

6 September 2012

The House Standing Committee on Education and Employment

Parliament House,

Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into Workplace Bullying

This piece contains some confidential information.

Following a period of six years out of the workforce I am once again contemplating going back. This is a huge step for me and brings with it much anxiety and apprehension given the impact workplace bullying has had on my life. Six years ago, I was working in the finance sector and was hired to fill a position as an Investment Analyst at a prestigious fund management firm in a very male dominated workplace. During the 2 years I was in this position, I went from being a confident and capable woman respected for my ability, to one who completely doubted myself and showed numerous physical and emotional signs of what I would later learn was post traumatic stress. The incidents I endured over the two year period can be seen in brief at the end of this letter. Workplace bullying led to me being diagnosed with depression and anxiety for the first time in my life and lead to a mental and emotional breakdown, followed by my eventual resignation. I have been on anti-depressants since this time and find it difficult to cope without their assistance. I have also had consistent psychological intervention, at my own cost, due to the impact of this bullying.

In as much as workplace bullying is detrimental to anyone for reasons pertaining to mental and emotional health and self-esteem, I have also found it to have a recurring impact on my personal relationships (marriage, friends and family) a detrimental impact on the attachment between myself and my first born (born after the workplace bullying incidents) including post natal depression, huge financial strain on my marriage as I have been unfit for work and in need of psychological intervention and medication and the added anxiety and concern over the long term impact of my depression, moods and self-esteem on the well being of my two young children.

Research shows the impact of an emotionally unavailable mother on her children and the connection to low self-esteem, identity issues, anxiety and academic progress. The long term effect of workplace bullying goes FAR beyond the individual victim; and has an ongoing, indeed a domino effect to many of those around that victim. The impact will effect families, health, communities and indeed our health system and therefore economy.

Like most newly-wed couples my husband and I had many plans and dreams for our future. Three months into our marriage I experienced a mental breakdown. Still holding on to the threads of the independent and capable woman I was, I decided to leave my job and try to focus on the positive things in my life. A few months later I discovered I was pregnant. However, I eventually miscarried

and have no doubt that the abuse I suffered at work and my inability to recover from 2 years of workplace bullying was somewhat to blame.

Following this traumatic event, I again picked myself up and began to seek employment in the field I had worked so hard to develop skills in. I found myself unable to obtain work because many agencies in the finance sector had contacts with the people who bullied me. I was invited eagerly to numerous interviews based on my CV; however when I attended the interviews contact had been made with my previous employer and I was then told the positions were no longer available. During the interviews themselves, the interviewer was often unusually interested in asking questions relating to my previous employer rather than questions relating to the advertised position. I was afraid my career was over and completely shell shocked (to use another PTSD term) that my bullies continued to have some control over my life. This was the final straw, the feeling that I could not escape them and move on with my life. I began to abstain from social situations, avoiding contact with people and preferring to stay home. Simple tasks like going to the supermarket made me apprehensive. I felt paranoid, helpless and trapped.

It took six months before I found the strength to gain employment and it was a much lower paying position as a receptionist. I worked there until my first child was born.

Looking back at this period of my life, as a mother with two children I worry about the effects my illness has had on them. I am not just talking about depression and anxiety being hereditary but also my parenting skills being affected by my inability to deal with the stress of everyday life, which began with my experience of bullying.

As mentioned earlier, my husband and I had many plans and dreams. I found the stress on our family of being jobless and the ongoing cost of medication and psychologist fees have meant I'm unable to get the help I need. This has further impacted my family and they are the unnecessary victims.

I put into place the suggestions made by APS psychologists, I approached HR, I tried to discuss issues with my superiors. I even resigned and tried to move into another workplace. None of this was successful in dealing with the insidious nature of the bullying and the relentless way in which it continued. Policies by the Government are required which leave no room for bullies to hold their power and their threatening ways over the people who are also meant to be there to assist squashing this behaviour.

We need more community and workplace awareness of workplace bullying and the grave impact it has on individuals and our wider community. People continuing to downplay its effects and say it is part of the Aussie Culture or if you can't take it get out, need to be shown in no uncertain terms by our Government that it is a serious issue for us all. If not, we will continue to see the huge rise in diagnoses of stress, depression, anxiety, domestic violence, diabetes, behavioural problems in children and academic problems. All due to the emotional and mental toll that bullying has on any human being, whether at school, in racial disputes or the Australian workplace.

List of Incidents Endured over a 2 year period

- Experienced isolation, embarrassment and was regularly humiliated in front of other workers
- Made false allegations against me eg. my sexuality and referred to me as a lesbian
- Talked about me being a virgin and the type to not enjoy sex
- Banter when I had lunch at my desk regarding the smell and someone would pass wind; they'd laugh and walk away. This was a regular occurrence.
- Was told regularly the good looking ones weren't the best ones for the job
- Was told I had a brain the size of a pea
- Lack of opportunities and when any came my way, it was taken away
- Was dismissed and overlooked at meetings
- When asked at a dinner by a top level exec if I'd like the opportunity to go to the US, my manager dismissed me saying I wasn't the right person
- Was put down regularly in front of colleagues by my co-workers and my manager
- Another manager, when he'd walk past would sing

