

# Defining Harassment and Bullying at Work Issues

YUZANA BINTI MOHD YUSOP

*Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin*

***Abstract- Defining unacceptable behaviour at work such as harassment or bullying is crucial and high-priority. People modestly searching for an explanation of special concept to avoid confusion. The nature of terminology is defectively understood especially to laypersons. The purpose of this article is to notify in deciding on terminology and define the situation of unacceptable behaviour distinctly. Vague terminology and definition that executed may affect the consequences of any research related in this field. When identifying the terminology and define of unacceptable behaviour, procedure and policy must be well-delineated for organizations to detect which behaviour is unacceptable.***

***Indexed Terms- Define, terminology, harassment, bullying unacceptable***

## I. INTRODUCTION

Significant issues like harassment and bullying at work merit a serious attention. Browsing and searching for these issues we may found hundreds of studies worldwide especially from the European countries. Tremendous volumes of research and data which are available from Western society relocated this issue for policy implementation, effectively to build favourable and productive working relationships at work. With the increasing research output over the years, Western researches could focus on many specific issues in the field of harassment or bullying behaviour at work. Either harassment or bullying at work is considered a serious problem especially the victim and bystander. Research has also demonstrated that the consequences of such behaviour can lead to both short- and long-term mental health problems. Everyone reacts differently, attributable to sickness. Many consequences are related to the effects of prolonged exposure to high levels of pressure. The uncontrollable social situation for these individuals may lead not only to severe psychological trauma but also of an extremely extended stress condition that seriously threatens the individual's socio-economic

existence, productivity, job security, and even marriage. For those countries without policy, it is time to take step ahead to focus on this issue. Before we go any further defining the situation is the high priority with the intention of policy can be prepared. Due to serious consequences of this matter defining the behaviour clearly what action could be categorising as harassment or bullying at work must be done. So that it is easier can be validated and enforcement can be carried out too.

## II. DEFINING AND TERMINOLOGY THE UNWANTED CONDUCT AT WORK

The nomenclatures harassment, bullying and mobbing are often used interchangeably and there is characteristically a great deal of overlap. Researchers around the world have tried to identify and define universally described unacceptable behaviours in terms of form, category, frequency and duration. The intentions, experiences and the norms of specific organisational culture or conflict contribute to an understanding of what is defined as unacceptable behaviour. Hoel (1999, as cited in Caponecchia, Sun & Wyatt, 2011) claimed that the definition is very important because it governs how this phenomenon is measured. Any kind of harassment, bullying or mobbing deliberately conducted is deemed to be unwarranted conduct; and the most effective way to ensure a peaceful workplace, for everyone, is to change the unwanted behaviour. Having clear regulations or policies in the workplace is one way of promoting a healthy working environment and indirectly it may lead to culture changes. Harassment policy is well-developed in many western countries such as the United States (Kidwell & Martin, 2005) and Norway (Casey, Skibnes & Pringle, 2010).

For better implementation, it is important to identify how behaviours are defined and to clearly differentiate between the different unacceptable behaviours. Harassment defined under legislation is when the unwanted conduct relates to the person's identity e.g.,

his or her gender, faith or ethnicity; mobbing is defined as when the unwanted conduct is perpetrated by more than one person with the deliberate intent of making someone wish to leave work; whereas bullying is thought to occur when someone's identity is not relevant but the unwanted conduct is based on abuse of power. Countries such as Norway, Sweden, Canada, United Kingdom, United States and Belgium have all taken rapid action by responding with statutory regulation in order to address and prevent such events routinely happening in the workplace. Guidance on the European Framework for Psychosocial Risk Management (PRIMA-EF) aims to promote a strong European agenda to address psychosocial risks include violence, bullying and harassment at work (Leka & Cox, 2008). Leka et al. (2011) had mentioned that there has been an impressive framework built against harassment and violence at work at the European level for the last five years. The project monitored by a number of agencies from the European Union in the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre in Occupational Health. Therefore, defining the behaviour distinctly and which terminology appropriate to execute is the right stride to start in taking action seriously towards this situation.

