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A Thematic Analysis of stories of Workplace Bullying Told on the World Wide Web

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

This study explored how the experience of workplace bullying is described by targets of the phenomenon. The target's experience has been neglected by the research to date as it is difficult to gain access to their point of view. A qualitative approach was undertaken to develop the study in order to gain insight into this experience. Targets' stories were analysed for themes which revealed important aspects of this experience.

The World Wide Web was utilised to harvest narratives from carefully selected websites which granted consent to access the stories. These websites provided anonymity for the targets to freely express their experiences of the phenomenon in an effort to provide self-help assistance to viewers. The World Wide Web is a new frontier for the research community which is still developing clear ethical guidelines for this arena. Therefore this project developed its own protocol for conducting its study which was informed by debates o the ethics of internet bases data collection.

The analysis of harvested stories identified two global themes: acts of bullying and ongoing consequences. Acts of bullying included the following sub themes: a triggering event, hindsight, persistent and unrelenting negative criticism, scapegoat, tasks and duties changed, deadlines, basic rights denied, personal attacks and name calling, and temper tantrums. The second global theme encompassed ongoing consequences for the target. This theme consisted of the sub themes: rendered powerless, safety hazard, and psychological contract. These themes illustrated a trajectory for the progression of the phenomenon of bullying from targets' points of view.

This trajectory provides a richer and more specific understanding of workplace bullying which can assist practitioners and researchers to develop ways for organisations to prevent workplace bullying and/ or undertake interventions when it occurs.

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Thank you to the website creators who granted consent to utilise the data on their websites and the targets who chose to utilise the World Wide Web to share their experiences of workplace bullying on these web sites. I hope that they have been able to continue their journey through recovery.

I would also like to take the time to show my appreciation to the many lecturers and tutors during both my undergraduate and post graduate years all of which have allowed me to answer the many questions I came to university with.

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