

Workplace bullying

**R-AGE
AGAINST
BULLYING**

Bullying goes far beyond the classroom, into the workplace and throughout different stages of life.

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If you think bullying is something that only happens when you're in school, you're deluded.

From verbally abusive bosses to sexually inappropriate colleagues, bullying is something that we could have to face up to throughout our working lives.

While workplace bullying might be a grey area at times (is it bullying if someone gets consistently overlooked for promotions or bonuses?), it can rear its ugly head in pretty obvious ways.

Take Jeffrey (not his real name), 27, for instance. Even though he was used to being called names from his time in secondary school, the kind of verbal abuse he used to get from a former employer was too much to take.

"My former boss has problems with his temper," said Jeffrey. "He would scold us loudly with profanities over minor issues, and most of the time those issues were just blown way out of proportion."

The boss, Jeffrey said, would yell at the entire office at times; but one of the last straws for Jeffrey was when things got personal.

"He would use my marriage to question my dedication to the job. He would say things like: 'Because you got married young - that's why you have no commitment and passion for your work'," said Jeffrey.

After a about a year, the "toxic environment" became too much for Jeffrey to take and he quit.

The experience didn't just affect Jeffrey's professional career. It left a huge dent on his confidence as well.

"It was a motivational downer. I



HELP International School counselling psychologist Dr Gerard Louis said that bullying is normally an act of misconduct that is consistent.

started wondering whether it was worth it working in such a toxic environment, even though it was a good job at a reputable company. It was the worst year of my working life so far," said Jeffrey.

Are you being bullied?

Though Jeffrey firmly believes what he experienced constitutes workplace bullying, there is a fine line between an office bully and someone with poor interpersonal skills.

So what exactly constitutes workplace bullying? Even Jeffrey came to a point where he started wondering whether his boss' tongue lashings was "normal" workplace behaviour.

According to the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI), workplace bullying is defined as the "repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons by one or more perpetrators". For HELP International School counselling psychologist Dr Gerard Louis, the keyword in

that definition would be "repeated".

"If it is a one-off act, then it might not be considered bullying," he said. People do, after all, make one-off mistakes.

Another important thing to remember is that whether an act is considered bullying or not depends largely on the person on the receiving end of it. No harm, no foul, right?

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said: "Some things can be considered part of working culture. If a recipient doesn't find it unacceptable, then it is fine. But if an employee feels aggrieved by it, or it is against his or her rights, then it is bullying."

But workplace bullying can be more than just persistent verbal abuse.

Brand manager Adilah, 28, was sexually harassed by her former boss, who would make sexual remarks about her body, ask her to drive him home alone, and even invite her to his place after work.

"These things violated my rights as a Muslim girl, and he used his position to harass me and manipulate me into doing things that are not required of me," said Adilah, who was also forced to share a room with two male colleagues during a working trip. She left the company soon after.

Know your rights

Malaysian Trade Union Congress general secretary Halim Mansur said that most of the reported workplace bullying cases are not physical in nature.

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"It's not the kind of bullying you (might) see in schools. Nowadays, workplace bullying is when workers are not given proper protection, not enrolled to social security (SOCSO) and Employee Provident Fund (EPF), face sexual harassment and violation of their basic rights as per the Malaysian Employment Act," said Halim.

He added that some employees endure workplace bullying because they don't know their rights. Denying an employee the promotion and/or bonus that they clearly deserve is also considered as bullying on the employer's part. Halim emphasised that every company should have an induction programme to introduce its rules and regulations, working culture, benefits, and rights for the employees.

"If a worker is discriminated against and constantly asked to perform duties that are not according to his or her job specification and ends up being aggravated and intimidated, they should make a report."

Who do you call

The problem with workplace bullying is that over 70% of the bullies are managers, as was the case with Jeffrey and Adilah.

But that doesn't mean employees should stay silent when they see it happening, said Louis.

"If you are bullied, you should voice out and get evidence to show that you are bullied. A bully is normally a powerful person, so don't directly confront them.

According to Halim, if the first step, which is to report the bullying issue to the company's human resource management (to solve the problem domestically), doesn't work, then the worker should report it to the Industrial Relations Department.

Two options are given to bullied workers. Employees who would like to end their service with the company can file a constructive dismissal under the Industrial Relations Act 1957, which entitles the employee to terminate the employment contract.

