

Reporting Workplace Bullying Research

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Abstract

My research project explores the existing policies, procedures, protocols, and technologies Alberta post-secondary institutions use to report workplace bullying. Current analysis shows little research has been conducted to these specifications in the field and there is much to explore, from user experience to reporting effectiveness. Workplace bullying is an ever-prevalent issue (Farmer, 2011) which has both intense and adverse effects on both the employee, management, and the institution. To help guide my research, I used the Technology Acceptance Model and Constructivism as theoretical frameworks. The research was conducted using case study as its methodology and drawing on aspects from meta-synthesis; qualitative research enabled me to focus on the “what and why”. I researched eight post-secondary institutes within Alberta, as well as engaged with three participants from a post-secondary institute from different backgrounds to bring more meaning and insight to my research.

Key Terms: bullying; cyberbullying; online bullying; bullying in the workplace; mobbing, workplace; postsecondary education

Chapter 1

Introduction

Workplace bullying is an ever-growing problem that continues to spread around the globe (Farmer, 2011), making this often-lost issue ever-so prevalent. From poor mental and physical health, stress, and anxiety to long lasting effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder (Gardner, Driscoll, Cooper-Thomas, Roche, Bentley, Catley, Trenberth, 2016), workplace bullying can take its toll on both the employee and an organization. “Workplace bullying has been recognized as a main source of distress that is associated with subsequent health and decreased well-being” (Verkuil et al., 2015, para. 4). Verkuil et al., (2015) and the Government of Canada (2020) made the correlation that workplace bullying could lead to higher levels of absenteeism, reduced satisfaction, job commitment, and in some cases “workplace bullying has been associated with psychotropic drug use” (Verkuil, et al., 2015, para. 4). Workplace bullying exists and needs to be addressed by both the organization and governments (Farmer, 2011; Verkuil et al., 2015; Gardner et al., 2016) to ensure the behavior is stopped for the well-being of everyone involved. Exploring the policies and procedures of eight Alberta institutions regarding what constitutes bullying, general requirements to follow, and how to report the incident, 75% displayed a process that may be hard to interpret, convoluted, and vague. This creates multiple barriers which could interfere and interrupt the reporting process: barrier one is that the victim must report the incident to multiple people, on multiple platforms. This can create “negative health effects such as depression, anxiety, and symptoms mirroring PTSD” (Farmer, 2011). Barrier two is that many people who experience workplace bullying are afraid to report this due to “stigmatization, victimization or reputational damage” (Gardner et al., 2016) and therefore would rather forego reporting the bullying incident. Barrier three is the uncertainty of resolution:

“Employer responses to reports of bullying have consistently been found to be inadequate and may range from helping the target, to doing nothing, to retaliating against the person reporting the bullying (Gardner et al., 2016). None of the Eight institutes researched had any information regarding what technology is used to report workplace bullying, however two institutions offered technology to assist with the process. Technology has been used to improve efficiency in the classroom within post-secondary institutes across Canada, with the need for classes to move to an online capacity (University Affairs, 2020) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, “There is growing interest in bullying behaviour, which is mediated by technology” (Gardner et al., 2016). The lack of using online technology could provide an opportunity to explore whether and how technology might be used to contribute to the reporting and resolution of bullying in the Alberta college sector and towards education around not just bullying, but how to address it.

Research Question(s)

Question: In what ways might online technology be used to support the reporting of workplace bullying within Alberta colleges?

Sub-questions: How can existing protocols (policies and procedures) be merged with technology to aid in the reporting of workplace bullying?

What strategies/key factors might be used to help an institution determine what technology should be implemented?

What recommended features could contribute to a technology being used to assist with the reporting of workplace bullying?

Limitations and delimitations

To ensure assumptions were avoided, limitations and delimitations heavily influenced the direction of my research. Limitations are characterized by “potential weaknesses in your study and are out of your control” (Simon & Goes, 2013, p.2), whereas delimitations are “characteristics that limit the scope and define boundaries” (Simon & Goes, 2013, p.2). The limitations I faced was the limited number of people (five) I was able to consult with. I also encountered a lack of response from the participants I reached out to, as well as a delay in the preferred time for participation feedback. The restriction of using a case study and meta-synthesis restricted my area of research and generalized my findings due to methods I needed to use to bring the qualitative study together. Throughout the project, other assignments and deadlines were present and even though I used a set time frame to help with logic and order, there was a continual fear of failure from feeling rushed and overwhelmed. Because I chose to work within a limited scope and focus specifically within one province, limited secondary research presented itself.

The delimitations I faced were wording of the questions/discussion with the participants, which are workers within the post-secondary institute and geographical location, specific to Alberta. Researching online reporting technology and post-secondary websites came with barriers regarding policies and procedures, as certain amounts of information were unavailable to the public. I had to be cautious as I have access to information within the Bow Valley College staff website which I was not permitted to disclose, even though blatant answers were accessible. I deliberately chose not to research the five First Nations colleges within Alberta, strictly because I felt limiting my area of research helped acknowledge my limitations in time, expertise, and availability. The participants I chose to consult with served as a delimitation as well as the ethic review committee that needed to check my questions prior to asking the participants. I was not

able to ask certain questions, the participants were in turn not able to answer specific questions or discuss certain items, and there were time constraints present. Although delimitations were in my control and assisted in defining boundaries (Simon & Goes, 2013), my research question was specific to location and industry which I thought was an asset in terms of finding a possible solution to my research questions.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Frameworks

The proposed research was guided by the following theoretical frameworks: Constructivism and the Technology Acceptance Model. Constructivism and constructed knowledge bring understanding on what impact reporting workplace bullying could have on the individuals thought process (Ruey, 2010). This played a large factor in my research, as constructivism insinuates the reality of the situation is based on the individual's perspective (Woo & Reeves, 2007). "Constructivism is a theory about knowledge and learning" (Woo and Reeves, 2007, p. 18) meaning learning and knowledge makes sense to the learner through their own personal experiences. The technology acceptance model (TAM) helps identify how technology is perceived by the user as "perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use" (Davis, 1989, p. 1). This means that if a person believes the system to be too complicated and that learning the software poses too many challenges, they will opt to not learn or navigate the technology (Davis, 1989). TAM helps evaluate variables when researching technology and the implementation/usage of technology, such as potential losses, frustration, and the possibility of creating a realm of distrust for the user (Chung, 2006). Using both constructivist theory and the technology acceptance model helped frame how online technology can be used to support the reporting of workplace bullying. Using multiple theories allowed a more objective lens to be used as "the nature of the phenomena being studied allows for those phenomena to be viewed from multiple perspectives (Anfara & Mertz, 2015, p. 97). Integrating TAM helped determine and influence the patterns of behavior when it comes to learning and using online software and constructivism was used when conducting the secondary research and participant interaction. Because people use their own truth and experience to form the basis of their knowledge (Woo &

Reeves, 2007), both theories helped expand and bridge on why, why not and how workplace bullying is being reported.

