Workplace Bullying and the Role of Trade Unions: Issues of Voice and Collectivism

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INTRODUCTION

There is a considerable and discrete body of research into the construct of workplace bullying, indicating it is significant problem in the UK and elsewhere (Zapf *et al*. 2003) which has an extremely detrimental impact on targets and organisations (Mayhew *et al*. 2004). Indeed, several studies indicate aggressive behaviour directed at employees not covered by protective legislation may be more damaging than physical abuse (Mayhew *et al*. 2004) or sexual harassment (Hershcovis and Barling 2008). However, studies appear to have neglected ways of intervening in cases of workplace bullying (Lewis and Sheehan 2003; Shannon *et al*. 2007). Little is known about which support mechanisms targets of bullying utilize, the nature of the assistance provided, and the efficacy of the various sources and types of support. Despite its legitimate concern as a workplace issue, little has been written on bullying from an industrial relations perspective (Hoel and Beale 2006), with few, if any, studies conducted into the role of trade unions in addressing this issue. However, some researchers believe there is scope to study workplace bullying within the context of an unequal employment relationship, diminished employee voice (Liefooghe and Mackenzie Davey 2001; Hoel and Beale 2006) and collectivism (Ironside and Siefert 2003).

This paper addresses some of these overlooked areas by applying some industrial relations thinking to the problem of workplace bullying. We consider the various sources of support used by targets of workplace bullying as voice channels through which employees air grievances. The study investigates whether formal organisational routes or third party representation by trade unions or others provides an effective voice for bullied employees. We go on to consider whether particular individual and collective actions taken by trade unions on behalf of their bullied members influence outcomes. These findings will build on our limited knowledge of bullying intervention strategies and inform the development of effective anti-bullying programmes by trade unions and employers. In addition, lessons are learnt about the wider industrial relations themes of the provision of a legitimate voice for employees, collectivism and union renewal.

The paper is based on an exploratory study into the role of trade unions in addressing workplace bullying. Three trade unions participated in the research. Although they cannot be named for reasons of confidentiality, they represent employees in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors in Wales or the UK as a whole. Their memberships range from approximately 20,000 to in excess of one million. In this paper we present some preliminary results from one of the unions studied ('Union A') located in the public sector. This union was chosen as research indicates bullying is more prevalent in the public sector than the private, despite having a higher union membership density (Hoel and Beale 2006). First, we critically review the relevant workplace bullying research and industrial relations literature pertaining to employee voice and collectivism in the background to this study. We then set out the research methodology and discuss some of the key findings from the early stage analysis, before highlighting the main conclusions.

BACKGROUND

Workplace bullying

Individual perception plays a part in determining whether negative behaviour is viewed as bullying or not (Einarsen 2000). However, most academics (see, for example, Leymann 1996; Einarsen 2000; Vickers 2006) agree that bullying necessitates some form of negative behaviour directed at individual(s), which is repetitive and enduring, and involves an imbalance in power between target and perpetrator. For some, the requirement that harm is caused to the target is also central to the construct, although there is more debate about whether it is necessarily inflicted intentionally. The traditional conceptualization of workplace bullying as an escalated interpersonal conflict (Leyman 1996; Zapf and Gross 2001) has been challenged by some researchers. Liefooghe and Mackenzie Davey (2001) found that when employees defined bullying for themselves they distinguished between 'individual' bullying, which was a product of interpersonal relationships, and 'organisational' bullying, comprised of the routine subjugation of employees by depersonalized and over-controlling organizational practices, such as the primacy of monitoring systems. Ironside and Siefert (2003) contend that most bullying is organisational in nature, manifested as the 'subtle and indifferent ways in which management's right to manage is asserted' (p397). For researchers like Liefooghe and Mackenzie Davey (2001) and Ironside and Siefert (2003) workplace bullying is rooted in an unequal employment relationship. For them, strict managerial control is used to obtain employee compliance in order to maximise profits. This fosters behaviour which is not simply 'tough' and competitive' but which constitutes abuse (Sheehan 1999).

