University of South Australia | Centre for Workplace Excellence

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workplace bullying | what does the evidence say?

@DrTuckey #bullying #workplacebullying #healthywork

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my collaborators

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WORKPLACE BULLYING

Workplace bullying occurs when:

- A person or a group of people repeatedly behaves unreasonably towards a worker or a group of workers at work AND the behaviour creates a risk to health and safety

Bullying does not include reasonable management action carried out in a reasonable manner

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KEY MESSAGE #1

workplace bullying is a serious
WHS hazard

FOCUS OF EXISTING RESEARCH

Review of research design and methods from 234 primary empirical studies on workplace bullying and generalised harassment (studies conducted 1987-2012)

Steep increase in publications since 1987 ($r = .88$); 58% published since 2008

Main interest has been on outcomes followed by antecedents

Research focus	n (%)
Outcomes	105 (44.9%)
Antecedents	63 (26.9%)
Both outcomes and antecedents	45 (19.5%)
Process	20 (8.7%)

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OUTCOMES

Meta-analytic evidence from 66 studies (conducted 1989-2011)

Cross-sectional studies

Positive associations
- Mental health problems (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- Post-traumatic stress
- Generalized strain
- Psychosomatic symptoms
- Burnout
- Physical health problems
- Absenteeism

Negative associations
- Job satisfaction
- Organisational commitment
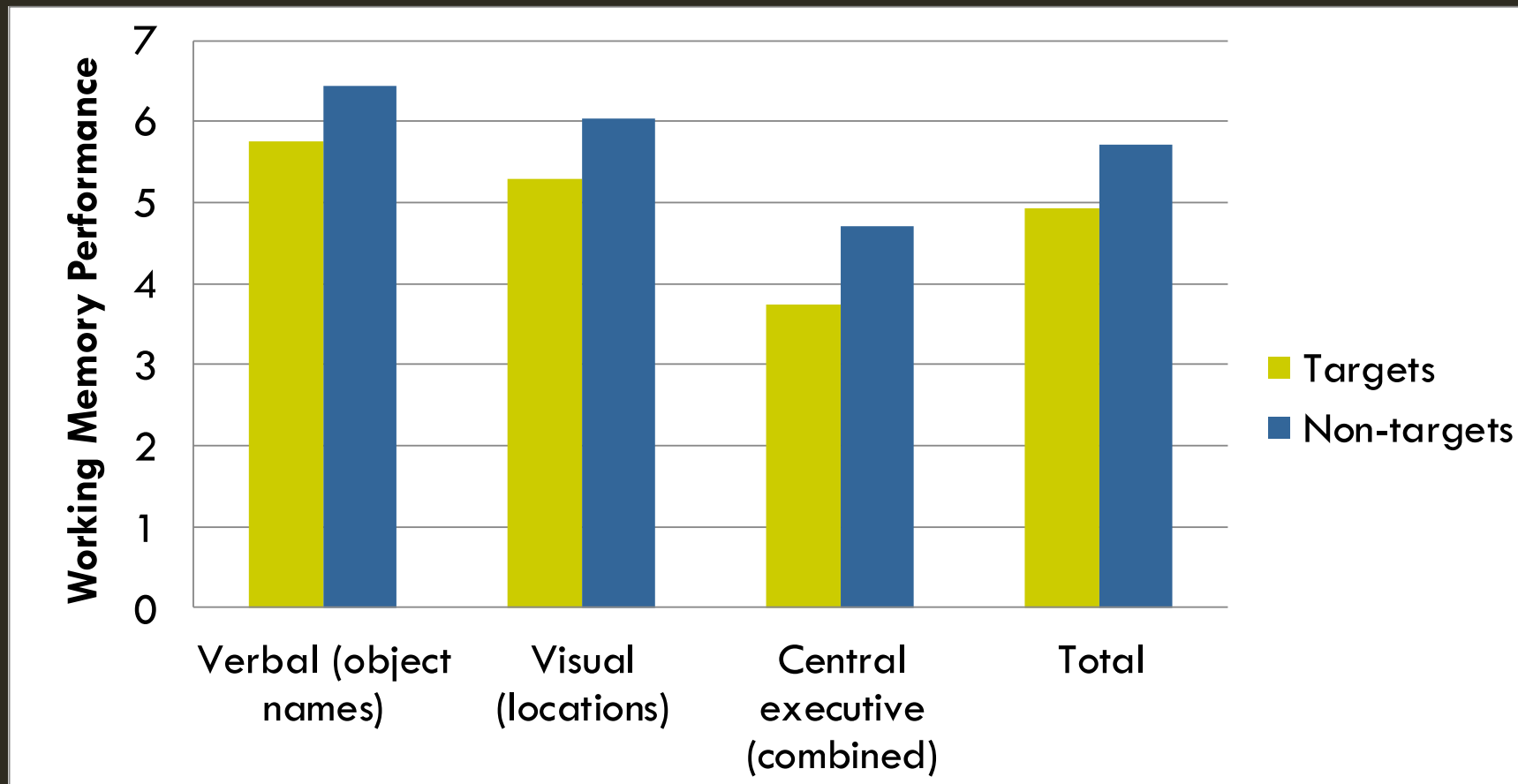
Longitudinal studies
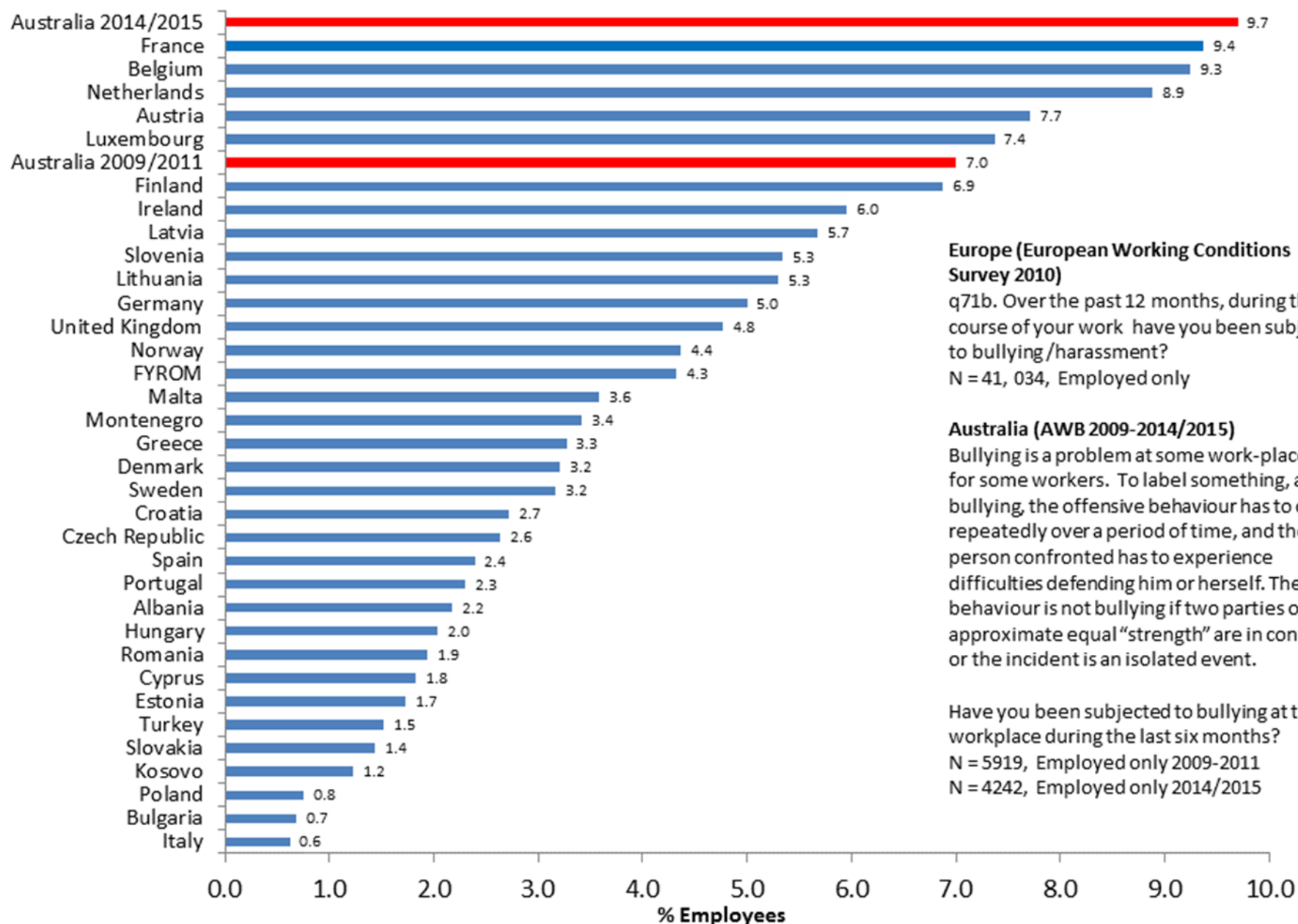
Lagged positive effects
- Bullying → Mental health problems
- Bullying → Absenteeism
- Mental health problems → Bullying

