

Full Length Research

Staff education and respectful workplace Policies

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This review aimed to examine respectful workplace policy in Canada and how its provincial counterparts make available staff education to resolve or diminish workplace bullying. The study was based on the assumption that to understand the delivery of staff education, the broader context of respectful workplace policy building must be fully considered. Findings established that the Canadian government mandated that each province is responsible for ensuring that each of its health authorities or regions establishes Respectful Workplace Policy. Several government regulations exist to help employers with policy-making that direct harassment and bully-free work environment. Other findings from the study of 10 provinces and three territories suggested these complaints of bullying did not have a separate policy; as an alternative, bullying was placed as a subgroup of ancillary behaviours, harassment, discrimination and violence. This review can help all parties better understand the responsibility of staff education together with policy-making and conflict resolution necessary to resolve complaints of workplace bullying. This quantitative descriptive study found differences in respectful workplace policy across provinces as to how policy defines and refers to workplace bullying.

Key words: Bullying, harassment, violence, discrimination, mobbing

INTRODUCTION

A significant dimension of a respectful workplace policy is the delivery of staff education. In many hospitals, it is the responsibility of nurse educators to teach nurses about workplace compliance and their legal obligations related to preventing or minimizing workplace bullying. The problem is that healthcare organizations throughout Canada make use of various policies, guidelines, and teaching methods to teach, support, and direct nurses toward resolving workplace conflict in respectful and constructive ways. The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study is to examine respectful workplace policies for similarities and differences in teachable bullying content. An examination of respectful workplace policies should reveal no difference in bullying content. Reviews of bullying reveal that multi-realities exist for this phenomenon. As an old phenomenon, bullying is situated between perpetrator and target, and as a new phenomenon bullying is constituted by an unbalance of organizational power (Osborne, 2009). In order to provide a thematic overview in

which this study differentiates bullying from other workplace behaviours; harassment, discrimination, violence, and mobbing are defined:

Bullying

Foremost, bullying stands apart from other workplace behaviours by its characterization. The province of Quebec first described bullying in Canada as “Any vexatious behavior in the form of repeated and hostile or unwanted conduct, verbal comments, actions or gestures that affect an employee's dignity or psychological or physical integrity and that results in a harmful work environment for the employee” (Canada Safety Council, 2005). Island Health (2013) defined bullying as “any repeated or systematic behaviour, physical, verbal or psychological including shunning, which would be seen by a reasonable person as intending to belittle, intimidate, coerce or isolate another person” (Canada Safety Council, 2005).

Saskatoon Health Region (2011) identified bullying as “repeated, health harming mistreatment by one or more people by verbal and/or physical abuse, threats, intimidation, humiliation, work interference, sabotage, exploitation of known vulnerability, or combination of any of the above” (Canada Safety Council, 2005). According to Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health (2014) its harassment guidelines classified bullying as a type of harassment in which “repeated conduct adversely affects a worker’s psychological or physical well being” (Canada Safety Council, 2005).

Harassment

The term harassment came to the forefront in a landmark piece of civil rights legislation originating in the United States which supported workplace harassment as a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History, 2006). Harassment is an act committed by a person that makes another feel uncomfortable, offended, intimidated, or oppressed. Types of harassment include sexual, age, disability, gender, national origin, race, ambient, and religion. The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2013) suggested that harassment occurs when someone makes unwelcome remarks or jokes about your race, religion, sex, age, and disability. New Brunswick’s South-East Regional Health Authority (2011) described harassment as a form of discrimination or an expression of abuse of authority and power that is unwanted and unwelcome. According to the British Columbia Human Rights Code harassment is “a form of discrimination in which a person or group is subjected to unwelcome comments or behaviours that is insulting or demeaning, or is otherwise offensive” (British Columbia Ministry of Justice, 2013). The Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, which prohibits discrimination, define it as: “Every person has a right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his human rights and freedoms, without distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age except as provided by law, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap” (Chainey, 2010).

