

Bullying Kills -- What to Do?

Bullying in school, the workplace, the military, by parents, or in social interactions such as dating, shopping, and driving sometimes kills and always results in violence. The killing is not just limited to suicides and shootings, and participants can be students, adult workers, and military personnel. A bully habitually badgers and intimidates smaller or weaker people on a periodic basis. And, this behavior is often the cause of death, the destruction of hopes, embarrassment and ridicule, unprofitable time spent, infringement of one's rights, intimidation and harassment to name just a few. Bullying can be defined in many different ways, but is divided into four basic types of abuse – emotional (sometimes called relational), verbal, physical, and cyber. The statistics are astounding.

In Schools

70.6 percent of teens have seen bullying occurring in their schools.

In the results of a 2001 landmark study, *Student Reports of Bullying*, 432 gifted students in 11 U.S. states revealed that more than two-thirds of the eighth-graders had been bullied at school and nearly one-third harbored violent thoughts as a result. A 2002 report, *School Bullying*, released by the U.S. Secret Service concluded that bullying played a significant role in many school shootings. Graphs from *Bullying Statistics 2014* show 28 percent of U.S. students in grades 6-12 reportedly have experienced bullying or are feeling bullied. Experts agree that most incidences of bullying occur during middle school. 70.6 percent of teens have seen bullying occurring in their schools – and approximately 30 percent of young people admit to bullying themselves. “With so many students seeing what goes on, one has to wonder why bullying proliferates – especially since the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) reports that bullying stops within 10 seconds 57 percent of the time when someone intervenes.”

Recently, a boy scout shared with our congregation a suicide attempt he made because he had been bullied. He said as he placed his knife under his chin, “something” made him stop and he dropped the knife on the bathroom floor. When the knife hit the floor, the tip bent in a rounded formation so that the tip could not be used. His faith was restored, he reported the abuse, and later became friends with his former bully.

Last year, the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc, Theta Kappa Omega Atlantic City Chapter, partnered with Harambe Social Services to host the Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month workshop entitled “Love Me, Respect Me.” February is Teen Dating Violence Month. It is a national effort to raise awareness about abuse in teen and 20-something relationships and promote programs that prevent it. One of the many websites for preventing teen dating violence is “Love is Respect” at <http://www.loveisrespect.org/resources/teendvmonth/>. Consider looking for such an event in your area and attend with a teen.

In New Jersey, we have the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act to combat bullying in public schools throughout the state. First enacted in 2002 to protect specific groups of students against bullying for specific reasons such as discrimination, the updated 2010 bill protects all students, regardless of the purpose for bullying. Remember, these bullies will eventually seek and gain employment. Although the anti-bullying act does not cover the workplace, the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (NJLAD) offers this protection.

In the Workplace

48% of Americans are affected by bullying in the workplace.

Workplace bullying is the repeated, malicious, health-endangering mistreatment of one employee by one or more employees. The mistreatment is psychological violence, illegitimate conduct to prevent one from performing work well. Thus, an employer’s legitimate business interests are not met. The behavior is a risk, and sometimes violent risk, for the employer if ignored long enough. Bullying starts young with horrific results and if left unchecked, the bullies grow up to continue their devastation in the workplace. Bullies thrive at work because they can be charming, presentable, socially skilled, professionally successful and well-regarded by superiors. And despite employer policies that discourage and punish bullying, many workers manage to strategically abuse colleagues and still have successful careers. The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) 2014 survey, *2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey*, reported 48% of Americans are affected by bullying - 69% were male perpetrators and 31% were female perpetrators. The ten-page report shares graphs on causes, support for a law, what stopped the abuse, employer reactions, race, rank of the perpetrator, and bullying experience by gender.

Workplace bullying laws do not exist on the federal level nor in some states, but the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (NJLAD) and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) have remedies for workplace bullying when discrimination or harassment exist. Other states may also have this provision. Both employees and employers are at risk when bullying occurs. Examples follow.

Kansas enacted “the healthy workplace act; relating to abusive work environments; prohibiting certain acts and providing certain remedies for violations” in 2009. Employees found guilty can be ordered to stop and desist and may lose wages and employment. An employer found guilty could incur emotional distress damages up to \$25,000. [House Bill No. 2218]

EEOC shared they settled a disability discrimination lawsuit in which King Soopers in Denver was ordered to pay \$80,000 in 2011 to a mentally challenged employee who suffered repeated bullying and taunting because of his learning disability. Also, in its report “Retaliation – Making it Personal,” EEOC explained that *the act of retaliation is equivalent to revenge where a person perceives unfair treatment and attempts to restore equilibrium by taking the matter into his or her own hands. Organizations that foster a climate of aggression and bullying are more likely to have managers who abuse power and retaliate when claims are made.*

In the Military

Women serving in the U.S. military are more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire in Iraq.

