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ThirdSector

The Impact of Bullying in the Voluntary Sector

Insights from the Charity Pulse 2008
Staff Satisfaction Survey

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Introduction

Charity Pulse is an annual staff satisfaction survey conducted by Birdsong Charity Consulting and *Third Sector* magazine. This year's survey ran from 5 March to 25 April 2008.

Charity Pulse is a new approach to measuring staff satisfaction in the voluntary sector, because it enables individuals working for any charity to take part. The aim of the research is to build up a picture of working life in charities and help to raise the standard of people management in the sector.

It also provides the opportunity for charities to receive cost-effective benchmarked staff satisfaction data, by choosing to actively promote the survey to their staff.

We had a record response this year, with over 1000 charity people taking part, representing 181 charities.

This special report examines the impact of bullying on staff satisfaction. It focuses on the survey responses of the 115 individuals who told us that they had been bullied at work during the last twelve months.

Key Findings

Charity Pulse explored the subject of bullying for the first time this year. The results provide some new insights into the impact of bullying in the voluntary sector.

The key findings are:

- 12% of charity staff have experienced bullying in the last year
- You are more likely to find bullies in charities with less than 25 staff
- Senior managers are the most likely to get bullied
- People who have been bullied are less satisfied in every area of the survey - disengaged from the cause, the organisation and the people leading it
- A third of all dissatisfied staff have been bullied in the last year
- Bullying increases workplace stress
- Bullying increases staff turnover

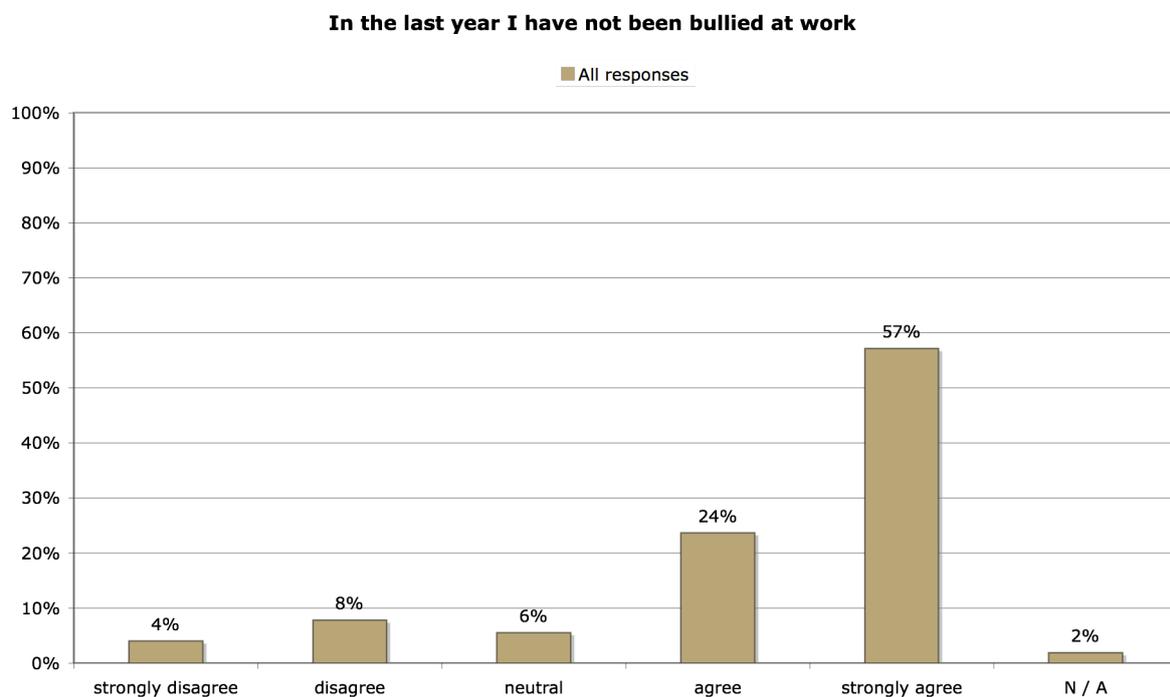
The Impact of Bullying

In 2008 one would like to think that bullying in the UK workplace was a thing of the past but, sadly, this is not the case. Headlines regularly remind us that the voluntary sector is not immune to this practice. But these are only isolated incidents, surely?

