

# Understanding workplace stress and bullying in New Zealand workplaces

**Most of the world's population spends one-third of their adult life at work, making the workplace the setting where most people spend the largest proportion of their time outside the home.**

The potential benefits to New Zealand of reducing work-related injury and ill health include the reduction of premature death and disability, increased productivity, reduction in work-related employee absence, reduction in risk of re-injury, improved industrial relations through improved workplace health and safety, and a reduction in costs.

New research on workplace bullying suggests nearly one in five workers in the New Zealand hospitality sector, which includes hotels and restaurants, has suffered from some form of workplace bullying.

Researchers identified the kitchen as a literal hot-spot for overbearing and belittling behaviour, and say it has become "normalised" as an accepted part of the hospitality culture.

Study leader Professor Tim Bentley from Massey University, Albany, says the findings showed stress and bullying are at high levels when compared internationally. "The magnitude is higher than expected. Bullying is happening and it is not being addressed. It has long been accepted that this is the way of working – if you cannot stand the heat get out of the kitchen. But once the pressure is off, they will all go for a drink together and socialise after work."

And it is not just cooks, waiters and bar staff coping it at work. Employees in three other sectors – health, education and travel – have similar rates of bullying to hospitality workers.

The researchers had already identified those sectors of the workforce as at higher risk of bullying and, funded by the Department of Labour and the Health Research Council of New Zealand, they surveyed 1,728 workers, including doctors, nurses, teachers and academics as well as hotel and restaurant staff.

Eighteen per cent reported they had been victims of bullying at work, while 75 per cent had suffered from stress. Professor Bentley says nine times out of 10 the manager is the bully and bad leadership is the cause.



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#### Key words:

- Workplace stress and bullying, ill health, premature death and disability

#### Aims of this research:

- To establish the level of bullying in the New Zealand workplace, the impact and how to address the issues

"There needs to be a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying and this requires a cultural change. If we see someone driving unsafely, we would challenge that, but people do not stand up and address bullying behaviour. We need to be confident enough to challenge people if we see this happening and strategies need to be identified to prevent it in the workplace," he says.

In health and education, ineffective leadership was identified as one of the main factors leading to increased stress and bullying. The study found that employers in all four sectors had limited understanding of the workplace bullying problem and how to address it. Reporting structures were not effective with bullying or included as part of wider harassment or violence initiatives.

The full report is available on this Massey University webpage - <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/about-massey/news/article.cfm?mnarticle=sorry-chef-but-youre-a-bully-15-04-2010>.

This research is funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand.