

**Bullying in the Workplace:  
Making a Cyber Connection**

By

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## **Abstract**

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Bullying is no longer a problem of the young. Bullying has gone beyond face-to-face interactions between individuals and has found its way into the workplace. Victims now find it nearly impossible to hide from bullying's consequences, especially with the use of evolving technologies. Research shows a prevalence of workplace bullying. The current research study explores the way bullying tendencies are being handled and addressed by employers. Consideration is also given to the evolving ways person-to-person interactions now take place with the introduction of technology and its role in communication.

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## Section 1 – Purpose, Need, and Organization of the Study

### *1.1 Introduction and purpose of the study*

The purpose of this study is to explore bullying and bullying tendencies in the workplace. Reports of bullying of young, school-age victims have recently become abundant in the media, resulting in multiple suicides across Canada. A victim from the Halifax area brings this topic extremely close to home with many lasting effects. In response to the increasing prevalence of bullying both in the school system and other walks of life, such as the workplace, a special task force has created the Nova Scotia Cyber-Safety Act (2013), the first of its kind in Canada.

Currently, employers and employees lack knowledge surrounding workplace bullying and react to it once it has occurred when their approach should be proactive. Employers should be knowledgeable in their roles and responsibility for ensuring a safe work environment; likewise, employees should know what their rights are in the workplace. Bullying is a criminal offence, and the Cyber-Safety Act has helped to bring this to light within school systems, but employers must also be aware of the consequences of bullying in their workplace. The Cyber-Safety Act as developed will help employers to address and improve awareness and accountability for the actions of their employees.

Research demonstrates a prevalence of bullying taking place in the workplace. This study will explore further ways these tendencies are being dealt with and addressed by employers, as well as evolving with the changes in the way person-to-person interactions now take place with the introduction of technology.

### *1.2 Need for the study*

In Halifax, the Chronicle Herald reported on March 12, 2014 of two government employees, managers in their respected departments, ordered off the job due to an ongoing

investigation into intimidation and bullying in the workplace. The actions of these two managers would not have been identified if the departments in which they were employed had not participated in workplace assessments. Participants of the assessments were asked to comment on their work environments and share any related concerns they had in a confidential manner, which resulted in the exposure of the two manager's unacceptable actions.

This example identifies the need for this study. Employees in this particular work environment were not comfortable coming forward and reporting the bullying and intimidation that they were experiencing in the workplace. Instead they suffered in silence. The reasons for why they choose to stay silent are unclear, but the assessment has prompted further inquiry into finding ways to help change the workplace environment and culture. Employees from other businesses and organizations are too falling victim to workplace bullying, as well as becoming bystanders against their own will to these acts of incivility.

This study is focused on how comfortable and knowledgeable employees and co-workers are to report acts of bullying in the workplace. The aim is to help identify victims and bystanders and to assess how familiar they are with policies and procedures their employers have for identifying and addressing bullying. However, first it will be established if any acts of bullying were brought to the attention of the employers, how they were handled and whether or not the victim or bystander is pleased with the outcome and final results of reporting the incivility.

As part of the investigation into how satisfied employees are with how an organization reacted to reported acts of workplace bullying, participants were asked about any changes to the organizational culture that they may have noticed or experienced. Once

an act of incivility is reported to an employer or direct supervisor, it would stand to reason that cultural changes would follow. The purpose of this study is to find out whether any changes noted were positive or instead, created a more negative or hostile workplace environment.

This study will also investigate the extent to which employees are aware of changes made to employer anti-bullying policies based on the introduction of the Cyber-Safety Act (2013). As human interaction continues to change through technology use, it is important to change current policies and procedures to reflect new means of interaction.

### *1.3 Organization of the study*

For the purpose of this study, views of individuals from a variety of workplaces and in varying degrees of authority were gathered. The research was conducted in an interview format to collect detailed responses from each participant. Participants for this study were selected on a voluntary and convenience basis. Participants were asked to participate in the study through general conversation or e-mail invitation from the primary investigator.

Eleven interviews were conducted at mutually agreed locations at the convenience of the participant. Each interview was thirty to sixty minutes in duration, which were recorded and later transcribed to be included in the research analysis portion of this study. Participant responses were anonymous and identified as Participant One through Eleven.

To maintain anonymity, participant gender and profession are not attached to responses and simply identified in a group setting. All participant responses included in the final analysis of the study will include only responses from participants that completed the interview process.



## Section 2 – Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction and scope of literature review

As a concept, workplace bullying is not new; research on this topic began in Sweden in the 1980s (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2007) as a result of the country's revolutionary research on schoolyard bullying. Commonalities that extended from the schoolyard to the workplace were recognized, and research was expanded to further investigate the dynamics of bullying in the workplace. Cox (2012) finds that "workplaces typically provide clear expectations for employee productivity, but expectations regarding employees' interpersonal interactions are less transparent" (p. 247). With increasing workplace complexity "in terms of staffing, resources, communication and intricacy of work, they have become increasingly subject to the occurrence of complex and troublesome interpersonal dynamics" (p. 248).

Current literature on bullying in the workplace, its characteristics, previous research in the area, as well as an examination of current conceptual theories is presented below, specifically, recent concepts of cyber-bullying and its impacts on the workplace in Nova Scotia, where recent events have prompted the province to become an active leader in the development of bullying-reduction policies and procedures. New systems, laws, and law enforcement teams have been established throughout the province, and the services they provide will be reviewed in greater depth, as well.

### 2.2 Literature review

A history of current workplace-bullying research is outlined by Lutgen-Sandvik (2007). Research in workplace bullying started in the 1980s out of Sweden as a direct result of the country's ground-breaking findings on schoolyard bullying.

Lutgen-Sandvik (2007) outline the origins of research studies conducted worldwide, including Finland, Britain, Australia, South Africa, Austria, and currently spanning into North America, including both Canada and the US. Sidle (2010) identified that most research conducted had been primarily conducted in Western cultures with little to no focus in Eastern cultures. Given the difference in cultural beliefs, the question is presented as to whether or not the research to date can be used to help draw similar conclusions in Eastern cultures. Axtell (2013) suggested that bullying can be stressful in all cultures but cultural influences could vary the degrees of distress experienced. Another possibility is that with increasing globalization, difference a multiplicity of cultural beliefs within the same workplace could impact the likelihood of workplace bullying.

For this literature review, topics covered include: gender differences in responding to incivility (Pearson, 2005); influences on the degree of distress (Sidle, 2010); rights of the workers (Harvey, 2009); policies and procedures (Samuels, 2006; Vega, 2005); risk factors associated with workplace bullying (Branch, 2013); and the value of educating staff on diversity to prevent acts of incivility (Townend, 2008).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies emotional abuse as psychological violence (Sloan, 2010), and two of the main forms of this violence as identified by the ILO are *bullying* and *mobbing*.

From the literature, definitions of workplace bullying vary slightly, but all have common characteristics. The first and most important is that the acts must be reoccurring in nature. Other common factors include: acts unwanted by the victim, acts are offensive in nature or humiliating towards the victim, or the acts will begin to affect the victim's workplace performance and potentially that of the bystanders who witness these acts.

Much like the definitions used to identify bullying in the workplace, the terms used also vary. It is not uncommon to hear bullying in the workplace also referred to as workplace incivility, mobbing, or harassment.

The following is the working definition of bullying that was used for the purpose of this study: “Bullying is repeated acts and practices that are directed at one or more workers, which are unwanted by the victim(s) which, may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offense, and distress, and may interfere with job performance and/or cause unpleasant working environment” (Harvey, 2009, p. 27).

Many individuals are unclear as to what acts constitute bullying and what acts do not. For an act to be considered bullying, it must be repeated on multiple occasions. A single act of incivility may be frowned upon but is not considered bullying. It is worth noting that it has been found that the occurrence of bullying in the workplace is an offence of equal opportunity; both men and women are just as likely to be victims of the incivility (Pearson, 2005). If the bully and the victim are both males, Pearson (2005) found that it is more likely for incivility to intensify, as it is typical of males to seek to get even. On the other hand it was also presented in the same study that female victims were less likely to be open about what was occurring and more likely to speak of the bullying behaviour outside of work, instead of speaking to someone within the organization.