Literature Review

Workplace bullying can have intense and adverse effects, such as stress, reduced physical and mental health, reputation damage, and anxiety (Gardner et al., 2016). Because these effects can exacerbate over time, organizations may experience below average productivity due to the perpetrators using resources and work time on non-work activities (Gardner et al., 2016). Most people do not report workplace bullying due to victim blaming or the fear of repercussions (Meidav, 2020) and according to McKay, Arnold, Fratzl and Thomas, “49% of those being bullied do not report the incident” (2008, p. 91), as they did not think any difference could be made (McKay et al., 2008; Gardner et al., 2016). Despite the problems and complications which can arise from workplace bullying, organizations have a difficult time dealing with the result of bullying and bullying reporting (Gardner et al., 2016), as “rules and guidelines are required, they are rarely sufficient” (Gardner et al., 2016, p. 1). This “recurring theme among the respondents has been a lack of action by the university administration to deal with the problem of potential workplace bullying after being informed or approached about the behaviour” (McKay et al., 2008, p. 90). McKay found bullying victims “were more likely to talk to the union (31% of respondents) or a lawyer (15%) rather than equity services (13%), a person in a position of authority (11%) or human resources (4%)” (McKay et al., 2008, p. 91).

Anti-bullying legislation was passed in Canada beginning in 2004 (Hollis, 2017; Government of Canada, 2017), yet when the Government of Canada created an online survey in 2017, it was found that harassment was still the most common type of inappropriate behavior in the workplace (2017). From the survey, “a full 60% reported having experienced harassment,

30% of respondents said that they had experienced sexual harassment, 21% that they had experienced violence and 3% that they had experienced sexual violence” (Government of Canada, 2017, High levels of harassment and violence section). Within the same study, 75% had reported the incident (Government of Canada, 2017), which means 25% of cases went unreported altogether. There are many reasons as to why workplace bullying could go unreported as the victim has to relive the problem by retelling the incident (Miller, 2019). This could be too difficult or traumatizing and the “individual simply does not want to go through the whole process of interrogation and investigation” (Miller, 2019, para. 7). Another factor of not reporting workplace bullying is associated with being bullied by a direct superior, or a person in a position of power (Hango & Moyser, 2018). Hango and Moyser found that 39% of workplace harassment for men and 32% for women (Hango & Moyser, 2018) was from a superior, therefore creating a roadblock in who to report the incident to. This could create a fear of making the situation worse or even possible retaliation (Miller, 2019); although retaliation is not legal, it continues to happen (Miller, 2019).

A way to avoid the roadblocks of reporting bullying to a superior, reliving the trauma, as well as helping combat the psychosocial problem of bullying, online technology could be used as an aid by providing the user with the confidence and autonomy to report the bullying incident. This could remove the current procedures in place of having to meet with several different people or departments to discuss the matter in a face-to-face setting (Bow Valley College, 2019; Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2020; University of Calgary, 2020). Research into the policies and procedures of reporting workplace bullying yielded no mention of what technology is used by any post-secondary institute within Alberta, and apart from the University of Alberta and Grant MacEwan University, no information was available on how technology is being used

to help report the bullying incident (Bow Valley College, 2019; Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2020; University of Calgary, 2020; University of Lethbridge, 2021; University of Athabasca, 2021; Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2021). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many jobs and positions were thrust into an online capacity as a necessity, with the use of technology and online media within the workplace growing at a rapid and steady pace (Gardner et al., 2016). One of the most important things with any type of online delivery system is interaction and communication (Woo & Reeves, 2007), however, “despite the widespread use of subjective measures in practice, little attention is paid to the quality of the measures used or how well they correlate with usage behavior” (Davis, 1989). One of the gaps identified within the research is the outcomes and objectives the user may have regarding using an online reporting tool to report workplace bullying, and how implementing the software could help (or hinder) the reporting of workplace bullying. Being able to outline what objectives and outcomes are being defined, which revolve around job satisfaction, stronger job quality, and performance could be a motivator in streamlining a reporting software and needs to be addressed by further research.

Most post-secondary institutes within Alberta currently use a remote form of course delivery, with some offering multiple forms of teaching which consist of real-time online (RTOL), anytime online (ATOL) and combined online (COOL) learning (Bow Valley College, 2020).

Using technology in post-secondary institutions to report bullying might streamline the reporting process but is an area that has not been researched in depth. Reporting workplace bullying is a daunting, redundant process with multiple layers and delivery” (Government of Alberta, 2020). Therefore, the staff are already using online technology in a broader capacity

prior to the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Reviewing some of the post-secondary institute's websites, software such as Brightspace, Google Meets (SAIT, 2020) and Microsoft Teams (Bow Valley College, 2020), educational technologies are employed on a wide scale, forcing the faculty and staff to embrace the online and remote delivery medium. With user satisfaction being regarded as "one of the most important measures" (Almarashdeh, 2016, p. 250) when using online learning tools, little is known in terms of research, which measures faculty and staff satisfaction: "universities need to evaluate the effectiveness of computer usage by measuring user satisfaction with computers in a workplace which is very important to the success of any program or organization" (Almarashdeh, 2016, p. 249). However, Second Life found "both customer satisfaction and IT development has positive influence on consumer's service enjoyment and experience" (Gajendra & Li, 2014, p. 3), which could infer that more evaluation needs to be done to obtain positive results regarding user satisfaction with online software at post-secondary institutes. Although online technology exists and is currently being used at a post-secondary level, the process regarding filling out the paperwork, making multiple reports and reaching out to several departments to report workplace bullying is still in effect (Bow Valley College, 2019; Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2020; University of Calgary, 2020). This displays the available online technology is not being utilized in the form of a reporting tool.

