Bullied at Work: A qualitative study of coping strategies

Shellie Simons PhD, RN
May 2012

Objectives
1. Describe the bullying experience among nurses in Massachusetts.
2. Describe strategies nurses who have been bullied used to cope with workplace bullying.

Who is doing the bullying?

The nurse as bully

Theoretical Framework
The theory of Oppressed Group Behavior
- Fanon (1963)
- Freire (1970)

Published Research


Coping Strategies Used by Nurses Who Are Bullied at Work

This study was funded by a grant from Eta Omega, Sigma Theta Tau

Conducted in spring 2011 and Submitted for publication to Journal for Nurses in Staff Development

Methodology

- A qualitative descriptive design
- Interviews were audio taped & transcribed verbatim
- Entered into NVIVO 9 for analysis.
- The text was then interpreted using conventional content analysis methodology.

Sample

- N= 18
- 14 ♀, 4 ♂
- 16 white, non-Hispanic; 2 black;
- Mean age 41 years
- Educational level
  - AD- 2; BSN- 8; MSN- 8
- 14 staff nurses; 3 CNS; 2 other

Common bullying behaviors

- Yelled at
- Humiliated in front of others

Theme 1

"Develop a Thick Skin"

- "You need to be ready so that you have a bit of thick skin."
- "Work on not taking offense at off handed remarks."

Theme 2

"Know your Agency's Written Policies"

- Most respondents were uncertain of their agency's policies on a Hostile Work Environment.
- Know your chain of command.
Theme 3
“Direct Confrontation”
- “Address the behavior immediately rather than letting it go and festers.”
- This involves a clear and polite request for the behavior to stop.
- If this is effective, no other action is needed.

Theme 3
“Keep a diary”
- Try to organize what happened in your head and then writing it down.
- Keep a written record of bullying episodes.
- If further action is needed, don’t rely on your memory of events.

Theme 4
“Report the bullying behavior”
- Speak to the individual before reporting it to anyone.
- Know the proper chain of command
- Report behavior to Human Resources

Theme 5
“Getting Better”
- A few said that it got better over time as people got used to them.
- Of the six respondents who were licensed for two years or less, four stated that over time, the bullying gradually abated.

How was the situation resolved?
- Bullying stopped over time
- Target left the unit or agency
- Some just got used to it

2009 Joint Commission Requirements
- The hospital has a code of conduct that defines acceptable & disruptive, inappropriate behaviors.
- Leaders create and implement a process for managing disruptive and inappropriate behavior.
Limitations

- Difficulty recruiting subjects to participate in the study.
- Confusion over the definition of bullying and horizontal violence.

Selected References