Male or female, the unacceptable behaviours of incivility will flourish in environments where employee input and suggestions are muffled. For Pearson (2005) managers and leaders play an important role in an organization, listening to employee thoughts and concerns and careful to evaluate them to their best efforts. Samuel (2008) points out that Canadian researchers have found acts of workplace incivility can be

more destructive than sexual harassment. Research shows a lack of policies and procedures within organizations to address bullying, while most organizations typically have countless policies in place in an attempt to stop sexual harassment.

Lutgen-Sandvik (2007) supports the commonly accepted belief that one-time instances of incivility do not constitute bullying. For Lutgen-Sandvik, workplace bullying consists of four features: repetition, duration, intensity, and displays of power. All research on bullying in the workplace has agreed on the feature of repetition and that the negative acts need to happen on a frequent basis. What is considered frequent—daily, weekly or variable throughout a week—is debatable from one study to the next. However, noting that these acts occur on multiple occasions is simply not enough. The length of time over which these acts are happening should also be taken into consideration. Are weekly acts over the span of a month considered bullying as compared to the same acts occurring monthly over the span of a year? A mutually accepted duration has been noted to vary from one study to the next. Lutgen-Sandvik (2007) used the term *intensity* to identify the number of different negative acts the victim experiences. A bully will often have their “go to” methods they chose to employ as their tactics but can also switch in response to the situation at hand and resources available. Finally, the level of power that is displayed is important. In the same study, Lutgen-Sandvik suggests that for any number of reasons the target feels an inability to stop the acts of bullying; therefore, the bully holds a degree of power over the target. This level of power could be for reasons such as the target’s physical size, the level of authority that the bully holds over the target, or even relationships outside of work.

Lutgen-Sandvik (2007) also suggests in support of their degree of power over a target that bullying is progress that occurs along an escalating continuum, as compared to

the concepts of first, second and third degree burns. Lower levels of bullying acts that are common, but may be harmful over time, are viewed as first degree burns, similarly to sunburns. Further escalation to more persistent and frequent acts of bullying are comparable to second degree burns that, like the bullying, were more painful and often times needed more trained professional help to heal. Finally, bullying thought to reach its third degree often results in intense scarring and permanent damage. Bullying that has reached this degree has been noted to result in psychological damage, post-traumatic stress disorders, and suicide. Balducci (2012) presented a similar concept in their research data analysis. They, too, felt that bullying was best conceptualized as a continuum. They presented that bullying was not a phenomenon but a gradually evolving process.

The acts of bullying can be viewed on a continuum that progressively increases in intensity for the victim and, as a result, victims may find themselves in the cycle of bullying. Vega (2005) suggested that a tolerance for bullying builds up in the targets, and then a cycle of demoralization begins. First, feelings of incompetence or the lack of ability to confront the bully festers. Overtime, bullying will progress, as the target feels less and less able while the bully pushes more and more. It was suggested that this cycle will continue until the target gives up and finds employment elsewhere. Vega (2005) presented findings from a study conducted by Namie (1999) which found that three out of four victims/witnesses to bullying resign or are simply driven out of the organization.

Bullies have been identified as driving employees from their careers and employment. Aware of the situation or not, employers have roles and responsibilities toward their employees and their human rights. These rights start with the moral and social responsibility that employers have to protect their employees from bullying (Wiedmer,

2011). In the workplace, it is crucial that employees believe that they are valued and belong; but to do this they must first feel physically, psychologically, and socially safe. The most essential part of this is the role that the organizational managers and supervisors play in building and sustaining a healthy and bully-free work environment. In the workplace, employees should feel as though respect and civility are of the utmost importance.

Van Heugten (2012) found that the negative consequences of bullying remain with the victim and have long-lasting effects well after they have departed from an organization. Without seeking the appropriate help, depression, anxiety, and the potential for thoughts of suicide appear. O'Moore (2011) found in a clinical study that a common group of symptoms for victims of workplace bullying is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Within the group, symptoms include: reliving experiences through recurrent memories or dreams, becoming withdrawn from life, seeing no future for themselves, feeling emotionally restricted, and vigilantly searching their environments for new threats and danger.

With all this consideration on the negative impact bullying has on its victims, attention should also be placed on the negative impact it has on those that witness it: the bystanders. Lutgen-Sandvik (2007) suggests that quality-of-work outcomes of bystanders are negatively affected through observed acts of bullying, including an increased likelihood of resignations, as well as general and mental stress reactions.

For Harvey (2008), accountability is key to reducing bullying behaviours and its impacts on organizational environment. Making the right people take responsibility for their actions and the negative impact that they are creating in the workplace would be a

step in the right direction. Unfortunately, how to do this is an ongoing debate among researchers. The first and foremost step in dealing with bullying tendencies is to create a policy that clearly states the organization's position on the behaviour. Most importantly "any organization that truly wishes to discourage bullying needs a policy explicitly stating that bullying will not be tolerated" (Harvey 2008). Organizations can achieve this through establishing a code of conduct, as a means to express both desirable and undesirable actions an organization identifies. Having staff read through and given the opportunity to pose questions with respect to such a document should become common practice for all organizations. Acceptance of this practice would help to ensure that staff members are familiar with what is acceptable, and unacceptable forms of behaviour. By creating a solid policy for employees beyond the code of conduct would also be helpful. It would help to open the doors of communication between organizations and their employees, and offer direction on possible resolutions (Samuels, 2008). Policies for clear understanding of where to start communications can also act as reference points from where an investigation should start, if necessary.

The concept of creating globalized standards to address incivility in the workplace has been suggested in the literature. Paired with a universal code of business ethics, the Society for Human Resource Management is pushing for widely-accepted, global standards of human resource policies and procedures, where policies emphasizing the importance of an understanding of cultural differences when identifying bullying behaviours and tendencies are demonstrated (Axtell, 2013).

Branch (2013) found that Sweden's lack of success was revealed in an increase of reports of bullying since anti-bullying legislation was implemented, including errors in the

introduction of the legislation; the appropriateness of the training materials that managers receive to help victims; the lack of prevention efforts, such as interventions and rehabilitation processes; and a lack of specific training designed for all levels of the organizations from employees to managers, union representatives, and stakeholders. However, Woodrow (2014) drew attention to the lack of attention that has been paid to the adoption and implementation of policies and procedures that were recommended to help manage workplace bullying. Without monitoring the implementation and success of such practices how can it be expected that employers will know how to help prevent bullying occurrences?

The Nova Scotia Cyber-Safety Act (2013) identifies cyberbullying as

any electronic communication through the use of technology including, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, computers, other electronic devices, social networks, text messaging, instant messaging, websites and electronic mail, typically repeated or with continuing effect, that is intended or ought reasonably be expected to cause fear, intimidation, humiliation, distress or other damage or harm to another person's health, emotional wellbeing, self-esteem or reputation, and includes assisting or encouraging such communication in any way. (CyberScanInvestigation Unit, 2014, p. 1)

This act is the first of its kind in Canada. It was created to protect victims of cyberbullying and hold those responsible for their actions under the law.

In partnership with the introduction of the Cyber-Safety Act, Nova Scotia also developed CyberSCAN, the province's first investigative unit dedicated to complaints made in regards to cyberbullying, to help victims, and resolve cyberbullying situations

through the use of informal and formal legal methods. Even with these measures, it is unclear how informed the working population is of the services available through CyberSCAN. A number of action plans have been put in place to address cyberbullying with school-age populations, but with minimal efforts to help employers and employees understand how this new unit might play a role in their organization.

### *2.3 Discussion of literature review*

All of the literature agrees that bullying is not a negative act directed at someone that happens as a one-time event. To be considered bullying, negative acts must be carried out and directed towards a target on multiple occasions. Other aspects also considered include duration, frequency, and level of power displayed in the negative acts. These characteristics of bullying appeared to have been neglected throughout a fair deal of the research in this field.

There is a clear understanding across the literature as to what constitutes bullying in the workplace and how it is identified. While all definitions have some variation, all include the same general concepts as sound theoretical foundation. All this considered, a gap in the literature concerns how to successfully approach and contend with the act of bullying within the workplace once bullying has occurred. Employers and supervisors may find themselves at a crossroads as to the best approach to take. They by no means condone the behaviour of bullies within the workplace and the cultural environment but often times find themselves at a loss of ways to address it. Giorgi (2013) suggests that supervisor training plays an important role in reducing bullying. It was thought that supporting managers with information on bullying and mental health would be beneficial. Who is responsible to provide employers and managers alike with this information? Follow up

must also be considered to evaluate how useful information provided was in addressing bullying in the workplace. Without a process to evaluate progression and success of the help provided, its full benefits could not truly be accessed.

