

Bullying and Harassment Factsheet

Bullying and harassment are common but unpleasant workplace behaviours. An important element of safeguarding is ensuring that staff and associates (including volunteers, board members, contractors etc.) feel safe at work. Preventing bullying and harassment contributes to creating that safe environment.

1. Introducing bullying and harassment

Figure 1- Definitions of Bullying and Harassment

Bullying is rude, abusive, or threatening behaviour or misuse of power that intends to make a person feel humiliated or ashamed.

Harassment is when bullying is because of a person's identity, or who they are such as their age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual identity etc. Often harassment is covered by law.

FACT: Bullying and harassment are terms that are often used interchangeably. Bullying is rude and unpleasant behaviour whilst harassment is rude and unpleasant behaviour because of a person's identity such as their age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual identity etc. In certain countries these identity characteristics are 'protected characteristics' which means it is illegal to be rude or unpleasant towards someone because of those characteristics.

FACT: People who experience these inappropriate behaviours are more likely to experience anxiety, be less satisfied at work and want to leave the organisation. Humanitarian staff who experienced bullying and harassment have reported stress, frustration, demotivation, demoralisation, fear and a lack of trust (Charity Commission, 2020; Konterra Group, 2019; Independent Commission 2019; Shale 2018; UNAIDS, 2018; UNICEF 2019).

FACT: Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work and all organisations should take any form of harassment or bullying seriously. Organisations should create a fair and inclusive working environment that enables everyone to feel valued. Leadership teams and human resources staff should lead the development of a positive and inclusive culture with zero-tolerance for harassment and bullying.

FACT: All staff and associates should feel confident to bring complaints without fear of retaliation.

FACT: “Violence and harassment in the world of work remains pervasive, affecting all countries, occupations and work arrangements...It deprives people of their dignity and is incompatible with decent work and social justice.”¹

1.1. Examples of bullying and harassment behaviours

FACT: Harassment and bullying may be against one or more staff and may be a single incident or repeated incidents across a wide range of behaviours, from extreme forms of intimidation, such as physical violence, to more subtle forms such as ignoring someone.

FACT: Harassment and bullying can take place without witnesses, in face-to-face interactions, as well as in writing and online.

Examples:

- Unwanted physical contact.
- Unwelcome remarks about a person’s age, dress, appearance, race or marital status, jokes at personal expense, offensive language, gossip.
- Ignoring and excluding from work and/ or social activities.
- Failure to safeguard confidential information.
- Shouting and use of obscene language.
- Displaying icons, flags, logos, images etc. which may offend.
- Personal insults.
- Setting impossible deadlines.
- Persistent unwarranted criticism.
- Cyber bullying.

2. Bullying and harassment is a global problem

FACT: Bullying and harassment in the workplace is widespread. There are no global figures showing the prevalence but published reports within the humanitarian sector show that bullying and harassment is common (see figure 2).

¹ International Labour Organisation (2019) *Eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work convention No. 190, Recommendation No. 206, and the accompanying Resolution*. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_721160.pdf

Figure 2- Reported incidence of bullying and harassment in the humanitarian sector

Organisational reviews exploring bullying and harassment reported:

- Oxfam: one third of staff witnessed bullying, discrimination or abuse of power. Some partner staff also experienced bullying by Oxfam staff (Independent Commission, 2019).
- Save the Children: 28% of staff experienced bullying or discrimination and 15% harassment in the past three years (Shale 2018).
- UNAIDS (2018) staff survey: 58% of staff experienced ill-treatment; 64% discrimination; and 43% abuse of authority.

International standards on safe workplaces

FACT: The global community has made it clear that violence and harassment in the world of work will not be tolerated and must end.

FACT: On June 21, 2019, the International Labour Organisation Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work Convention (No. 190) and Recommendation (No. 206) were adopted. These are the first international standards aimed at ending violence and harassment in the world of work and giving the global workforce the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment.

3. Responsibilities of organisations

FACT: Organisations must put in place a robust and well-communicated policy that clearly articulates their commitment to promoting dignity and respect at work. This can be a separate policy, or a statement contained within a safeguarding policy or a human resource policy.

FACT: An organisation's responsibilities to safeguard staff and associates from bullying and harassment include any environment in which work-place activities take place, such as offices, field locations, guest houses and even work-related social activities.

FACT: Organisations must be aware of 'cyber bullying'. Cyber bullying includes unpleasant texts or emails sent from organisational hardware or using organisational software and Wi-Fi. Images of colleagues posted on external sites without their consent could be considered bullying.

FACT: Line managers must understand their role in addressing all forms of bullying and harassment.

Responsibilities of employees and associates

FACT: All staff and associates have a responsibility to behave in ways which support an inclusive and tolerant working environment. Everyone is responsible to implement the organisation's policy and be ready to challenge and report inappropriate behaviour.

FACT: People who bully or harass others may be personally liable for prosecution under criminal or civil law depending on the legal context.

Creating a culture of respect

FACT: Establishing an organisational culture which promotes dignity and respect for everyone will help prevent inappropriate behaviour. Organisations should send a clear message across the organisation that there is zero-tolerance of all bullying or harassing behaviours.

FACT: Senior leaders must demonstrate strong values which role model what a culture of dignity and respect looks like.

Anti-bullying and Harassment Policies, Communication and Training

FACT: Clear policy statements must communicate:

- Which behaviours are considered bullying and harassment.
- The impact of these behaviours and why they are not tolerated.
- The consequences of these behaviours.
- How to make a complaint.
- How complaints will be responded to.
- The responsibility of all staff and associates for their behaviour.

FACT: All staff and associates must be made aware of the bullying and harassment policy through induction and training. This must include:

- Staff and associates' rights and responsibilities.
- How to make a complaint.
- The organisation's commitment to respond to any complaints.

FACT: The policy implementation should be regularly monitored for effectiveness including:

- Records of complaints
- Outcomes complaints

FACT: Anti-bullying and harassment policies must be coordinated with the organisation's grievance and disciplinary policy.

4. Support to those who experience bullying or harassment

FACT: Anyone who experiences bullying or harassment should be offered confidential support. This support may include coaching, counselling, mediation etc.

FACT: Anyone can report bullying or harassment; the individual who experienced the bullying or harassment should make the decision to progress a complaint.

FACT: All complaints should be dealt with promptly in line with organisational policies and procedures.

FACT: Mediation is a voluntary impartial process which seeks to resolve conflict which is not at the serious end of the continuum.

FACT: Formal processes, including disciplinary and grievances are needed where bullying or harassment is persistent or serious.

FACT: Investigation of allegations of bullying or harassment should be treated as a disciplinary offence. Investigations should:

- Be prompt, thorough and impartial.
- Take evidence from witnesses.
- Consider evidence from both the alleged bully or harasser and the complainant.
- Include a timescale for resolving the complaint.
- Be confidential.
- Be recorded.

FACT: Where a complaint is upheld, action must be taken in line with the organisation's policy and procedures.

5. What should you do now?

ACTION- Review your organisations policy on harassment and bullying against this Factsheet and make adjustments as needed, or introduce one if it doesn't already exist.

ACTION- Check your country's laws to see if harassment is against the law so you understand the organisation's and individual's responsibilities.

ACTION- Communicate and action anti-bullying and harassment commitments to all staff and associates.

ACTION- Identify sources of potential support for those who experience workplace bullying and harassment.

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