Perceptions of workplace bullying in the New Zealand travel industry: Prevalence and management strategies

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ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying is a major cause of stress and psychological harm for employees and a costly problem for organisations. Within the travel industry, little is known about the extent and nature of the workplace bullying problem. This paper reports on findings from a survey of 332 New Zealand travel industry staff and managers. The finding that more than one-in-ten respondents experienced bullying in the workplace indicates a significant problem for the sector. In comparison to those who had not experienced bullying, targets of bullying reported lower levels of constructive leadership, colleague support, and supervisor support, and lower self-rated performance. Targets also reported higher levels of stress, lower levels of emotional wellbeing, higher absenteeism, and a higher intention to leave the organisation. Organisational responses to bullying reported to be most effective were those that focused on improvements in communication and relationships. The paper discusses the importance of leadership in developing a bully-free culture within organisations.

1. Introduction

International research has found workplace bullying to be a widespread problem in contemporary working life (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2010). Exposure to workplace bullying has been repeatedly shown by researchers to have damaging consequences for the target, observers, and wide-ranging negative consequences for the organisation (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2009). Indeed, exposure to workplace bullying is claimed to be a "more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other kinds of work-related stress put together" (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011a, p. 4). Workplace bullying has therefore commanded increasing attention from academics, employers, labour organisations and regulatory agencies as a problem of significant concern (Beale & Hoel, 2010).

Within the travel and tourism industry very little is known about the extent and nature of workplace bullying with nothing published on bullying in the travel industry in New Zealand or elsewhere. Researchers have considered related problems such as sexual harassment (Poulston, 2008) and the broader issue of workplace stress in the tourism, travel and hospitality sectors (Chang & Chang, 2007; Chiang, Birch, & Kwan, 2010; Murray-Gibbons & Gibbons, 2007; Ross, 2005; Wong & Lin, 2007). Workplace bullying has received some attention in the hospitality sector (e.g. Bloisi & Hoel, 2008; Poulston, 2005; Rowley & Purcell, 2001) but there exists little by way of a detailed examination. Consequently, with the individual and organisational costs of workplace bullying well documented (see Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011b for an extensive overview), travel and tourism industry employers and managers would benefit greatly from understanding the nature and extent of the workplace bullying problem in their organisations, and ways to effectively manage it.

This paper takes initial steps towards addressing this knowledge gap by examining data collected in New Zealand. Specifically, this paper provides a detailed examination of the prevalence of perceived workplace bullying within the New Zealand travel sector. Alongside an analysis of bullying prevalence, this paper also considers the

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nature and effectiveness of management strategies to control the problem. Finally, we consider the practical steps travel and tourism managers can take to address workplace bullying.

1.1. The New Zealand travel sector in brief

The travel industry in New Zealand typically comprises small retail travel agencies operating as franchisees of larger travel company chains. These outlets are generally located in popular shopping areas allowing for unscheduled access by the public. Business travel companies are less accessible to the public and generally provide all travel requirements to a number of companies whose employees travel extensively, often with little notice. For this sub-sector, work can be pressurised so timeliness and efficiency are very important. Wholesale companies, on the other hand, rely on volume of sales to both the retail and business travel sub-sectors offering a wide range of supplier products, such as accommodation, transport and activities, to on-sell to the public at competitive rates.

The Travel Agent Association of New Zealand (TAANZ) is the governing body for over 400 New Zealand travel companies, providing industry guidelines on issues such as accountability, technology, fair payment and government policy (TAANZ, 2010). Travel Agent Association of New Zealand (TAANZ) also provides guidance on the Health and Safety in Employment Act (1992), including the Amendment Act (2002), which covers workplace stress and fatigue as workplace hazards that employers must take all reasonable steps to control. The number of registered TAANZ selling staff in the travel industry in 2010 was 2243 (down from 2483 in 2009).

1.2. Conceptualising workplace bullying

Workplace bullying has been the subject of an extensive definitional debate (Einarsen et al., 2011a). While no agreement has been reached on a single, acceptable definition, several commonalities exist: bullying at work is defined as persistent, interpersonal abusive behaviour that may cause severe, social, psychological and psychosomatic problems in the target (Einarsen et al., 2011a; Rayner & Cooper, 2006). In terms of *how* bully behaviours may be experienced, Keashly and Jagatic's (2003) adaptation of Buss's aggression typology − covert/overt, verbal/nonverbal, physical/nonphysical − is a useful framework. With regard to *what* is attacked, the bully may focus on the task or the person (Rayner & Cooper, 2006).