With employers still struggling to deal with and address workplace bullying, the evolution of cyberbullying further complicates matters. Employers were confused enough on ways to help eliminate bullies throughout their organization without the confusion that cyberbullying has created. Questions like who is responsible to stop the acts of bullying when company computers are used to access social networks where bullying is carried out have started to arise. Other thoughts that have crossed minds also include blocking social networking sites and other websites if cyberbullying has occurred, but is it fair to block them for everyone at the fault of one or two individuals? Such questions need to be addressed in greater detail. First to be addressed is how familiar both staff and employers in Nova Scotia are with the Cyber-Safety Act and what it means for them. Most respondents seem to be under the impression that it is school focused and do not realize how powerful it truly can be to all Nova Scotians.

Employers need help understanding the best ways to combat bullying throughout their organizations. To help develop a greater understanding into organizational programs and policies to help address workplace bullying, a series of sixteen questions posed to the research participants were utilized explore the gaps in the literature:

1. Have you personally been a victim of workplace bullying?
2. Have you witnessed bullying in the workplace as a bystander?
3. Have you been affected by others' incivility in the workplace?

4. Does your organization have a policy designed to address bullying in the workplace?
5. Does your organization have protocol to follow when reporting incivility?
6. Are the policies and procedures used to address bullying within the organization common knowledge among employees?
7. If you have/or were to experience workplace bullying would you feel comfortable reporting to a supervisor or authority figure?
8. If you reported the acts of incivility to your organization were you happy with how the situation was handled?
9. Was the person(s) that the incivility was reported to receptive to the complaint?
10. Was the organization supportive of your well-being after the report was filed?
11. If you identified as a victim of workplace bullying would you say that you would or have sought retribution in deviant behaviours that could adversely affect the organization?
12. Was the organizational environment/culture different after the acts of incivility were acknowledged?
13. Was the change that you have identified in the organizational culture a positive change?
14. Adding to the definition of bullying with the use of technology to help carry out the act of bullying have you been a victim of bullying in the workplace?
15. Adding to the definition of bullying with the use of technology to help carry out the act of bullying have you been a witness of bullying in the workplace as a bystander?

16. With the introduction of the Cyber-Safety Act here in Nova Scotia are you aware of any changes that your organization has made to the current bullying policies?

## Section 3 - Research Design and Methodology

### *3.1 Design and methodology*

Given the nature of this study and its delicate topic, an interview process was used to research it in depth. No personal information that could identify participants was included in the information gathering of the interview process. This particular group of research participants was composed of a mix of males and females. Their forms of employment included personal trainer, sales representative, bank teller, program facilitator for community before and after school programming, city workers for a local regional and transit system, supervisor and staff from a food and beverage establishments, pharmacy technician, and registration clerk. The participants experience in the workplace includes first and second year university students working in their areas of study to individuals that have been working in their chosen career fields for more than a decade. Specific organizations were not discussed at any point and will not be identified in the final results of the research.

Participants for the interview process were gathered through convenience and participated on a voluntary basis. They were invited to participate in the interview process via e-mail or personal conversation. They were only invited if they met the following criteria:

1. That they are a working individual and were not the proprietor of the organization that they were currently working for.
2. That they were the age of majority in the province of Nova Scotia, 19 years of age.

The rationale for these stipulations was that proprietors could potentially have blinders to some of the situations within their organization and skewed responses during

the interview could result because of that. The rationale behind keeping the interview participants at 19 years of age or older was to focus on individuals that are in a predominately professional working environment versus the part-time environment that most students aged 15 to 18 find themselves employed in.

Once participants had agreed to be interviewed they met with the principle investigator at a mutually agreed upon location. Before the interview started, written and informed consent was received from each participant. To maintain consistency, the interview participant was first provided with the researcher's working definition of bullying in the workplace. The interview started once the investigator confirmed that the participant understood the definition that they were presented with. As the interview progressed, at the right interval prior to proceeding to question 14, the participant was then given the researcher's working definition of cyber-bullying. After confirming that the participant understood this second definition the interview then continued to its conclusion.

Throughout the duration of the interview some of the interview questions may draw on negative situations that the participant had experienced or witnessed. These memories may have brought forward uncomfortable or embarrassing feelings that otherwise may not have been thought of or felt without the interview. In the event that these feelings or memories become too emotional for the participants, they were free to stop the interview at any stage.

Resources were made available if the participants wanted or needed to further discuss their feelings with trained professionals. A list of free community resources that they could make contact with was provided to them to take with them at the completion of the interview and especially if they had stopped the interview mid-way.

Interviews were recorded at the time, and once they were transcribed into electronic format the interviews were erased from the recording device. All signed consent forms were stored securely in a locked cabinet in the research supervisor's office.

### *3.2 Interview questions posed to participants*

Each participant was first presented with the working definition of bullying in the workplace as it was previously presented in the literature review, and identified by Einarsen, in the study by Harvey (2008):

Bullying in the workplace is identified as repeated acts and practices that are directed at one or more employees or coworkers. These are unwanted by the victim(s) which, may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offence, and distress, and may interfere with job performance and/or cause unpleasant working environment.

Once the primary investigator confirmed with the participant that they understood the term that was being discussed, the first thirteen questions were posed to the participant. Once the participant had answered the first set of questions from the interview plan, they were then presented with a second definition that was also previously discussed in the literature review section. This new term helps to build on the definition of bullying in the workplace to also include the use of technology as presented in the Cyber-Safety Act (2013):

Cyber-bullying is when someone uses technology to bully someone else. The most common tools used for cyber-bullying are computers, cell phones, and other mobile devices. Bullying messages can be text messages, e-mails, social media posts, or embarrassing photos or videos.

At the conclusion of the interview, the participants were also invited to share any other details or points of interest that they felt could be useful to the nature of the study.

## Section 4 - Research Analysis

In the following section, all participants have been referred to as Participant One through Eleven as a way to maintain confidentiality. Responses for each question have been included in this analysis. Not every response included for every question, only those that added the most rich and valuable data to the research.

### 4.1 *Victims of bullying in the workplace*

Participants One, Two, Three, and Five all reported that they had not personally been victim of bullying in the workplace. The remaining seven participants all reported to some degree as victims. Each of their responses have been included. Each participant was subject to recurring negative acts that made the organizational culture hard to tolerate at times and left much awkwardness in the best of times. Of the seven victims, five of experienced bullying from co-workers while the remaining two received bullying from their direct supervisors, one of which was victim to both supervisor and co-worker incivility.

#### Participant Four

“Yes I have a few years ago when I returned to work from my maternity leave. The employee decided she wanted the job I was in and bullied and harassed me to my breaking point. She brought the manager into it as well. She called the manager saying that another employee didn't like working with me when they did not say it. I was instructed by the manager when I went to her to go to the HR department.”

#### Participant Six

“Yes, as a cashier for a huge cooperation in Canada, I have been a victim of workplace bullying. With the need for many employees in one business it is very easy

to form "cliques" with other employees much like public schools. I was an employee for two years and never felt like I fit in with anyone due to being an overweight teen, and had career aspirations for myself. People would talk about my weight and attitude behind my back when I brought my lunch, what I wore before work, and even how my uniform fit due to the fact I wasn't a "toothpick" like them. Other employees even explained to me when I was buying an unhealthy snack that I should purchase something else commenting I had gained weight. I had people laugh at me, put me down in any way to make me quit, because I wasn't in their group of friends, although being a student the business gave me flexible hours and I didn't overly hate the job at first, so I started not to take it personal after a few weeks.”

#### Participant Seven

“Yes, it got to the point that when I was being called names behind my back and referred to as something other than my name to my face and I asked them to stop the end result was a yelling match between myself and my co-workers. When the manager got involved she, too, yelled at me, slammed a door in my face, sent me home for instigating and would not talk to me about the situation after the fact. As the manager she would often let her friends who were also staff get away with breaking certain rules such as not wearing their full uniform and when I would test the waters and do the same thing she would call me out on it and I would get in trouble.”