Using technology in post-secondary institutions to report bullying might streamline the reporting process but is an area that has not been researched in depth. Reporting workplace bullying is a daunting, redundant process with multiple layers and steps to complete to report the incident (Bow Valley College, 2019; Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2020; University of Calgary, 2020). Abrami, Bernard, Borokhovski, Schmid, Surkes, Tamim, Woods, & Wade

(2014) support the idea that educational technologies can serve a “broad variety of modalities, tools and strategies for learning” (p. 272). Another gap identified within the research is how to offer victims a secure and confidential environment to report workplace bullying and if using an online reporting tool would be beneficial. “Reporting software connects with data sources, gathers information and provides insights in the form of graphs and charts based on the input data so the user can find useful information” (Software Testing Help, 2020, para. 1). Reporting tools allow the institute to conduct their own research in terms of bullying statistics within the institution, as well as tools on the decision-making process with visible insights and data (Software Testing Help, 2020) into benefiting and assisting the victim. More research and data collection are needed, as there is no current documentation which provides statistics into employees using online technology to report workplace bullying. However, employee analysis suggests the inability to report bullying successfully, as well as not having the complaint taken seriously can lead to serious implications for the employee (Bryant et al., 2009); which means more action is needed to encourage victims to come forward.

It is estimated through Statistics Canada, that absenteeism due to bullying and harassment in the workplace account to roughly \$19 billion per year (Hango & Moyser, 2018). Previous literature states that more action should be taken by post-secondary institutions to encourage victims to come forward to obtain accurate numbers, as stated the \$19 billion is a mere estimate. The victim may feel guilt and “this feeling of guilt—and not wanting to have to explain his or her side—can be enough to keep someone from speaking up, even if there’s no reason to feel this way” (Miller, 2019, para. 2). Though there are newly appointed positions such as a learner conduct officer at some institutions (Bow Valley College, 2019), little information is given as to their role and what they can do for the victim. It could even be contrived that this extra role adds

on yet another level in the reporting process, as the victim must relive the trauma and go through the investigation and interrogation process again (Miller, 2019). Creating an encouraging and authentic online environment, which ensures confidentiality and interaction (Woo & Reeves, 2007) is key to encouraging the reporting of workplace bullying. Using more features within online technology, opposed to the current process, may also serve as a benefit as it could reduce the already stressful situation by removing some barriers. Statistics show “19% of women and 13% of men reported harassment in their workplace in the past year” (Hango & Moysen, 2018, para. 1), “it’s in an employer’s best interest not only to take steps to keep all forms of harassment from occurring but also to be able to address them and put a stop to them if they do happen” (Miller, 2019, para. 12). With the recurring theme of lacking action by the post-secondary institutions to deal with workplace bullying (McKay et al., 2008), more research needs to be done to gain a deeper, more meaningful understanding.

Chapter Three

Methodology

My proposed research was conducted by using a multifaceted approach. The research's primary methodology was case study but drew on aspects from meta-synthesis to help establish an understanding of what technologies were being used by post-secondary institutes to report workplace bullying and why. Meta-synthesis, an interpretive technique, allows researchers to use multiple qualitative studies to deepen the understanding of any subject matter (Walsh & Downe, 2005). "The aim of meta-synthesis is interpretive rather than deductive" (Walsh & Downe, 2005, p. 1) and aided in understanding how these technologies effected users, which helped in gathering the qualitative research needed to identify how workplace bullying was being reported. Utilizing a qualitative research approach allowed for the gathering of data that focused on the "what" and the "why," through discussions and questions, unlike quantitative data. "Quantitative research employs the use of numbers and accuracy, while qualitative research focuses on lived experiences and human perceptions" (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018, p. 1). This qualitative approach, combined with an in-depth literature review and meta-synthesis, brought an understanding to the complex issue of workplace bullying, and allowed me to synthesize existing research with the primary research I conducted, and produced fresh outlooks and insights. Blending meta-synthesis and qualitative research provided a more fruitful and well-rounded interpretation of the data available. According to Berman (2017), using qualitative and quantitative methods is not enough to be constituted as a mixed method approach, but "it is in the integration or linking of the two strands of data that defines mixed methods research and highlights its value" (Berman, 2017, p. 7). This told me there needed to be multiple phases when collecting and analyzing data from both research methods, the combinations of data bringing greater understanding and meaning to the subject matter. Using a qualitative perspective seemed

to make the most sense for my research, however, including articles that used a mixed or quantitative method allowed me to view the research from multiple lenses. Denzin (1978) stated the result of using mixed methods “will be a convergence upon the truth about some social phenomenon” (p.14), which is the ideal I looked for within my research.

Methods

My research was specific to post-secondary institutes within Alberta and how technology could assist with the reporting of workplace bullying. With such a narrow and specific field of study, I reached out to three departments and four individuals who currently work within the post-secondary field. I wanted to consult with one member of each area/department of a post-secondary institute - from faculty, administration, management, human resources, and information technology, with the hope to discover what technologies are being used, how the technologies are being used and whether they are effective. Using a qualitative lens to approach the project meant I would be able to gain insight by collecting and reviewing research which discussed concepts and understanding from non-numerical data. I searched for quantitative data, in hopes that I could gain more insight and analysis to paint a more thorough and cohesive picture, however quantitative research in this area is lacking. I attempted to follow Berman's (2017) idea of breaking each research method into phases and then integrate the two separate forms of data collection into one cohesive form of analysis, however due to lack of statistics, I was unable to bring this to fruition. I created a discussion platform which involved questions to ask the participants, the collection of data through a thorough literature review, an analysis of data, and the creation of a problem statement which showed the research objective (Wentz, 2014). To ensure validity and trustworthiness, I ensured to use credible sources and websites such as: Google Scholar, Sage Publishing, Research Gate, and post-secondary websites within

Alberta, as well as the Government of Canada website, and the Government of Alberta website to assist in researching the reporting of workplace bullying and reviewing the online technology used.