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OBJECTIVE COGNITIVE PERFORMANCE

Australian and European Bullying Rates

Country	% Employees
Australia 2014/2015	9.7
France	9.4
Belgium	9.3
Netherlands	8.9
Austria	7.7
Luxembourg	7.4
Australia 2009/2011	7.0
Finland	6.9
Ireland	6.0
Latvia	5.7
Slovenia	5.3
Lithuania	5.3
Germany	5.0
United Kingdom	4.8
Norway	4.4
FYROM	4.3
Malta	3.6
Montenegro	3.4
Greece	3.3
Denmark	3.2
Sweden	3.2
Croatia	2.7
Czech Republic	2.6
Spain	2.4
Portugal	2.3
Albania	2.2
Hungary	2.0
Romania	1.9
Cyprus	1.8
Estonia	1.7
Turkey	1.5
Slovakia	1.4
Kosovo	1.2
Poland	0.8
Bulgaria	0.7
Italy	0.6

% Employees

Europe (European Working Conditions Survey 2010)
q71b. Over the past 12 months, during the course of your work have you been subjected to bullying/harassment?
N = 41, 034, Employed only

Australia (AWB 2009-2014/2015)
Bullying is a problem at some work-places and for some workers. To label something, as bullying, the offensive behaviour has to occur repeatedly over a period of time, and the person confronted has to experience difficulties defending him or herself. The behaviour is not bullying if two parties of approximate equal "strength" are in conflict or the incident is an isolated event.

Have you been subjected to bullying at the workplace during the last six months?
N = 5919, Employed only 2009-2011
N = 4242, Employed only 2014/2015

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KEY MESSAGE #2

workplace bullying is an organisational problem

ANTECEDENTS

Meta-analytic evidence from 90 studies (conducted 1987-2005)

Organisational factors are more important than individual factors (e.g., self-esteem, negative affectivity) in determining bullying exposure