The findings of the *Charity Pulse 2008 survey* are very revealing. It may come as something of a shock to read that in our sector, in 2008, 12% of employees were subject to bullying in their place of work.

12% of charity staff experienced bullying in the last year

115 of the people who completed this year's *Charity Pulse* survey had been bullied in the last twelve months.



Although 12% of charity staff did experience bullying, a very healthy 81% thankfully did not.

How do these results compare with other sectors? We do not have directly comparable data, but two recent surveys help to provide some context.

In 2007, the Samaritans/nfpSynergy cross-sector survey *Stressed Out* found that 81% of us admit to having been bullied at some point in our careers, with bullying being a weekly cause of stress for 22% of UK workers. 11% of us admitted to having bullied others.

UNISON provide figures from a large UK cross-sector study on bullying at work (published by UMIST and the TUC in 2000) that reveal 10% of workers had been bullied in the past six months and 25% in the last 5 years. They also reported that 47% of workers had witnessed bullying in the workplace.

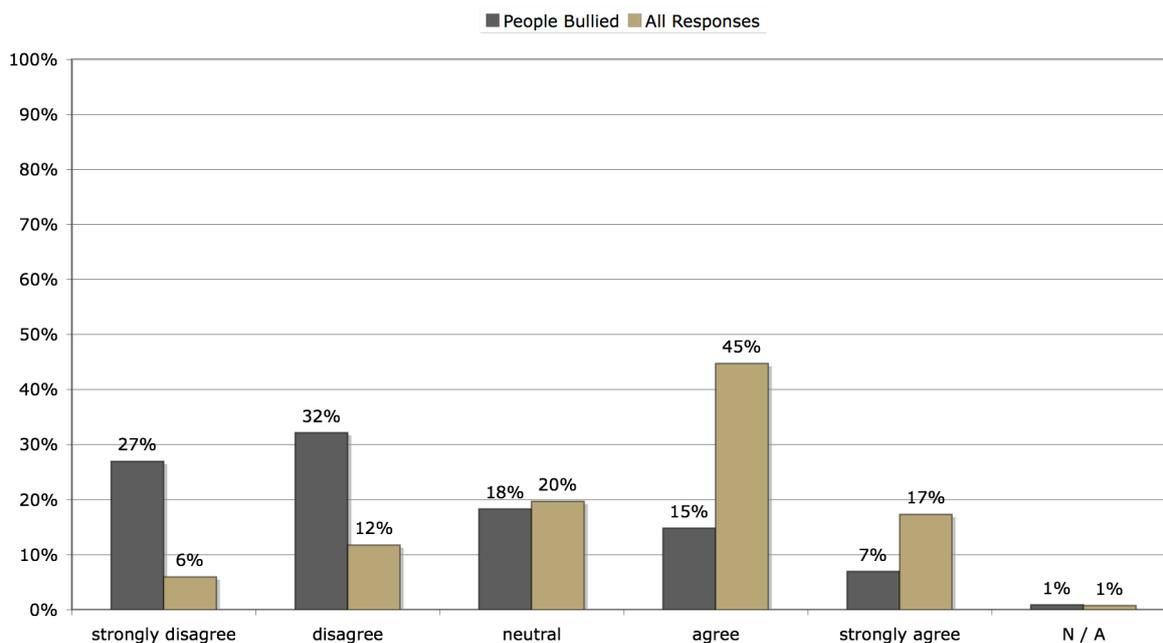
So, it would appear that the incidence of bullying in charities may be less than in other sectors.

People who have been bullied are less satisfied in every area

That said, bullying is a very serious matter and it appears to colour every aspect of working life in charities. The respondents who had been bullied scored less than the sample average in every area of the survey. Not only were they less happy with their management, they were also less satisfied with their work life balance and their development opportunities.

They felt more isolated than other staff - disengaged from the cause, the organisation and the people leading it.

