Trainees’ Experiences of Workplace Bullying: Our Responses and Responsibilities as Clinical Psychology Trainers

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Overview of the Session

• Brief background to provide context
• Overview of Lan’s research on psychologists’ experience of workplace bullying in pre-qualification roles
• Spotlight on the implications for the clinical training community
• Consider our roles and responsibilities
• Recognise the challenges
Context: Definitions and conceptualisations of workplace bullying

• Understandings of what constitutes ‘bullying’ as socially constructed
• Challenges of definition
  • Usually operationalised in the research literature terms of frequency and duration
  • Power differentials
  • Acts of bullying

“Workplace bullying is defined as a situation in which one or several individuals persistently, and over a period of time, perceive themselves as being on the receiving end of negative actions from superiors or co-workers, and where the target of the bullying finds it difficult to defend him or herself against these actions.”

(Nielson & Einarsen, 2012)
Context: Bullying in the NHS

- 2018 NHS Staff survey: 24% staff reported experiencing bullying, harassment or abuse from other staff members in the previous 12 months.
- 2017 BPS Survey: 13% reported bullying or harassment from managers over the previous 12 months.
- Studies suggest high levels of workplace bullying within the healthcare sector
- Healthcare students at higher risk (e.g. studies of nursing and medical undergrad students)
- Research on the impact of workplace bullying on NHS staff (e.g. Carter et al, 2013)
The Study

How have trainee clinical psychologists experienced workplace bullying during their training and in pre-qualified psychology roles prior to training?

Qualitative study using Thematic Analysis
Interviews with 14 participants

Lan Rachel Brown, Barbara Mason & Madeline Carter (2019)
Overview of findings: Bullying & Negative Behaviours

- ‘Persistent and unjustified criticism’
- ‘Changing the goals’
- ‘Excessive monitoring’
- ‘Being ignored’
- ‘Preventing access’
- ‘Unfair practices’
Overview of findings: Themes

- Activating Threat Responses
- Making Sense of the Bullying
- Difficulties Navigating Power within the System
- Finding Safety and Support
Difficulties Navigating Power within the System

- Being in a vulnerable position
- Challenges to speaking up
- Feeling let down by responses
Finding Safety & Support

- Finding Safety and support
- Support within the system
- Finding outside support
- Later work being reparative
Implications / Discussion

• Both positive and negative experience of Programmes
• Programme staff as both part of the problem and part of the solution
• Similarly supervisors as in some cases ‘perpetrator’ and in others ‘supporter’
Some good practice recommendations

• Ensure trainees are aware of processes for reporting bullying and other negative behaviours

• Have conversations about what ‘it’ is and how the course manages difficulties on placements, including bullying.

• Build in other independent sources of support (e.g. professional mentors who are not connected to the programme or to placements)

• Respond with empathy and attend to the emotional impact, as well as dealing with more formal processes.
Challenges

• The inherent challenge of the ‘gatekeeper’ role
• Balancing perspectives
• Recalling other stories
Questions & Discussion

- How do we recognise bullying when it occurs?
- How do we support our trainees to recognise and name it as such?
- How best do we support our trainees in these situations?
- How do we ensure a balance between acknowledging the trainee’s experience and hearing the supervisor’s perspective?
- How do we navigate multiple ‘truths’
- How do we stay alert to our own avoidance?
- Navigating the line between ‘bullying’ and ‘negative feedback’ in situations where poor performance is an issue?
References