A considerable body of research has established that outcomes for targets of bullying are overwhelmingly negative, frequently involving serious health impairment (Hansen *et al*., 2006), absenteeism, job neglect or exit (Einarsen 2000) or transfer to an inferior position (Zapf and Gross 2001). Yet, some studies found a perceived supportive environment may mitigate some of the harmful effects of workplace bully (Hansen *et al*. 2006; Tuckey *et al*. 2009). Studying the related construct of workplace violence, Schat and Kelloway (2003) investigated the buffering effects of two types of support identified in House's (1981) classification. They found 'instrumental' support (that which directly helps the person in need) significantly moderated the detriment to emotional wellbeing, somatic health and job-related affect. 'Informational' support (that which provides information that a person can use in coping with personal and environmental problems), however, significantly affected emotional wellbeing only. Workplace violence research also suggests the source as well as the nature of the support may be significant (Leather *et al*. 1998). They found that whilst respondents perceived they received more support from family and friends, only intra-organizational sources influenced outcomes. However, these studies were based on small-scale, highly selective samples and the measurement of verbal and physical aggression. The findings should not be generalised to other populations or a construct like workplace bullying which involves mainly psychological behaviours. Research is needed on which specific sources of support and actions taken improve the situation for targets of bullying.

In terms of sources of support, only a few studies have included information on where bullied employees turned to for help. A cross-sectional study of the experience of workplace bullying in the UK by Hoel (2002) revealed that informal and non-organisational sources of support, such as colleagues and family and friends, were preferred over the formal support functions provided by employers, such as personnel and occupational health. Two US studies, focussing on the utilisation of formal support services, discovered those exposed to chronic general harassment were less likely to approach services provided by the workplace than victims of sexual harassment (Shannon *et al*. 2007) and diminished levels of trust in Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) amongst targets of bullying (Fox and Stallworth 2004). Overall, the evidence available suggests a tendency for targets to have limited faith in the structures provided by employers to address workplace bullying. However, there is a need for empirical research into the effect of various sources of support upon the outcomes for targets, and the reasons why some sources of assistance are rejected.

As regards the type of support provided, a common theme in the literature is that employers fail to adequately address complaints of workplace bullying (for example, Zapf and Gross 2001; McKay *et al*. 2008). In a rare study of how organizations respond to alleged bullying, Salin (2009) found Human Resources (HR) primarily employed 'reconciliatory' measures, chiefly having discussions with the parties involved or with occupational health, and 'transfer' measures, involving moving either the target or the perpetrator to another part of the organisation. 'Punitive' measures, where perpetrators were held accountable, were used to a much lesser extent. This exploratory study provides some useful data on the prevalence of anti-bullying measures within organisations, but questions remain about their effect upon employees' working lives. There is a need to extend the research to include how different responses to bullying influence outcomes, and to encompass recent EAP initiatives and informal and non-organisational sources of support including trade unions.

Despite the introduction of anti-bullying policies into a number of organisations and an increasing armoury of intervention mechanisms in the form of EAPs, there is little evidence that these have been embraced by bullied employees or translated into improved circumstances for them, although it should be noted that most studies are based upon the perceptions of self-identified targets of bullying. This poses the question of whether any perceived inadequacy is a product of high expectations amongst targets, well-intentioned but poorly conceived interventions, or a tolerance of bullying on the part of employers in contradiction of their stated policies. Researchers like Ironside and Siefert (2003) consider bullying may be used strategically by managers to shape employee behaviours in order to meet the performance targets they are pressurised and rewarded to achieve. For Vickers (2006) anti-bullying policies and programmes merely provide a veneer of concern for employee welfare, whilst primarily serving to protect organisations, for example from litigation. Individuals who instigate complaints still risk alienation, ostracism, career disruption, loss of employment and health impairment. Lewis and Rayner (2003) explain the apparent inaction of HR in terms of their changing role from a personnel function, concerned with employee welfare, to Human Resource Management (HRM), which is more about sanctioning management decisions and protecting the organisation, for example, by not admitting liability. They argue that neither trade unions, because they are marginalised, or HRM, because of a conflict of interest, are fulfilling the voice function for employees.

