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How does the concept of emotional labour enhance our understanding of workplace bullying?

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Abusive and aggressive behaviour at work

- **Until recently a taboo subject**
- **Many organisations denied that there was a problem**
- **Research and media attention in past decade has led to a more detailed analysis of the phenomenon**
- **Pioneering research carried out in Scandinavia initially – now worldwide – provides a clearer definition**



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Ishmael & Alemoru (1999)

- **‘persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, which amounts to an abuse of power and makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable. Bullying undermines a target’s self-confidence and may cause them to suffer stress.’**



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Bowie (2000)

- **‘a perceived or actual verbal, emotional threat or physical attack on an individual’s person or property by another individual, group or organisation’.**



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Vickers (2010) discussing Hochschild's work

**‘...when bullying takes place in Public
Administration workplaces, the targets of
bullying and mobbing undertake emotion
work... with potentially deleterious outcomes.’**



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Report by Healthcare Commission (2008)

- 13% of NHS staff bullied by colleagues
- 8% bullied by managers
- 23% bullied by patients
- 18% bullied by patients' relatives
- Most did not report it



Report by Healthcare Commission 2009

- **10 per cent of minority ethnic staff, compared to 7 per cent of white staff, reported experiences of bullying and harassment from a manager or team leader.**
- **Similar rates reported by nurses and junior doctors from minority ethnic groups**
- **Most events of bullying and harassment are not reported to employers.**
- **Experiences of bullying and harassment are associated with poor organisational and health outcomes;**
- **These include: stress, higher sickness absenteeism, lower productivity, and intention to leave the job**



Healthcare Commission 2009

- Support has been found to alleviate the detrimental impact of bullying and harassment on organisational and health outcomes. However, only a minority of victims report receiving support
- Initiatives exist to tackle bullying and harassment in the NHS, but efforts to target racist bullying and harassment need to be embedded in these.



Interviews from BMA survey

- **It seems common for white consultants or their wives to be invited out socially but not BME Consultants (BMA survey);**
- **Lots of ethnic minority doctors are stuck at locum or staff grades (BMA survey).**



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Evolving process 1 (Einarsen)

- **Often triggered by a work-related conflict**
- **During escalation of conflict a person may become disadvantaged**
- **Gradually becomes the subject of aggressive behaviour on part of colleagues**
- **The effect is to humiliate, intimidate, frighten or punish the person**



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Evolving process 2 (Einarsen)

- **During early stages difficult to pinpoint**
- **Later the behaviour is more direct**
- **Target person is avoided by colleagues, isolated, humiliated in public**
- **As conflict continues the attacks become more frequent**
- **The stigma makes victims less able to cope, become more vulnerable and ‘a deserving target’**



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Often disguised as an individual issue

- Abrasiveness
- An attitude problem
- A personality clash
- Poor interpersonal skills



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‘Normalised’

- Where there is an autocratic management style;
- More likely in workplaces that do not uphold values of democracy and fairness.



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Negative behaviours at work

- **Threat to professional status:** public humiliation
- **Threat to personal standing:** offensive remarks
- **Isolation and social exclusion:** being ignored
- **Unrealistic workload:** impossible deadlines
- **Destabilisation:** e.g. removal of responsibility; excessive monitoring
- **Unwanted physical contact:** e.g. sexual harassment; heavy hand on shoulder



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Emotion management by targets

- Impression management
- Self-monitoring
- Performance art
- Bodily display of neutrality or calm
- Hide true feelings
- Put on a brave face



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Costs of Emotional Management for Targets

- **Burnout**
- **Stress**
- **Low self-esteem**
- **Depression**
- **Cynicism**
- **Role alienation**
- **Emotional exhaustion**



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Costs of Emotional Management for Bullies

- Adjust to toxic workplace environment
- 'Normal' and 'well-adjusted' on outside but dysfunctional inside
- Irrational desire for power and domination
- Grandiosity
- Depression
- Destructiveness



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Typical action taken

- Informal support from colleagues (defenders) but much indifference (bystander apathy)
- Some support from union representatives
- Target blamed (inefficient, personality difficulty, etc)
- Damage not acknowledged
- Many targets leave (Rayner on basis of exit interviews estimates around 25% of job changes)



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Consequences

- **Health problems when aggressive acts occur regularly and when attributed to deliberately hostile intentions**
- **Severe emotional reactions, especially fear, anxiety, helplessness and shock**
- **Perceptions of life in general and workplace in particular reflect threat, danger and insecurity**
- **In extreme cases symptoms are those of PTSD**
- **Affects motivation of workforce in general**
- **Economic difficulties**



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Emotional labour tools

- These tools can be used to preserve patient's dignity, e.g. through listening and gentle persuasion
- But nurses and carers may also need to detach themselves emotionally when dealing with toileting, washing and dressing;
- Emotional tools can be used manipulatively to achieve 'co-operation' from the patient;
- Potential for vulnerable or challenging service users to be subject to bullying or abuse



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Collective emotional labour

- Some emotional display rules are taught to employees;
- Others are learned;
- Where situation is ambiguous, employees make their own rules. (Hochschild, 1983)



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Informal communities of coping

- Formed to deal with everyday emotional pressures or even abuse from clients or customers;
- A context for sharing negative emotions about clients as a form of relief;
- Often runs counter to official management policy;
- Potentially can also justify negative behaviours such as bullying (Korczynski , 2003)



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Three sets of pressures on employees

- Management expectations;
- Peer pressures;
- Pressures from self to behave in appropriate ways;
- Each involves emotional labour with costs and benefits in varying degrees.



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What do we need to ‘heal the wounds’?

- **Descriptive information on the phenomenon itself**
- **Information on the causes and consequences**
- **Information on actions that can be taken to prevent or resolve the problem**



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Arbitration

- Arbitrator retains power over process and outcome
- Arbitrator usually has obligations to organisation
- Arbitrator often has power to punish and blame
- Focus on past actions
- Outcome tends to be win-lose



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The role of counselling

- **Psychosocial perspectives on the work environment**
- **Insights from research and practice**
- **A flexible and creative use of counselling skills and knowledge**
- **Working with the relationship**
- **Fostering emotional literacy**



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Conciliation

- **Disputants retain power over process**
- **Conciliators do not take sides**
- **Conciliators remain non-judgemental and non-punitive**
- **Focus on future**
- **Aim for win-win solution**
- **Underlying issues explored**



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Self help checklist 1

- **Acceptance by management that bullying takes place?**
- **Does code of conduct include a statement of zero tolerance?**
- **Is policy seen as organisational?**
- **Has it been endorsed by senior management?**
- **Are there procedures in place for dealing with public harassment of staff?**
- **Is the anti-bullying policy actively disseminated?**



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Self help checklist 2

- Is policy backed up by training for staff?
- Are there processes of support for both victim and perpetrator?
- Are there processes of support for witnesses?
- Is there a monitoring of complaints to check whether incidence is lessening?
- Is there any follow-up for all involved after the investigation is over?
- Has there been an examination of exit interviews, staff turnover statistics?



Creating a positive work environment

- Has discussion on values taken place in organisation?
- Is there a values statement that mentions staff?
- Was this drawn up through a process of consultation?
- Are differences of culture taken into account?
- Does management have a commitment to individuals' personal and professional growth?



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Creating a positive work environment

- Are there opportunities for celebration?
- Is the workplace attractive?
- Are people appreciative of one another?
- Are mistakes accepted as 'part of life'?
- Is there zero-tolerance of backbiting and gossip?
- Is it an environment where it is safe to say what you think?