Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

WORKPLACE BULLYING IN THE NEW ZEALAND NURSING PROFESSION: THE CASE FOR A TAILORED APPROACH TO INTERVENTION

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Human Resource Management

at Massey University, Albany

New Zealand

Kate Marie Blackwood

2015

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores intervention in the workplace bullying experiences of New Zealand hospital nurses. Workplace bullying is a recognised problem internationally, and nursing is a high risk profession for such ill-treatment. With existing studies mapping the workplace bullying terrain, the research field is now moving towards how best to manage the problem. Recent research has identified numerous barriers to effective intervention and, as a result, existing studies recognise the need for a different approach that considers the impact of the work environment on intervention efficacy.

The aim of this study is to understand how the work environment influences intervention in workplace bullying. Specifically, the research was guided by two questions: i) how do targets of workplace bullying in the New Zealand nursing profession represent their intervention experiences? and ii) how do work environment factors impact on the intervention experiences of targets of workplace bullying in the New Zealand nursing profession?

The findings of this research are informed by 34 semi-structured interviews with targets of workplace bullying and three focus groups with organisational representatives responsible for bullying intervention. Thematic analysis of the interviews resulted in the development of an holistic intervention process model portraying how targets represent their intervention experiences. Subsequent thematic analysis of the interview and focus group data identified how a number of contextual and work environment factors influence the intervention process model.

The model explains three key stages of intervention, namely identification of a bullying experience, reporting and intervention agent response, and how each of these stages influences the final outcome of an intervention experience for targets of workplace bullying. Specifically, the cyclical and iterative way in which these stages are experienced by targets is emphasised. A number of contextual and work environment factors that are barriers or facilitators in the intervention experience are explained. To explain the influence of contextual factors, five types of bullying experience are presented, each with a unique set of features that influence intervention in different ways, emphasising the heterogeneous nature of workplace bullying. Work environment factors are also identified as influencing the intervention process, providing empirical support for an extension of the work environment hypothesis to intervention in workplace bullying experiences. Tailored intervention strategies are recommended in light of the findings.

ACKNOWLEGDEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to a number of people who have supported this study. First and foremost, to my amazing supervisors, Dr Margot Edwards, Associate Professor Bevan Catley and Professor Tim Bentley. I cannot thank you enough. Your support and encouragement have motivated me and given me the confidence to complete what initially seemed a huge and impossible challenge. I could not have achieved this without you. Thank you for all of the opportunities which have made this an enjoyable and rewarding academic apprenticeship and not anything like the solitary and arduous exercise a PhD is so often portrayed to be.

To the other members of the Healthy Work Group, particularly Dr David Tappin and Dr Darryl Forsyth, thank you for your support, encouragement and advice. I have absolutely loved working with you and really hope to continue my involvement with the HWG. I would also like to extend my thanks to all of the academic and professional staff in the School of Management at Massey University. The support and collegiality shown by the school really has been central to my PhD experience. A very big thank you especially to Dr Kaye Thorn and Dr Darryl Forsyth, who read the draft of my thesis and provided valuable feedback.

I would also like to thank the organisations and participants who were involved in this study. To my stakeholder group members, I could not have conducted this research without your support. Your engagement and interest in the study has motivated me and your willingness to offer assistance throughout the study is deeply appreciated. To the participants who volunteered their time to participate in this study, I acknowledge the strength it took for many of you to share your stories and thank you sincerely for the contributions you have made to this research.

Finally, to all of my family and friends, a big thank you for your support, for providing an ear to listen and a shoulder cry on through the hurdles. Adam, you've been by my side through countless thesis-focused hours and have been nothing but supportive - for that I'm forever grateful. Finally, to the best parents a girl could ask for, thank you for your encouragement, support and belief in me. I love you to the moon and back!

PUBLICATIONS

Some of the ideas and versions of various chapters of this thesis have been published or presented in the following forums:

Refereed journal articles

Blackwood, K., Bentley, T., Catley, B., Tappin, D., & Forsyth, D. (2013). Out of step? The efficacy of Trans-Tasman law to combat workplace bullying. *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations, 38*(1), 27-41.