Reviewing the workplace bullying literature, Zapf, Escartín, Einarsen, Hoel, and Vartia (2011) suggested several typical categories of bullying behaviours: 'organisational measures' that affect the targets' tasks and competencies, 'social isolation', 'attacking the private person', 'verbal aggression' and 'spreading rumours'. Workplace bullying is thus predominantly psychological in nature with physical aggression infrequently reported (Rayner & Cooper, 2006; Zapf et al., 2011). To add to the difficulty of identifying and analysing bullying, it is also important to consider the behaviours that bullies do *not* do (Rayner & Cooper, 2006). Such acts of omission are exemplified by the bully withholding task-related information from the target, such as minutes, meeting dates and email communication (Rayner & Cooper, 2006).

However, the harmful impacts of bullying may be less about the actual behaviour per se and more about the frequency and duration of the behaviour, and the target's perception of it. According to Leymann (1990), it is the persistency of the unwanted behaviour that ultimately drains the target's coping resources, and which acts as the key definitional criterion of bullying. This persistence serves to demarcate bullying from similar constructs such as conflict, harassment, and workplace violence (Einarsen et al., 2011a; Hoel &

Beale, 2006; Leymann, 1996; Rayner & Cooper, 2006). Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, and Alberts (2007, p. 847) provide a typical definition of workplace bullying that reflects the persistent nature of bullying over an extended period of time:

> We define bullying as a situation where one or several individuals perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or more persons *persistently* over a period of time, in a situation where the targets have difficulty defending themselves against these actions. We do *not* refer to a one-time incident as bullying.

The negative consequences of bullying for the target are substantial. At the individual level, targets are likely to have lower self-esteem, more negative emotion, anxiety, stress, fatigue, burnout and depression than non-targets (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen, Matthiesen, & Skogstad, 1998; Hoel, Faragher, & Cooper, 2004; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). These negative impacts are not limited to the target of bullying. Indeed, negative health effects have also been found among those who have witnessed bullying but have not been personally targeted (Burnes & Pope, 2007; Hoel et al., 2004; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007).

Negative consequences for the organisation are also considerable. Targets of workplace bullying have greater absenteeism, along with reduced job satisfaction, organisational commitment and work motivation (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Burnes & Pope, 2007; Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006; Loh, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2010). Targets are also more likely to leave the organisation (Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2004, 2008). Further organisational costs include displaced effort in helping staff cope with bullying incidents, and the costs associated with investigations of ill treatment and potential court action (Rayner & Keashly, 2005).

Studies investigating the relationship between bullying and organisational status have concentrated on the status of the bully rather than the target (Zapf et al., 2011). Einarsen and Raknes (1997) found no difference between the experience of negative behaviours for workers, supervisors and managers. Similarly, an extensive study by Hoel, Cooper, and Faragher (2001) of British employees found little difference in prevalence rates when compared across different organisational status groups. Hoel et al.'s (2001) study also indicated that gender has an important interaction effect. According to Hoel et al. (2001), from a study of some 5288 employees, male workers and supervisors were more likely to be bullied than their female counterparts, however, female senior managers reported being bullied more than male senior managers.

In terms of the status of the bully, Hoel et al. (2001) found that the majority of respondents (74.7%) reported that the bully was of a superior organisational status while a substantial minority (36.7%) reported that a colleague had bullied them. Other studies conducted in the UK and Ireland (O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire, & Smith, 1998; Rayner, 1998) have found that employees were mostly bullied by their superiors. However, Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) reported that colleagues and superiors equally bullied Norwegian employees. A meta-analysis by Zapf et al. (2011) of 40 published samples, found that supervisors had bullied 65.4% of targets with 39.4% bullied by colleagues and 9.7% bullied by subordinates. Based on this analysis and their review of the literature relating to the organisational status of targets and bullies, Zapf et al. (2011) concluded that bullying occurs at all organisational levels and is not simply a top-down process where the targets are the weak and defenceless.