Discrimination

Discrimination as characterized by the Manitoba Human Rights Code is “a course of offensive and unwelcome conduct or comment made on the basis of a Protected Characteristic” (Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, 2010). McMurray (2011) reported that discrimination against men in nursing related to public opinion; males occupying traditional female nursing roles; conversely women in medicine was more favourably accepted.

Violence

Violence on the other hand means threatening, attempting, or

actually applying physical force to a person that can cause an individual injury or uttering threatening statements that cause the worker to feel at risk of injury (Workers Compensation Board of PEI, 2011). Spentor, Zhou and Xin (2014) reported on two types of violence; physical and non-physical. Physical violence was most prevalent in geriatric facilities, emergency departments, and psychiatric units; whereas, non-physical occurred in all nursing units excluding geriatric.

Mobbing

Mobbing (ganging up on someone or psychic terror) occurs “where the victim is subjected to a systematic stigmatizing through, inter alia, injustices (encroachment of a person's rights), which after a few years can mean that the person in question is unable to find employment in his/her specific trade” (Leymann, 1990). Mobbing can occur for many years and only become apparent when one of the parties achieves the upper hand. Unresolved incidences of mobbing can lead the nurse toward long-term sick leave, absenteeism, relocation of employment that can result in the nurse receiving ungainly work, an illness resulting in psychiatric care, or employee migration.

A review of the literature revealed that in 1867, the Canadian government delegated responsibility for healthcare and education to its provinces (Parliament of Canada, 2012). Each provincial jurisdiction is responsible for delivery of its healthcare and education in which they receive funding from the federal government through transfer payments. Because of increasing awareness of workplace bullying, harassment, and violence, the federal government has mandated that each of its ten provinces and three territories develop policy pertaining to a respectful workplace (Government of Canada, 2011). The policies must mention staff support, education, and training.

Respectful workplace policies are often derived from government acts and regulations. Because of the numerous acts and regulations, respectful workplace education may be mutually reinforcing or interdependent throughout Canada. Table 1 provides a summary of various acts (n = 31), codes (n = 10), commissions (n = 6), regulations (n = 7), coalition (n = 1), charters (n = 3), and policies (n = 2) that contribute to make respectful workplace policy. Also noted in the literature is that federal and provincial health care systems have developed respectful workplace policy mutually exclusive of one another (Alberta Health Services, 2013; SHR, 2011). Mainly, information on Respectful workplace policy spotlights harassment, violence, disrespect, and discrimination in relationship to racial, sexual, and gender issues (Miedema et al., 2009; Vessey et al., 2010). Missing from the literature is inclusive data linking respectful workplace to reduced workplace bullying.

Options for resolving deadlocks or impasses resulting from workplace bullying include conciliation, a conciliation board, mediation, arbitration, and alternate dispute resolution (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013). The Government of

Table 1. Summary of acts, codes, commissions, regulations, coalition, charters, and policies used to establish respectful workplace policy.

British Columbia (BC) Human Rights Code of British Columbia (Protection from Discrimination) BC Human Rights Coalition Occupational Health and Safety Regulation Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms	Government of Canada Canadian Human Rights Act Canadian Human Rights Commission Canadian Labour Code Violence Prevention in the Workplace Regulations New Brunswick (NB) New Brunswick Human Rights Act Criminal Code New Brunswick Health Rights Commission	Ontario (ON) Occupational Health and Safety Act Ontario Human Rights Code Bill 168 Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act (Violence and Harassment in the Workplace) Ontario Human Rights Tribunal Ontario Human Rights Commission
Alberta (AB) Alberta Human Rights Act Alberta Human Rights Commission Criminal Code (Canada) Health Professions Act (Alberta) Occupational Health and Safety Act and Regulations (Alberta)	Newfoundland (NL) Article 4 of the Newfoundland and Labrador Occupational Health and Safety Act Articles 22 & 23 of the Newfoundland and Labrador Occupational Health and Safety Regulations Canadian Human Rights Act	Quebec (QC) Civil Code of Quebec Occupational Health and Safety Legislation Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms
Saskatchewan (SK) The Public Service Act Occupational Health/Safety Act Corrective Discipline Policy Occupational Health and Safety Regulations The Public Service Act The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code of Conduct	Nova Scotia (NS) Nova Scotia Human Rights Act Civil Service Act and Regulations Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission Occupational Health and Safety Act Criminal Code of Canada	Prince Edward Island (PE) Provincial Human Rights Act Prince Edward Island Human Rights Commission Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Employment Standards Act
Manitoba (MB) The Manitoba Human Rights Code Civil Service Regulations The Civil Service Act Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act Personal Health Information Act The Workplace Safety/Health Act Labour Relations Act (Manitoba)	Nunavut (NU) Workplace Harassment Policy Nunavut Human Rights Act Canadian Human Rights Act Nunavut Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Nunavut Public Service Act and Regulations	Yukon (YU) Yukon Human Rights Act Canadian Human Rights Act Public Service Act Northwest Territory (NT) Northwest Territories' Human Rights Act Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission Workers' Safety & Compensation Commission

Note: (n = 60) Adapted from provincial and federal government websites

Canada (2011) reported that alternate dispute resolution is more cost effective in both time and money for resolving workplace conflict. Yamada (2011) suggested that dispute resolution is more constructive and acceptable when used in situations that include workplace bullying. Dispute resolution includes starting with a problem, gathering general information, coming together and making an agreement, identifying what works and what did not, and use learning goals that ask questions and identifies the parties concerns (Stewart, 1983).

Establishing rules and regulations do not entirely alleviate the problem of disrespectful workplace behaviours; instead, nurse educators need to support and teach nurses about the value of supporting an organizational culture with standards and values against bullying. An important component of implementing a respectful workplace learning plan is carrying

out organizational values, goals, and objectives identified in the respective workplace policy. Figure 2 presents the essential steps taught by a nurse educator for informally and formally reporting bullying in the workplace; making, resolving, presenting and investigating complaints, resolution, and evaluation.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2012) reported that 40% of Canadians have experienced workplace bullying on a weekly basis. In 2008, the Government of Canada introduced regulations to prevent violence in the workplace and these regulations protect the fundamental right of workers and employers (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2011). Under the Canada Labour Code “Every Canadian worker has the right to be treated with dignity and respect”. Contrary to realizing a lessening of bullying behaviour in the

Table 2. Responsibility of employer and employee for resolving workplace bullying.

Managing Bullying	Responsibilities
Employer educates all employees about discrimination and harassment, its prevention, and eradication using Respectful Workplace Policy and Human Right Legislation	Supervisor, Manager, Director, Physician Leader or Executive are responsible for providing employees with knowledge of Respectful Workplace Policy
Human Resources Consultants	Guides managers through the application of the policy Provides coaching, in-service training, and uses internal or external expert intervention to bring knowledge to the workplace
Conflict Management Program Coordinator	Shares responsibilities with Human Resources Consultants. Receives complaint initiated through provincial Human Rights Tribunal. Appoints qualified internal and external mediators.
Executive Director of People and Organizational Development	Decides whether time limits for filing formal complaints should be extended Approve the engagement of an investigator or mediator for formal complaints of harassment. Handles the appeal process (written and received within 30 days of the decision)

workplace, healthcare providers are witnessing an increase in these actions among their employees (Canadian Institute of Health Research, 2012). For example, reporting co-workers for observed breaches in policy and procedure, break in isolation protocols, improper hand washing technique, unfinished patient care, and incomplete documentation. Other bullying behaviours include withholding information, undermining the value systems of others, using positions of power to control the actions of others, yelling at co-workers, and placing others under pressure to meet impossible deadlines (Civil Service Commission, 2014; Rucker, 2008, 2012). These repeated, and unwanted unconstructive interactions, power disparities, and actions can negatively affect the nurse’s performance, patient outcomes—and loss of the nurses’ sense of worth (Dawan, et al., 2014; Hutchinson & Jackson, 2013; Rucker, 2008). According to Lee and Chang (2012) and Zelek and Phillips (2003) a paradigm shift needs to occur whereby nurses move away from their rite of passage, eating their young, and negative vertical/horizontal behaviours that are no longer accepted as the norm but as bullying. However, when it comes to bullying nurses are without doubt victims of their social order, power imbalances, and chain of command.