The small sample of literature I reviewed revealed there is minimal secondary research available with information regarding what technologies are being used to report workplace bullying in post-secondary institutions throughout Alberta. I hoped to expand this by gathering more data from the search engine Google Scholar, which provides scholarly articles and journals free of cost. I also used the Royal Roads University library, the City of Calgary and the City of Edmonton online library to help retrieve additional books or documents on the topic, to no availability. I was able to consult with three participants, using questions I created where an empathetic, user-centered approach was utilized. I conducted one discussion with a participant through MS Teams and using the same questions, had a word document emailed back from two participants. I used active listening skills and open conversation to encourage discussion with the participants who stated they preferred to meet face to face rather than fill out the questionnaire. Before disclosing the questions or meeting with the participants, I created an information letter, with consent, to use and release the results within the research. Respecting the person's time, I compiled all necessary information through a one hour-long conversation and emailed the questionnaire for those who preferred and requested that method of interaction. Engaging with one person from each department would have allowed a more thorough understanding of the topic at hand with robust conversation into the technology used to report workplace bullying. Unfortunately, I was not able to meet with all desired departments, but I was able to obtain a variety of participants such as: Online Delivery Officer, Associate Dean and Program Chair. The participants were able to provide a firsthand account of reporting workplace bullying which

brought a deeper understanding to the problems identified within the field, comparable to the literature being researched and possible solutions.

Per the Alberta Government website (2020), there are 37 post-secondary institutes in Alberta, 26 of which are publicly funded. I conducted research and collected information/data from eight of these institutes' websites. This gave me an overview of just over a quarter of the post-secondary institutes and a broader spectrum by researching private, public, technical, and vocational schools. Although there were approved post-secondary programs from other providers (Government of Alberta, 2020), if the headquarters were listed outside of Alberta, I did not consider them within the research. The institutes selected were in two major cities with the highest populations, as well as an institute which is considered "Canada's number one online institute" (Athabasca University, 2020), as well as another large University, the University of Lethbridge, which has campuses throughout Alberta.

Data Gathering tools/processes.

After I compiled all the received information, I allowed time to organize my findings in a clear and concise manner. Using Tripp's four phase action inquiry cycle (2005) of planning, acting, monitoring, and describing, then evaluating, I had planned to include tables and charts within my final paper under the appendix subsection. However, due to lack of research within this area, I was unable to find and provide enough thorough information to include any table or chart within the final paper.

Because my research is human-centered, with the purpose of bringing awareness, qualitative content analysis was employed to help breakdown and understand the research I collected after the consultations. Content analysis is "a technique that derives from the communication sciences" (Flick et al., 2004, p. 269) which helped me analyze the data I

retrieved from the discussions with the participants and compare it to the literature available. Content analysis can be used to help identify themes or possible patterns within the research (Flick et al., 2004) and because the consultations lent a subjective viewpoint, using this research method for analysis allowed me to remain objective. Using an empathetic approach, I needed to employ strong time management skills, organizational skills, and inter-personal communication skills, while remaining impartial. The bulk of my research has focused on facts from secondary research I conducted, which is made up of websites, articles, and journals, as well as reviewing the few statistics currently available to the public. Content analysis was first pioneered because of the growing mass media at the beginning of the twentieth century (Flick et al., 2004) and helps find “interrelations between different textual components” (Flick et al., 2004, p. 269). After reviewing the data, I was able to find correlational relationships, which did not outline cause and effect, but helped link two or more variables (Asamoah, 2014) within the research.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure I followed the ethical review process, I discussed my intentions with my appointed academic advisor prior to conducting the assessment/consultations. Using the five principles for research ethics, written by Smith (2013) and outlined by the American Psychological Association helped ensure I avoided any quandaries circling around ethical dilemmas. These principles include (Smith, 2013):

- i. Discuss intellectual property frankly
- ii. Be conscious of multiple roles
- iii. Follow informed-consent rules
- iv. Respect confidentiality and privacy
- v. Tap into ethics resources

Prior to reaching out to the participants, I had to first complete the Tri-Council tutorial and comply with all items outlined within the applied research project handbook. Because I am an employee of the post-secondary institute where I planned to conduct my research, I had to reach out to the Research Ethics Board to obtain approval by providing examples of my research questions and completing the TCPS2 Core certification within two weeks of submitting the research application, as well as completing forms and documentation outlining my intentions/research project. I was given recommendations and areas to avoid when asking questions specific to bullying and to be mindful of confidentiality and explore non-disclosure and the right to refuse/reject questions. As an added caution, I consulted the American Psychological Association ethics code which provided some guidance and principles regarding an ethical framework for participant research (Smith, 2013).

Chapter Four

Findings and Analysis

To understand why bullying occurs within the workplace and why there is a lack of victims coming forward to report such occurrences (Bryant et al., 2009; Miller, 2019), childhood and adolescent bullying was explored throughout the findings. Identifying what anti-bullying measures are being implemented by both the public and the Government to help address and educate people on bullying are explored, as well as what correlation this could potentially have in the future due to the awareness these measures have caused. Exploring gendered bullying and the difference between men and women in academics reporting bullying could identify potential gaps in research, as well as provide evidence that bullying is embedded in a culture found both inside and outside post-secondary institutions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many positions are being thrust to an online capacity (Hodson et al., 2018), therefore exploration of cyberbullying could illuminate an area which may need closer attention and research. Being able to find a correlation between the research and participants feedback could help bring a clearer, more thorough understanding of how reporting workplace bullying is conducted within post-secondary institutions.

