioration. This 'tactic' is a well-documented bully 'defence', plus it also serves to hasten the elimination of the 'target' from the workplace.

With 4 out of 5 (82.35%) respondents to the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* stating 'depression' as the number one health-related effect *after* having been singled out by a workplace bully – we hasten to add their 'depression' is *not* 'clinical depression', which emanates from mental illness (inward cause)...but in fact is 'reactive depression', resulting from an 'external' cause.

The difference is crucial, because many HR Personnel, senior staff, and other workplace bully followers, enablers, and protectors – will erroneously believe the bully's assertion that the 'target' is 'mentally ill', and will react accordingly. The 'clue', is that the 'health-related' problems identified in Table 9 manifested *after* the workplace bully singled out the 'target'.

4 out of 5 (82.35%) respondents to the *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* also ranked 'sleeping problems' equal to 'depression', as a health-related effect. It's not uncommon for a workplace bully 'target' to suffer from sleeping problems/difficulties during, and after exposure to workplace bullying. Medically speaking, sleeping problems are known as 'adjustment insomnia'.

Adjustment insomnia is the medical term for sleep difficulties that result from an identifiable stressor, such as workplace bullying. According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, symptoms may also involve anxiety, worry, depression, muscle tension, and headaches. Adjustment insomnia usually goes away within three months, but it may linger if the person remains in the stressful environment or can't otherwise adapt to the situation.

WebMD Article, [*"Workplace Bullying Linked to Sleep Problems"*](#)

A recent article published on WebMD to highlight the results of a sleep study found that "people who are intimidated, insulted, or otherwise harassed on the job are more likely to have sleep disturbances than are other workers", and that "the more often someone was bullied on the job, the more likely they were to have sleeping difficulties." ([*Workplace Bullying Linked to Sleep Problems, Sept 2009*](#)).

The study also revealed that both men and women exposed to bullying in the workplace were more than twice as likely to experience sleep disturbances, than their 'non-bullied peers', and that sleep problems increased for those who 'witnessed' workplace bullying as well. Further, the article also made reference to a possible link between workplace bullying, and suicide and other health-related issues:

Workplace bullying may be considered as one of the leading job stressors and would be a major cause of suicide and other health-related issues," Isabelle Niedhammer, PhD, epidemiologist and researcher at the UCD School of Public Health & Population Science at the University College Dublin in Ireland, says in a statement. "Our study underlines the need to better understand and prevent occupational risk factors, such as bullying, for sleep disorders."

Know Bull! has suspected for some time that workplace bullying has been a major contributor to suicide rates in Australia for many years – and *not* because of cases that have gained media coverage, like [Brodie Panlock](#), who was subjected to humiliating bullying by fellow workers before she threw herself from a multi-storey car park in Melbourne in 2006.

Our information comes directly from those most affected by a workplace bullying suicide: the parents who have lost a child; the workers that have lost good friends and colleagues; family members who have lost siblings, cousins, nephews, aunts, uncles; and partners who have lost the mother, or father of their children.

"It's likely that many suicides are the result of bullying, but the target's lack of awareness of what is going on, their unwillingness to confide what is happening, the traumatization, and the inability to articulate, everyone else's denial, the bully's accomplished lying and Jekyll and Hyde nature, plus the general lack of knowledge and awareness of society, prevent the real cause from being identified."

<http://www.bullyonline.org>

The most sobering finding of the Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* revealed that 1 in 5 (16.6%) of respondents said that they had "known of, or worked with a staff member who, after being targeted by a workplace bully, later committed suicide". This statistic on its own indicates that despite OH&S legislation – many 'unsafe' workplaces exist, and that perhaps OH&S legislation doesn't have sufficient 'teeth' to curb the existence of workplace bullying, and that workplace bullying (and its effects) should in fact have its own 'criminal category'.

"People kill themselves for a variety of reasons. Sometimes drugs and alcohol are a factor, as are social factors, poverty, deprivation, mental illness, etc. However, whilst some people decide to end their life because of despair, others take their life because they see it as a "logical step". I've often thought that the former category (despair) is the result of "mental illness", whilst the latter (logical step) is because of "psychiatric injury". The difference is important because injury has an external cause - in other words, something - or someone - is liable. The differences between mental illness and psychiatric injury are often not recognized; understanding the differences could alter the verdict, perhaps from suicide to manslaughter."

[Tim Field](#)

The Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* revealed strong support for workplace bullies and the organisations that support them and/or fail to address bullying – to be held legally accountable.

94.4% of all survey respondents agreed that organisations and senior personnel who fail/refuse to address workplace bullying should be held legally responsible i.e. prosecuted for the actions/effect a workplace bully has on other staff (See Table 10).

Question 19: Should organisations and senior personnel who fail/refuse to address workplace bullying be held legally responsible i.e. prosecuted for the 'actions/effect' a workplace bully has on other staff?		
Yes	No	Undecided
94.4%	0.00%	5.5%%

• Table 10.Support for senior personnel and organisations being held 'legally responsible'.