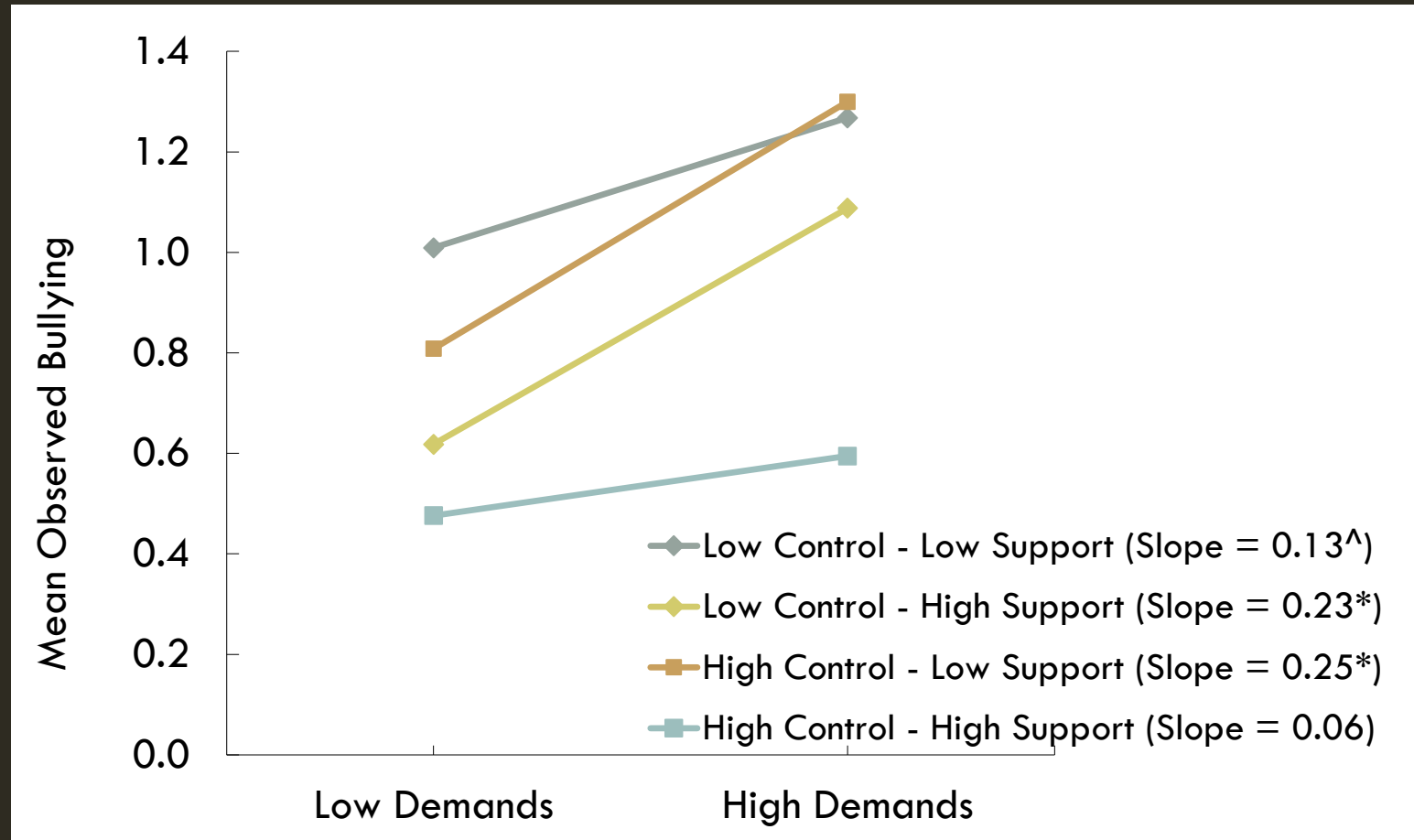Job demands increase the likelihood of being exposed to bullying
- Role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload
- Work constraints

Job resources decrease the likelihood of being exposed to bullying
- Autonomy (job control)

Source: Bowling, N. A. & Beehr, T. A. (2006). Workplace harassment from the victim's perspective: A theoretical model and meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91,* 998–1012.

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AN EXAMPLE   job demands, control, and social support

Mean Observed Bullying vs. Low Demands / High Demands

- Low Control - Low Support (Slope = 0.13^)
- Low Control - High Support (Slope = 0.23*)
- High Control - Low Support (Slope = 0.25*)
- High Control - High Support (Slope = 0.06)

Source: Tuckey, M.R., Dollard, M.F., Hosking, P.J., & Winefield, A.H. (2009). Workplace bullying: The role of psychosocial work environment factors. *International Journal of Stress Management, 16,* 215-232.

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A SYSTEMS ISSUE

Bullying arises primarily from 'stress' in the organisational system

- High demands, pressure, role stress
- Low control, lack of resources

Bullying is tolerated and reinforced depending on the culture

Workplace bullying

High demands

High pressure

Role stress

Cultural enablers

Low control

Lack of resources

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BULLYING BEHAVIOUR   symptom, not disease

Prevention needs to focus on the
root causes

Bullying behaviour

Poor work environments

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KEY MESSAGE #3

bullying is still tackled at the tip of the iceberg

Employer actions
Employee actions

- Monitor the impact of corrective measures

- Prepare staff to appropriately manage bullying complaints

    - Train staff in conflict management

- Identify and reduce the organisational risk conditions for bullying to provide a safe working environment

- Develop and publicise a bullying policy and code of conduct

- Appoint contact officers
- Set-up reporting mechanisms
- Investigate complaints and take corrective action

- Provide support to targets
- Report bullying when it occurs

- Educate employees about bullying and harassment
- Complete bullying awareness training
- Behave appropriately

See also: Vartia, M. & Leka, S. (2011). Interventions for the prevention and management of bullying at work. In S. Einarsen, Hl. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. Cooper (Eds.). Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace: Developments in Theory, Research, and Practice. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Employer actions
Employee actions

Systems focus

- Monitor the impact of corrective measures

- Prepare staff to appropriately manage bullying complaints

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Corrective measures

Preventive measures

- Appoint contact officers
- Set-up reporting mechanisms
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- Educate employees about bullying and harassment
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- Provide support to targets
- Report bullying when it occurs

