

## Health & Safety Special Issue: Spotlight on Harassment and Bullying

**If you believe that you are being bullied, the chances are, you are!**

### Introduction from John Bamford UCU Health & Safety Official



Conventional wisdom says that bullying at work is counter-productive and destructive. But UCU believes that bullying is often used as a deliberate management technique in higher education institutions. Recent work published by UCU members at the University of Manchester suggests employers may believe that the advantages of intimidating staff in order to drive increased workloads or impose changes

may outweigh the disadvantages.

The problem affects many HE staff. A UCU survey published in 2010 reported that 35% of teaching staff in HE said they had been bullied at work in the preceding six months, and more than half of HE teachers said they had been bullied in the preceding five years. The study found you are more likely to be bullied if you are:

- a woman;
- a full time member of staff;
- on a fixed-term contract, and
- a trade union representative.

Bullying causes stress-related physical and psychological responses; victims suffer heart attacks, and develop clinically-diagnosable mental illness like depression and anxiety. Few victims want to admit they are being bullied, and anyone who is bullied desperately wants it to stop, but it's very difficult for an individual to deal with. Even where there is a policy in place to deal with bullying, victims have a real fear that, if they raise the issue, the perpetrator will react, and the bullying will get worse. Individual victims are easily isolated by cunning bullies.

Employers don't generally have a good record of dealing with the perpetrators; often the victim is blamed and is relocated while the bully remains in post and carries on.

Everyone needs to understand that bullying is a collective problem – and UCU needs to organise around it. We need to understand the scale of the problem; members need to be involved in planning how to deal with it; mass protests and collective responses need to be made; it needs to be raised on the bargaining agenda and employers need to understand very clearly they have to deal with it.

Bullying can affect staff at every level of the institution and from all backgrounds. It involves a misuse of power, and is usually, but not always, perpetrated by managers against staff over whom they have power. It may particularly affect women, disabled, ethnic minority and LGBT staff, and can be a form of discrimination. Bullying and harassment are a major danger to staff health. They are often closely linked, and may overlap, but they are legally distinct.

### Definition of harassment

Harassment is unlawful when it is on the grounds of sex, gender reassignment, race, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, or disability. It is also unlawful to subject a person to sexual harassment on the grounds of membership or non-membership of a trade union. The law defines harassment as unwanted contact which has the purpose (intentional) or effect (unintentional) of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person.

### Definition of bullying

Bullying may include harassment and harassment may include bullying. However, there is no statutory definition of bullying, which is defined by ACAS as behaviour that: is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting, is an abuse of power, and uses means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

### Effects of bullying and harassment

When bullying and harassment occur they not only affect the complainant but have a knock-on effect for the work area or institution in which they are occurring. Relationships between work colleagues become strained and at times difficult, with some colleagues not wanting to 'get involved' as they do not see the bullying and harassment as having anything to do with them or they themselves may not want to become a target for the perpetrator.

**If you've identified bullying or harassment in your workplace don't ignore it - you can contact your UCU rep for advice and support.**

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You can download a copy of the UCU publication *Stopping Bullying and Harassment* from:

[www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3314](http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3314)

# Cyber-bullying Survey

## Cyber Communication at Work

Advances in ICT have come so far that most people now use some form of electronic communication in their working lives. Although communication technology has been designed to make working easier, some people experience negative behaviours through communication technology. Our research team is made up of three researchers from the Institute of Work Psychology (Sheffield University) and one researcher from the Institute of Work, Health and Organisations (Nottingham University). We are interested in understanding how negative behaviours enacted via electronic communication can influence employees working lives and well-being. We will also be investigating some factors that may help to reduce the impact of negative behaviour enacted through technology.

If you would like to take part in the study, you can find our survey at the web address below:

[https://acsurvey.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_5nLrg1JiApPhli](https://acsurvey.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5nLrg1JiApPhli)

We aim to have the data collection period of the study completed by Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> November, therefore if you could complete the survey before this date it would be greatly appreciated. However we will be extending the study beyond this date if necessary so responses past the 4<sup>th</sup> November are also appreciated. The survey will take no longer than 15-20 minutes and all responses will be anonymous and confidential.

If you have any questions about the study, please email Sam Farley ([sjfarley1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:sjfarley1@sheffield.ac.uk)). Many thanks for your help.

*Dr Christine Sprigg, The Institute of Work Psychology*

## Where To Go For Help

We understand that being a victim of bullying behaviour or harassment in the workplace incredibly hard to cope with. UCU offers completely confidential support to members. We will assign an individual caseworker to look at the information you can provide working with you to resolve difficult situations. Contact us at [ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk)

Useful information:

UCU: Information designed for UCU members

[www.ucu.org.uk](http://www.ucu.org.uk)

University of Sheffield: Information about the Harassment Network

[www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/eamp/harassment](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/eamp/harassment)

Health & Safety Executive (HSE): Clear information on the Management Standards for work-related stress

[www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress)

Trades Union Council (TUC) Click on the worksmart link for useful information

[www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/rights](http://www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/rights)

## Personal Cases

**We have a lot of contact with individual members who run into problems.**

In a recent case, a member was put on formal disciplinary charges, which was a real concern, not least because a written warning can mean that the staff member concerned is in a riskier situation in the event of redundancy. The offence in this case was that the member did not submit a request for annual leave by email as per an earlier circular instruction.

Despite the (relatively) minor nature of this offence, the informal and verbal warning stages were leapfrogged by management. The formal disciplinary panel decided that a written warning should be issued. At this stage, the member called in the Union to help with an appeal.

After a full - and fair - hearing the disciplinary panel's decision was overturned and no written warning was issued. This case shows the need for members to be aware of their rights under agreed procedures.

This Bulletin is a campaigning newsletter published by the UCU Committee at the University of Sheffield. If you wish to comment on an item, to suggest a topic for coverage in future issues, or to contribute as a member, please email [ucu@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ucu@sheffield.ac.uk).