Employee voice

A distinction is usually made between 'direct' voice, involving direct lines of communication between employer and employee, and 'representative' (indirect) voice, whereby employer-employee engagement is through a third party, typically a trade union (Terry 2010). Whether concerned with collective bargaining about wages and conditions or pursuing individual grievances, representative voice provides an alternative to manager-driven voice channels (Dundon *et al*. 2004). However, trade unions' share of the 'voice market' is diminishing (Willman 2005). This is due in part to competition from other forms of indirect voice, including statutory bodies like works councils or advocacy organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (Heery *et al*. 2004). In addition, representative voice is being supplanted by direct channels developed by employers (Terry 2010) such as team briefings and quality circles (Fernie and Metcalf 2005). For researchers like Fairbrother (2000), these HRM-inspired initiatives are merely a 'gloss' to legitimise attempts to control and reorganize the workforce. Typically, managers choose the type and scope of voice mechanism, which frequently emphasise performance improvements rather than issues of justice (Dundon *et al*. 2004), and consultation rather than joint regulation (Terry 2010). There is some evidence that direct voice systems are deliberately or unconsciously used by managers to avoid unions, and are treated with some scepticism by employees (Bach 2004; Terry 2010).

Applying models of voice to workplace bullying, formal organisational support systems can be considered as direct voice channels for airing grievances. Such support may be provided by managers, HR, Occupational Health and also a range of EAPs, encompassing mediation,

counselling and the provision of harassment contact officers. As with other direct voice channels, EAPs have multiplied in recent years. Representative voice is provided mainly by trade unions, with other informal and extra-organisational support, including colleagues; health practitioners; family and friends; acting as advocates. This paper addresses the question of whether employer-led voice regimes have supplanted indirect voice in airing grievances like workplace bullying, and whether the choice of voice mechanism affects the outcomes for targets.

Collectivism

The diminution of trade union voice has been accompanied by a decline in collectivism (Heery *et al.*, 2004). Waddington and Kerr (1999) identified three possible forms of relationship between trade unions and their members. 'Individualism' exists where members are passive consumers. Under 'managerial servicing relationships' trade unions establish members' views and needs through non-participative means, such as staff surveys. 'Participative workplace unionism', on the other hand, seeks to secure improvements to terms and conditions and restrict managerial prerogative. Some industrial relations researchers believe there has been a shift in employee attitude away from a collective view of society towards a more individualistic orientation, which has been reflected in the changing role of trade unions, away from collective bargaining and promoting justice towards the provision of financial packages and other services to individual members (Fernie and Metcalf 2005). Others (for example, Waddington and Whitson 1997; Waddington and Kerr 1999) contest this view. Based on their studies of a large general workers' trade union, they argued that traditional collective reasons were the main motivators in the recruitment and retention of members, while financial services were peripheral. However, this conclusion was based on the authors categorising the most significant determining factor, 'support should a problem arise at work', as a collective reason for union membership. Whilst the authors concede it could be an expression of self-interest, they reasoned the *provision* and *effectiveness* of support depended upon collective organization. However, it could be argued that, as self-preservation was the main *motivation* for union membership, this was an indication of individualism. Furthermore, actual or expected support may be restricted to access to a union representative, rather than mobilising the support of colleagues, who are frequently unsupportive (Einarsen 2000).

Whether viewed as an indicator of individualism or collectivism, providing effective support to employees experiencing workplace problems like bullying appears to be central to union membership (Waddington and Kerr 1999; Charlwood, 2003; Fernie and Metcalf, 2005). Fairbrother (2000) considers British trade unions at a crossroads: members can choose to combine to defend and extend their common interests or pursue their individual ends. For some (for example, Willman 2005) union renewal is dependant upon improving individual services. Others, like Ironside and Siefert (2003), who view bullying as rooted in an imbalance of power in favour of management, argue that bullying is less likely to occur, and more likely to be tackled, where there is a strong union presence. There is some empirical support for this argument. For example, Badigannavar and Kelly's (2005) study of contract research staff found collective action frames, including whether staff attributed blame to their employer; discussed problems; identified with the union and believed it had influence, yielded better terms. In relation to bullying, this raises the question of whether supporting individual members on a case-by-case basis or addressing bullying as a workplace problem and mobilising the support of colleagues delivers the best outcomes for targets.