Behaviour focus

KEY MESSAGE #4

bullying can be designed out through risk management

INFORMING RISK MANAGEMENT

Analysis of real-life workplace bullying complaints, to learn about how bullying manifests in organisational systems
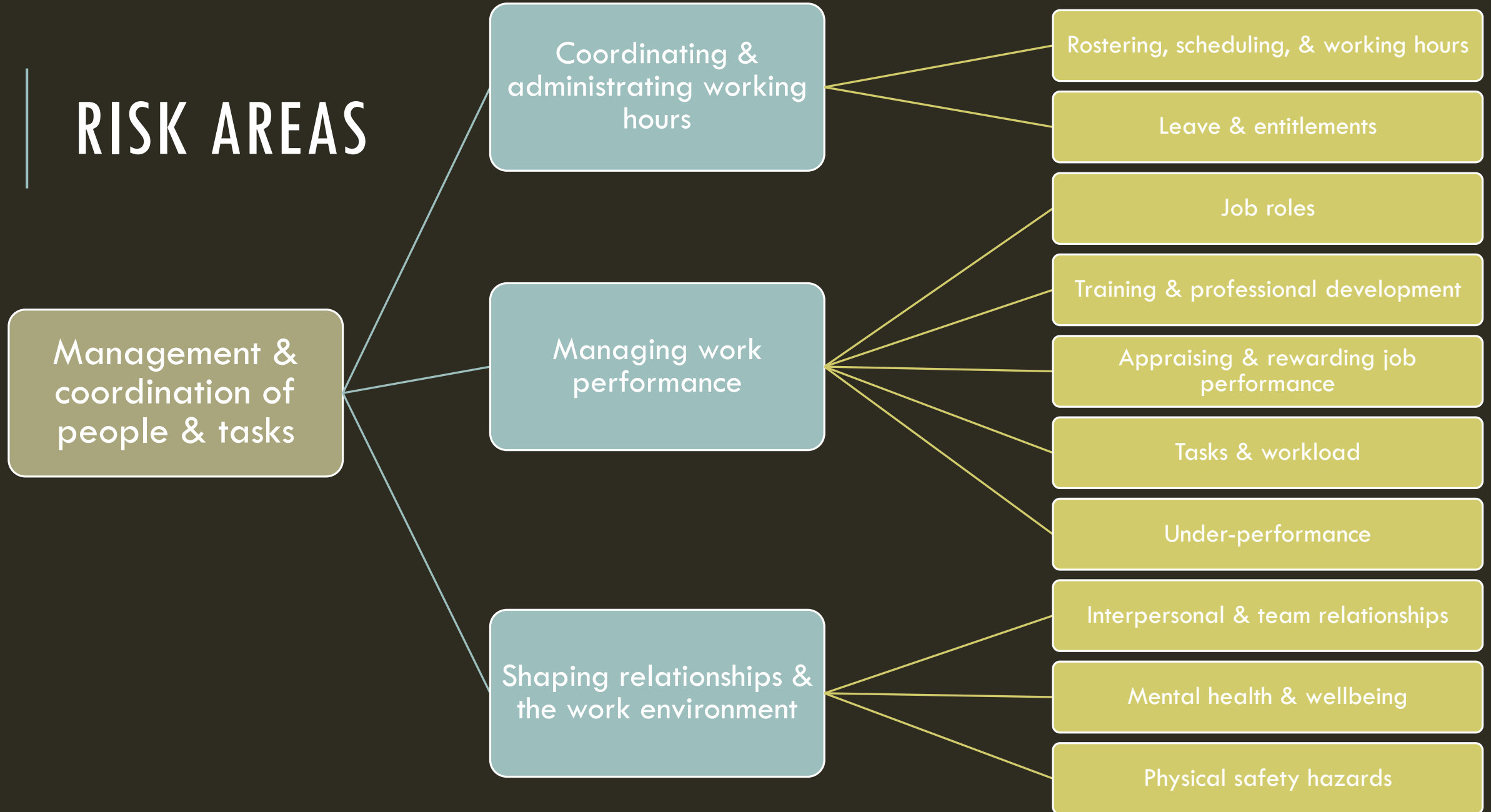
Sample of 342 workplace bullying complaints lodged with state work health and safety regulator SafeWork SA