For quite some time, bullying appears to be an ongoing and ever-prevalent issue (Farmer, 2011) and steps have been taken to by the Government of Canada to implement knowledge, understanding and anti-bullying measures in children, since bullying was being experienced in elementary schools at a rate which could not be ignored (Craig et al., 1998; Sudermann et al., 1996). Projects were introduced nationally by the Government of Canada, with design phases to help train teachers, introduce the community to possible risks associated with bullying and the eventual evaluation and implementation of new school policies deterring bullying (2018). Recognizing and implementing these measures displayed the need to address these concerns,

however bullying is a behavior which does not stop with children and is not limited to the classroom environment (Pepler & Craig, 2000; Rigby et al., 2004). Bullying behavior seen in children can be associated with antisocial behavior in adults (Craig et al., 1998), as Pepler and Craig's (2000) research showed, when these children become adolescents and eventually adults, they may become involved with delinquent behaviors or engage in dating violence and sexually harass as they become older (2000). To omit the bullying behavior prior to adulthood being reached, children need to change the way they deal with conflict, frustration, and interpersonal communications (Craig et al., 1998) to avoid aggressive tendencies and possible psychological problems in adulthood (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Being able to define and acknowledge the issue of bullying in children can help parents, communities, peers, other children, and adults intervene (Government of Canada, 2018a), however a study showed that as students became older, they were less likely to intervene or stop bullying if witnessed with 11% - 19% of students reporting they tried to stop the bully (Government of Canada, 2018a). Students found that their teacher or another adult stopped the bullying 25% of the time (Charach et al., 1995), though it was felt that all adults should solve the bullying problems, especially since those students being bullied informed the adult and no intervention was taken (Charach et al., 1995). A pattern was found where children who bullied on the playground grew up to be adults who displayed bullying behavior and harassment in the workplace (Rigby et al., 2004), underlying the need for the Government of Canada to begin implementing anti-bullying measures at an early age (2018). Bringing awareness to bullying incidents and supporting victims helps shift the focus to allow children, adolescents, and adults to intervene with bullying incidents (O'Connell et al., 1999). An example of the effectiveness of bringing awareness is pink shirt day, also considered "anti-bullying day", which is celebrated on the last Wednesday of February in Canada, however the

United Nations declared May 4th to be the official “anti-bullying day” (Government of Alberta, 2021). The initiative began in 2007 in Nova Scotia, Canada where a male high school student was bullied for wearing a pink shirt. As a sign of solidarity, friends organized a protest where they handed out pink t-shirts to other male students in the school to support the bullying victim (Pink Shirt Day, n.d.). The principle in wearing a pink shirt is to take a picture and then share the images on social media, with hopes of bringing more awareness and understanding to combat bullying worldwide. As per news outlets (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2021; The Province, 2016) pink shirt day is about promoting inclusion by bringing awareness to the issue of bullying, has raised 1.2 million dollars since 2008 by selling hundreds of thousands of t shirts, achieved 65,000 tweets in 2015 alone and is now hosted in 75 countries (The Province, 2016). Even though there is universal awareness from pink shirt day and Government bills passed in each province to help combat bullying, the Canadian Institute of Health Research found that in a 2012 study one in three adolescents are still bullied, with 47% of parents having reported that their child has been a victim of bullying (Government of Canada, 2018b). It is also noted that 40% of Canadians experience weekly bullying at their place of work and females are bullied more frequently than males (Government of Canada, 2018b).

Statistics Canada found that 19% of women reported bullying in their place of work, with the most common form being verbal abuse (2018). In forms of bullying or abuse, women are subjected to stalking or sexual harassment (Reid, 2018) which may be why women report sexual harassment more than men (Statistics Canada, 2018; Velatsianos et al., 2018). From famous female authors like J.K Rowling intentionally omitting their first name to ensure fairness and equality based on gender, to female scholars deliberately censoring their online participation, even removing themselves from social media and online spaces (Veletsianos et al., 2018; Vitak

et al., 2017) displays how harassment based on sex or gender, may be part of a workplace bullying culture. Unfortunately, little is known about the experience of women scholars or faculty being bullied (Velatsianos et al., 2018), however a survey conducted at one Canadian university displayed a large, gendered experience of harassment by faculty members (Cassidy, Faucher and Jackson, 2014). Female faculty reported higher levels of harassment with the majority being “perpetrated by students or colleagues and occurred through email, course-related sites, or social media” (Cassidy, et al., 2014, p. 4). In terms of emotional distress, women experience more “insidious and likely qualitatively different” (Velatsianos et al., 2018, p. 3) levels of psychological and emotional distress than men. Being exposed, or even witnessing harassment and sexism in the workplace, can greatly affect and impact a woman’s career aspirations in post-secondary (Velatsianos et al., 2018; Duggan, 2014), as the harassment can lead to lower self-esteem, higher rates of anxiety and bouts of depression. “These impacts illustrate the critical importance of this issue and its broader social implications: if women curtail their online participation as a result of harassment, the end result is likely a reduction in diversity of thought and opinion in the commons as well as within academia more generally” (Hodson et al., 2018, p. 4).

With 22% of female academics reporting cyber bullying, compared to 6% of their male counterparts, cyber bullying is becoming a significant form of bullying within academia (Velatsianos et al., 2018). Researchers have found that 40 percent of online users have experienced forms of online abuse (Duggan, 2014; Velatsianos et al., 2018) with most perpetrators being students or colleagues through social media, websites, and email correspondence (Velatsianos et al., 2018). Outside of the realm of academia, 31% of Canadians who use social media reported they had experienced a form of online bullying (Reid, 2016) and

40% of online users have experienced online abuse (Duggan, 2014; Hodson et al., 2018).

Although it shows that women are targeted more than men using an online platform, men are not impervious to being harassed and bullied online, though the type of bullying differs; women experience more threats of a sexual nature than men and have sexual violence threatened upon them (Duggan, 2014; Hodson et al., 2018). Online abuse is becoming more concerning (Hodson et al., 2018) as it can be associated with workplace bullying due to the nature of working in an online capacity. The faculty, scholar or employee could be teaching remotely, publishing scholarly work/articles, interacting with students and associates through the online world. As the technological world advances, so do the terms and scope of technological bullying, which can make it hard to study, understand or even define what constitutes as cyberbullying and the interventions required to halt the abuse (Donegan, 2012; Velatsianos et al., 2018). Online bullying has allowed the issue of bullying to expand and reach a wider, broader audience (Donegan, 2012) and it was found that “those who are cyberbullied are also likely to be bullied offline” (Hamm et al., 2015).