METHOD

The study adopted a three-stage mixed methods design. In the initial phase, the issue of how workplace bullying was addressed was explored through focus group discussions and individual interviews with officials and members from the participating trade unions. The key issues which emerged were used to design the instrument which was used in the second

stage of the study, a survey of members, after cognitive testing. Finally, the qualitative data were revisited to seek explanations for the trends revealed by the survey. This paper reports some of the survey findings from Union A relating to the sources of support utilised by targets of bullying, the action taken by trade unions, and outcomes in terms of the impact upon targets' health and wellbeing; how incidents of bullying were resolved; and targets' satisfaction with those resolutions. The questionnaire was delivered online as this was cost-effective and convenient for members. The entire membership of approximately 20,000 was invited to participate as a large number of people needed to be surveyed in order to obtain a subgroup of targets of acceptable size to study (Nielsen 2009). Targets were identified by asking respondents to label themselves as bullied or not, according to the following definition, based on Fevre *et al.* (2009):

> 'By bullying I mean a situation where you have persistently over a period of time perceived yourself to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or more persons, in a situation where as the target of bullying you have had difficulty in defending yourself against these actions. For the purposes of this survey only, I am not referring to a one off incident as bullying.'

Similar definitions have been used in a number of studies of workplace bullying (Nielsen 2009). Allowing respondents to decide for themselves if they had been bullied recognises the importance of context and the ability to manage situations in the experience of workplace bullying (Einarsen 2000). Whilst academic definitions may not correspond to all respondents' real-life experiences of bullying (Fevre *et al.* 2009), providing some guidance reduces the likelihood that respondents will interpret the term 'bullying' so widely it becomes a different concept (Nielsen 2009).

The effect that bullying had upon targets was measured by asking them to indicate if the impact upon their health and wellbeing had been 'extremely negative', 'negative', fairly negative', 'fairly positive', 'positive', 'extremely positive' or had 'no effect'. Bullied respondents were also asked whether or not they were still experiencing bullying. Those who answered 'no' were directed to a list of possible ways in which the situation had been resolved and asked to indicate which option(s) applied. The items (listed in Table 1) were developed from the qualitative data gathered in the first phase of the research. Satisfaction was measured by asking these respondents if they would have liked the situation to have been resolved differently, being offered the options 'yes', 'no', and 'uncertain'. All self-identified targets of bullying were provided with a list of possible sources of support (shown in Figure 1), arising out of the qualitative data, and asked to indicate whether they had utilised them or not. For each source utilised, respondents were asked if they had found the service 'very helpful', 'helpful', 'unhelpful', 'very unhelpful', or 'neither helpful or unhelpful'. For each source rejected, respondents were asked to indicate their reasons. All those who indicated that they had turned to the trade union for support were directed to a list of possible trade union actions (shown in Table 1), also produced from the qualitative data, and asked to indicate which one(s) had been undertaken. A Chi-square test for independence was used to explore any associations between these variables. This paper reports the results of this early stage analysis, while further work will employ more sophisticated multivariate techniques.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample

727 survey responses were received, representing approximately 3.5% of the membership of Union A. Of these, 602 were sufficiently complete and comprised the final sample. After adjusting for those who preferred not to disclose demographic information, 64% of the sample was female and 36% male. 5% were aged 16-24 years, 20% 25-34 years, 29% 35-44 years, 33% 45-54 years and 14% over 55 years. Most respondents (74%) were White

Welsh, 17% White English, 4% from other White backgrounds, 4% from mixed backgrounds and 1% from Asian, Black or other backgrounds. Discussions with Union A suggest the demographic composition of the sample resembles that of the broader membership. 159 respondents (26%) labelled themselves as bullied within the last two years, which is within the ranges reported in a number of British studies of workplace bullying adopting similar methodologies, although comparisons are difficult owing to differences in, for example, sampling techniques or definitions of bullying provided.