Comparisons of the prevalence of workplace bullying internationally and between industry sectors are extremely difficult, due to the fluidity of definitions and their operationalisation, and the utilisation of a variety of measurement tools. In their review of the

literature, Rayner and Keashly (2005) reported that British studies indicate that around 30% of employees experienced weekly bullying behaviours over a six month period. According to Rayner and Keashly, these rates are higher than those reported for Germany and Scandinavia. In the United States, Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007) reported that 28% of their sample experienced weekly bullying behaviours in the last six months. In New Zealand, small scale prevalence studies conducted in the health sector by Foster, Mackie, and Barnett (2004) and Scott, Blanshard, and Child (2008) indicate that workplace bullying is a problem, although neither study used internationally recognised rigorous approaches to measurement as described in Nielsen, Notelaers, and Einarsen (2011).

1.3. Organisational factors that shape workplace bullying

One of the factors frequently found to be associated with workplace bullying is leadership (Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Investigating this relationship, Hoel, Glasø, Hetland, Cooper, and Einarsen (2010) found that a leadership style where punishment was meted out independent of the target's behaviour was the strongest predictor of self-perceived exposure to bullying. For those respondents who were classified as having observed bulling, an autocratic leadership style was found to be the strongest predictor (Hoel et al., 2010). However, the absence of a participative leadership style and the presence of laissez-faire leadership style were also associated with perceptions of bullying.

The findings of Hoel et al. (2010) are consistent with other reports in the literature. Autocratic, tyrannical and laissez-faire styles seem to be the most common leadership deficiencies associated with bullying (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2005). Subordinates can feel directly bullied by autocratic leadership that is authoritarian, rule-based and inflexible (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Coyne, Craig, & Smith-Lee Chong, 2004; Coyne, Smith-Lee Chong, Seigne, & Randall, 2003; Foster et al., 2004; O'Moore et al., 1998; Vartia, 1996) but also indirectly through perceptions of injustice or betrayed expectations (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Blau & Andersson, 2005; Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007; Tepper, 2000). Laissez-faire leadership may be seen as bullying in itself (Hoel et al., 2010) but perhaps, more importantly, it can promote conditions for bullying to flourish. Thus, laissez-faire leadership is likely to be associated with increased levels of role conflict and role ambiguity, creating uncertainty about goals, responsibilities, and work tasks which are all precursor of bullying (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007).

The links between bullying and leadership supports Aasland, Skogstad, and Notelaers' (2010) finding that destructive forms of leadership are not an anomaly, but potentially widespread. In a study of a representative sample of the Norwegian workforce, Aasland et al. (2010) found that between 33.5% and 61% of 2539 respondents reported that their immediate superiors had shown some kind of consistent and frequent destructive leadership during the last six months. In Aasland et al.'s (2010) conceptualisation, destructive leadership is comprised of a range of active and passive behaviours while leaders can display both constructive and destructive behaviours over time. Consequently, this study and the findings of Hoel et al. (2010) highlight that the relationship between leadership and the experience of negative acts such as bullying is a complex one.

Work environment factors have also been posited as being related to bullying and several explanations have been put forward. Frustration–aggression reasoning argues that stressful work leads to aggressive behaviour, while a social interaction approach argues that stressors indirectly affect aggression as stressed workers come to act in ways that elicit aggressive behaviour in others (Einarsen, 2000). It can also be argued that negative work environments can

be a result, as well as a cause, of bullying (Zapf, 1999). Some of the specific work environment factors that have been found to be associated with bullying are outlined below.

- Lack of control over work tasks, time and behaviours has frequently been associated with bullying (Browning, Ryan, Thomas, Greenberg, & Rolniak, 2007; Einarsen, 2000; Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007; Foster et al., 2004; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001; Rayner, 1997; Zapf, 1999). Removing control by micro-management or excessive supervision can be a form of bullying in itself as it increases feelings of powerlessness in the targets (Vartia, 1996). Lack of control over work is often associated with high workloads, also associated with bullying, and with lack of time control (Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2007; Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 1994; Rayner, 1997).
- Lack of clarity around work roles and goals, and inadequate information and communication are linked to bullying (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen, 1999; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007; Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007; Vartia, 1996). Role conflict and role ambiguity can lead to incompatible or conflicting demands and expectations, which in turn can give rise to frustration and stress.
- Poor communication, deliberate miscommunication (which is a bullying strategy), or conflicts that affect information flow are all associated with bullying (Zapf, 1999).
- Uninteresting, unchallenging or meaningless work may give rise to frustration (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen et al., 1994) although the importance of this for bullying has been challenged (St-Sauveur et al., 2004; Vartia, 1996). Poor working environments may increase the likelihood of interpersonal conflicts, which may result in bullying (Zapf, 1999), however the role of conflict as a mediator in the work environment–bullying relationship has rarely been explored.
- Work with high requirements for co-operation between individuals and groups can provide sources of conflict (Einarsen, 2000; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996) as can work that requires competitiveness for tasks, status or advancement (O'Moore et al., 1998; Vartia, 1996). Unsatisfactory social situations, with a lack of social support, perhaps due to friction, cliques and conflicts, are frequently associated with bullying (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007; Rayner, 1997; Sheehan & Barker, 1999; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002; Zapf et al., 1996). A supportive work environment can reduce targets' intentions to quit.