Blackwood, K., & Catley, B. (2013). Workplace bullying in the nursing profession: A call for secondary intervention research. *Meiji Business Review*, *60*(4), 91-106.

Refereed book chapters

Catley, B., Blackwood, K., Forsyth, D., & Tappin, D. (2015). "Workplace bullying in New Zealand: "She'll be right?" In M. Omari, & M. Paull (Eds.), *Workplace abuse, incivility and bullying: Methodological and cultural perspectives.* London, England: Taylor and Francis.

Blackwood, K., Catley, B., Bentley, T., & Tappin, D. (2013). Bullying at work: Its meaning for HRM and ER. In J. Parker (Ed.), *The big issues in employment: HR management and employment relations in New Zealand.* (pp. 159 - 176). Auckland, New Zealand: CCH New Zealand.

Bentley, T., Blackwood, K., Catley, B., Gardner, D., Le Fevre, M., & Tappin, D. (2013). The vulnerability of the bullied worker. In T. Fashoyin, M. Tiraboschi, M. Sargeant, & M. Ori (Eds.), *Vulnerable workers and precarious working.* (pp. 274 - 292). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Refereed conference presentations

Blackwood, K., Catley, B., Edwards, M., & Bentley, T. (2014, December). *Workplace bullying and the nursing profession: Factors influencing effective intervention.* Paper presented at the Australia and New Zealand Academy of Management Conference, Sydney, Australia.

Blackwood, K., Bentley, T., Catley, B., Edwards, M., & Forsyth, D. (2014, June). *Multi-party perspectives on factors inhibiting resolution of workplace bullying*

complaints in New Zealand's nursing profession. Paper presented at the 9th International Conference on Workplace Bullying and Harassment, Milan, Italy.

Blackwood, K., Bentley, T., Catley, B., & Edwards, M. (2014, June). *Factors influencing target approaches towards workplace bullying resolutions*. Paper presented at the 9th International Conference on Workplace Bullying and Harassment, Milan, Italy.

Blackwood, K., Bentley, T., Catley, B., Edwards, M., & Tappin, D. (2014, September) *"Am I really being bullied?" Factors influencing target labelling of their experience and implications for interventions.* Paper presented at the International Congress for Occupational Health and Work Organisation and Psychosocial Factors, Adelaide, Australia.

Blackwood, K., Bentley, T., Catley, B., & Edwards, M. (2013, December). *Factors influencing the reporting of workplace bullying: Evidence from the New Zealand nursing profession.* Paper presented at the Australia and New Zealand Academy of Management Conference, Tasmania, Australia.

Blackwood, K., Catley, B., Tappin, D., & Bentley, T. (2012, December). *Falling between stools: Workplace bullying and the New Zealand employment relations context.* Paper presented at the Australia and New Zealand Academy of Management Conference, Perth, Australia. (***Received Best Paper HRM stream award***)

Blackwood, K., Catley, B., Tappin, D., Forsyth, D., & Bentley, T. (2012, November). *Workplace bullying and human resource management: Lessons from Employment Relations Authority and Employment Court determinations.* Paper presented at the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand 2012 Research Forum, Auckland New Zealand.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... **i**

ACKNOWLEGDEMENTS ..... **ii**

PUBLICATIONS ..... **iii**

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **x**

LIST OF TABLES ..... **xi**

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION **1**

1.1 Locating the research 2

1.2 Research aims 6

1.3 Research design 7

1.4 Research contributions 11

1.5 Thesis structure 11

CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCING WORKPLACE BULLYING **13**