The senior management team is effective



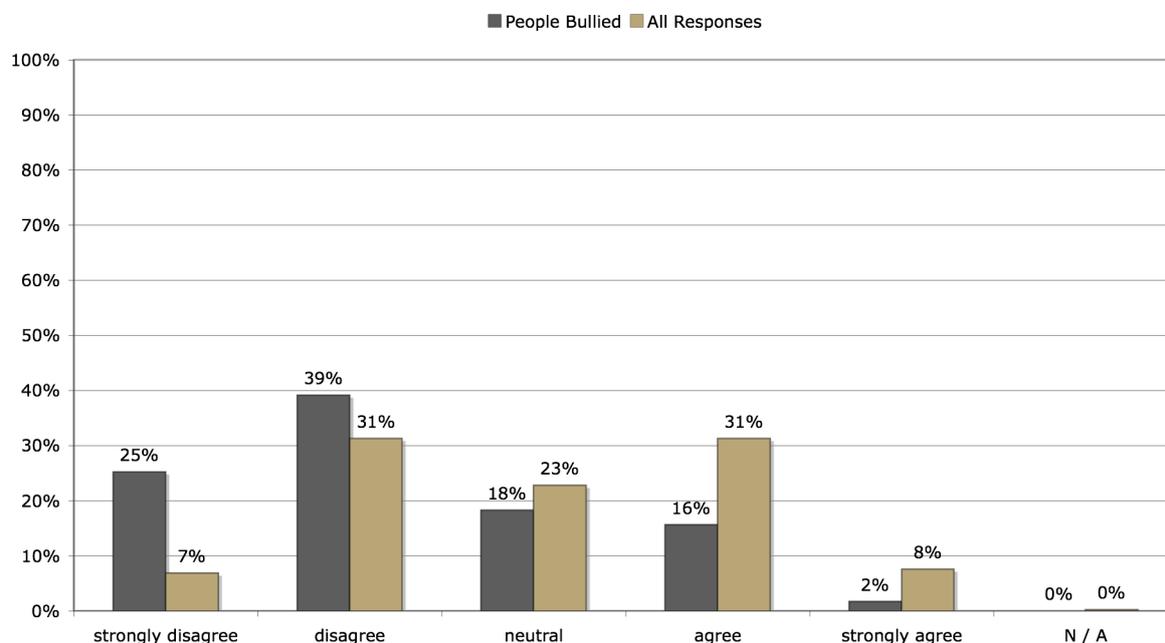
Only 22% agreed that their Senior Management Team is effective, compared to 62% of all respondents.

People directly affected by bullying represented an average of 32% of dissatisfied charity staff across the survey. So, if bullying were eradicated from the voluntary sector workplace, it would have an immediate positive impact on charity staff satisfaction and morale.

Bullying increases workplace stress

Compared to the average charity worker, employees who have experienced bullying are finding working life much more stressful. 64% get stressed at work, compared to 38% of the sample as a whole.