#### Participant Eight

“Yes, ma'am. I was bullied by one of my direct supervisors. She was our lead personal training personnel and was in charge of all of the personal trainers that were on staff. I was having such a bad issue that I was going home crying at the end of the day; I

was called fat and watched while I was on break to see what I was eating. My supervisor started to force me to work out more and eat certain things. I was attacked from all angles and it resulted in a huge complex for me. I ended up depressed while I was working there.”

#### Participant Nine

“Yes, it started as first being ignored when I had valid opinions and ideas about certain activities. Eventually I found out that I was being talked about while not at work only to find out after the fact. In the end I was treated like one of the children in the program verses one of the program facilitators that I was.”

#### Participant Ten

“Yes, I was bullied by one person at work who would do anything under their power to make working a hard thing to do. If I made a mistake she would make sure to let everyone know that yet again I wasn't able to do my job without mistakes. She would talk to other employees about me and make it clear how she felt about me and that she was better than me at our job. She would always watch what I was doing so she could report back to the supervisor about what I was doing. She would use our in house computer messenger system we had at work and talk about me with someone who was sitting right next to me. I know this because on a few occasions she sent me the message to me by mistake. These are only a few things I can recall of that she did to make my life hard at work.”

#### Participant Eleven

“Yes, not at my current place of employment. At my last job there were two individuals that were constantly bullying me for the way I would carry out a task. If they didn't feel it was how they felt it was how things should be done they would constantly attack me for how it was done. By the end of my time working with that company it was

very unpleasant; I hated going to work and it was especially hard to work a shift when I had to work with either of these two individuals because how uncomfortable they made me. Their constant taunting made me sick to my stomach at times and there was times I was brought to tears from frustration and embarrassment.”

#### 4.2 Witnessed bullying in the workplace as a bystander

All but two participants (Participants Three and Nine) interviewed had witnessed bullying in the workplace as a bystander. Of those two participants, only one, Participant Three, had not personally been a victim of bullying nor had they been a bystander. As well as being bullied in the workplace, Participants Seven, Eight, and Ten were all bullied by the same individuals that they witnessed bullying others as a bystander. Participants One, Two, and Five identified as not experiencing bullying but witnessed it happening to others throughout their organization.

##### Participant One

“I have on a number of occasions been witness to bullying in the workplace. Just a few months ago a new employee was called out by a senior employee that he wasn't doing his job. As the night went on the senior employee continued to point out mistakes the new employee was making in a rather derogatory way instead of coaching him on how to do the tasks properly. This led to the new employee being so worked up and unsure of himself that he had to withdraw from work in the middle of his shift and discuss how to go forward with the supervisor.”

##### Participant Two

“Yes. I have experienced supervisors picking on trainees, to the point where the trainee did not want to return to work. I have also witnessed verbal altercations between employees.”

#### Participant Four

“Yes, a co-worker who worked there at the same time felt she could push people around all the time regularly saying and doing whatever she wanted and without suffering any direct consequences as a result of her actions.”

#### Participant Five

“Yes, someone I work with is quite thin and maybe not the quickest worker or the best at multitasking. Another one of my co-workers gives her a hard time over everything she does/doesn't do. Most people think she is joking but I think the co-worker being bullied does not feel the same way. She tries to laugh it off but I believe it really does bother her.”

#### Participant Six

“Yes, in my previous workplace, I worked with a young gentleman who had a learning disability but had one job that he absolutely loved. It was to gather the baskets, the rest of the guys that did this same job would often laugh at him when he was explaining something that they felt wasn't really age appropriate for him such as his younger hobbies or stories. They would also set him up with task he could not do and it would result in him having a breakdown and they guys would stand back and point and laugh. They would also trip or push him or anything else to get him out of their way or to get a chance to laugh at him with each other.”

#### Participant Seven

“Definitely, I was not the only staff member that was being called names both to and not to our faces. Often times our ability to do our job was questioned even though we had been doing well prior to the new manager’s arrival.”

#### Participant Eight

“Yes, in many cases very similar to the ways I was experiencing the bullying myself.”

#### Participant Ten

“Yes the same person at work would bully anyone that suited her fancy at the time. She would tend to focus on one person at a time but many people were affected by her actions on multiple occasions.”

#### Participant Eleven

“Yes, there are two employees that have very special personalities. My co-workers and the employees of a business that also operated in conjunction with the company I worked for were constantly making fun of these individuals. They would do this both to their faces as well as behind their backs. They would be laughed at to their faces for things they said for how they handled customers. The staff were not very nice towards these gentlemen.”

### 4.3 *The effects of others incivility in the workplace*

Each participant that had experienced workplace bullying, either as a victim or bystander, were affected in their own ways by the incivility of others. The way participants were affected ranged from anger and frustration over the lack of respect bullies displayed with their actions to despising the workplace to the point of not wanting to report for scheduled shifts, knowing they would have to work with certain individuals. Other affects

that were mentioned included refusing to work with the bullies, awkwardness in the organizational atmosphere, workplace manipulation, and depression. One participant noted that it not only changed their work life but also their personality, as well as affected them at home and school and how they interacted with others.

#### Participant One

“I have been affected by the incivility of others in the workplace. At the time it made me angry that someone would have so little respect for others to act in a demeaning way for no reason other than the lack of better judgement.”

#### Participant Two

“Yes, there were definitely changes in the way(s) I have worked with those particular employees after the fact. Any incident like that affects the work dynamic. There have been specific cases where I refused to work on particular shifts with employees after I had witnessed incidents of bullying in the workplace.”

#### Participant Four

“Yes, it makes the working area uncomfortable and awkward to be part of.”

#### Participant Six

“Yes, with my previous example the guys would try and get you involved in any way when you witness them doing something. If you don't want to participate in there games they would manipulate you by telling you if you told authorities on them that they would make sure that they knew you were involved too.”

#### Participant Seven

“Yes it made the workplace a very crappy place to be. The manager clearly had her favourites and I was not one of them as were a couple of my other co-workers. It got so bad at one point for one of them that she had to be transferred between stores because she could not work in ours any longer. By the end of my time there it was a chore to get out of bed and come to work because I knew how bad every shift was going to be.”

#### Participant Eight

“Yes, definitely. I ended up very depressed while I worked there. It changed my personality totally as well.”

#### Participant Nine

“Being looked down upon, like I was at the bottom of the totem pole or like my opinion was not valid regardless of the situation or suggestion I put forward made it very difficult to work with the other program facilitators.”

#### Participant Ten

“I was affected at home and socially. I would come home from work and just complain about how I was being treated and how it was being dealt with. As well it was hard being out and running into her because she would make me feel uncomfortable to even be out with our mutual friends with her there at the same time. I was scared what she might do or later bring up.”

#### Participant Eleven

“Yes, the environment in which I worked it was very hard to work with the two individuals that would tease and taunt me. These individuals also were very rude and uncivil to one another which made it were difficult to work a shift that overlapped with their switch over as one was leaving and the other was ending their shift. They often made it difficult and uncomfortable in the workplace when their presence was required together.”

#### 4.4 Organizational policies designed to address bullying in the workplace

Policies designed to address bullying or harassment in the workplace turned out to be less common. Participants One, Two, Three, Four, Eight, and Eleven were all very familiar with the policies that their employers have in place to address and help prevent bullying in the workplace. Participants Six and Nine were both unsure of any policies that may be in place and Participants Five, Seven, and Ten knew that there were no policies that employees were made aware of designed to address workplace bullying. Interestingly, Participant Eleven did mention that the employer where they experienced bullying firsthand at work did not have any policies in place, whereas their current employer did, and they had not experienced bullying there.

##### Participant One

“My organization does have a policy designed to address bullying in the workplace. All this information can be found in our employee hand book we are each given at the time we are sworn into the union.”

##### Participant Two

“Somewhat, there are several informative posters regarding harassment in the workplace as well as information about the importance of maintaining a respectful work environment.”

##### Participant Three

“Yes, if bullied in the workplace we are advised to go to our immediate supervisor and tell them the problem. They will set up an arrangement with our HR department to address the problem.”

Participant Four

“Yes, there is a zero tolerance at my workplace for bullying. Even though I am in a different department now the policy is in affect right across the entire organization.”