Table 1: Resolutions per the survey

The perpetrator acknowledged their behaviour
The perpetrator moved on to bully someone else
The perpetrator left their position for reasons unconnected with the bullying
The perpetrator was moved to another part of the organisation by your employer because of the bullying behaviour
The perpetrator was formally disciplined, suspended, demoted or dismissed
The perpetrator was informally reprimanded retrained or monitored
You believe the perpetrator was reprimanded retrained or monitored 'off the record'
You changed your behaviour
You changed jobs for reasons unconnected with the bullying
You changed jobs on your own initiative to get away from the bullying
Your employer arranged for you to work in another part of the organisation
You took sick absence
You resigned with no job to go to or to take up a less favourable position
You signed a compromise agreement
You took your case to an employment tribunal
You pursued a personal injury claim
You were suspended or dismissed
You accepted the situation
You have reached a workable solution
You feel more able to cope

Sources of Support

The percentage of bullied members who utilised the various support mechanisms is shown in Figure 1. As targets frequently used more than one source, the total exceeds one hundred percent. There is a tendency for targets of workplace bullying to favour indirect voice channels, in particular family and friends (approached by 69% of targets); co-workers (55%); and the trade union (40%), rather than the formal support mechanisms provided by employers to resolve such issues. This lends support to studies by Hoel (2002), Fox and Stallworth (2004) and Shanon *et al.* (2007) which suggest some lack of faith in employer-initiated grievance processes, mirroring a scepticism for direct voice channels reported in the industrial relations literature (Bach 2004; Terry 2010). The relatively low uptake of mediators (5%), other EAP (such as help-lines) (9%), harassment contact officers (11%), Occupational Health (16%), and staff counsellors (24%) was largely due to these functions being unavailable. However, other reported reasons included a lack of awareness, difficulty of access, or the belief that these bodies were impotent. There was also a tendency for targets to decline formal organisational routes which were readily available to them. Less than a third of targets looked to a senior/line manager or HR for help. The main reasons cited involved an expectation that they would not be impartial, would not do anything, would hold it against them or that it was managers who were perpetrating the bullying. Informal and non-

organisational sources of support were also generally considered the most helpful, consistent with the impression contained within much of the workplace bullying literature.