- I was told by one manager to sit on his lap which I refused to do
- When wanted me to stand in for him with some clients, he approached my then manager by phone. I then heard when got off the phone he had a conversation with saying he couldn't believe wanted me to represent him and asked her instead.
- The boys were promoted and received pay increases however I did not
- I always received good praise for my work from the team I worked for (and in Sydney)
- I was even asked by if I wanted to move to Sydney so I could work with them
- I was constantly told by my colleagues that they weren't used to having a female in the team and it didn't suit
- They used that as an excuse for excluding me – it was a boys club.
- I was also made to feel as if my job wasn't secure. I was regularly receiving comments and questions asking if I've started looking for another job, and even told the guy I replaced wanted his job back.
- Was told by very early on if there was someone he didn't like then as a team we shouldn't speak to them – that's how it worked. Over the two years I saw him and my other colleagues isolate me from other workers.
- On one occasion sprayed the area where we sat with deodorant, saying it smelt. He sprayed it mainly in my direction (over my head), and the fumes made my eyes sting and water. I had tears streaming down my face and left the office.
- I was constantly humiliated by banter about hygiene, sexual orientation and preferences
- I was asked what my sexual preferences were
- At times I thought they were bullying me because I was disinterested in them sexually unlike some other females in the office. In other words, I didn't massage their egos.
- I was asked by a co-worker why I wasn't interested in and when I responded by saying he's not my type, I was told it didn't matter. It would just be sex.

- At one of the Xmas parties I had my photo taken with a few people and I heard one of them being asked by why they had done so as the photo was now pasted on a board.
- I never got invited to the team Xmas lunch/dinner. When asked he said he didn't want to sit next to someone he didn't like through a meal.
- When joined the team, they organised a team lunch to the Press Gallery and I didn't get invited. confirmed this about 8 or 9 months later.
- and never spoke to me when was around.
- I was told by that he had to put up with a lot of s*** from because of me.
- Any friends I made were carefully steered away
- When my new manager started they saw me come out of a meeting with him laughing and joking. One of them then said they'd speak to him.
- attitude then changed towards me
- I was asked to work on a very large project (\$3bn pension fund in Europe) with the property team. On my first meeting with them, I was told I would receive everyone's work at least two weeks prior to the due date so I could spend some time putting it all together. One afternoon after I got back from lunch I was asked to attend a meeting by my manager , , one of the lawyers, and I sat down. I was told I had to put everything together that afternoon for submission that day. I was shocked and overwhelmed. left work early to attend the Motor Show. I worked back really late to get the document finished.
- One morning I noticed everyone had left and it was just and I. I asked if there was a meeting and she said if it was compulsory we'd know about it. When the others got back I asked why I wasn't invited and he said he'd sent my invite to the wrong address and it was put on last minute so he didn't get the chance to resend it. Later that day I asked about the meeting with the US execs and he said he'd received the invite a few weeks before.
- I was told later that the US execs had noticed my no show and they were told I wasn't dedicated to the job by .
- My manager took me aside one day to tell me that someone put in a complaint against me to higher management on the premise that I wasn't dedicated to the job. I was told it was . He had complained about the half day I'd taken off for my bridal fitting. This was despite approving it in advance as annual leave.
- When I approached he made me believe that it was a concerted effort and that our manager had even told him that he would be taking over my duties. When I approached with this he just laughed.
- Prior to doing the performance appraisal with my manager he asked me to think about other areas in the company I'd like to work for and let him know. I couldn't understand why he asked me this. I felt very insecure about my job. I realised it was another way they were trying to get me out.
- In writing commentaries for the Investment Bulletin, my manager asked me to take on more writing and I agreed. I felt he would nitpick at some things. I asked a few times to be sent on an advanced writing course but nothing came of it.
- I arranged a meeting with HR but on the day I noticed he was very reluctant to go ahead. When I asked if we could have it in another room (his office was a footstep away from where my team sat), he was dismissive and made no eye contact. I then proceeded to

find another room and waited another 20mins for him to show. I started to discuss some issues but given his behaviour and attitude I decided to not pursue the topic.

- When [redacted] started (HR assistant to [redacted]) I decided to approach her. I firmly believed that she would be untainted and unbiased. We had a meeting and I told her about some of the preferential treatment the guys were getting and [redacted] failing to talk to me at all. She said she would discuss with [redacted] and get back to me. This didn't happen. In fact I found that she avoided me and was a bit brusque. I was shattered.
- When [redacted] (HR Manager) finished up, on her last day she made a passing comment like "I don't know what you're going to do". I then realised that she was aware of some of the things that were going on and felt that I'd lost my opportunity of talking to her. I was very upset.
- I was diagnosed with depression and started antidepressants within a few months of starting my job.
- I suffered gastroenteritis for a long period during my employment
- I felt I had no choice but to leave the company in April 2008 after having a breakdown.
- I saw a psychologist and received treatment for clinical depression
- A few months after leaving my job I miscarried
- When I attended interviews for jobs with a few agencies I was told the job was no longer available and they couldn't help me further. This was despite them making the original appointment. Rather than being interviewed for the job, I was queried on my reason for leaving my previous place of employment, the other agencies I'd approached and in one case the consultant had personal information about my marriage that I had not provided. I felt sick in the stomach.
- The bullying has followed me and I felt I no longer had a future in the industry.
- I took a much lower paying job with hopes of a fresh start. After finishing my contract I left to have my first child.
- Twelve months later I approached another agency with the hope of gaining work in a different industry. Once again I was asked to come in for an interview as the consultant was impressed with my skills and experience to date. Unfortunately the attitude was very different on meeting and I was told the job was no longer available. I found it soul destroying that this could still happen 2 years after leaving that job. I realised that they would pursue me and prevent me from gaining employment. I felt defeated. I have remained unemployed since and this has been a heavy financial burden on my family.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate this opportunity of having my voice heard.