1.4. Primary, secondary and tertiary interventions

With bullying recognised as a serious psychosocial hazard that leads to negative consequences for the target and organisations (Vartia & Leka, 2011), attention is turning to the prevention and management of workplace bullying. As for all forms of workplace stress, primary prevention is the most important of all approaches to address workplace bullying. However, a combination of primary, secondary and tertiary approaches that are directed at both the individual and the organisational level will be necessary for a comprehensive workplace bullying prevention strategy (Vartia & Leka, 2011). A number of primary prevention measures are available to the employer. While most primary prevention measures tend to apply more readily to relatively large organisations, much can still be applied in smaller companies that typify the New Zealand travel and tourism sectors.

One such key primary prevention strategy is establishing an anti-bullying culture (Duffy, 2009; Needham, 2003; Yamada, 2008), by means of changes in values, attitudes, verbal expressions and

ways of interacting (Cassitto, Fattorini, Gilloli, Rengo, & Gonik, 2004). The necessary components of such a culture include a genuine organisational commitment to culture change, effective education and policies, and attentiveness to people and behaviour. Critically, senior managers and/or business owners need to act as role models and exhibit a norm of open, honest and mutually respectful communication (Yamada, 2008).

Policies for workplace bullying must also be developed. As Rayner and Lewis (2011) comment, a policy provides a statement of the employer's intent and the formal and informal process available to address particular instances. A workplace bullying policy should therefore contain a definition of bullying, a statement of the organisation's commitment to eliminating or reducing bullying, the duties of managers, a complaints procedure and the potential for disciplinary action (Duffy, 2009; Holme, 2006; Pate & Beaumont, 2010; Rayner & Lewis, 2011; Vartia & Leka, 2011). The workplace bullying policy should also be supported by other forms of communication including training, socialisation and induction processes (Duffy, 2009; Harvey, Treadway, & Heames, 2006, 2007; Holme, 2006; Rayner & Lewis, 2011).

Human resource practices are particularly relevant to the management of workplace bullying in travel and tourism sector workplaces. In regards to employee selection, one key primary prevention strategy is to use staff selection systems to screen out those with undesirable traits or motives (Blackman & Funder, 2002; Fodchuk, 2007; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Glendinning, 2001) or to select those with desirable qualities such as integrity (Ferris, 2009) or emotional intelligence (Yamada, 2008). However, these approaches need to be treated with care due to their potential for adverse impacts, and all selection measures must be valid and job-related. Alongside selection, other human resource management-related activities that can potentially impact on the presence of workplace bullying in travel and tourism organisations include performance management, reward systems, promotion procedures, and the provision of appropriate reporting systems for dealing with bullying complaints (see Needham (2003) for a discussion on human resource and other primary measures to prevent workplace bullying, and Baum (2007) for a review of human resources in tourism).

Turning to secondary interventions, conflict or dispute resolution processes may be necessary once bullying has occurred in an organisation, including direct negotiation, mediation or adjudication (Fox & Stallworth, 2009). The target of bullying must be given assurance that the use of conflict or dispute resolution systems will not result in retaliation or further victimisation. Without this assurance there is unlikely to be good uptake of the program by those who may need it (Fox & Stallworth, 2009). It is necessary to notify the person accused of bullying of a complaint against them and that they are given opportunities to present their own perspective. All incidents need to be fully and fairly investigated, keeping an open mind and focusing on the behaviour of individuals concerned rather than their personalities (Needham, 2003), and bullies, as well as targets, need to be treated fairly (Lucero & Allen, 2006; Rayner & Lewis, 2011). Other interventions that may also be required to effectively resolve the issue include coaching, counselling, performance management and dismissal of the bully (Ferris, 2004; Namie & Namie, 2009; Rayner & Lewis, 2011). Examples of bullying cases which have been addressed fully and fairly will be necessary if employees are to trust their organisation to change its approach to bullying (Namie, 2008).

An obvious strategy for an individual who has experienced bullying is to seek help from within the organisation from a supervisor or human resources personnel, but research has generally found that managers are often ineffective when dealing with bullying (Ferris, 2004). Options for targets of bullying include seeking a transfer, collecting evidence, finding allies and sharing experiences with others who have undergone a similar situation (Cassitto et al., 2004). The provision of peer supporters who can provide advice and support in confidence and also information about other sources of assistance is likely to prove an effective option for many organisations (Holme, 2006; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Resch & Schubinski, 1996; State Services Commission, 2003).

There are also several tertiary intervention approaches to bullying. Targets respond well to short-term counselling that provides support during the investigation and intervention by the organisation (Ferris, 2004; Lockhart, 1998). While counselling on stress-coping strategies may have some value (Lewis, Coursol, & Herting Wahl, 2002; Rammsayer, Stahl, & Schmiga, 2006), this is likely to be appropriate only in the short term rather than in situations of persistent bullying. When bullying has had severe psychological outcomes, psychological or psychiatric treatment may be required (Groeblinghoff & Becker, 1996). Training to help targets cope or to build resilience is often recommended along with supportive websites to reduce social isolation (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007) but while these may provide short-term help to targets, they are unlikely to resolve bullying.

In considering the extant literature on the management of workplace bullying presented above, it is apparent that effective prevention will involve a combination of primary, secondary and tertiary approaches rather than the application of any single measure. Indeed, bullying prevention will depend to a large degree on the quality of leadership within the organisation and the human resource management response to the bullying problem (Needham, 2003, 2008). Policy will also be key to creating a culture where bullying is not accepted and where everyone understands what behaviour is appropriate in the workplace (Bentley et al., 2009a). The application of these organisational-level aspects of prevention is considered alongside individual level strategies in the present research. The aims of the present research were therefore to: (1) determine the prevalence and nature of perceived workplace bullying in a wide range of travel industry workplaces including the retail, business and wholesale sub-sectors; (2) assess the impacts of bullying on targets and their organisations; and (3) examine the perceived effectiveness of preventive practices used currently by travel industry organisations to manage the problem of workplace bullying.

2. Method

2.1. Sample and respondent recruitment

The sample was drawn from approximately 2250 staff employed in over 400 New Zealand retail and business travel agencies with full or allied Travel Agency Association of New Zealand (TAANZ) membership, along with 33 travel wholesale companies listed in the 2009 TAANZ directory. The TAANZ membership is considered by the industry to be representative of the wider workforce for the travel sector. Participants were invited to participate via promotion of the research project on industry websites (TAANZ and New Zealand Institute of Travel and tourism, NZITT), and also through three online travel industry media websites: www.traveltoday.co.nz; www.etravelblackboard.co.nz; and www.travelmemo.co.nz. Each website included information about the research and an invitation to participate in an online survey entitled *The survey of work and wellness*.

In addition, potential respondents were emailed an information sheet designed to attract travel industry workers to respond to the online survey. All potential respondents received information providing details of the research project, confirmation of the university's human ethics committee approval of the study, participant

confidentiality and rights, and contact and support details prior to commencing the survey. Respondents accessed *The survey of work and wellness* online, with each respondent assigned a case number (unique identifier). Completed surveys were downloaded to an Excel file by the researchers. All data was collected during a six week period between July and August 2009. This sample formed part of a wider multi-industry sample using the same survey instrument (Bentley et al., 2009b).

2.2. The survey of work and wellness

The survey comprised a combination of validated scales and, where existing scales and items were not available or unsuitable, items developed by the researchers to investigate specific issues. In addition to items measuring workplace bullying, items relating to predictor and outcome variables (correlates of bullying) were also included. The scales used and their origin are shown in Table 1.

2.2.1. Exposure to bullying

The revised edition of the Negative Act Questionnaire (NAQ-R) was used to measure how often during the previous six month period respondents had been subjected to various negative acts, which when occurring on a frequent basis, might be experienced as bullying (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; Nielsen et al., 2009). Agreement was reached with these researchers for the use of this scale. For the purposes of this research, bullying was operationally defined as 'exposure to at least two negative acts, at least weekly, within the last 6 months'. This was deemed necessary based on consultation with senior industry people, other researchers working in the field and the recommendations contained in the research literature.

All the items in the NAQ-R are described in behavioural terms without reference to the word 'bullying'. It contains items that refer both to direct (e.g. verbal abuse, offensive remarks, ridicule) and indirect (e.g. social isolation, slander) behaviours. This approach to the collection of data on bullying is important, as use of the term 'bullying' from the outset might have led to either (a) priming effects or (b) range restriction effects because people do not think of these negative interpersonal behaviours as bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009; Hoel et al., 2004; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). Based on their investigation of its validity, Einarsen et al. (2009, p. 38) concluded that it "comprises a reliable and valid measure of exposure to workplace bullying." Alongside the NAQ-R, a single item measure asking respondents if they had been subjected to bullying at the workplace during the last six months was also utilised (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). Using both methods enabled data to be collected on the perception of being bullied and the exposure to different negative acts (Salin, 2001).

2.2.2. Psychological strain and wellbeing

Two further variables of interest were workers' experience of psychological strain (stress) and their feelings of overall psychosocial wellbeing. These variables were assessed with two widely used and validated instruments. The measure of psychological strain was the General Health Questionnaire (12-item version) constructed by Goldberg (1972). This instrument has been extensively used in research on work-related stress (Whaley, Morrison, Payne, Fritschi, & Wall, 2005) and has strong psychometric properties (Makikangas et al., 2006). It includes both positively and negatively worded items that assess various aspects of psychological strain. The second outcome of primary interest was individuals' overall psychological wellbeing. To assess levels of wellbeing, we used an instrument constructed by Warr (1990). This measure comprised eight positively worded adjectives, such as 'calm', 'enthusiastic' and 'motivated', and seven negatively worded adjectives, such as 'tense', 'worried' and 'miserable'. Respondents indicated how frequently (over the past six months) they had experienced these feelings. The Warr instrument has been extensively used and validated in previous research on psychosocial wellbeing (e.g. Makikangas, Feldt, & Kinnunen, 2007).

Once the construction of the survey was finalised, it was then piloted amongst eight respondents, representing different age groups and job roles in the different sub-sectors of the travel industry, and a range of ethnicities including Māori, Pacific, and European, with one participant having English as a second language. As a result of the pilot, the stress questionnaire (GHQ) was shortened from the 20-item to the 12-item version on the basis that several questions on the longer version were deemed to be too intrusive by several of the participants.

2.3. Data analysis

The survey data were analysed using SPSS. "No opinion," "not applicable," and "do not know" responses were recoded as missing data. The psychometric properties of all scales were checked by assessing their factor loadings and reliabilities. In all cases these

Table 1
Measures of constructs in *The survey of work and wellness*.

Name of scale	Items	What it measures	Authors/source
Negative Acts Questionnaire − Revised	22	Workplace bullying − exposure to negative acts	Einarsen and Hoel (2001)
Organisational commitment	6	Employees' feelings of emotional commitment to their organisation	Meyer and Allen (1997)
Organisational support	7	Feelings of support from the organisation	Djurkovic et al. (2008)
Leadership	16	Perceptions of manager's leadership, communication, and conflict solving	Bass and Avolio (1990); Ekvall and Arvonen (1991); Kristensen and Borg (2000)
Sense of community	3	Perceptions of work climate	Kristensen and Borg (2000)
Social support	8	Perceptions of support from supervisor and work colleagues	O'Driscoll (2000)
Psychological wellbeing	15	Sense of wellbeing at work	Warr (1990)
General Health Questionnaire	12	Psychological strain	Goldberg (1972)
Absenteeism	1	Number of days absent from work over past 6 months	Developed for this study
Turnover intentions	3	Intentions to leave the job	O'Driscoll and Beehr (1994)
Job performance	3	Perceived level of job performance	Kessler et al. (2003)
Bullying	5	Self-reported experiences	Developed for this study
Coping	10	Self-reported coping with bullying at work	Kristensen and Borg (2000)
Coping effectiveness	1	Perceived effectiveness of coping with bullying	Developed for this study
Organisational responses	14	Perceived actions taken by the organisation to deal with bullying	Developed for this study

were acceptable, with reliabilities ranging from .75 to .95. Data were analysed by looking at distributions, with comparisons calculated through Pearson's correlation or independent-sample *t*-tests.