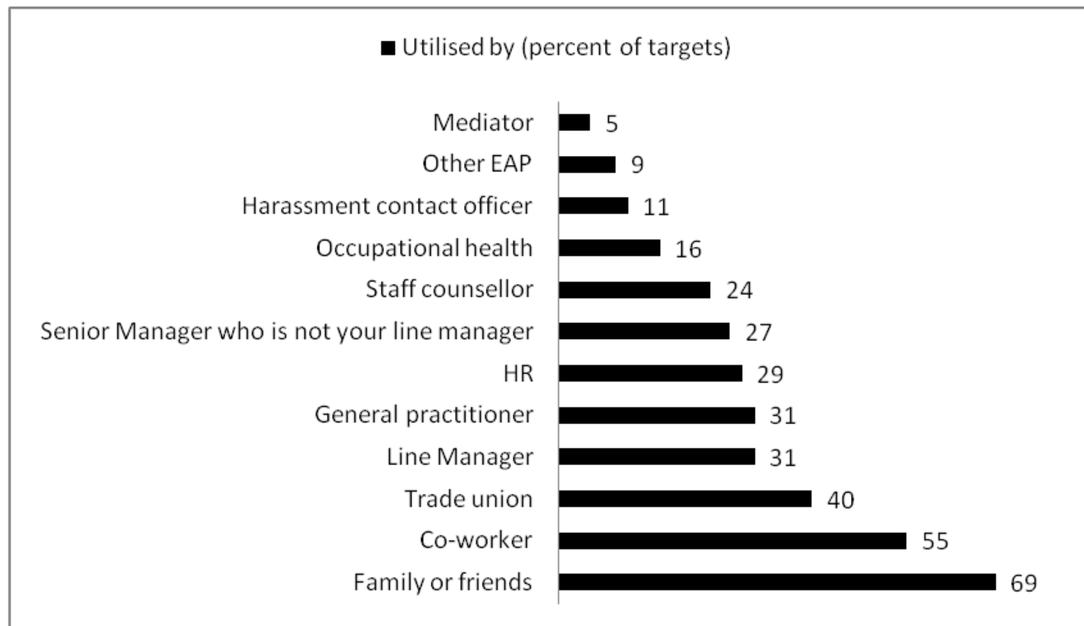

Figure 1: Sources of support utilised by targets

Trade union action

66 bullied respondents turned to the trade union for assistance. The frequency of the actions taken by union officials on their behalf is shown in Table 2. The total exceeds one hundred per cent as the actions are not mutually exclusive. The most common response was to provide informational support to individual bullied members, specifically explaining the possible actions targets could take (reported by 66% of respondents who approached the union), explaining the likely consequences (50%) and asking targets what outcome they wanted (44%). This result is unsurprising as providing information is a necessary first step in handling bullying-related enquiries, not all of which will lead to formal complaints. Nonetheless, there remains a high level of dissatisfaction amongst targets of the way in which incidents were resolved. Just 8% would not have like a different resolution with a further 30% uncertain. By contrast, the least frequently reported types of trade union action were to provide instrumental support at the individual or workplace level. There were no reports of 'naming and shaming organisations'. Legal action in the form of personal injury or employment tribunal claims were reported by just 2% and 5% of respondents using union services respectively, although some members who pursued legal clams may have left both the workplace and the union and would not, therefore, be identified in this survey. Working with the employer to put anti-bullying procedures in place and actively seeking the support of other colleagues were also relatively rare, being cited by just 3% and 8% of respondents using union services respectively, in parallel with the general trend of declining collectivism reported in the industrial relations literature. The union/member relationship closely resembles one based on individualism (Waddington and Kerr 1999).

Influence of the source of support upon impact, resolutions and targets' satisfaction

There were some significant associations between the sources of support utilised by bullied individuals and the impact upon their health and wellbeing. Usage of staff counsellors (x^2 = 6.04 (2), $p < 0.05$, Cramer's V = 0.23), occupational health (x^2 = 8.06 (2), $p < 0.05$, Cramer's V = 0.28), general practitioners (x^2 = 24.4 (2), $p < 0.01$, Cramer's V = 0.47), and family and friends (x^2 = 8.5 (2), $p < 0.05$, Cramer's V = 0.26) was associated with a more negative impact profile. However, the Cramer's V values indicate the effects were small using

Table 2: Frequency of actions taken by trade unions

Action taken by trade union	Percentage of targets utilising trade union support
Explained the possible action I could take	65
Explained the likely consequences of any action	50
Asked me what outcome I wanted	44
Gave me advice on how I could resolve the situation informally	39
Made me feel more able to cope	38
Encouraged me to take action	35
Had an informal word with my employer on my behalf	26
Represented me in a formal grievance, capability, sickness absence or disciplinary process	23
Gave me guidance on how to gather witness or documentary evidence for a formal grievance	21
Accompanied me to an informal meeting with the perpetrator or other officer of the organisation	20
Prepared a formal grievance case for me	11
Negotiated a compromise agreement with my employer	9
Negotiated with my employer for a move to another position	8
Actively sought the support of other colleagues	8
Discouraged me from taking action	6
Provided legal assistance to take my case to an employment	5
Took no action	5
Worked with my employer to put anti-bullying procedures in place	3
Provided legal assistance to pursue a personal injury claim	2
Named and shamed my employer to an outside body	0

Cohen's (1988) criteria (Pallant 2007), apart from GPs, which had a medium effect. Owing to the cross-sectional nature of the survey, we cannot establish cause and effect. It may be that these voice mechanisms exacerbate the situation for targets, or that these are the sources of help that the most severely affected turn to. Also, caution must be exercised in drawing firm conclusions owing to the small number of respondents in some categories, particularly those who experienced merely a 'fairly negative' reaction to bullying. It is interesting to note that seeking the support of senior/line managers; HR; co-workers; harassment contact officers; mediators; other EAP; or the trade union did not appear to alter how negatively individuals were affected by bullying. This theme is developed further in the paper.