### III. FORM, CATEGORY AND FREQUENCY OF UNWANTED CONDUCT

Many factors beyond mere definitions contribute to the development of this phenomenon, including form, category and frequency of the inappropriate behaviour. Crawford (1998) referred to bullying or mobbing as a particular collection of behaviour. Inappropriate behaviour that occurs repeatedly over time exposes the victim to considerable verbal or physical negativity which causes emotional instability leading to fear and anxiety. Quine (2001) found victims were consumed with helplessness, depression and shock (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002) and exhibited musculoskeletal problems (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Namie & Namie, 2000; Quine, 1999; Tepper, 2000; Vartia, 2001). There are many forms of inappropriate behaviour, such as teasing, jokes, and spreading rumours, attacking a person's appearance, ignoring victims, withholding information, imposing impossible deadlines and calling unwanted names. Cyber bullying has only recently become a recognised form of bullying which can take the form of malicious

online gossip and rumours. Clearly this phenomenon of inappropriate behaviours can take numerous forms and occur with varying degrees of severity ranging from minor to major. Current research has identified various categories that can be classified as inappropriate behaviour. This becomes a problem when trying to implement a clear policy to identify and encourage a provoker to desist from his/her actions. It could occur as, for example, physical or psychological violence (Sperry, 2009), as direct and indirect (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukiainen, 1992), obvious and less obvious (Adams & Crawford, 1992), physical and nonphysical, verbal and non-verbal, personal- and work-related attacks (Hoel & Cooper, 2000), overt and covert (Chappell & Di Martino, 2000; Keashly, 2001; Hoel & Cooper, 2000). Physical and non-physical is likely to be the most important distinction about inappropriate behaviour because it identifies one very extreme form, physical violence. Physical violence includes beating, kicking, slapping, stabbing, shooting, pushing, biting and pinching, among employees. In contrast, non-physical violence is regarded as the intention to use power communicated verbally or non-verbally, including the threat of physical force that can result in physical and mental damage (Hoel & Cooper, 2000). The deviant behaviours can be grouped into similar categories to make it easier to differentiate between the various forms of behaviour. For instance, Leymann, (1996) registered 45 forms of mobbing which are divided into five categories: Attacks on the possibility of communication (e.g. interrupting, shouting), attacks on the social relationships (e.g. prohibition of communication), attacks on social reputation (e.g. spreading rumours), attacks on the quality of profession or life (e.g. criticism in the workplace), attacks on one's health (e.g. violence, sexual harassment). Zapf, Knorz and Kulla (1996) have also classified different modes of inappropriate behaviour. The attacking victim's attitudes were included as a new approach to the research to subcategorise the inappropriate behaviour into seven groups. They broadened and re-analysed the four concepts which were organisational measures, social isolation, attacking victim's private life and physical violence (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Leymann, 1992). Another two classifications proposed by the literature are verbal aggression (Vartia, 1993) and rumours (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukiainen, 1992). The

frequency and duration of incidents in which an employee experiences inappropriate behaviour has been of interest to researchers. Typically, episodes of incidents are recorded as daily, weekly, and monthly, over a six month period. Frequency and duration are cited as key criteria of the phenomenon in various studies. Coyne et al. (2003) maintained that the impact of both duration and frequency of inappropriate behaviours is highly subjective. However, (1996) emphasised that even, at least once a week for at least six months (p. 168), may have significant implications for the victim in terms of psychological and social misery. Similarly, in their work, Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper (2003), use the same criteria as Leymann and contend that the incidence of inappropriate behaviour has to occur repeatedly and regularly over a period of time (p. 15). In contrast, findings from Belgium suggest that experiencing two or more negative acts of discrimination per week has a greater power to affect the victim in comparison to only one act per week.

Thus far, not all research uses the same definitions as well as how they measured the unwanted conduct in term of form, category and frequency. There are numerous terms and definitions which have been utilised to illustrate unacceptable behaviour at work in this field, such as workplace bullying (Adams & Crawford, 1992), psychological terror (Leymann, 1996), mobbing (Zapf, Knorz & Kulla, 1996), interpersonal deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2003), hostile work environment (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Zapf et al., 1996), victimization (Aquino, Grover, Bradfield & Allen, 1999), emotional abuse (Keashly, 1998) and many more. Therefore, most of those studies applying dissimilar terminology and definition as well as evaluation method. The argument is, are all of the studies measuring the same phenomenon?

#### CONCLUSION

Definition and terminology of unacceptable behaviour at work remain controversial issues. Meanings overlap and often actions are classified according to the severity and frequency of the abuse. There must be a clear definition on what harassment or bullying or any other terminology that will exercise before drafting an act concerning this issue. Regardless of any

definitions use, the aim should be to overcome and eliminate the unwanted phenomenon at work. Yet, from a legal prospect, it is important that employers and those responsible especially Human Resource Department understand the difference between terminologies which is apply and as such put complete workplace policies in place.

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