In more serious cases, if an employee finds his or her life threatened and endangered, he or she may file a report for constructive dismissal and compensa-



It can be a fine line sometimes, but persistent verbal abuse can be considered workplace bullying.



I find it's usually the bullies who are the most insecure. - Tom Felton, actor



MEF executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said that people take the issue of bullying lightly, thinking that it is something that is petty. But it is an act of misconduct that can result in disciplinary action.

tion for the unfair actions made against the victim.

"Look for people who can help, like trustworthy colleagues or higher authorities if it is your bosses who are bullying you," said Louis.

He added that it always require the first strike against the bully, or else nothing will change and the bully will go on bullying. "It is normal to feel ashamed if you are sexually harassed or humiliated in public, but nothing is going to change if no one is going to take action."

Singled out

According to Louis, bullies often target victims as publicly as possible, which makes workplace bullying all the more embarrassing.

"Bullies likes to perform and demonstrate their power. They

often single you (the victim) out, isolate you, and humiliate you with nasty comments."

Moreover, he added that bullies often try to find a way to disguise what they're doing, and make it seem like it's the victim's fault.

Suresh, 26, for example, was made to seem incompetent even though his boss had been treating him unfairly.

The graphic designer, who has been working in an advertising company for the past five years, believes his boss has been intentionally denying him a proper laptop to work with.

According to Suresh, the company benefits includes a laptop and smartphone for all employees. However, Suresh has been left with an old, malfunctioning laptop and not given a smartphone at all.

"I don't really care if I get a smartphone. But as a graphic designer, I need a decent computer to work with. The current compu-

ter that's given to me isn't just old and slow, but the colours are inconsistent. So whenever I produce a print image, it comes out different from what I see on screen. How am I supposed to work this way?" said Suresh, who believes his boss is practising favouritism.

And yet when the colours of Suresh's designs don't match what was requested, his boss is the one that turns on him.

"It's been like this for the past few years, and the only reason I am staying is so that I can continue to build my portfolio for my career in the future. I don't want to be job hopping," he said.

■ *Bullying is a vicious cycle that starts from our experiences in childhood. Help break that cycle by supporting the RAGE Against Bullying campaign. Go to RAGEAgainstBullying.com to pledge your support.*

Help, I'm a victim!

ACCORDING to HELP International School counselling psychologist Dr Gerard Louis and Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan, here are the things you should do if you are a victim of workplace bullying:

1 Tell someone

It's important to voice out and let people understand what is happening so they can help you. Talk to people whom you can trust – superiors, colleagues, friends, family, etc. And if the bullying involves a criminal act (physical or sexual abuse), you could even report it to the authorities. If it's a direct superior bullying you, speak to a more senior figure within the company.

2 Gather evidence

Make a note of all the bullying incidents – where and when it happened, as well as exactly what happened. You need to show that you have been bullied on a regular basis, and this information could come in handy.

3 Know your rights

Know your rights as an employee and take your stand against bullying. By understanding your rights, you are able to identify any act of misconduct and address it immediately in order to stop being a victim.

IF you have been a victim of workplace bullying, or seen it happening to a colleague, go to RAGEAgainstBullying.com and drop a pin on our online "heat map".

We developed the map to achieve two things – firstly, to show everyone how serious bullying is around the country; and secondly, to let victims know that they are not alone, and there's nothing to be embarrassed about.

Your pin on that map could help someone else realise that there is nothing wrong with admitting that you were (or are still) bullied, because everyone has gone through it one way or another. In fact, it's the bullies who should feel ashamed.

Help make a difference today. Go to RAGEAgainstBullying.com, or post a message on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram using the #RAGEAgainstBullying hashtag.

Drop a pin against bullying!

The R.AGE Against Bullying website at RAGEAgainstBullying.com



BULLYING isn't just bad for the victims, it's bad for business as well. According to bullyingstatistics.org, having a bullying culture in your company can result in:

- High turnover. Having to constantly hire and train new employees is costly, especially when you know they probably won't stay long because of the bullying – and then you'll probably have to lose them to a competitor.

Bad business

- Low productivity. If you have a workforce that is constantly being bullied, they're not going to be motivated to do their best. Bullying could also lead to stress-related illnesses.

- Lost innovations. A bullying culture will cause your workforce to be less concerned with sharing and generating new

ideas. Everyone's simply too busy bullying or being bullied.

- Difficulty hiring quality employees. It's a widely-known fact that the younger generation values a positive working environment. If your company has a reputation for bullying, you will miss out on top talents.