As regards resolutions, taking sick leave was significantly, positively correlated with consulting other EAP ($x^2 = 5.15$ (1), $p < 0.05$, phi = 0.63) and occupational health ($x^2 = 4.60$ (1), $p < 0.05$, phi = 0.33), both of which had a medium effect based on Cohen's (1988) criteria (Pallant 2007), and GPs ($x^2 = 15.21$ (1), $p < 0.01$, phi = 0.51), which had a large effect. GPs were also moderately, negatively associated with feeling more able to cope ($x^2 = 6.48$ (1), $p < 0.05$, phi = -0.35). These findings may reflect that these are the voice mechanisms used by the most desperate to obtain relief or sick notes. Dealing with the perpetrator 'off the record' was moderately associated with using the services of a mediator ($x^2 = 4.21$ (1), $p < 0.05$, phi = 0.40). This may suggest that mediation facilitates 'low-key' resolutions in the early stages of an interpersonal conflict, as suggested by conflict management theory (Zapf and Gross, 2001). Alternatively, avoiding the allocation of overt blame may allow mediation to take place. Arranging for the target to work in another part of the organisation was related to approaching a staff counsellor ($x^2 = 6.61$ (1), $p < 0.05$, phi = 0.35) and the effect was large,

which may indicate counsellors usually trigger managed moves. Again, the results must be treated with caution as some subsamples were small, particularly regarding resolutions which sanctioned perpetrators. As with impact, senior/line managers, HR, harassment contact officers, co-workers and the trade union did not appear to influence how bullying was resolved. The lack of influence over resolutions extended to family and friends, consistent with Leather *et al.*'s (1998) findings that non-organisational support, whilst considered helpful, fails to improve outcomes.

No significant relationships were found between the source of support and targets' satisfaction. Overall, there was no clear indication that the choice of voice mechanism to air concerns over workplace bullying greatly influenced any outcomes. This may appear to contradict other research by Hansen *et al.* (2006) and Tuckey *et al.* (2009). However, these studies found only either partial support for the buffering effects of social support, or that the moderation only operated in conjunction with other job-related factors. The apparent failure of providers of organisational support to affect outcomes may reflect that they do not share targets' interpretation of events; lack competency; or, as suggested by researchers like Ironside and Siefert (2003), tolerate bullying in order to obtain employee compliance. Indirect voice regimes may fail to improve the situation for targets of bullying either because their interventions are well-meaning but inappropriate, or because they lack the power to alter managerially-driven outcomes.

Influence of trade union action upon impact, resolutions and targets' satisfaction
No significant relationships were identified between the action taken by trade unions in cases of bullying and the wellbeing or satisfaction of targets. However, some union responses were significantly associated with particular resolutions. These are listed in Table 3 (union responses are categorised according to House's (1981) typology). The strength of the association is indicated by the Phi coefficient, shown in the last column. Table 3 suggests, despite the emphasis placed by union officials on providing informational support to individuals, it does not appear to have much influence upon outcomes. Only one such action ('they gave me guidance on how to gather witness or documentary evidence for a formal grievance') was significantly associated with one outcome, namely ('you feel more able to cope'), although the effect was large. Instrumental support, both at the individual or workplace level, appeared to have the most effect. This adds support to Schat and Kelloway's (2003) study of workplace violence and, to some extent, industrial relations commentators like Ironside and Siefert (2003) and Badigannavar and Kelly (2005) who believe collective action may yield the best results for members. Several instrumental actions correlated significantly with reaching a workable solution and feeling more able to cope, but also with resolutions which held perpetrators accountable ('The perpetrator acknowledged their behaviour'; 'The perpetrator was informally reprimanded, retrained or monitored'; and 'You believe the perpetrator was reprimanded, retrained or monitored 'off the record'). The effect size was at least moderate.

However, instrumental support was also related to the perpetrator going onto bully someone else. Several respondents used the comments box provided to note that where bullies had apologised, they remained unsanctioned and had simply moved onto the next target. This may explain in part why many targets are dissatisfied with the way their cases were handled, irrespective of how it was resolved. Of particular note is the negative association between 'They had an informal word with my employer on my behalf' and 'you changed jobs on your own initiative to get away from the bullying'. This may provide some hope that low-level interventions may keep targets of bullying in post. Alternatively, it may be the case that perpetrators were only sanctioned in even the mildest terms once targets were driven from the workplace. However, these results must be interpreted cautiously due to the small numbers in some categories, particularly the more 'extreme' responses, such as legal action, or resolutions which hold alleged perpetrators accountable.