Participant Five

“Not that I'm aware of, but they do have an open door policy where you can go speak with any member of management.”

Participant Seven

“Not really, they say they have an open door policy that you can go and talk to them if there is a situation or something that you feel needs to be address. The problem is when you do go and talk to a supervisor or manager they have a tendency to flip the situation around on you so that you are the problem rather than a victim.”

Participant Eight

“Yes, it is very clearly outlined by this company and every staff member is aware of it from their initial hiring and training process.”

Participant Eleven

“My previous employer did not, that I was made aware of. Where I am at now there is a well-known zero tolerance policy for bullying in the workplace and as new hires we are all required to review each of these policies and had to sign off agreeing to these practices as part of my employment.”

4.5 Organizational protocol for reporting incivility

Similar to the previous question, Participants Six and Nine were not aware of any protocol that had been put in place to report acts of incivility that had then occurred. On the other hand, the remainder of the eleven participants were all aware of protocolsto report any acts of incivility, but their opinions on its usefulness were varied. Regardless of whether or not protocol was in place, some participants found it useless and would not have used it or had already chosen not to use it.

#### Participant Two

“Yes, typically any incidents would be reported to management and there would be a meeting with any parties that happened to be involved in the incident. If there were any other witnesses to the incident they would also be questioned but not likely at the initial meeting regarding the incident. Depending on the determined outcome, employees may or may not be "written up" where a report would be completed, which would remain in their permanent file. In some circumstances or if the incident was not the first documented report of incivility, the particular employee who was responsible for the bullying would likely be fired.”

#### Participant Three

“Yes and very easy, as soon as a problem is addressed to a supervisor or Human Resources and immediate action would be taken to address the problem.”

#### Participant Five

“Yes, first you speak with your direct supervisor and if it is not dealt with in a timely manner then you go to the next step up in management.”

#### Participant Seven

“There was someone that I was supposed to be able to report situations like this to, her title is actually the company’s Human Resource Manager. As the Human Resource Manager I was not really comfortable at all reporting to her as reports in the past had gone unaddressed or the fault of the situation was placed back on me or the other staff that were bullied. It was like we had done something to bring on the situation ourselves rather than being a victim.”

Participant Eight

“You would think there was but when I followed that protocol I felt like I was attacked for doing so.”

Participant Ten

“Yes we would report to our supervisor than to the manager if nothing was done. They would sit both of us down and talk about what was going on and how we could fix it. If nothing was dealt with after talking to them we then had to report to the HR department for further help.”

Participant Eleven

“Yes my current organization does. It starts with reporting to the direct supervisor and the supervisor will bring it to the attention of the union rep. No actions can be taking to address the issue directly with the staff involved unless a union representative is present.”

*4.6 Common knowledge of policies and procedures used to address bullying*

For the most part, all participants identified the policies and procedures at their workplaces as common knowledge. For those three participants that did not feel these policies were common knowledge, they were all of the belief that they knew who to seek to find any information they desired in regards to their company's policies.

#### Participant Two

“Employees are provided with paperwork upon being hired. Most employees would likely report any incidents to management. “

#### Participant Three

“No, if an employee wished or needed to find out more information they would either have to contact a supervisor but most likely go to the source of the information and talk with the Human Resources Department.”

#### Participant Five

“I would say that most employees are aware of the open door policy. The company I work for has meetings every week with a member of upper management where a member of each department attends and anything can be brought to their attention. “

#### Participant Seven

“It was common knowledge that we were supposed to be able to approach our immediate store manager for any reason and then the Human Resources manager but it's hard when your manager is part of the problem you are trying to report.”

#### Participant Eight

“Yes, employees were very well aware of the policies that were in place to help prevent this kind of negative activity. When you start employment with this company your initial training stages actually includes a section that address what to do if you are experiencing unhappy times at work. It all starts with your club manager.”

#### Participant Nine

“No but if I needed this information I am sure that I could get it from either my supervisor or the Executive Director.”

#### Participant Ten

“Yes, every six months we reviewed the policies and procedures and signed off on paper that we read and understand each on them.”

#### Participant Eleven

“Yes we are all made aware of these policies and procedures our first day on the job and issued a pocket size booklet to use as a reference if and when needed.”

### 4.7 *Comfort reporting to a supervisor or authority figure*

Overall, most participants would have been comfortable to report any acts of incivility to a supervisor or other authority figure in their workplaces. Of those that felt they would have been comfortable, two participants did report acts to a direct supervisor and higher within their organization. Two participants found themselves on both sides of the fence, either feeling comfortable enough to report the acts and later regretting doing so or, in the other case, not reporting them at the time and later wishing they had. Participant Three made some interesting points. As the sole participant that had not experienced bullying firsthand nor witnessed it, they were the most uncomfortable with the idea of reporting any such acts.

### Participant One

“Yes I would feel comfortable reporting to a supervisor, this being the first step in a series of procedures to resolve such an issue.”

### Participant Three

“No, it may be easier if all employees received copies of the company bullying policies regularly such as annually and if they were reviewed and revised as necessary. Working on my own on such a regular basis makes it difficult to establish good relationships with supervisors or those staff in the Human Resources department. I can see how someone might feel nervous telling them there is an issue because they do not know them well enough to know how receptive they will be to this information they are being presented with. Where I work there is a firm “no favouritism in the workplace” rule in regards to scheduling and overtime calls; everyone is treated with the same respect. Human Resources and supervisors also advertise their open door policy but not being familiar with them I can see how that would make it difficult to take advantage of that policy.”

### Participant Four

“Yes I would it is unacceptable and I would not allow it to myself or a co-worker.”

### Participant Five

“Yes I would have no problem, you are supposed to feel comfortable while working and if you are having trouble with another member of your team it most certainly needs to be addressed.”

#### Participant Six

“At the time no, today I wouldn't have a problem with it. I have learned that you shouldn't work in a place that makes you miserable due to bullying.”

#### Participant Seven

“After I made my first report and the blame for the situation was turned around back on me in such a way that it was my fault it happened. I definitely became less comfortable reporting any of the situations that came along later. The further the bullying escalated the further I continued to report it from immediate supervisor, to store manager and eventually the Human Resource manager.”

#### Participant Nine

“Yes I reported it to both the facility General Manager and the Board that oversaw the facility operations.”

#### Participant Eleven

“At my current employment I would have felt very comfortable reporting these issues. The union and supervisors were always very supportive anytime I experienced the need for them to get involved in a situation.”

### 4.8 Satisfaction with how incivility reports were handled within the organization

Of the eleven participants, eight reported any workplace bullying. Of these there was a 50/50 split as to who was satisfied with the outcomes from reporting. Those satisfied still felt that there was more room for improvement when dealing with the

situation. Those not satisfied also expressed that the situation went undealt with and some felt it only became progressively worse as time went on.

#### Participant One

“Having reported such acts of incivility in the past, I have been satisfied with how the situation was handled by my superiors. However better initial communication between the employee and employer might have resulted in resolving the issue more promptly.”

#### Participant Two

“Under most circumstances yes, in some circumstances a close relationship with supervisors or management would influence how the situation was handled. Employees who were at fault were not reprimanded or in some situations the entire incident was simply ignored. I believe that everyone should be shown the same level of respect in the workplace and everyone should be held to the same standards when it comes to being accountable for their actions in the workplace.”

#### Participant Seven

“The higher I was reporting these situations the worse it seemed to become for me and eventually I started to look for another job opportunity so that I could leave this company for good. I was not happy at all with how the end result came about. I was made to feel like I was constantly left out in the workplace after I made my initial report and each report thereafter. I was still being made fun of and left on the sidelines. I was not included in fun activities that were being planned with the rest of the staff and co-workers stopped talking as soon as I was in their work space as if I had interrupted a private conversation each time.”

#### Participant Eight

“No, I reported it to my club manager who happened to be very good friends with my Personal Training supervisor and I was attacked for reporting my issues, by both my

direct supervisor and the club manager. My direct supervisor felt I should have spoken to her first about the situation and my experiences but that was not the protocol that was outlined for us to follow in that particular situation. I was in an all-girls club and the staff started to gab, that's what girls do right? In the end the only one that was there to support me was the front desk supervisor. She stood up for me and acknowledged to others that I was bullied and I helped to get me through the nine months I stayed there after I was attacked for following protocol.”