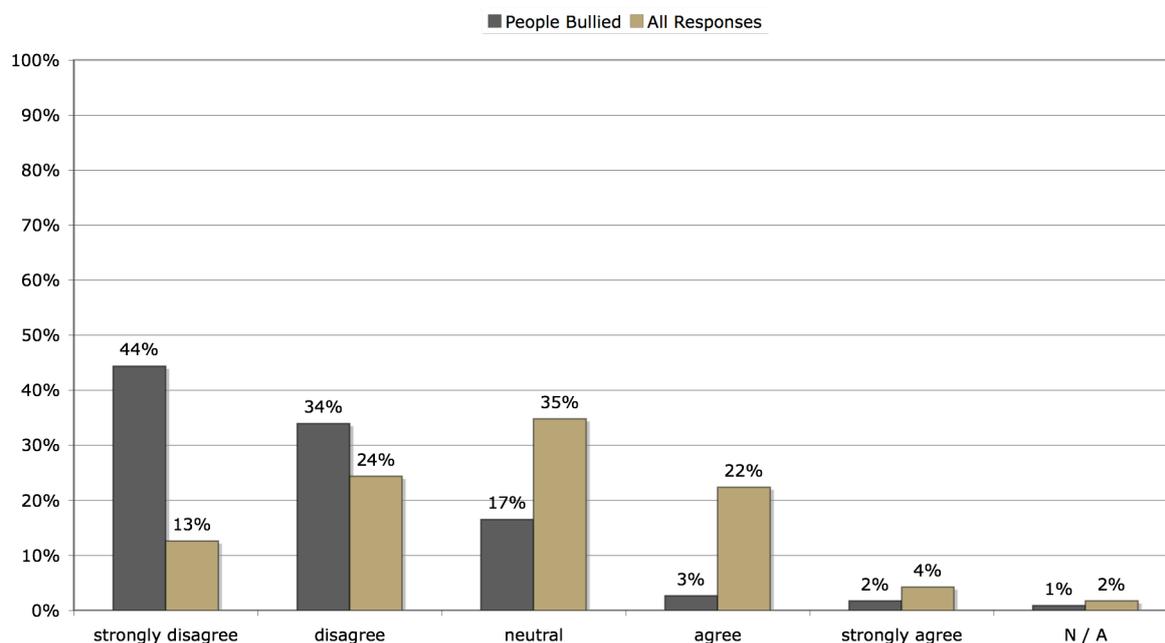
I rarely get stressed at work



Bullying is an indicator of poor performance management

People who have experienced bullying are emphatic about how they feel about their charity's ability to deal with poor performance. Only 5% of them agreed that their charity handles this well, compared to 26% overall.

Poor performance is dealt with effectively at this charity



Where are the bullies?

According to this research, bullying appears to be more prevalent in charities with less than 25 staff. 31% of those bullied worked for these smallest of organisations. The comparable figure for the sample as a whole was 16%.

Bullies were under-represented in charities with between 26 and 200 employees.

In the larger charities, with over 200 staff, the prevalence of bullying was around the average. In these organisations, there is some anecdotal evidence that bullying is more likely to occur in smaller regional out-posts than at a head office.

Who gets bullied?

What type of person would you expect to get bullied at work? The shrinking violet covering in the corner of the office? If so, then the findings of this research might surprise you.

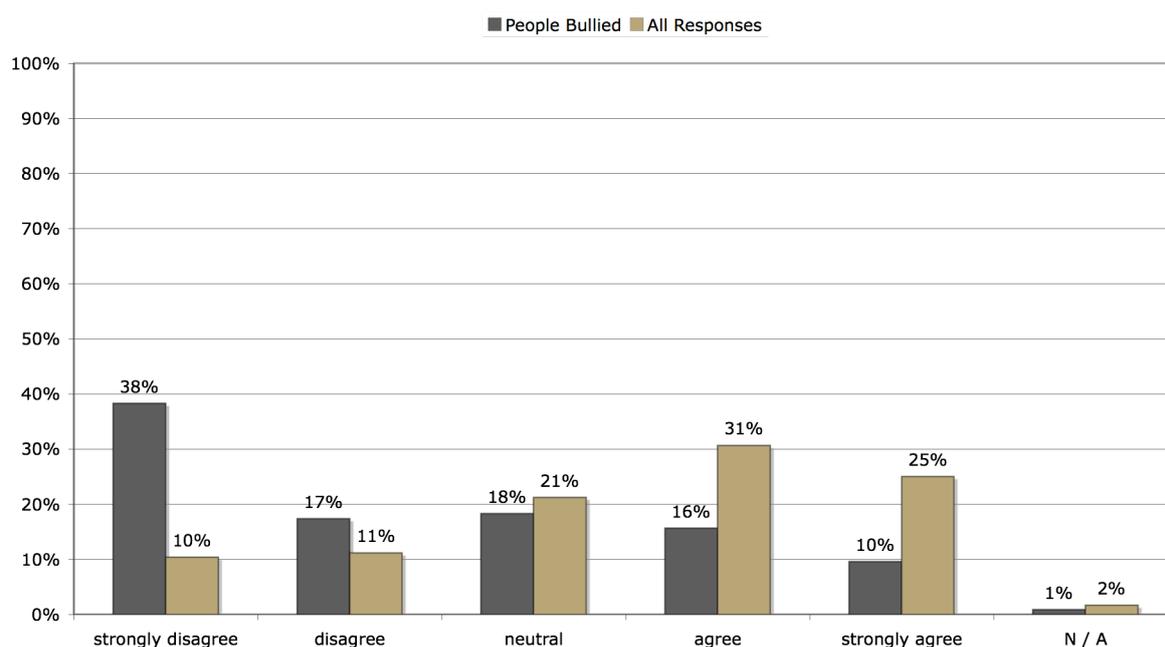
The individual most likely to find themselves the subject of bullying in the voluntary sector is the senior manager. 16% of senior managers completing the survey had been bullied in the last twelve months, compared with 9% of support staff, 11% of middle managers and 13% of other executive staff.