While 100% of respondents who agreed that organisations and senior personnel should be prosecuted for the effects of workplace bullies resulting from failure/refusal to address bullying in the workplace – *also* stated they would support the introduction of a 'new' statutory course of action encompassing the notion of 'the deliberate and/or intentional infliction of a hostile work environment', under which organisations, and bullies could be held legally accountable (See Table 11).

Question 20: Would you support the introduction of a 'new' statutory course of action encompassing the notion of 'the deliberate and/or intentional infliction of a hostile work environment', under which organisations and bullies could be held legally accountable?		
Yes	No	Undecided
100%	0.00%	0.00%

• Table 11.Support for 'new' statutory course of action for 'deliberate/intentional infliction of hostile work environment'.

Conclusion – What are the implications of this survey on businesses and organisations in general?

"How do we sweep this under the carpet?"...

Last year, Know Bull! received an email from another anti-workplace bullying organisation asking if we had "any good news stories, how organizations deal with bullying constructively?" Our answer at the time was a resounding, "there isn't any".

We also noted that our peculiar response had a lot to do with the nature of the 'anti-bullying' work we had done with Australian organisations up to that point – which had only seen our services being requested *after* a workplace had deteriorated to the point of 'crisis'. Needless to say, we've seen everything from highly questionable business practices, to flagrant breaches of OH&S; and staff suffering from all manner of conditions ranging from anxiety and depression, to diagnosed PTSD².

Every one of these organisations was, at the time of initial contact, almost haemorrhaging with staff turnover and associated costs (including law suits, lost productivity, bad publicity, payouts, fraud, etc). However, none had even considered they may have workplace bullies and toxic workplace cultures that needed urgent addressing, nor were equipped to deal with it.

Perhaps what was most surprising, was not so much the 'denial' of the possible existence of workplace bullying – but the 'how do we sweep this under the carpet' mentality we encountered on so many occasions. And when Know Bull! outlined the potential impact of workplace bullying on the health and welfare of their staff (and their families), we saw the eyes of many CEOs, EDs, senior staff, HR personnel, and board members – simply

² PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

'glaze over'. Their apparent concern was *not* the collective welfare of their staff – but the removal of workplace bully 'targets'.

No organisation or company is immune from workplace bullying...

Organisations and companies are simply *not* doing enough to eradicate workplace bullying. The Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* supports this view with the finding that although workplace bullying is being reported – it's not being adequately addressed. Workplace bullies are 'opportunists'. And as long as organisations where workplace bullying is not actively discouraged and dealt with, exist – so too will workplace bullies. The reality is that no organisation, large or small, is immune from them, nor the high cost of keeping them.

A 'healthy' bottom line vs keeping a workplace bully...

Setting aside for the moment the human 'toll' of workplace bullying...*no* organisation can afford to keep a workplace bully. Period.

The Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* indicates the actions of a workplace bully has the potential to reduce the performance of their targets by 50-70%, and that of other employees by up to 40%. 9 out of 10 staff will feel the added 'stress' created by a workplace bully, while 7 out of 10 staff will leave as a direct result of workplace bullying. And bear in mind that the ones leaving will be the more dedicated, experienced, and highly professional staff. Innovation, creativity, and the ability to continue competing in ever-changing markets will increasingly diminish. Workplace bullies effectively 'dumb down' organisations. And if your company or organisation is one that has *no* enforceable policy or procedure in place that provides employees with a means to tackle bullying and harassment — you could find yourself in court defending a contractual breach of the duty of care. So too, if an anti-bullying policy exists — but is not enforced.

"The financial cost of workplace bullying to business in Australia is estimated to be between \$6 billion and \$13 billion a year." This includes indirect costs, such as absenteeism, labour turnover, loss of productivity and legal costs. Accordingly, "the average cost for a stress claim is \$41,186 compared to \$23,441 for a physical injury claim."

The Australian Human Rights Commission believes that the 'cost' could be even higher, with their online 'Workplace Bullying' fact sheet estimating that "workplace bullying costs Australian employers between \$6 - \$36 billion dollars every year when hidden and lost opportunity costs are considered."

From [Know Bull! – Bullying 'facts' and 'stats'](#)

Further, the Know Bull! *Extent and Effects of Workplace Bullying Survey* indicates strong support for introduction of a 'new' statutory course of action encompassing the notion of 'the deliberate and/or intentional infliction of a hostile work environment', under which organisations, and workplace bullies could be prosecuted. As mentioned previously, workplace bully tactics/actions/behaviours – don't just 'happen'. They are deliberate, planned, and used to hide the 'inadequacy' of the workplace bully. Bullying is behaviour...behaviour is choice...therefore bullies 'choose' to bully.

With the effect of workplace bullying resulting in degrees of 'psychiatric injury' (which is 'external' in origin) – caused by the actions of another person/persons (thereby denoting liability), it is *not* unrealistic to expect that workplace bullying will, in the not too distant future, be viewed and treated in a similar fashion to other serious crimes involving injury. We also note that other anti-bullying groups are also supporting the push for a change to legislation – legislation that will hopefully result in the extinction of workplace bullies and the organisations that harbour them.