2.1 Defining Workplace Bullying 14

2.1.1 Behaviours *15*

2.1.2 Frequency and duration *17*

2.1.3 A single target *18*

2.1.4 Power imbalance *18*

2.1.5 Intent *19*

2.1.6 A definition of workplace bullying *20*

2.2 The prevalence of workplace bullying 20

2.3 The consequences of workplace bullying 21

2.4 Workplace bullying and the work environment hypothesis 23

2.4.1 Individual factors *24*

2.4.2 Work environment factors *25*

2.4.3 Moderators *30*

2.4.4 Summarising the work environment hypothesis *33*

2.5 The research context: The nursing profession in New Zealand 34

2.5.1 Academic and practitioner interest in workplace bullying in New Zealand *35*

2.5.2 Workplace bullying research in the context of nursing *37*

2.5.3 The New Zealand nursing profession *39*

2.6 Conclusion 41

CHAPTER THREE: SECONDARY INTERVENTION IN WORKPLACE BULLYING 43
3.1 Managing workplace bullying 44
3.1.1 Primary intervention 45
3.1.2 Secondary intervention 47
3.1.3 Tertiary intervention 48
3.2 The intervention gap 49
3.3 Understanding and labelling workplace bullying 50
3.3.1 Negotiating definitional elements 51
3.3.2 Target labelling process 53
3.3.3 The IA labelling process 55
3.4 Target responses to workplace bullying 58
3.4.1 Coping responses 58
3.4.2 Reporting 62
3.5 Organisational responses to workplace bullying 64
3.5.1 The anti-bullying policy and intervention 65
3.5.2 Barriers to anti-bullying policy implementation 66
3.6 The aims of this current research study 69
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY 75
4.1 Research rationale 75
4.2 Justification for the paradigm and methodology 77
4.2.1 The methodological approach 77
4.2.2 Research design 77
4.3 Organisation Recruitment 83
4.3.1 Site selection 83
4.3.2 The stakeholder group 84
4.4 Data collection and analysis 85
4.4.1 Data collection phase one 86
4.4.2 Data collection phase two 100
4.5 Ethical considerations 106
4.5.1 Ethical considerations for the interviews 106
4.5.2 Ethical considerations for the focus groups 108
4.6 Conclusion 109

CHAPTER FIVE: THE HOLISTIC BULLYING INTERVENTION PROCESS 110

5.1 An overview of the experiences 110

5.2 Target information processing: The themes 115

5.2.1 Perception and cognition 117

5.2.2 Decision to avoid 124

5.2.3 Ability to avoid 132

5.2.4 The feedback loop 136

5.2.5 Breaking the cycle 140

5.3 Presenting an holistic intervention process model 142

5.3.1 Vignette #1: Participant N30, 'Sarah' 145

5.3.2 Vignette #2: Participant N25, 'Sami' 146

5.3.3 Vignette #3: Participant N24, 'Marnie' 147

5.3.4 Summarising the application of the intervention process model 148

CHAPTER SIX: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING BULLYING INTERVENTION 149