#### Participant Ten

“No nothing ever changed when going to management for help. The actions that were happening would stop for a little while and then picked back up like nothing was ever said to address it stopping. To me it seemed as though management felt this was a 'high school' matter, and that I should learn to not pay attention to what was being done to me and how I was being treated by my co-worker.”

#### Participant Eleven

“Yes, the co-worker was very promptly informed of his inappropriate nature and how his comment was not acceptable. This particular situation the co-worker was made aware of my particular condition as being autistic and how his comments could negatively impact his employment because of their inappropriate nature. Under my request he was not reprimanded for his comments and views on autism.”

#### 4.9 Was the person(s) that the incivility was reported to receptive to the complaint

Of the eight participants who made reports of bullying, five stated that their complaints were heard and management was receptive, and they indicated that they eventually felt as though nothing had been done to deal with or address the bullying reports.

#### Participant One

“Yes the supervisor who took the report of incivility was very receptive to the complaint. From my experience with my four direct supervisors I do believe that all of them would have the same response and approach to resolving this kind of issue. Knowing that they would have to abide to the same rules and regulations regarding such an issue I feel they would all be as receptive as the next.”

#### Participant Two

“Yes, they were very receptive to my complaint but as I mentioned sometimes the situation and complaints were taken no further.”

#### Participant Four

“With my incident the person had other issues going on. HR was then aware as to how to deal with and how to approach the situation. The bullying stopped and eventually we stopped working in the same areas together.”

#### Participant Seven

“Initially we were sat down for a meeting with a mediator and eventually made to sign documents indicating that certain actions were not to happen again and if they were to happen again what the consequences would be. They appeared receptive in the beginning but some of the actions and name calling still continued. They were not very receptive

beyond the initial report I had made. The consequences never materialized because reports were later brushed off.”

#### Participant Nine

“Yes, but the changes were a result of those that were picking on me started to obey general changes throughout the organization, nothing specific was addressed in regards to my complaint.”

#### Participant Eleven

“Yes, very much so, his wife actually has the same autism spectrum disorder so he was very receptive. For this reason he was very easy to communicate with.”

#### 4.10 Support of organization upon filing a report of bullying

It appears that the less receptive an organization was to receiving a report of bullying, the less satisfied the participant was with the overall support of their organization. In a number of instances, participants sought out new employment. While another participant felt as though they were being attacked for reporting the bullying acts, they only found support from other departments.

#### Participant One

“Yes the organization was very supportive and followed up frequently to make sure the situation was resolved and that no other issues resulted from the original report.”

#### Participant Seven

“No in the end I was dismissed by the company and the person that was doing the bullying is still employed by them. There were a number of complaints filed against her but in the end when I did what she was allowing other employees to do I was verbally

abused by her and later dismissed by the Human Resources Manager only after completing my shift.”

#### Participant Eight

“Those that should have supported me attacked me instead and others that were not even my immediate supervisors stood up for me and made sure it was acknowledged that in fact I was a victim of bullying.”

#### Participant Nine

“Somewhat, in my opinion it got pushed to the side and then bigger changes in the facility were made and general actions were forced to change based on the new rules and regulations. Throughout my complaint actions were not taken or made to make me feel as though I was supported.”

#### Participant Ten

“No, everyone in the branch knew what was going on; it wasn't hard to tell. This person was well known for being a bully to everyone in different ways. A complaint was sent to HR but nothing ever came of it.”

#### Participant Eleven

“Yes, they even brought in a representative from the Autism Society to help educate my supervisors and co-workers on the nature of my condition and how best to communicate and work with me.”

### 4.11 Acts of retribution in deviant behaviours

Of the eleven participants, only one identified as acting out in a deviant manner that could have negatively impacted their employer and the business where they were operating. Even though their actions were inappropriate, the participant did not actively seek out

retribution from the employer in the form of deviant behaviours. Overall the participants interviewed were not characteristically individuals that were out to find retribution or hold their employers responsible. Those participants that felt that their employers could have responded better either reported the situation as far as it could be reported or sought other employment.

#### Participant One

“Being the type of person I am I would not resolve myself to such deviant behaviours to avoid any kind of adverse effects on myself, co-workers and my organization.”

#### Participant Five

“No I would never, if my employer did everything in their power to help me after I was bullied and the bullying didn't stop that's on the person doing the bullying not on the employer.”

#### Participant Six

“I would have reported them if I knew that they would have been terminated or punished knowing that they would not stop if they were to stay with the company.”

#### Participant Seven

“No, I had managed to find other employment before I was dismissed. I was dismissed before I could put in my notice though. I thought about taking the situation further and possibly as far as filing a complaint with the Labour Board but decided that I was at a new job and would rather just put the whole situation behind me and focus my energy on my new job and the opportunities that it was presenting me with. I actually bit my tongue and held back from talking negatively about the company, I decided to be the

bigger person because doing something that could negatively affect the company now could hurt me even more so later.”

#### Participant Eight

“I went higher with my complaints and had my immediate personal trainer supervisor written up for mental/verbal abuse. The club manager in the end was also written up because she did not do anything about my reports when I was following the company’s protocol. That put a very big awkwardness in the middle of everything which is essentially why I ended up leaving in the end. I did leave on my own “good” terms but in the end all those friendships have been dissolved, their actions did not exactly show peace and love.”

#### Participant Eleven

“Yes, with my previous employment there was a number of yelling matches that would have been heard and witnessed by the general public that could have significantly changed their thoughts on the establishment and whether or not to return again. In my current employment I have not been given any reason to seek out retribution.”

#### 4.12 Shifts in organizational culture different once incivility was acknowledged

Of those participants that reported acts of incivility, they all agreed that there was a shift in the organizational culture. Unfortunately, for one participant, changes as a result of reporting were not for the better. They reported that the culture they were subjected to work in only became nastier with time after the incivility was reported. One other participant identified that it was a more comfortable working environment because they knew what they were facing and how to avoid it. In such a case, the bullying situation was not resolved simply avoided.

#### Participant One

“Yes, once the acts were acknowledged and dealt with the environment in question was a better place to be in and co-workers generally got along better.”

#### Participant Two

“Yes, but it was usually only a temporary change. In a few situations it was the same individuals creating the situations to start with. In most cases that I have witnessed victims tend to ignore or simply deal with particular employees differently who cause tension in the workplace.”

#### Participant Four

“It was a better work environment. I knew what I was up against and was able to just avoid conflict and any situations involving the other employee.”

#### Participant Seven

“Definitely, after I complained about the situation it appeared like there was an effort to change but it almost felt like a false sorry; it was lacking sincerity. I still felt uncomfortable and was still treated like an outcast on occasion.”

#### Participant Eight

“No, it just got nastier, the longer it went on the worse the situation got. There was a definite change in their actions towards me. After I had them written up it was like a storm came through the club. As a result I only stayed with the company for another six months until I found somewhere else to work.”

### *4.13 Perception on changes to organizational culture*

Those that reported acts of incivility within their organizations were at a 50/50 split as to whether or not the changes that were experienced were of a positive or negative nature

to the organizational culture. Two participants felt as though things remained so negative that their best option was to change departments or find new employment altogether.

#### Participant One

“I believe the change has been positive for all parties involved. After the fact I believe a better relationship between employees has been the outcome. This due to a renewed sense of respect between co-workers and a mutual knowledge of how to properly approach certain situations that could be taken in a different way than they were initially supposed to be taken.”

#### Participant Two

“Yes, the change was often temporary as I mentioned but most employees tend to come to a common ground regarding previous issues at work. Once changes are made regarding situations these changes tend to help reduce the overall tension in the work environment.”

#### Participant Three

“I can comfortably say that I believe that our company would do what it needed to do to maintain a positive and happy working environment so I do think any changes they would make in response to bullying would be of a positive nature.”

#### Participant Four

“I no longer work in that department so I cannot truly comment on the change. The whole situation certainly played a contributing factor to make me want to leave but there were other reasons as well.”

#### Participant Seven

“No it was very negative and insincere, it only continued to escalate.”

#### Participant Eight

“The changes were not good at all; I ended up leaving the organization as soon as possible once everything was brought to the attention of the owner of the company. The environment was not pleasant at all to be working in and eventually I just found another job.”