Lovell and Lee (2011) and Stagg et al. (2013) suggested that caring for nurses affected by bullying is a huge burden for the healthcare industry. The burden is seen both financially and loss of worker productivity, reaffirming the need for staff education to reduce incidences of bullying. Accreditation Canada noted that Stanton Territorial Health Authority, North West Territories (NT) has addressed the issue of bullying by adding a model of workplace bullying to its respectful workplace training program (Stanton Territorial Health

Authority, 2011). For this report Table 2, provides the employer and employee with a support framework to pursue when teaching staff about seeking resolution from workplace bullying (Newfoundland Labrador Canada, 2013; VIHA, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

The research question is to what extent, if any, do respectful workplace policies differ in bullying content? Thus, to determine the extent of bullying content on the dependent variable, respectful workplace policies, the null and alternate hypotheses would be:

H₀: There is no difference between bullying content in respectful workplace policies.

H_A: There is a difference between bullying content in respectful workplace policies.

The concepts used to understand how nurse educators inform nurses relative to workplace bullying are depicted in Figure 1. These steps include (a) developing and implementing reporting procedures; (b) developing and implementing complaint procedures; (c) educating managers and nurses, and (d) evaluating and annually reviewing outcomes. In this study, respectful workplace policies were analyzed using a quantitative content analysis methodology. Neuman (2003) defined content analysis as “a technique for examining information, or content, in written or symbolic material” (p. 61). This methodology was used to examine and study

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics: Frequency and percents between respectful workplace policy and its subject matter.

Category	Population > 1,000,000		Population < 1,000,000	
	f	%	f	%
Awareness	2	14.29	2	14.29
Processes/Procedures	3	21.43	3	21.43
Support/Promote/Facilitate	2	14.28	4	14.29
Complying with Legislative requirements	1	7.14	1	7.14
Prevention/Reducing Risk	0	35.71	5	0
Definitions and Defining behaviours	2	0	0	14.29
Duties and Responsibilities	4	7.14	1	28.57
Total	14	100	16	100

Note: n = 13.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U-test measures of relationship between bullying and harassment content.

Parameter	Z-score	P-value	U-value	Critical value	Significant
Ordinal by ordinal Bullying and harassment	-2.8838	0.00398	18	33	$P \leq 0.05$

systematically content information relative to teaching staff about respectful workplace policy.

A non-probability purposive sampling was selected from a list ($N = 620$) of Canadian health systems, regions, authorities, faculties, and training centers (CIHI, 2014; Definitive Healthcare, 2014). One policy was selected from each of the ten provinces and three territories using a table of random digits for a sample size ($n = 13$). The confidence level was 95% with an alpha set at .05. Inclusion criteria incorporated only English language publications, and exclusion was publications lacking bullying content. Only policy dated from 2009 and later was examined for similarities and differences relevant to workplace bullying. The intended audience for the policies were nurses.

Over a period of six months, examiners read the policies and analyzed them according to a scale based on the four intents. The intents included developing and implementing a reporting procedure, developing and implementing a complaints procedure, educating managers and nurses, and evaluating and annually reviewing outcomes. Policies were classified as no material, minimal material, relevant, or not relevant to the intended audience. The data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics described frequency distribution and themes in the data, whereas inferential statistics explained conclusions about different groups of policy content.