3. Results

3.1. Respondent overview

A total of 332 participants completed *The survey of work and wellness*, representing approximately 13% of the New Zealand travel industry workforce based on TAANZ figures. The survey respondents came from a wide range of job roles across each of the three main sub-sectors of the industry with more than one-half of the respondents from the retail sector (53%; n = 176), and the remainder from business (27%; n = 90) and wholesale (20%; n = 66) organisations. The largest proportion were female (81.9%; n = 272), reflecting the distribution of gender across the travel sector. With regard to ethnicity, 289 (87.0%) self-identified as New Zealand European, 23 (6.9%) self-identified as Māori and the remainder self-identified as belonging to other ethnic groups. The mean age was 38.4 years (SD 12.16). Forty (12.0%) were senior managers/executives, 51 (15.4%) were middle-level managers, 25 (7.5%) were front-line supervisors and 193 (58.1%) were non-managerial employees (23 respondents (7.0%) did not answer this question). Two hundred and ninety-two respondents (88.0%) reported that they worked as members of a team frequently or all of the time.

3.2. Bullying prevalence

To identify respondents who had been bullied, the criterion of experiencing at least two negative acts, at least weekly during the past six months was used. Based on this criterion, 11.4% (n = 38) of the sample had been bullied in the last six months. The negative acts that were most frequently identified were: 'someone with-holding information that affects your performance'; 'having your opinions and views ignored' and 'being exposed to an unmanageable workload'. Bullying was also measured by direct self-report. Percentages were much lower for this question, with just five respondents (1.5%) reporting that they considered themselves to have been bullied either 'several times per week' or 'almost daily.' Respondents were also asked about witnessing bullying, and 30 (9.0%) reported that they had witnessed bullying behaviours to others in their workplace in the last 6 months.

Table 2 provides a comparison between bullying prevalence findings for the travel sector with those found for the wider multi-industry survey (Bentley et al., 2009b). It is noted that the travel sector experienced a lower prevalence of bullying than the other sectors surveyed, for both the NAQ-R and self-reported measures (NAQ-R: χ^2 (1) = 11.68, p < .001; self-reported bullying: χ^2 (1) = 6.95, p < .05). There were significant differences in the prevalence of bullying by sub-sector (χ^2 (2) = 6.734, p < .05). Seven percent (n = 12) of retail travel respondents had been bullied compared to

14.0% (n = 9) in wholesale travel and 18.0% (n = 17) in business travel.

3.3. Stress prevalence

Job stress was also considered as an outcome variable in the study as workplace bullying is known to be a major source of stress and to correlate highly with measures of strain and wellbeing (Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, & Salem, 2006). The criterion for considering someone to be experiencing a high level of stress was a report of at least four symptoms of stress in the last six months "rather more than usual" or "much more than usual" (Murphy & Lloyd, 2009). This resulted in 74.7% (248) of the travel sector sample being defined as reporting stress compared to a prevalence of 75.5% for the wider sample (Table 2).

3.4. Bullying and stress prevalence by gender

Data were analysed for differences in bullying and stress by gender and for those working at different organisational levels. There were no significant differences between women and men in reported levels of negative acts experienced, self-reported bullying, and stress (Table 3). Both gender groups showed relatively high levels of experiencing bullying behaviours (NAQ-R), lower levels of self-report bullying, and high levels of stress.

Reported levels of experiencing bullying and stress were similar across different hierarchical levels. For instance, rates of stress ranged from 64% (for first-line supervisors) to 80% (middle managers). Analyses showed that there was a significant difference only for experiencing bullying behaviours with no bullying reported by senior managers. There were no significant differences between levels of self-reported bullying or stress across hierarchical level (Table 4).

3.5. Work experiences of targets and non-targets of bullying

The analysis compared those identified as targets of bullying (11.4% of our sample) with those not bullied, in terms of theoretical antecedents and outcomes of bullying (Table 5). Targets of bullying reported that their workplace had lower levels of constructive leadership, higher levels of laissez-faire leadership, lower levels of colleague and supervisor support, less organisational support, and less effective organisational strategies than those who had not been bullied. In terms of the likely effects of bullying, targets reported

Table 2
Prevalence of negative acts, bullying, and stress by sector.

	Bullying case: Negative Acts Questionnaire	Bullying case: self-report	Stress case: General Health Questionnaire	Total number of respondents
Health	18.4% (134)	4.8% (35)	76.9% (559)	727
Education	22.4% (103)	5.2% (24)	81.5% (374)	459
Hospitality	15.0% (20)	2.3% (3)	49.6% (66)	133
Travel	11.4% (38)	1.5% (5)	74.7% (248)	332
Total	17.8 (308)	3.9% (67)	75.5% (1308)	1728

Source: Bentley et al. (2009b).

Table 3
Prevalence of negative acts, bullying, and stress by gender.