Eight Alberta post-secondary institutions were involved in this research, including Bow Valley College (BVC), Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT), Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), University of Calgary (U of C), University of Lethbridge (U of L), Grant MacEwan University, and Athabasca University. The policies and procedures of seven post-secondary institutions identified what guidelines and structures are currently in place regarding what constitutes bullying, general requirements to follow, and how to report the incident. However, as stated previously, these policies and procedures could be hard to interpret, convoluted, and vague. For example, within the SAIT (2018) handbook, there are eight pages which expand on bullying and the people involved, yet the reporting requires several steps, with

the first step being to inform the bully of their inappropriate behavior and ask that individual to stop (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2018). This is then followed by three other stages of having to notify the supervisor, or manager, employee services, or an HR advisor, and finally the association or union to which the faculty belongs (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2018). It appears that five of these institutions (NAIT, SAIT, BVC, U of C and U of L) use this traditional form of reporting and meeting with several departments to discuss the incident, which circles back to possible barriers encountered that discourage the reporting of workplace bullying. Out of the eight universities researched, only two offered an online reporting tool (Grant MacEwan and U of A) and displayed the technology used to report workplace bullying. This reporting tool also included links to a confidence line for employee's and faculty to report workplace bullying, contact information for people ranging from board of governors, human resources, and association boards to supervisor's and presidents, as well as open education resources which provided articles, institutional PowerPoints and literature associated to what constitutes as workplace bullying. No evidence was found on counselling services being offered freely when searching bullying or workplace bullying, although a separate search on seven of the institute's websites brought up counselling services offered. Of all the post-secondary institutions, there was no mention of what technology was utilized or implemented to assist in the reporting of workplace bullying.

Cyberbullying appears to be growing at the same speed and rate as technology (Donegan, 2012; Hodson et al., 2018) which could be a contributing factor regarding why people may not want to use technology to discuss or report workplace bullying. The technology being used within post-secondary institutions remains understudied, along with the restrictions and the rate at which faculty and employees are being bullied (Veletsianos et al., 2018). A plethora of

information can be found regarding the many types and forms of bullying, yet there is limited information about the technology used to assist with this phenomenon. “The web has had a profound effect on the ways people interact” (Jordan & Weller, 2018, p. 2), with an array of positives but obvious problems and tension which could potentially interfere with engagement in an online world (Jordan & Weller, 2018). Understanding both the technology used and the process to how workers in a post-secondary environment report workplace bullying would be a great benefit to ensure adequate policies and procedures are put in place to protect and educate the employees. Through the research and feedback from the three participants, there seems to be no technology in place that assists with the reporting of workplace bullying which is accessible or visible to the public. Grant MacEwan and University of Alberta offer an online reporting tool; however, the software is not specified as to how it is utilized as a reporting tool. The participants confirmed what the research had already alluded to; there is a lack of technology in place to assist with reporting workplace bullying, even though participant A and C stated the institution (BVC) has a current technology which could be used to assist with this phenomenon, a reporting feature does not exist. Participant B was not aware of any technology or current processes where technology was used to report workplace bullying, including the policies and procedures about bullying in the workplace. The answers from all the participants provided similarities found throughout the research and reiterated some statistics and points to what could be an emerging trend.

Participant A discussed that they would rather leave their job than report their superior for workplace bullying and both participant A and B stated they would not report workplace bullying for fear of repercussions, a possible damaged reputation and risk of stagnation in their careers. This correlates to what Meidav (2020), Miller (2019) and McKay et al., (2008) discussed

as to the rationale why people, specifically women, do not report workplace bullying and why workplace bullying goes unreported 49% of the time (McKay, 2008). All three participants discussed fears of being stigmatized as a “whistleblower” or “tattletale” and the option to remain anonymous is not currently an option when reporting bullying in their institution. The participants discussed the need to have more conversation, literature and examples provided as the discussion which circles around bullying seems to be deemed as taboo and can possibly make people uncomfortable. The process of conducting the interviews, the 38% response rate and the lengthy process and discussion I had with the ethics board, where my questions were critiqued and changed prior to conducting the interviews, reiterates the participants feelings in that the conversation may be uncomfortable and sensitive to review. However, in two interviews the importance and relevance of having this discussion was a priority to educate, instruct and inform the staff of policies, procedures and what to do when being bullied. Without staff understanding what constitutes workplace bullying, how to report it, a fear of possible repercussions and most importantly not having technology there to assist them with this journey supports the idea that bullying will continue to thrive within the environment (Hauge et al., 2009).

Chapter Five

Recommendations

Recommendation	Timeline
Consolidate available information for staff to ensure they can find information on bullying (including open education resources) and how to report workplace bullying in an easy to find, accessible location.	Three months
Develop new and update existing policies and procedures including research done by post-secondary institute regarding workplace bullying.	Two years
Streamline communication regarding bullying and reporting bullying with staff by including other departments.	Three – six months
Implement an online reporting tool for reporting workplace bullying.	One – three years

Consolidate available information for staff to ensure they can find information on bullying (including open education resources) and how to report workplace bullying in an easy to find, accessible location

Consolidate information on workplace bullying which includes providing open education resources, support, tips to recognize bullying, and instructions on reporting in a central, easy to find and use location. Based on feedback from the participants, being able to locate this information could help reduce stress and provide more accessible information involved with reporting workplace bullying. A time frame of three months would be realistic as more information needs to be either found or written and then migrated over to the webpage. Involving the information technology department, human resources, counselling and possibly leaders

within the institute to give approval could create time constraints, however consolidation of information can be added to existing workloads to not exceed finances or incur additional costs.

Rationale to Consolidate Information

There is a plethora of information found when searching “reporting workplace bullying” through the Google search engine, however this information would be best served if post-secondary institutes would collect and amalgamate pertinent information for their employees to access and utilize in one, easy to find location. From tips and tricks to helping someone discuss, overcome, and report workplace bullying, to occupational health and safety sites discussing the current issue of bullying within the workplace. Based on the findings, the conversation circling around workplace bullying is increasingly more popular and prevalent within news outlets, social media, blogs, and press sites versus what is being found inside of scholarly articles and journals, as well as the post-secondary institutes websites. Though discussion on bullying does not seem to be happening in abundance within the academic realm, more conversation is happening in other sectors and amongst employees based on participant feedback and information found in social media and search engines. This may be because workplace bullying is so prevalent that people want and need quick and easy access to investigate the incidence, as well as seek advice or counsel on an immediate basis (Donegan, 2012; Gardner et al., 2018; Velatsianos et al., 2018). An example of consolidating information using an open education resource would be linking a website such as “The Muse”, to the post-secondary institutions bullying information section. “The Muse” offers online information and advice to people searching for specific topics and takes in over nine million monthly users (Ziv, 2020). They offer a complete guide to dealing with workplace bullies (Ziv, 2020) which ranges from how to deal with bullies, types of bullies encountered in the workplace, statistics on bullying, witnessing bullying, reporting bullying and

why bullies get away with bullying (to name a few). The convenience of having this information free and available in one easily accessed area could benefit the workplace by educating and assisting the employees regarding workplace bullying and how to report an incidence. An employee should have this type of information readily available, so they do not have to search outside of what is recommended and substantiated outside the approval of the institution. Based on the participant responses, only one participant knew where to locate bullying information and how to report bullying, and out of the eight post-secondary institutes researched, five offered information regarding bullying.