RESULTS

Findings from the content analysis found information varied in ways that healthcare regions throughout Canada used respectful workplace policy as an intermediary for providing staff education to employees. Descriptive statistics in Figure 3

presented key subject matter used by nurse educators; (a) awareness (b) measures (c) supports (d) legal compliance (e) prevention (f) classifications and (g) commitments for outlining individual roles and responsibilities that create and support a respectful workplace. Figure 4 presented and described a content overview of the organization, staff education, management, and employee's workplace accountabilities. Accountabilities varied from organization to organization. Some organizations held the employee responsible for his or her conduct, whereas, others gave the responsibility to managers to ensure and provide a respectful workplace environment. Staff education varied from training programs to staff completing on-line training courses. Table 3 presented frequency and percents between respectful workplace policy and its subject matter in provinces with population > 1,000,000 ($n = 6$) and provinces/territories with population < 1,000,000 ($n = 7$). Provinces with a population greater than 1,000,000 people included ON, QU, BC, AB, MN, SK and provinces/territories less than 1,000,000 people were NS, NB, NL, PE, NT, YU, and NU. Outcomes for provinces with population > 1,000,000 (35.1%) focused on preventing and reducing the risks of disrespectful workplace behaviours and (21.43%) spotlighted definitions and defining behaviours. Provinces with populations < 1,000,000 (28.5%) concentrated on duties and responsibilities relative to respectful workplace. All provinces and territories had equal concentration on awareness (14.9%), processes/procedures (21.43%), supporting, promoting, and facilitating a respectful workplace (7.14%), and complying with legislative requirements (14.29%).

The inferential statistic, Mann-Whitney, was used to test the hypothesis between bullying and harassment content. The Mann-Whitney U-Test, a nonparametric test, tested the hypothesis without making the assumption that values about the specific distribution of groups were normally distributed,



Figure 1. Steps for educating nurses about workplace bullying and respectful workplace

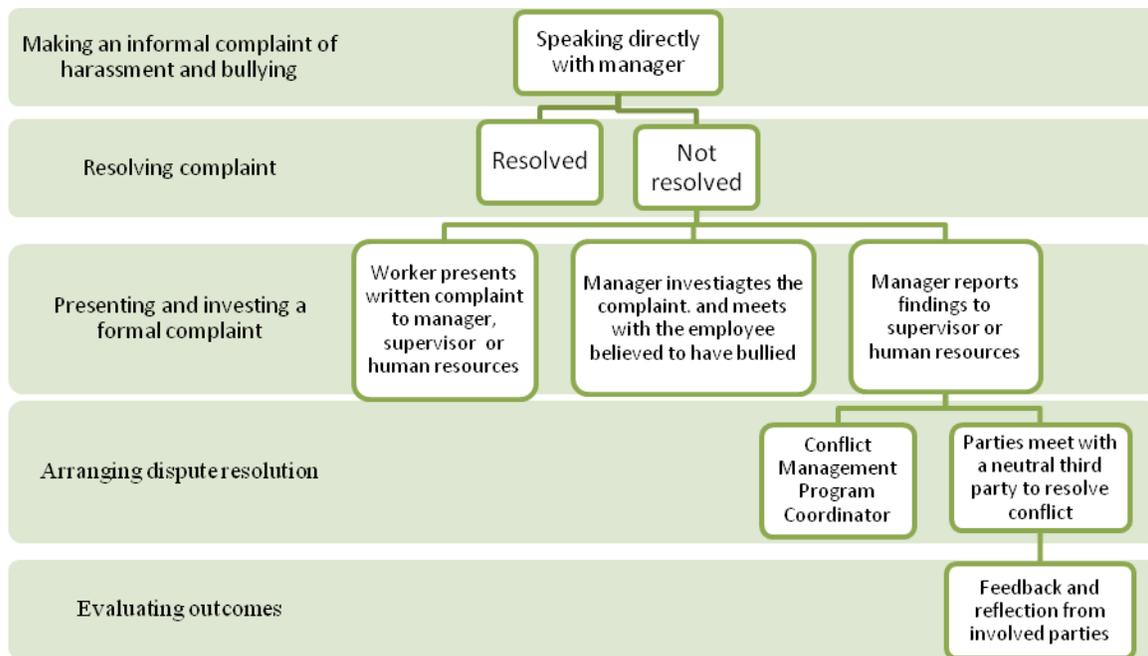


Figure 2. Bullying complaints resolution algorithm: Making, resolving, presenting and investigating a complaint, resolution, and evaluation. Adapted from Guidelines Workers Compensation Act © 2015 Work Safe BC (the Workers' Compensation Board of BC).

