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18 June 2012

Inquiry into workplace bullying
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives,
PO Box 6021,
Parliament House,
Canberra
ACT 2600

I would like my information considered as part of the review on workplace bullying. As far as possible I will aim to be pragmatic and succinct in my responses, please understand given that workplace bullying is something that I have personally experienced that some of my responses may be through my own experience. I will aim to address the terms of reference as best as I can later in my submission but will attempt first to give you an overall picture of my personal situation.

Also please also find attached in this and the following emails several documents supporting my submission please be aware that they should not be publicly published as they identify other parties.

A background on my situation is that a new principal arrived in our workplace in 2008 she was for the most part of that year very proactive in achieving the goals for the school as a team. But this began to alter as her first year passed.

She began to treat another colleague badly but protested that this person was not doing her work, which myself and others began to believe the principal even though we had all worked with the other employee for many years. By the end of 2009 this employee had basically moved on both myself and another employee had suggested to the principal that health issues could be the reason that she

was having difficulties with the employee and asked that she address this with the employee which we believe the principal did not. I know understand what the principal had done to this woman was workplace bullying.

In March 2011 after many previous comments by the principal about another 2nd employees work ethic and some very stressful situations and the principal actually voicing to me she wish to remove that employee from her position and even offering me the position. I began to see a pattern of behavior of this principal and started to stand up for the employee I also was approached by several families about the principals behavior toward their children I referred them to the local schools office. These actions by myself all of which I am required to do under the Code of Conduct made me a target not only by the principal but by her superiors.

This woman was protected to every end when if the department had of stepped in when she had difficulties with the first employee with conflict resolution and team building strategies I believe the situation would not have escalated to what it did, with three long term employees no longer working in the school that they loved and had been productive employees achieving many great things as a team.

I believe the career goals of the principal and her friendships within the department led to the demise of the jobs of three good people.

I have been on stress leave because of this situation since 22 March 2011 and although I have recently been cleared to return to work am not having much luck finding another job I believe that being this is a small rural area where everybody knows everybody I will struggle to find employment again as the principal has been able to voice her side which she has done, whilst I have become a recluse and my story has not been told. 15months later my life is still in limbo.

It took the department 8 months to investigate mine and another ladies grievance and our lives and that of our families have changed forever I am no longer an active member of this small community of which it took a long time to become accepted after moving here from the city and my family and I have become recluse and ostracized due the bullying actions and the poor investigation by the

- **The prevalence of workplace bullying in Australia and the experience of victims of workplace bullying;**

Given our workplace was a small rural school with a small staff and that three employees experienced bullying out of a staff of about 7 and that since I have been on leave I have learnt that this is a major issue in many other schools within in the NSW area I think this problem is huge.

And sadly these people are teaching our children, what example are they setting for the children. A lot of those perpetrating the behavior are the leaders and executives of the schools.

- **the role of workplace cultures in preventing and responding to bullying and the capacity for workplace-based policies and procedures to influence the incidence and seriousness of workplace bullying;**

I do not believe that the [redacted] took these matters seriously. Although they have a document called the Code of Conduct and they have policy on dealing with complaints none of this was adhered to what they did instead was to accuse myself and the other employee of collusion. I did not ask them to crucify the principal I asked them to do something so we all could keep our jobs. I believed they would they did not and what I believe is because of their actions they will somewhere in the future have problems again with this woman as his behavior was not managed appropriately.

I believe there should be a written process with a step by step process on how to deal with work place bullying that remains in hard copy located within several areas of a workplace so it can be accessed by any employees. If such a document is only electronic it can become too hard to access for some.

Bullying investigations should be completed in a timely manner like any alleged crime the longer it is left the more likely evidence can be changed, lost or memories cloudy.

There should be a national process for addressing workplace bullying that is the same Australia wide.

- **the adequacy of existing education and support services to prevent and respond to workplace bullying and whether there are further opportunities to raise awareness of workplace bullying such as community forums;**

There should be mandatory mediation at the very outset of any complaints if this is not thought to be advisable then there should be mandatory counseling and mentoring for not just the bullied but the bully.

The investigation of any bullying should be done by an independent organization and not by the organization that the complaint originated in.

There should be a national media campaign about what is and what isn't bullying the charges a bully can face and the charges for false complaints.

Adults should be made aware of how their behavior is mimicked by children something similar to the DOC ads that used to be on with the children are a sponge type theory.

If bullying is made socially unacceptable there would be a certain percentage of people who will think twice about perpetrating bullying behavior yes there will always be those who still behave unacceptably but I believe this will reduce the incidence of bullying.

An example of how an effective campaign can be quite successful is the anti smoking campaign it is now socially unacceptable and that has made more of an impact with a lot of people quitting because it is not the done thing or at least going into hiding to have a cigarette.