6.1 The known bully experience 150

6.1.1 The key features of the known bully experience 150

6.1.2 The impact of the known bully features on the intervention process 153

6.2 The performance-related experience 159

6.2.1 The key features of the performance-related experience 159

6.2.2 The impact of the performance-related features on the intervention process 161

6.3 The conflict-related experience 169

6.3.1 The key features of the conflict-related experience 169

6.3.2 The impact of the conflict-related features on the intervention process . 171

6.4 The learning-related experience 177

6.4.1 The key features of the learning-related experience 177

6.4.2 The impact of the learning-related features on the intervention process 179

6.5 The role-related experience 183

6.5.1 The key feature of the role-related experience 183

6.5.2 The impact of the role-related features on the intervention process 184

6.6 Typology summary 187

CHAPTER SEVEN: WORK ENVIRONMENT FACTORS INFLUENCING BULLYING INTERVENTION 190

7.1 Overview of focus group responses to the typology 191

7.1.1 The known bully experience 191

7.1.2 The performance-related experience 194

7.1.3 The conflict-related experience 195

7.1.4 The learning-related experience 197

7.1.5 The role-related experience 199

7.1.6 Summary of key intervention areas raised by focus group members 201

7.2 Prerequisites to effective intervention 202

7.2.1 IA willingness and ability to intervene 202

7.2.2 Target and perpetrator response 203

7.3 Work environment factors 206

7.3.1 Societal-level factors 208

7.3.2 Industry-level factors 211

7.3.3 Organisational-level factors 219

7.3.4 Team-level factors 227

7.4 Summary of work environment factors influencing workplace bullying intervention 230

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION 232

8.1 Secondary intervention as an holistic process 233

8.1.1 Perception/ cognition as a component of the holistic intervention process 235

8.1.2 The decision to avoid as a component of the holistic intervention process 236

8.1.3 The ability to avoid as a component of the holistic intervention process 238

8.1.4 The holistic intervention process 239

8.2 Workplace bullying as a heterogeneous phenomenon 241

8.2.1 The known bully experience 244

8.2.2 The performance-related experience 248

8.2.3 The conflict-related experience 252

8.2.4 The learning-related experience 257

8.2.5 The role-related experience 260

8.2.6 The typology as a theoretical and practical contribution *262*

8.3 Extending the work environment hypothesis to workplace bullying intervention 264

8.3.1 The nature of work *269*

8.3.2 The structure of work *271*

8.3.3 Culture *272*

8.3.4 Team leadership *274*

8.4 Conclusion 275

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION 277

9.1 Overview 278

9.2 Theoretical implications 279

9.3 Methodological contributions 281

9.4 Practical contributions 284

9.5 Limitations and suggestions for future research 286

9.6 Concluding comments 290

REFERENCES 292

APPENDICES 320

APPENDIX A: Participant Recruitment Advertisement 320

APPENDIX B: Participant Information Sheet 321

APPENDIX C: Letter of Massey Human Ethics Committee Approval 322

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Research Process Map 8

Figure 2.1. Mapping the Work Environment Approach to Understanding Workplace Bullying 26

Figure 4.1. The Original Information Processing Framework 79

Figure 4.2. The Ecological Systems Framework 83

Figure 5.1. A Process Model of Secondary Intervention in Workplace Bullying 144

Figure 6.1. Barrier Areas in the Intervention Process Model for the Learning-Related Experience 188

Figure 6.2. Facilitated and Barrier Areas in the Intervention Process Model for the Known Bully Experience 188

Figure 7.1. Systems Model Illustrating Work Environment Factors Influencing Workplace Bullying Intervention 207

Figure 8.1. A Process Model of Secondary Intervention in Workplace Bullying 234

Figure 8.2. The Similarities between Risk Factors and Factors Influencing Effective Intervention 268

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1. Bullying Behaviours as Listed in the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised 16

Table 4.1. Stakeholder Group Representative Roles 84

Table 4.2. Semi-structured Interview Questions Guided by the Information Processing Model and Ecological Systems Framework 90

Table 5.1. Target Reports to IA 113

Table 5.2. Intervention Action by IA 114

Table 5.3. Intervention Outcome 114

Table 7.1. Key Intervention Areas for the Known Bully Experience 193

Table 7.2. Key Intervention Areas for the Performance-Related Experience 195

Table 7.3. Key Intervention Areas for the Conflict-Related Experience 197

Table 7.4. Key Intervention Areas for the Learning-Related Experience 199

Table 7.5. Key Intervention Areas for the Role-Related Experience 201

Table 7.6. A Summary of the Key Intervention Areas for the Bullying Intervention Typology 201

Table 8.1. Practical Strategies to Encourage Effective Intervention in the Known Bully Experience 248

Table 8.2. Practical Strategies to Encourage Effective Intervention in the Performance-Related Experience 252

Table 8.3. Practical Strategies to Encourage Effective Intervention in the Conflict-Related Experience 256

Table 8.4. Practical Strategies to Encourage Effective Intervention in the Learning-Related Experience 259

Table 8.5. Practical Strategies to Encourage Effective Intervention in the Role-Related Experience 261