and that the probability of the observations were either by chance or dependent on other observations. In Table 4 Mann-Whitney U-Test was ($Z = -2.88, p = 0.004$) and U-value 18

between bullying and harassment content. The result is significant at $p \leq 0.05$ and did not happen by chance. Based on the findings, sufficient evidence existed to reject the null

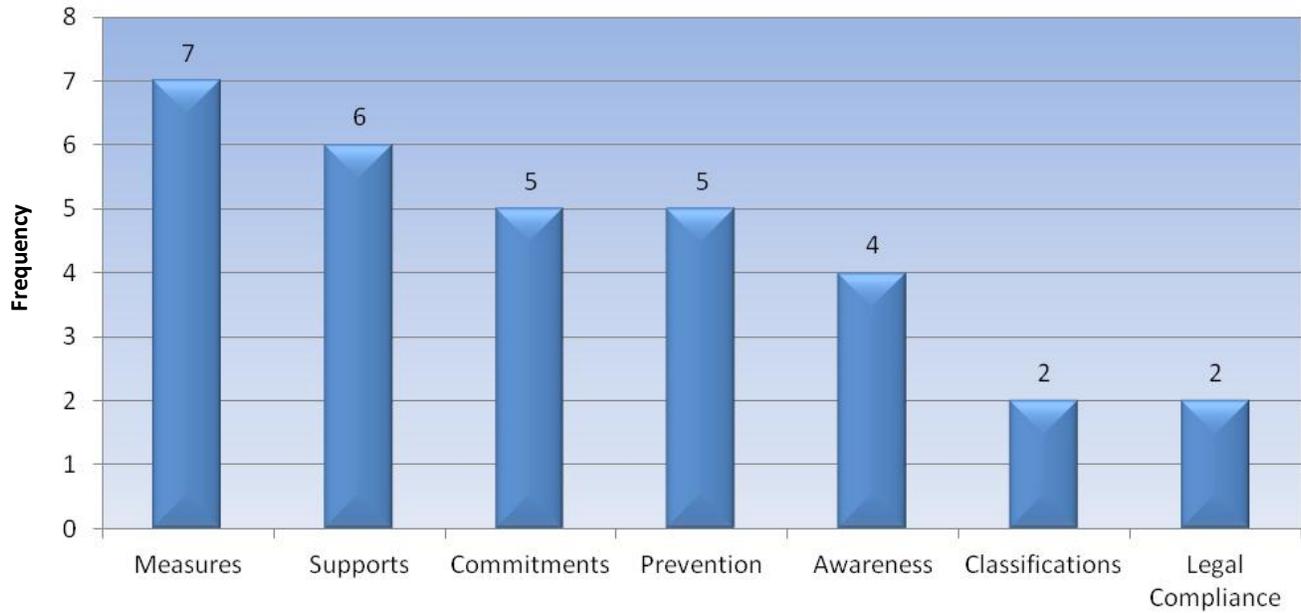


Figure 3. Respectful workplace content: Roles and responsibilities.

