

Stress

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Bullying at work, health outcomes, and physiological stress response

Bullying has many parallels with chronic stress; its victims report higher levels of depression, anxiety and health complaints and it is, on the whole, subjective. Causal direction is unknown.

Prolonged bullying could have similar effects to chronic stress if the victim cannot cope with it.

Bullying is a highly subjective state. A person who copes easily with bullying might not report having been bullied. It also seems likely that some people would perceive themselves to have been bullied when others would regard such a reaction as disproportionate. Nevertheless, if bullying is to have a role in ill health reactions it must first be perceived. It is probably the person's perception of the bullying that counts.

In this study of 437 employees 5% reported having been bullied during the past 6 months. Among these, there were statistically significant higher scores on measures of somatisation (perception of symptoms with no organic cause), depression, anxiety and mental ill health. [A number of typing errors in the report are evident; values may not be reported with any confidence]. The authors sought differences in cortisol levels but such differences were unclear.

The study was cross-sectional.

Comment

Bullying is subjective.

This report confirms that people who report bullying at work also, on average, have a set of negative affects. The degree to which these traits or states influence reporting or, increase the risk of being bullied or, are the result of being bullied is unclear.

Even when there are witnesses to specific (non violent) events, and facts can be established, bullying is subjective. It is probably the person's reaction/perception that counts.

At 5% prevalence in 6 months, there are many opportunities for complaints to arise.