Complaints were de-identified, transcribed, and released for analysis

Thematic analysis of all case materials
- Around 5,500 pages of information

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Ms Susan Purcell v Ms Mary Farah and Mercy Education Lt T/A Saint Aloysius College [2016] FWC 2308 (11 July 2016)

Ms Susan Purcell = Teacher, OHS Representative
Ms Mary Farah = School Principal

The Fair Work Commission found that 4 of 16 alleged incidents of bullying behaviour constituted repeated unreasonable behaviour creating a risk to the teacher's mental health

#8 Annual Performance Appraisal
Involving the new business manager, with whom Ms Purcell had a poor relationship, in the annual review

#13 Misinformation about LSL Payment
Telling Ms Purcell aggressively that her LSL payment had not been approved, when it had

#15 Induction Course
Requiring Ms Purcell to undertake induction training on return from LSL, with no basis in policy or practice
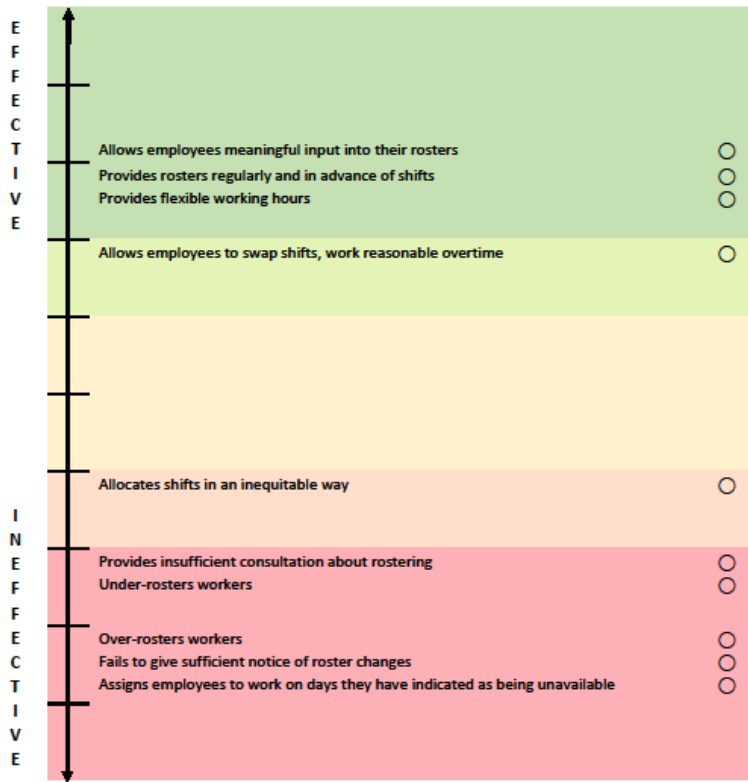
#16 Allocation of Mentor
Assigning a less experienced staff member as a mentor for Ms Purcell, without demonstrable need for mentoring

1. ROSTERING, SCHEDULING, AND WORKING HOURS
How work shifts are rostered, and how hours of work are assigned.

To complete this scale:

1) In the circles on the right-hand side, please place a tick ✓ next to ALL of the behaviours that are typically performed in your work unit when the job activity of rostering, scheduling, and working hours is carried out.

2) On the arrow on the left-hand side, please place a cross ✗ at the position on the arrow representing your views today about the general level of effectiveness or ineffectiveness in how rostering, scheduling, and working hours are managed in your work unit. *Remember, the behaviours should only be used a guide to help you decide the level of effectiveness or ineffectiveness with which this job activity is performed as a whole.*

E F F E C T I V E

Allows employees meaningful input into their rosters ○
Provides rosters regularly and in advance of shifts ○
Provides flexible working hours ○

Allows employees to swap shifts, work reasonable overtime ○

Allocates shifts in an inequitable way ○

I N E F F E C T I V E

Provides insufficient consultation about rostering ○
Under-rosters workers ○

Over-rosters workers ○
Fails to give sufficient notice of roster changes ○
Assigns employees to work on days they have indicated as being unavailable ○

Risk Assessment Tool For Psychosocial Hazards

CLARIFYING AND DEFINING JOB ROLES

The assignment of employee job roles and the clarity of information about employee job descriptions, responsibilities, and role expectations.