- **whether the scope to improve coordination between governments, regulators, health service providers and other stakeholders to address and prevent workplace bullying;**

I believe that the process surrounding workplace bullying and the ensuing system of work cover process is a horrific experience I believe this process should be managed by a specialized agency who has dedicated employees from related areas of government such as work cover and health services.

- **whether there are regulatory, administrative or cross-jurisdictional and international legal and policy gaps that should be addressed in the interests of enhancing protection against and providing an early response to workplace bullying, including through appropriate complaint mechanisms;**

I believe an independent workplace grievance investigation body should be set up so that the process remains unbiased and streamlined I believe that HR departments have too many other issues to deal with to properly investigate bullying issues with such actions taken as;

Put together an OH & S Manual on Behaviour Issues in the workplace available to all staff where a process of identifying;

- A check list on the process of how to deal with issues like
- Behavior Changes in employees
- Performance changes in employees
- Personality conflicts
- And when an issue should be passed on to the next level this all should have a documentary process so that it is clear to those dealing with or making the complaints that a process is to be adhered to and what the steps of the process are.

No employee should ever feel that they have been thought to be a whinger or the tables turned on them for making a complaint of bullying.

I believe that government agencies set up to investigate corruption and the such allegations do not have enough power to subpoena documents and witnesses to carry out a thorough and proper investigation.

- **whether the existing regulatory frameworks provide a sufficient deterrent against workplace bullying;**

- **No it does not** from what I have experienced personally and from what I have read and researched since workplaces protect employees that bully as they are seen to be high achievers. Yet the cost of their actions, financially, socially, emotionally for all those involved including the government would be highly likely to far out way the initial achievement their actions had in the workplace.

- **the most appropriate ways of ensuring bullying culture or behaviours are not transferred from one workplace to another; and**

To make known that it is not socially acceptable and that it will go on your record if your bullying behavior is not stopped. That they are dealt with thoroughly and in a timely manner.

- **possible improvements to the national evidence base on workplace bullying.**

Many people are concerned how they will be portrayed when they have admitted being bullied as it makes them believe they will look weak. So the true picture of what is going on will not be evident as people refrain from reporting and also will drop out of the grievance process as it is not treated the same as any other criminal behavior within the workplace such as stealing etc. The investigations involving bullying are not thorough as would be expected in any other investigation evidence and witnesses are not consider or questioned as part of the investigation so there is no true outcome.

Not attacking the bully about behavior change and attitude change in society although most psychiatrists and psychologist believe their behavior cannot be changed as it begins in childhood I would hate to see the bullied then bullying the bully.

As society has changed the pressures within the workplace to achieve have grown the increase in bullying is partially due to this change as workers feel the pressure of having to achieve both at work and in their private life.

I also believe that schools inactions in dealing with bullying are allowing these children to grow into adults whose behavior has not been checked or managed in such a way that they will understand that it is unacceptable before it becomes habitual behavior.

In conclusion I believe that myself and my work colleagues were used as stepping stones by the principal so she could use what we had achieved as a team as her work alone.

I am not against people have career objectives but not at the cost of those around them. I am also completely mortified at the handling of my situation by the NSW as all they managed to achieve was to possibly completely destroy my ability to ever gain employment again destroy my reputation within the community that I have lived for 15 years. Impact negatively on my family and create a financial burden on my husband and involve my little girl in the actions of a bully.

There have been times the thought of taking my own life have crossed my mind and that of the colleague that I stood up for. How unfair is that I would reach such utter despair because I did what I was supposed to do as stated in the Code of Conduct and also what I was counseled to do by the PSA as part of protecting myself and others from bullying in the future.

Had I have known what would happen to me I would have run a million miles. Thank god for my family, my husband, my little girl who sadly had to hold me in her arms one night whilst I cried and I told her I didn't want to live anymore something I will regret for the rest of my life, and for my work colleague who went through this with me as without her having firsthand knowledge of what I was feeling I would have thought I was losing mind.

I hope this bullying review does what needs to be done and addresses through its outcomes the actions that need to be taken against workplace bullying.

If you wish to speak with me further I am happy to do so I also have many other documents related to my situation if you require them.

Yours sincerely

OH &S Officer Name		Date	/ /				
Complainant Name		Accused Name					
Bullying Report	Date	Action 1	Completed Y/N	Action 2	Completed Y/N	Action 3	Completed Y/N
First instance	/ /	Refer complaint to investigation unit		Ascertain outcome from complainants mediation		Ascertain outcome from Accused mediation	
Second instance	/ /	Refer complaint to investigation unit with second notification flagged		Refer Complainant to OH&S mediation committee		Refer Accused to OH&S mediation committee	
Third instance	/ /	Refer complaint to investigation unit with third notification flagged		Refer Complainant to OH&S mediation committee		Refer Accused to OH&S mediation committee	