Some argue that bullying in the military should be allowed because “soldiering” is different from other occupations. Soldiers expected to risk their lives should, according to them, develop strength of body and spirit to accept bullying. But, isn’t it the job of military trainers to build strength and spirit for “soldiering?” The United Kingdom Ministry of Defense defined bullying as: “...the use of physical strength or the abuse of authority to intimidate or victimize others, or to give unlawful punishments.” This is not building the “strength and spirit” of our soldiers. In 2000, the United Kingdom Defense Training Review addressed many of these issues found in a number of deaths, supposedly by suicide at Princess Royal Barracks.

In the U.S., the Tailhook scandal was a series of incidents where more than 100 U.S. Navy and United States Marine Corps aviation officers were alleged to have sexually assaulted 83

women and 7 men, or otherwise engaged in “improper and indecent” conduct at the Las Vegas Hilton during the 35th Annual Tailhook Association Symposium from September 8 to 12, 1991. The assaults weren’t one or two officers against one soldier, but up to 40 officers against one victim. In addition, during the investigation, t-shirts were worn by officers saying that “Women are Property” and sexual assault reports included bullying of women in the hallway trying to get to their rooms. One of the victims had considered suicide especially after the retaliation but instead resigned from the Navy. As a result of the investigative findings of sexual assault and bullying, the careers of fourteen admirals and over 300 officers ended, and the Rear Admiral Duvall M. Williams, Jr resigned.

This horrendous behavior is not limited to the Navy. Since revisiting the Tailhook scandal, rape rings were found in the Army and assault groups were reported in other branches. In May 2013, California Representative Jane Harmon reported at a news conference during the Tailhook investigations that “women serving in the U.S. military are more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire in Iraq.”

What to Do?

Suicide, shootings, job abandonment, AWOL should not be options for victims of bullying. Although no federal law directly addresses bullying, in many cases, bullying overlaps with discriminatory harassment laws when it is based on protected classes (race, national origin, color, sex, age, disability, religion, or retaliation). State and local lawmakers have taken action to prevent bullying and protect children and some states have extended this protection for employees. The federal government is using existing discrimination and harassment laws to remedy bullying.

The world declared war on bullies in 1979 (Sweden) and America entered the fight in 1999. In poll after poll, Americans have voiced concern over the erosion of civility in modern life and human interactions, in government, business, media and online. We cannot exist in a culture that allows bullying in any way. We are human beings. School officials, employers, and the military have a legal duty of care to ensure that students and workers are protected from anything that may cause harm. Legal support is available. What else can we do?

What to do? For starters, we – all of us - can engage in open discussions about bullying in the same manner and frequency that we discuss the weather. All victims and potential victims need to know they are not alone and have viable options that will not cause them harm. Use

examples and resources in this article to begin discussions, be aware of the signs, report aggressions immediately, and design training. Author articles for publications and broadcasting and post in social media. Google the term “bullying” to discover more remedies. Don’t justify what you see and hear that borders on or is blatantly bullying. Report it! Let the experts decide. Shout out to the world that bullying will stop, and America knows how to stop it!

Joyce Pratt, Freelance Writer - Oneal Group

Sources:

AKA Theta Kappa Omega February 8, 2014 workshop entitled “Love Me, Respect Me,” for the Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month.

Bullying Statistics 2014. NoBullying.com.

Diversity & Inclusion Means Zero Tolerance for Bullying posted by Barbara Frankel 5/11/12 for Diversity Inc.

EEOC, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. *King Soopers (EEOC v. Dillon Companies, Inc.)* and *Retaliation – Making it Personal.* [www.eeoc.gov]

Employer’s responsibilities. Health and Safety Executive (HSE). United Kingdom.

Excerpts from The Bully at Work by Gary Namie, PhD & Ruth Namie, PhD, and bullyinginstitute.org.

New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, also known as P.L. 2010, Chapter 122.

Revisiting the Military’s Tailhook Scandal by Michael Winerip May 13, 2013, The New York Times. [Narrative and Newsreel]

School Bullying. National Conference of State Legislatures, Washington, D.C. (retrieved 7 December 2007).

Student Reports of Bullying, results from the 2001 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, US National Center for Education Statistics.

“The Culture of Bullying: Loss of Civility at School, Work, Politics” by Sam Ali, Diversity Inc., November 1, 2010.

Why Bullies Thrive at Work by Dana Wilkie on June 17, 2013 for shrm.org.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia:

Bullying

Tailhook scandal

Written Testimony of Dexter R. Brooks, Associate Director Federal Sector Programs, EEOC. Meeting of June 17, 2015: Retaliation in the Workplace: Causes, remedies, and Strategies for Prevention.

Zero tolerance in Army for bullying, hazing, August 13, 2012, by David Vergun, [News Archives](#)