To complete this scale:

a. Click the boxes corresponding to **behaviours** that are typically performed when the job activity is carried out. That is, if you believe that this behaviour or action regularly occurs in your work team or work unit, please click the box that aligns with that behaviour or action.

b. Next, position your mouse over the vertical line next to the boxes, and click once – a large blue cross will appear. Using your mouse, move the cross up and down the vertical scale until it aligns with a point that accurately represents how effectively or ineffectively that **job activity** is performed.
In other words, if you feel that *overall*, that job activity is managed well or effectively, your cross should be positioned higher up on the scale, in the green zone. Alternatively, if you feel that overall that job activity is managed poorly or ineffectively, your cross should be positioned lower down on the scale, in the red or orange zone.

c. You also have the option to **add relevant comments** in the text box, if you would like to provide further information about your ratings or the job activity in general.

E F F E C T I V

☐ Provides clear information about job roles and expectations

☐ Reviews job description in consultation with employees

☐ Clarifies job roles and expectations on a regular basis

PREDICTING BULLYING AND WHS RISKS

Current exposure (survey)

- Workplace bullying

WHS outcomes (records)

- Patient safety, worker injuries, absenteeism, workplace bullying, violence, threatening behaviour

The tool can:

Discriminate amongst HIGH, MEDIUM, and LOW risk hospital wards

based on independent records

Predict concurrent exposure to workplace bullying

beyond other known systems risk factors

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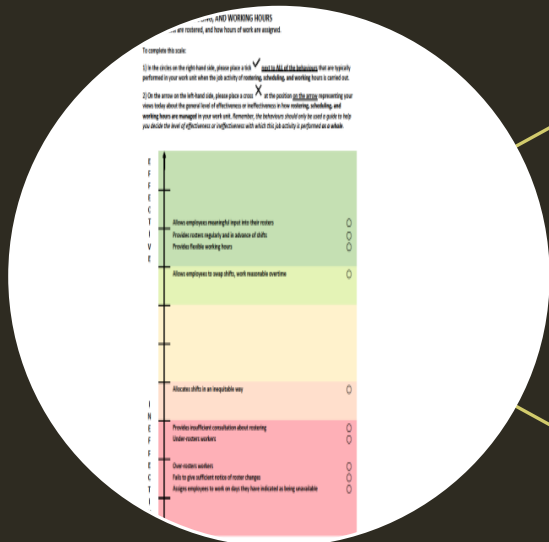
USING THE TOOL IN PRACTICE

WHS regulation	Targeted risk management	Systematic risk management	Initial assessment of complaints
SafeWork NSW	Correctional Services	Retail	Higher Education
WorkSafe Victoria	Health	Government	
SafeWork SA	Community Services		

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE   enhancing the regulatory response

Trial with SafeWork NSW

Response capability
- Objective assessment of risks
- Systems orientation
- Highlight areas for action

Response focus and efficiency
- Sharpens focus of investigation
- Contextualises the problem
- Quick and easy implementation

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INTERVENTION PROCESS

Diagnosis
- Risk audit tool
- Other data sources

Solutions
- Briefings
- Co-design workshops
- Priority action plan

Evaluation
- Intervention materials
- Stakeholder interviews
- Outcome measures

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RISK CONTROL STRATEGIES

Supervisory behaviour

▪ Skills to mange interactions in each of the risk contexts

Employee interpretations, expectations, and actions

▪ Assertiveness conversation skills

▪ Understanding of the job role and role of supervision

Organisational systems, structures, and processes

▪ Supervision and staffing models

▪ Selection and induction of supervisors

▪ Formal performance appraisal system

▪ Performance targets for supervisors (and workers)

▪ Role descriptions

▪ Process of workload and task allocations

▪ Communication processes and forums

▪ Opportunities for employee consultation and input

▪ Decision-making points / authorities

▪ Mechanisms to resolve concerns in the risk contexts

Coordinating & administrating working hours

Managing work performance

Shaping relationships & the work environment

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TAKE HOME MESSAGES

There is rigorous evidence that bullying has a range of negative effects for workers and organisations

Anti-bullying policies and bullying awareness training are important but not sufficient for bullying prevention – they focus on the tip of the iceberg

A substantial amount of bullying in organisations takes place through day-to-day people and task management activities

Organisational risk factors for bullying (the root causes at the bottom of the iceberg) can be risk managed to 'design out' workplace bullying and create a mentally healthy workplace

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THANK YOU