#### Participant Nine

“Yes, being able to give my opinion and being heard instead of my opinion not mattering or being dismissed was a much better feeling than being ignored. The organizational changes may not have been as a result of my complaint but they certainly helped make it much easier and bearable to work.”

#### Participant Ten

“No, we tried having me and the "bully" as far apart as possible while our shifts overlapped. It was also tried having us on different shifts. Both of these were changes I asked for because going to work was becoming a chore and not a pleasant.”

#### 4.14 *Victims of Bullying in the Workplace through the use of Technology*

With the introduction of cyber-bullying, only three of the eleven participants identified as having been bullied through the use of technology (Participants Six, Seven, and Ten). Participant Three noted a fine point that could be further addressed: they did not use social media platforms on any regular basis. For this reason they would not have been aware had cyber-bullying been occurring throughout their organization whether it was

targeted at them or other co-workers. For those that had experienced cyber-bullying, it was common among all three participants that Facebook was the social media platform used.

#### Participant Three

“No, I do not use social media much myself so I do not think I would know even if it was going on among co-workers or even directed at me personally.”

#### Participant Six

“Yes when the bullying was happening it travelled onto Facebook a lot. I had a few employees that I thought were my friends who would post if I messed up at work or if they noticed I had gained weight. This was often done by posting comments and such on each other’s Facebook walls where they all knew that I would be able to see it and read what they were discussing.”

#### Participant Seven

“Yes, my manager at the time and I were friends on Facebook and it was apparent that some of her comments were directed to me or about me without using my name outright. She was inadvertently making comments about work that were very clearly about the situation that was going on with myself and one other girl at the time. Eventually I was deleted as her friend on Facebook as I continued to complain and pursue the situations resolution further.”

#### Participant Ten

“Yes, Facebook and texting was a way in which this person liked to bully me on. I had to block her from Facebook and just learned to delete texts that came in from her without replying. After a while they did stop because she wasn't getting a reaction like she

wanted. We also had an inside messenger we used at work and she would also use that during work hours to bully as well.”

#### 4.15 Witnessed bullying in the workplace as a bystander through the use of Technology

More of the participants had been bystanders to cyber-bullying than had personally experienced it. In the cases that the participants had witnessed cyber-bullying, the platforms that were used as an agent to do so were Twitter, text messaging, instant messenger, emails, and Facebook. On multiple occasions, bullying that occurred with the use of technology was a continuation of the acts of bullying that occurred face-to-face while at work.

##### Participant Two

“Yes,I have witnessed bullying in the workplace on Facebook on several different occasions as well as through text messaging, however the incident involving text messaging was a continuation of an incident that occurred in the actual workplace.”

##### Participant Seven

“Definitely, what I witnessed on Facebook was more about my situation but the other girl was receiving mean text messages and about not being able to do her job properly. The text messages were eventually what made her ask to be transferred to another store because they were making her miserable.”

##### Participant Eight

“Yes, twitter was a big platform that was used.”

##### Participant Nine

“Yes through email a number of times.”

##### Participant Ten

“Yes, I would be shown messages that were sent via email or through the messenger we used at work.”

#### 4.16 Changes to organizational bullying policies as a result of the Cyber-Safety Act

Of all the participants that were interviewed, none were aware of the Cyber-Safety Act, its implementation here in Nova Scotia, or any changes to their workplace policies as a reflection of its introduction.

##### Participant Two

“No. Any cyber-bullying that I have witnessed in relation to the workplace were reported to management and documented, however I do not believe that there were any records placed in permanent employee files. How involved to get in these situations can be confusing to management.”

##### Participant Three

“As employees are not very informed about the policy we would not know if changes have been made to address the Cyber-Safety Act.”

##### Participant Five

“No I'm not sure if anything has changed with my employer, I have only been with them for just about a year now so I would imagine that these changes would have happened before I was on staff with them.”

##### Participant Seven

“No but I do think that if we were to be bad mouthing their company on Facebook they would be very quick to fix it, to ensure we no longer can without consequences. They

do not seem as quick to want to help their employees and keep them in a happy working environment.”

#### *4.17 Additional comments*

One participant wanted to end with a final statement about the impact of bullying in the workplace had on them:

It really does take a toll on the person that is being bullied and I don't think that people realize that but they need to. It is hard being a victim and going home thinking about what just happened at work and keeping that with you all night on your mind and carrying it with you back to work the next day. It is hard. It is most important to not let it go and address the problem right then and there because it does affect every aspect of your life.

## Section 5 - Discussion and Implications

### *5.1 Discussion of research findings*

As noted, of the eleven participants, four had not experienced bullying in the workplace with their current nor with previous employers. Of the remaining seven, only two were bullied by a direct supervisor and the rest by co-workers. Of the two bullied by a supervisor, one also experienced bullying from co-workers in conjunction with the bullying that they were receiving from their supervisor. That one participant had experienced workplace bullying in a mobbing-like situation. The supervisor used other staff to ensure that the victim was almost constantly verbally abused and made uncomfortable in the work environment until they were forced to find employment elsewhere. On top of being victims of bullying, a number of the research participants also witnessed bullying as a bystander. In a number of cases, the individual bullying the participant was also the individual who was witnessed bullying others in the workplace. On one occasion, a participant had identified as being neither a victim or witness to any form of bullying in the workplace. It was noted in their interview that their job required minimal supervision, and that they very rarely worked with others. Their complete lack of exposure to bullying in the workplace could simply be a result that they do not have typical working arrangements that would allow for such activities. On three occasions, participants indicated that they had no firsthand experience of bullying from someone in their workplace but had been bystanders.

From their experiences of bullying in the workplace, each participant was affected in their own respects, but with some degree of consistency between individual accounts. Often the experiences not only affected participants at work, it also had a lasting impact on their personal lives including, but not limited to, their family, school, and social interactions. Also documented during a number of interviews: bullying made the work

environments very uncomfortable. Effects on the participants included, but were not limited to, symptoms of depression, anxiety about going to work or with whom they were working with, anger and frustration, and fear of retaliation.

Only half of participants were confident their employers had workplace bullying and harassment prevention policies. Experiences of bullying could be reduced or possibly avoided if more employers had policies targeting preventing bullying tendencies. One participant noted that their former employer where they had been a victim of bullying had no policies in place, but their current employer did, where they had not experienced any such behaviour. Generally, those participants that self-identified as working for larger organizations were those individuals that knew with confidence that there were policies in place to deal with bullying behaviours in the workplace.

When asked about protocols within their organizations when reporting acts of bullying, all participants but two were more familiar with these than they were with company policies to prevent or deal with bullying. The same two participants, Six and Nine, were once again unfamiliar with any such protocol, as well as, policies within their respective workplaces. Feelings among participants varied when elaborating on protocols in place and whether or not they would choose to employ these protocols or felt comfortable doing so. These feelings were addressed later in the interview in greater detail. All but three participants felt that policies and procedures surrounding the protocols within their organizations was common knowledge. For those three respondents that did not agree that these policies were common knowledge, all were of the mindset that they could easily find out policy details and where to seek these out.

For participant comfort in reporting acts of incivility to a supervisor or other authority figure, one participant found that they were initially comfortable reporting those acts and quickly regretted it once they had. The tables were very quickly turned, and they were blamed for the acts that had occurred. One other participant later wished they had made a report, but, at the time, could not find inner strength to do so. Most interestingly, a participant that had not experienced nor witnessed any acts of workplace incivility was the most uncomfortable with the idea of reporting if the situation presents itself. Working alone for the better part of their job with minimal supervision made them hesitant because they did not have the opportunities, like other staff, to build bonds and relationships with co-workers and superiors.

Of the eight participants who chose to report acts of incivility they either experienced or witnessed, only half were satisfied with the outcome that was achieved. Of those that felt satisfied, each felt that there was still room for improvement with how each of their situations were handled. Two participants indicated that they wished they had chosen to handle their situations differently, one wishing they had decided to report the incivility, whereas, the second participant wished they had not reported the incivility. Once they had reported the acts of incivility, these respondents were made to feel as though they were in the wrong and responsible for the situation. With those participants that felt their reports were heard and felt as though their supervisors were receptive to them, they later felt that it was only temporary. Reports were heard, but no action was taken to help fix or eliminate the situations that arose. It should be noted that two of these individuals actively made the choice to change career focus after they had experienced workplace bullying and were very unhappy with how the incidents were handled once reported.