People bullied are most likely to be in their thirties, but they are no more likely to be male than female. They are more likely to work in communications or campaigning, with the next most likely area being fundraising. If you want to avoid the bullies, the best place to be is in the HR department. You are 40% less likely to be affected by them there.

People who experience bullying don't want to hang around

More than half of the individuals who had experienced bullying are looking to leave their charity within the next 12 months. This compares with just 21% of all respondents.

I plan to be working for this charity in a year's time



Evidence of bullying also shows up in the reasons given by these individuals for wanting to leave their charity. 19% give their main reason for wanting to leave as 'their immediate manager', compared to only 4% of the survey as a whole. 23% cite 'wider management/organisational issues' as their main motivation for moving on, compared to 11% overall.

Bullying is less likely to affect new recruits or long-servers. The highest incidence of bullying is among staff with between one and three years service.

Messages for Senior Management

Survey respondents were asked:

If there was one thing you could tell your Senior Management Team or your Chief Executive and they were obliged to act on it, what would it be?

Here are some responses from individuals who had experienced bullying:

Communicate more effectively and listen to the staff

Talk to your teams and find out what actually goes on

Be consistent in how you treat staff

Remove the emphasis on hierarchy

You need to deal with and challenge poor performance in the organization

Don't condone bullying, it destroys people's lives

Deal with bullying between volunteers

They need to value and support staff more than they currently do

Be more open, transparent and inclusive in your decision making

Listen to everyone not just the managers

There is a culture of blame, buck passing and bullying in your organisation - leaving people too afraid to make decisions. Take responsibility for your part in it and recognise that staff development and support is the way to get the best from your staff. That retention of staff and development of skilled staff is crucial if you want to achieve loyalty and most importantly of all results. Lead by example.

Resources

We hope that this report will help charities to identify and stamp out this most debilitating of behaviours. We also need to remember that, as the Chartered Institute of Personnel (CIPD) puts it:

Tackling a difficult and complex issue like bullying at work is much more than having a policy in the staff handbook. It's not just about the absence of negatives, but about actively defining and promoting positive working relationships.

If you or your charity would like more information on this issue, the following resources are available:

- **Birdsong** is setting up a new *Positive Working Forum* in September 2008 to provide interested charity staff with a supportive setting to develop assertive behavioural skills. For more information call: Sam Attenborough on 01707 882958
- The **Andrea Adams Trust** provides practical support to individuals affected by workplace bullying. Visit: www.andreadamstrust.org
- The **Samaritans** run a series of courses for organisations, including their *WorkLife* programme that tackles stress in the workplace. For more information visit: samaritans.org
- The **Samaritans/nfpSynergy** report: *Stressed Out: A study of public experience of stress at work* is available at: www.nfpsynergy.co.uk
- The **CIPD** *Bullying at Work* guide (2005) is available at: www.cipd.co.uk
- The **UNISON** guidelines on *Bullying at Work* (2003) is available at: www.unison.org.uk

Birdsong Charity Consulting

People work best when they feel good about themselves - when they're enjoying their work, feeling motivated and appreciated. They don't work best when they feel stressed, over-worked and over-looked.

Healthy people create healthy organisations and Birdsong exists to help charities work more effectively with their people. We help charities to become thriving, vibrant organisations where people love to work.

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