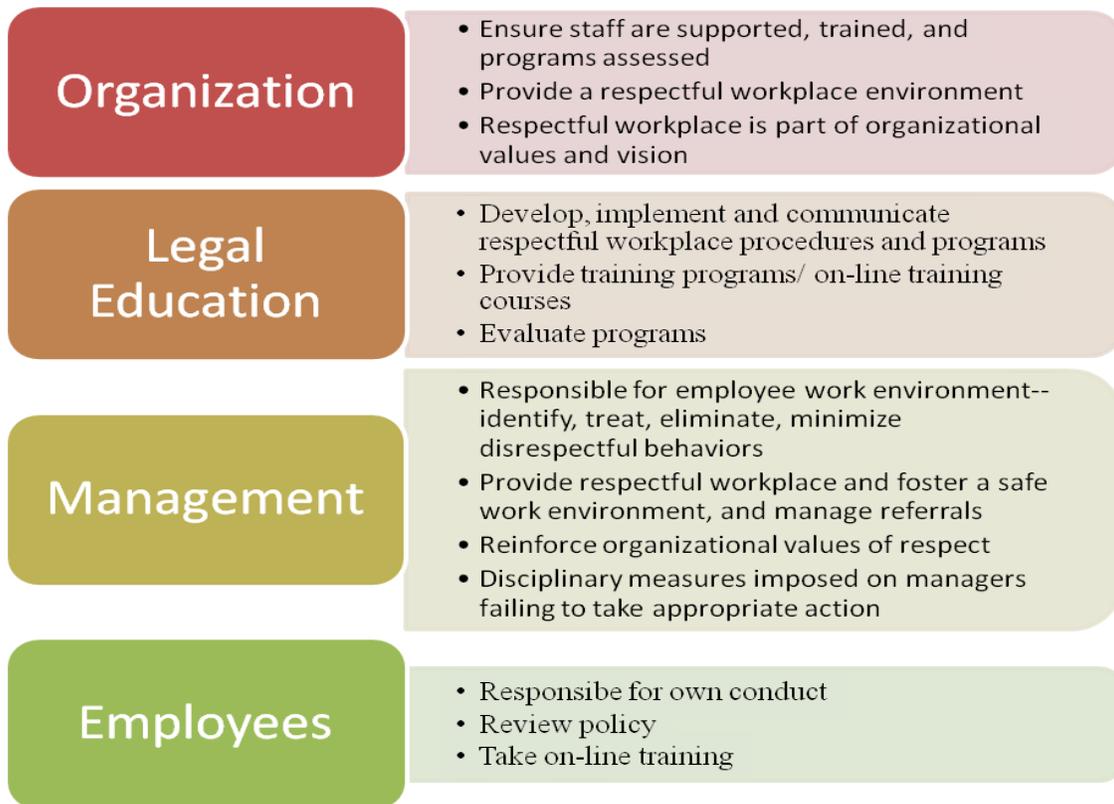


Figure 4. Themes: Responsibilities of the organization, legal education, management, and employees to ensure and provide a respectful workplace environment.

hypothesis that no difference exists in the type of content included in respectful workplace policy; the HA was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The most critical insights derived from this study was the lack of policy content available to nurse educators directing nurses, confronted with workplace bullying, as to how to search for information and seek resolution. Bullying content was often found embedded in a subgroup of ancillary behaviours; such as, harassment that described this behaviour as not respectful toward others. To best serve the nurses, nurse educator must design programs that help the nurse in identifying bullying situations. For example, addressing relational and cyber bullying when it happens, asking for support, speaking up, saving evidence, and knowing where to go for support and services to alleviate their apprehension and fears (Nova Scotia Canada, 2014). Despite insights gained from this analysis, it is important to acknowledge the limitation of the study. The scope of bullying is vast, and numerous definitions exist to describe bullying in the workplace. Second, many other definitions may be present that differ in interpretation, policy, and from province to province. Third, regulations pertaining to bullying may modify, vary, or alter as legislative acts change. Further research is needed to evaluate the impact of policy on bullying and explore the unexplored frontiers of bullying; for example, cyber bullying and relational bullying present in team nursing.

CONCLUSION

Strategies for respectful workplace education have its roots in regulations and policy. Each Canadian province and territory is responsible for regulating, creating and maintaining a respectful workplace policy that is supportive to both employers and employees. The importance of these policies must be conveyed to the employee and manager through staff education programs. Employees are encouraged to address disrespectful behaviour when it happens, support colleagues, refuse to participate in disrespectful behaviours, and observe self-awareness of their behaviour role. Managers are responsible for providing a respectful workplace that supports a safe work environment. Conversely, educating staff about respectful workplace behaviour continues to challenge the boundaries of ever changing delivery of staff education.

Conflict of interest

Author has none to declare.

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