An unintended consequence may be the time constraint and additional costs accrued. Depending on what literature is available to employees and whether the institution already has a bullying information section within their webpage can alter the expected outcomes and intentions. The institution may have to gather information and seek approval from boards, committees, and management prior to consolidation of information. If no literature, webpage, information, or policy is available, this could create additional workloads and costs.

Develop new and update existing policies and procedures including research done by post-secondary institute regarding workplace bullying

A recommendation would be to develop new and update existing policies and procedures regarding workplace bullying to ensure adequate revisions and updates are in place. A time frame of two years, with reviews and possible updates circling around bullying happening per annum to ensure current policies and procedures are up to date and that the implementation of new directives are feasible if deficits are found within the existing policies and procedures. Seeking feedback from all departments, through a confidential and secure polling software (such

as survey monkey) will allow a more in-depth overview from different aspects and points of view to help determine what areas of focus and courses of action need to be addressed.

Rationale to develop new and update existing policies and procedures

Most of the post-secondary institutes researched (seven out of eight) have policies and procedures in place, however the juxtaposition that needs to be addressed is that these policies and procedures are not being utilized (Gardner et al., 2016). As Meidav (2020) addressed, people being bullied in the workplace are not reporting the incident for fear of repercussions and McKay et al. (2008) state that 49% of bullying cases go unreported. Out of all the participants interviewed, two stated they would not report a bullying incident for fear of losing their job or remaining “stagnant within their position”, as well as reasons such as feeling like a “tattle tale”, having others find out and look down on them and being perceived as a liar (Gardner, et al., 2016). Ensuring the employee’s anonymity would be essential when conducting research/polling, as the employee should not fear possible repercussions from being honest and truthful. Credible statistics are available however, they are not current (Farmer, 2011; Gardner et al., 2016; Verkuil, et al., 2015) and out of date, which merits more research with updates done by the post-secondary institutes, preferably a non-biased sector to conduct objective feedback. The literature review and findings call for more research to be conducted – within the realm of academia, as well as within the post-secondary institutions.

An unintended consequence could be language and cultural barriers in terms of wording and defining a sensitive subject matter within the policy and procedures. There may be a difference of opinion when revising and creating new policies, as well as additional time for revisions and updates to language and punctuation. There are multiple levels of approval and

each level may require their own specific revisions, which in turn could extend the time frame and create additional costs to be accrued.

Streamline Communication regarding bullying and reporting bullying with staff by including other departments

Streamlining communication between multiple departments and areas allows the employees' more "safe places" to discuss bullying and report workplace bullying in their place of work. By utilizing the resources readily available at the post-secondary institute, offer training sessions with the counselling department and/or human resources department to discuss what bullying is, how to report workplace bullying, tips, and tricks on managing bullies and the stress involved with bullying. Offering the employees' information and/or training seminars through face-to-face, online, training seminars and with the option of a group or individual setting can be implemented within the next three to six months. The additional information and education will help achieve more understanding into what constitutes as workplace bullying by providing information which can include reporting tools, policies, and procedures, as well as real life examples.

Rationale to streamline communication

All three participants stated there needs to be more of a conversation circled around bullying as it appears to be a sensitive topic and one that most avoid (participant A, B & C, personal communication, March 18, 2021); the 38% response rate from reaching out to participants supports this conclusion. 40% of Canadians experience weekly bullying at their place of work (Government of Canada, 2017), so streamlining communication could benefit other areas such as bringing the conversation about bullying into more prominent places and conversations. Streamlining communication inadvertently brings education and awareness to the

forefront which is beneficial in fighting and eradicating workplace bullying (Velatsianos et al., 2018). Being able to have an open and honest conversation with the participants was met with barriers, displaying one possible reason the bullying conversation may be taboo. Prior to conducting the interviews, I was met with a lengthy process that could be likened to the antiquated process of reporting workplace bullying (Farmer, 2011). I had to search for and contact the ethical review committee and fill out two separate forms, totaling 13 pages of information, redo and submit the TCPS2 certification and submit my questions for review. The questions were then censored, and I was informed I had to avoid discussing personal experience, which makes sense and follows the ethical guidelines, however all personal thought processes had to be removed. Streamlining communication allows for a more open and honest dialogue to be created, as it can employ a setting where the user/attendee is comfortable opening up and having a discussion in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

An unintended consequence could be language and cultural barriers while educating the employees, as well as discomfort from employees who are reluctant to participate in a discussion circled around bullying. The counseling and HR department would need time to “train the trainer” so ensure adequate, appropriate, and similar information is shared within each session which could push the allotted time constraint past the three-to-six-month barrier. Additional stress and pressure put on the counselling and HR department could create staff shortages and time away from their regular scheduled duties, which could accrue additional costs.

Implement an online reporting tool

A recommendation would be that the post-secondary institution implement an online reporting tool which can be accessed from any device (with installation of application) for users to report workplace bullying in an anonymous, confidential manner. Due to research being

needed and the software needing to be installed, with adequate time for training, a recommended time frame would be anywhere from one year to three years. This recommendation may also solve the previous recommendation of consolidating information, as policies and procedures could be found within the application/reporting tool. To encourage employees to report workplace bullying, employers must ensure confidentiality (Woo and Reeves, 2007) and basing information on participant feedback and existing research, offering a reporting tool with the following information could encourage bullying victims, witnesses or curious employees looking for answers to come forward.

