

Personality clashes not the cause of workplace harassment

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While it may be easy to put workplace harassment down to personality conflicts, in reality workplace harassment is most often a product of the workplace itself, not the people in it.

This is the finding of research by University of South Australia (UniSA) researcher Dr Michelle Tuckey that was published today, 3rd March 2014, in the British Psychological Society's *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*.

According to Dr Tuckey more research needs to be done into the role organisations play in [workplace harassment](#), in order to address a critical issue with widespread social and economic impacts.

"Workplace harassment is bad for workers and bad for employers. For individuals, the adverse impacts include greater [mental health problems](#), more physical health complaints, greater burnout and, in the worst case scenario, suicide," Dr Tuckey says.

"Organisations also lose out – they face costly compensation costs, higher turnover, and lower job satisfaction and commitment to work.

"Research shows workplace harassment is generally not an issue of personality conflicts but rather a reflection of the whole organisational system. Yet our review of current studies done in the field found the overwhelming majority of harassment research has been conducted at the individual level, with 85 per cent of studies only including

information from one data source – most commonly the target or victim.

"We know a lot about the negative effects of harassment but in order to design better prevention initiatives, we need to discover more about the processes involved in harassment situations, as they play out over time, so that the best intervention points can be identified."

Dr Tuckey and colleague Annabelle Neall from UniSA's School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy have just completed a large-scale review of current workplace harassment literature over the last three decades.

Given that up to 12 per cent of employees may be exposed at any one time, the researchers are now calling for more research to be conducted to investigate the role of the organisation in enabling or preventing harassment within workplaces.

"Research looking into workplace harassment from multiple perspectives, such as witnesses and supervisors, will provide a better understanding of what factors are associated with workplace harassment," Dr Tuckey says.

"This will enable us to reach more accurate conclusions about preventing harassment and devise more effective strategies for its removal from the workplace.

"Prevention needs to take place at a number of levels. Organisations must have a clear bullying and harassment policy, and clear channels for resolving conflict before it escalates.

"In addition, senior management should build a culture that reinforces respectful behaviour and gives workers a voice to quickly resolve threats to mental health and well-being."

More information: "A methodological review of research on the antecedents and consequences of workplace harassment." Annabelle M. Neall, Michelle R. Tuckey. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. Article first published online: 3 Mar 2014. [DOI: 10.1111/joop.12059](https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12059)

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