Happy or not about how their employers responded, all participants indicated that they would not resort to acts of deviant behaviour as a form of retribution. Even though the participants felt that they had been wronged, they did not feel that it was in their nature nor appropriate to react negatively. To respond to others' wrongdoings with actions that would be out of character for the participants was not a consideration. For the two participants that felt the situation could have been handled in a more desirable manner instead of acting out towards their employer and seeking retribution, they made the decision to find employment elsewhere. Deviant behaviour was not typical of these participants, and they chose not to act against their morals and beliefs. One participant had an interesting perspective on the responsibility of their employer. They felt that if their employer did everything within their power to address the bullying, and it did not stop, the employer could not be held responsible for the bullying. This response indicates that there is a gap between employees and their knowledge of employee rights.

Once acts of incivility were reported to authority and addressed, those participants that noted they had reported acts of bullying also reported having experienced a shift in the organizational culture. Unfortunately, for one participant that noted the shift they experienced was very negative. For them their work environment seemed to only get worse and more unpleasant, where the respondent felt that the manager that should have been addressing the situation was blaming the respondent, and that their "short-comings" were the problem for the situation. Another participant said that the environment changed, but it was a short-lived change, and before long the culture was back to the way it was prior to the reports of bullying.

Once participants had been introduced to the concept of cyber-bullying, only three participants had experienced workplace bullying through the use of technology. A commonality noted among these three participants—Facebook was the social media platform used to carry out the bullying. Significantly, one participant did not personally use social media on a regular basis, so in the event they or any of their co-workers were the victim of cyber-bullying, they would be unaware. The number of participants that identified as being bystanders to cyber-bullying was greater than those that indicated they had experienced it firsthand. The acts of cyber-bullying were witnessed through the use of Facebook, Twitter, text messaging, instant messaging, and emails.

No respondents were aware of the Cyber-Safety Act, its implementation in Nova Scotia, or any changes to their workplace policies as a reflection of its introduction. Some respondents made interesting comments on how they felt their employers would handle it if the tables were turned and staff were targeting the company on social media platforms in a negative manner. Even though many of the organizations had policies in place to address harassment in the workplace, many participants felt that their employers were at a loss for how to handle such harassment issues if they were to occur by forms other than face-to-face.

With this in mind and the clear examples that employees are not aware of how to handle bullying that occurs through the use of technology, careful thought should be given to educating employers on this topic. Employers should be informed of methods employed to harass individuals, and how these methods have evolved overtime to reflect the use of technology and social media.

Education of both staff and managers is the best means to fight against workplace bullying, learning how to identify, deal, and follow up on reports of bullying. Staff need to know what rights they have and the potential consequences they will face if those rights are not respected. Managers will continue to find themselves in a tight spot if they are not properly equipped with the knowledge and confidence to address and eliminate any situations they witness or are informed of.

Data from my research identifies employers, especially small business owners, as ill-informed of the issues surrounding workplace bullying. Other areas of concern are a lack of employee knowledge about workplace policies and that cyberbullying is also a workplace issue.

The research findings support that employers are slow to address the changing nature of bullying. Employers cannot turn an ignorant eye to bullying in their business. Ignoring it will not make it disappear but only make it worse. Throughout this study, ways to help employers address bullying were identified and recommended. If employers play their part, workplace bullying could become a thing of the past. Throughout the research it was apparent that many of the laws governing bullying and cyberbullying were directed towards or designed to address youth bullying among school-age peers. This gap helps to identify why so many employers and their staff lack awareness about the laws now in place in Nova Scotia. Finding ways to better communicate new information surrounding the issue of workplace bullying to business owners would not only serve to benefit owners but also their employees.

## *5.2 Implications of the research*

From the respondent sample, it is evident that bullying in the workplace is still an issue for employees across Nova Scotia. From the feelings of participants, it is clear that employers and managers are uncertain and ill-equipped with how to deal with situations stemming from workplacebullying. As a direct result of alack of training and education, employers find themselves in difficult situations. Without the knowledge of how to deal with the delicate nature of the feelings and welfare employees and managers experiencing workplace bullying, employers are unintentionally making their staff suffer.

Knowledge is power. Employers need to educate themselves to help their staff.Likewise,staff need to be educated to help protect themselves. Bullying in the workplace can generate a great deal of pain and suffering to the victims. Looking at the research here, it is not only the employers that need to work on their policies and procedures but also possibly the governing labour boards that companies operate under. Consistently,participants who worked for larger organization were more likely to have clearly identified workplace policies. Small businesses may need more training and informationrelevant to enforcement to put the push on to have more clearly identified policies.

Workers and managers are entitled to a safe and pleasant working environment. Workers and managerswill continue to work in less than ideal working environments until companies equip themselves with the knowledge to encourage a bully-free and safe organizational culture.

## Section 6 – Limitations of the Study and Future Research Opportunities

### *6.1 Limitations of the study*

Respondents were recruited on a voluntary basis. For this reason, the conclusions of this paper cannot be applied as a blanket representation of the general population. All participants were from the former Halifax Regional Municipality and worked within the city of Halifax and its outer limits. For a more accurate representation, a greater sample is required for further study, including respondents from other areas of the province, including Cape Breton and the South and Western areas, as well as Digby and Amherst.

A limitation of this study is that participants self-identified as being bullied or as being witness to bullying in the workplace to their co-workers. It is possible that self-identification as a victim of bullying in the workplace could result in under reporting. Even though each respondent confirmed to have understood this study's definition of workplace bullying, it does stand to reason that some individuals may not see themselves as someone that would have been bullied, and, therefore, did not self-identify accordingly. For this reason it is possible that some responses could be skewed the resulting data in such a way that respondents could not have identified themselves as victims but identified themselves as bystanders for the same acts of bullying employed on both themselves and co-workers.

Another of this study's limitations revealed through the literature: even though each respondent was offered the same definition of workplace bullying on which to base their responses, no clear time-frame was indicated in that definition as to when bullying would have been experienced or witnessed. As a result participants had no clear understanding as to how long or recently these acts of bullying were to have been experienced or witnessed. An additional question could be added asking over what period of time did the acts take

place. Another option would be to add a clear time-frame to the definition, such as considering the last 12 to 18 months, similar to the time-frame used by Lutgen-Sandvik (2007).

## 6.2 Future research opportunities

The literature reviewed in preparation for this study and the research conducted brought to light a number of areas that would be beneficial to further investigate. From the perspective of how workplace bullying impacts an organization and its employees, more insight is needed into the physical and emotional toll that bullying has on an individual, including bystanders and the supervisors or employers whose responsibility it is to address, resolve, and monitor bullying situations or events.

Further research focus should be directed as to how to best address and resolve workplace-bullying situations. As every organization and business is different, areas of research that would be beneficial to investigate include organizational structure and whether or not there are changes that could be made to help prevent bullying from persisting. Looking at the organization's structure could also help bring to light significant differences between larger scale organizations and smaller businesses. Will what works in one environment work in another is an important question. Much like the research of the Western and Eastern regions of the globe cannot necessarily be generalized to all workplaces around the world due to cultural differences among accepted norms, it stands to reason that bullying tendencies may vary from larger scale organizations to smaller local businesses.

As mentioned above, an explicitly developed code of conduct would help organizations to establish a foundation of acceptable workplace behaviours. With this it

would help employers and their managers establish ways to approach and deal with cases of bullying in the workplace. In this research, it was evident that employers from smaller-scale businesses were less likely than larger organizations to have such policies and procedures. Small business owners would benefit from further research into the area of developing and implementing policies such as a code of conduct, as well as from making necessary anti-bullying resources easily accessible. The more knowledge these business owners gain, the more power they have to make a positive change within their companies to keep staff happy and productive.

A final opportunity identified is further expansion with implementation of the CyberSCAN Unit. As the first police unit of its kind, its successes and contributions in combating cyber-bullying are yet unclear. For those that know it exists, they seem to have the impression that it only applies to the schoolyard and not the workplace. Monitoring acts of bullying is becoming more difficult, as individuals get more creative in the ways to inflict negative, recurring acts. Understanding these changes will help further society's understanding, as well as the understanding of employers and supervisors, of how to address and resolve workplace bullying.

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