- Provide anonymity to openly discuss and report bullying.
- Offer contact information to all departments involved with bullying, as well as emergency contact information.
- Inform employees of policies, procedures, guidelines, and institutes mission statement regarding bullying.
- Allow a direct link to report bullying online.
- Provide open education resources (both internal and external) for tips and tricks on how to manage bullying.

Rationale for implementing an online reporting tool

Two out of the eight post-secondary institutes researched offered an online reporting tool which allows the user to report workplace bullying (University of Alberta, 2021; Grant MacEwan University, 2021). Having a reporting tool could allow the institute to conduct their own research, as well as offer tools on the decision-making process with visible insights and data (Software Testing Help, 2020), which could greatly benefit and assist the bullying victim and advance the institutes research on bullying. Offering an application where all necessary

information can be found could be an asset the institution, as it could avoid unnecessary interactions of employees reaching out to the incorrect departments or people seeking this information (McKay et al., 2008). Although there would be an initial cost upfront to create or buy the software, as well as train and advise on how to utilize the reporting tool, it could potentially save the institute millions of dollars long term. Hango and Moyser (2018) estimate that employers lose roughly \$19 billion per year due to bullying and harassment, as employees will call in sick, use short term disability, extended vacations or leave their positions altogether. Participant B (2021) expressed utilizing current software to its full potential including as a reporting tool could save the institution money, time, and human resources. The claim from Participant B (2021) is supported by Farmer (2011) and Hango and Moyser (2018) regarding saving possible costs, however no literature currently exists displaying reporting applications in a post-secondary environment being linked to a decrease in capital expenditures associated with workplace bullying.

An unintended consequence would be the additional stress and pressure put onto the information technology department as they would need to manage the software and programming involved. There may be issues with the server lagging which may require the institution to provide a larger monitoring tool and update their current system, in turn driving up cost. Hackers breaking into the system and breaching secure information is always a fear when using online programming, especially since a reporting tool should ensure privacy and anonymity. There may also be some software glitches at the beginning stages which will need to be corrected and eradicated. The question of outsourcing the software, if a current software is unable to support online reporting could be costly and require additional time due to stages of approval.

Chapter Six

The literature, lack of current statistics, and missing research outline the need for more exploration and advancement to be done regarding reporting workplace bullying in post-secondary institutes. There needs to be a better understanding regarding the process of reporting workplace bullying, as well as feedback from the victims, and what bullying entails within academia (Velatsianos et al., 2018) to paint a clearer and more concise picture, which would allow for steps to be taken to understand and hopefully ease the presence of bullying within the workplace. Adoption of reporting tools and updated systems to replace the current and daunting process of reporting workplace bullying appears to be essential in moving forward with reporting workplace bullying. Bryant et al (2009) suggest that employees are unable to successfully report workplace bullying which leads to other issues and implications which could be avoided given an adequate reporting system. There could be perceived barriers by the employer when implementing any recommendation, specifically new technology or software, such as a reporting tool. These barriers could be cost, time and accessibility (Woo & Reeves, 2007), as well as the desire for the employee to utilize the new software, as this is not perceived as useful (Davis, 1989). When researching and reviewing reporting tools within Alberta's post-secondary institutes, the research and information falls short, which again indicates a need for more research to be done in this field.

The goal of the implementation process is to reduce workplace bullying by helping assist employees to report incidents of workplace bullying with ease, autonomy and convenience. There needs to be clear strategies while working through each of the four recommendations to execute plans and put them into action. The critical actions required would be time management, attention to detail, communication with multiple departments and continual updating. Implementing a step-by-step procedure to develop, assess, evaluate, and execute each

recommendation would be beneficial to ensure the success and validity of each project undertaken. Without the recommendations being implemented, we will continue to see workplace bullying rates soar as people continue to enter the workforce. Coinciding with the rise in workplace bullying, reporting of incidents will continue to stagnate without the introduction of more current and confidential reporting tools to assist and educate both victim and bully. The Government of Canada and Alberta continue to implement programs circled around anti-bullying for school age children, yet we are not seeing the results, which could mean several things, including the programs themselves are not working or that no research has been conducted revealing these statistics. Being able to observe what is working, how it is working and why it is working, allows the post-secondary institute information and education on how to manage bullying within their system. Without this knowledge, as well as the employee not being given a platform where they feel comfortable and confident to discuss bullying, the much-needed change will not come.

The need for further research is evident within the literature and exploration of bullying within post-secondary institutions, how bullying is reported and the consequences of not reporting bullying would serve as a benefit for future research. There is limited information provided on what technology is being used and how it is being utilized by post-secondary institutions, so a study that examines the technology that exists, as well as the success rates, should be conducted in order to answer questions into how technology can assist with reporting workplace bullying. There are steps being taken by both the public, such as pink shirt day, and the Government of Canada and Alberta, such as anti-bullying measures in elementary schools. These programs and initiatives help bring education and awareness to such a prevalent issue, however, there are no current statistics available to measure the success of these programs and

initiatives. More research and data collection are required to expand upon what is working and what should be corrected to stay current, enlighten and bring more recognition to the culture surrounding bullying.

In conclusion, bullying is often an uncomfortable topic to discuss and many victims prefer to stay silent opposed to reaching out and reporting the incident (Bryant et al., 2009; Miller, 2019). Technology and education continue to evolve and with the world of academia being thrust into an online capacity (Hodson et al., 2018), technology is at the forefront, yet no evidence or research of how the technology is being utilized by post-secondary institutions is available. Out of the eight institutions researched, 25% use an online reporting tool, however other institutions have the capacity within their software (such as MS Teams at BVC) to implement a reporting tool, but do not; this displays another area where more research and analysis should be conducted and explored. Victims of workplace bullying should not fear repercussions or reprisal for coming forward and seeking help, yet the stigma of being a “whistleblower” continues to be prevalent within the workplace (Miller, 2019). To aid in the reporting of workplace bullying, more needs to be done for the victims. Providing a comfortable, confidential, and inclusive environment are key elements to ensuring autonomy and confidence in the reporting of workplace bullying, with hopes of minimizing and eventually eradicating this phenomenon.

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