Table 3: Action taken by the trade union and resolutions

Type of trade union action	Resolution	Phi
Informational support They gave me guidance on how to gather witness or documentary evidence for a formal grievance	You feel more able to cope**	0.58
Appraisal/emotional support They encouraged me to take action	You feel more able to cope*	0.44
Instrumental support They accompanied me to an informal meeting with the perpetrator or another officer of the organisation	The perpetrator acknowledged their behaviour*	0.55
They had an informal word with my employer on my behalf	You changed jobs on your own initiative to get away from the bullying*	-0.41
They prepared a formal grievance case for me	The perpetrator acknowledged their behaviour**	0.69
	The perpetrator moved on to bully someone else*	0.45
	You have reached a workable solution*	0.45
	You feel more able to cope*	0.45
They negotiated a compromise agreement with my employer	The perpetrator was informally reprimanded, retrained or monitored*	0.47
They provided legal assistance to take my case to an employment tribunal	The perpetrator acknowledged their behaviour**	1.00
	The perpetrator moved on to bully someone else**	0.69
	You feel more able to cope**	0.69
They provided legal assistance to pursue a personal injury claim	The perpetrator acknowledged their behaviour*	0.70
They worked with my employer to put anti-bullying procedures in place	The perpetrator acknowledged their behaviour*	0.70
They actively sought the support of other colleagues	-You believe the perpetrator was reprimanded, retrained or monitored ‘off the record’*	0.55

* p <.05. ** p <.01.

There are some methodological limitations which have not yet been mentioned, including the possible influence of unmeasured third variables, such as the disposition of targets or the competency of support providers, and response bias. The measure of health impact was necessarily simplistic to avoid an overly lengthy questionnaire. Reports of bullying, resolutions and the support received are based upon individuals' perceptions. The findings could, therefore, be criticised for being too subjective and there is the possibility of mono-source and common-method bias. However, perception is a key element in determining the incidence of bullying and, accordingly, we have accepted respondents' insights as the basis for this study. Some subsamples were small, reducing the reliability of some of the findings. Further qualitative research, such as that reported in the full study, is needed to provide data appropriate for small samples and to reveal the complexities behind the survey trends. It should be remembered that this paper only obtains one perspective, that of the members of Union A, and future studies incorporating the opinions of other interested parties such as union officials, employer representatives and EAP providers may provide an alternative interpretation. Whilst the sample can be considered representative of the members of Union A, the findings are not transferable to non-unionised employees in the same workplaces, or members of other unions, or the national working population. However, this exploratory study provides some useful insight into the utility of various organisational and trade union interventions in workplace bullying on which further replication studies can be based.

CONCLUSION

Despite the proliferation of employer-initiated voice channels for raising concerns over workplace bullying, they do not appear to have replaced representative voice or improved outcomes for targets. There is widespread mistrust of management and HR and EAPs, where they exist, suffer from a lack of awareness, access, and actual or perceived power. Employers do not appear to provide an advocacy function for employees in issues of justice like workplace bullying. Whilst third parties cannot be expected to share the perceptions of all self-identified targets of bullying, the relatively low level of satisfaction with the way incidents of bullying are resolved argues against a unitarist ideal, supporting the view of researchers like Lewis and Rayner (2003) and Dundon *et al.* (2004). This implies a role for trade unions or other indirect voice regimes in addressing workplace grievances like bullying. Indeed, the trade union, colleagues, family and friends, are the preferred sources of support for bullied individuals. However, despite their perceived helpfulness, these early findings indicate these support mechanisms appear to have little influence upon outcomes. The actions taken by the union in this study on behalf of bullied members tended to be informational and focussed on individuals. Such support appeared to deliver few positive outcomes from the perspective of targets. Instrumental or collective responses, however, are more associated with solutions which hold perpetrators responsible. Whilst the provision of information may be a necessary first response to bullying allegations, union officials may need to consider more formal and collective forms of action which effectively help to restore the power imbalance.

We believe this research is one of the largest studies of workplace bullying intervention strategies, and possibly the first to investigate the steps taken by trade union officials to address the problem. The findings reported here provide some much-needed empirical data on the efficacy of various support mechanisms and trade union actions. This may facilitate the development of anti-bullying programmes by employers and trade unions which are tailored to the needs of targets. However, further studies of the members of other unions and non-members are needed. Increasing the effectiveness of support for workplace problems to employees also has implications for union renewal.

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