	Bullying case: NAQ	Bullying case: self-report	Stress case: GHQ
Female	29 (10.7%)	4 (1.5%)	208 (76.5%)
Male	9 (15.0%)	1 (1.7%)	40 (66.7%)
Pearson chi-square	.91, 1df, n/s	.01, 1df, n/s	2.5, 1df, n/s

Table 4
Prevalence of negative acts, bullying, and stress by hierarchical level.

	Bullying case: NAQ	Bullying case: self-report	Stress case: GHQ
Senior manager/executive	0	0	27 (67.5%)
Middle-level manager	5 (9.8%)	0	41 (80.4%)
First-line supervisor	4 (16%)	0	16 (64.0%)
Non-managerial employee	29 (15%)	5 (2.6%)	151 (78.2%)
Pearson chi-square	11.23, 4df, p < .05	3.66, 4df, n/s	8.79, 4df, n/s

Table 5
Means (standard deviations) of work-related variables for targets and non-targets of bullying.

Construct	Target (n = 38)	Not Target (n = 294)	t
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Constructive leadership	1.97 (1.25)	3.14 (1.37)	4.99***
Laissez-faire leadership	1.71 (1.33)	0.94 (1.06)	−4.08***
Manager behaviour	2.75 (1.21)	3.69 (1.15)	4.69***
Supervisor support	3.16 (1.28)	4.27 (1.28)	5.03***
Colleague support	3.94 (1.42)	4.40 (1.12)	2.32*
Effectiveness of organisational strategies	2.78 (1.34)	4.47 (1.52)	5.71***
Organisational support	3.61 (1.62)	5.44 (1.43)	7.27***
Stress (GHQ)	1.88 (0.55)	1.18 (0.48)	−8.41***
Emotional wellbeing	2.48 (0.67)	3.77 (1.02)	7.60***
Problem-focused coping	4.08 (0.97)	4.33 (1.27)	.61
Resigned coping	4.00 (1.22)	3.42 (1.04)	−1.34
Selective coping	3.73 (1.09)	3.48 (1.33)	−.55
Self-rated performance	7.17 (1.44)	7.80 (1.19)	2.95**
Citizenship − interpersonal	4.72 (1.09)	4.32 (0.96)	−2.39*
Citizenship − organisational	3.58 (1.11)	3.64 (1.04)	.35
Affective org. commitment	3.84 (1.33)	5.19 (1.37)	5.74***
Turnover intention	4.52 (1.42)	2.62 (1.48)	−7.50***
Absenteeism	1.73 (1.10)	1.21 (0.58)	2.83**

*, ** and *** represent significance level of .05, .01 and .001 respectively.

higher levels of stress and lower levels of emotional wellbeing but no differences in the use of coping strategies than non-targets. Targets also reported lower performance, lower affective commitment, and a higher absenteeism and intention of leaving, relative to those not bullied.

3.6. Organisational responses to bullying

Respondents were asked to indicate the effectiveness of organisational responses to bullying. There was very little variation in mean effectiveness ratings of each response, with most participants perceiving organisational responses as between 'somewhat ineffective' and 'somewhat effective'. The items 'encouraging open and respectful communication between people' and 'encouraging appropriate ways for people to interact with their work colleagues' were, on average, perceived as being slightly more effective than

Table 6
Perceptions of the effectiveness of organisational responses to bullying.

How effective do you think your organisation has been in each of the following areas?	Mean	SD
Encouraging open and respectful communication between people	4.63	1.54
Encouraging appropriate ways for people to interact with their work colleagues	4.53	1.61
Its efforts to identify and resolve conflict quickly and fairly	4.48	1.61
Providing training and support in the management of relationships	4.17	1.74
Monitoring and reviewing staff relationships, especially fair treatment of people	4.17	1.83
Its efforts to identify the occurrence of bullying in this workplace	4.13	1.85
Its efforts to identify factors which might encourage bullying to occur	4.10	1.82
Developing a system for reporting incidents of bullying	3.84	1.91
Developing a clear procedure for handling complaints about bullying	3.84	1.97
Developing a workplace bullying policy	3.70	1.99
Reviewing its procedures for dealing with bullying	3.63	1.95
Establishing clear consequences for those who engage in bullying other people	3.62	1.98
Its efforts to increase awareness among its employees about bullying	3.46	1.97

Scale was from very ineffective (1) to very effective (6). Hence, those at the top of the table are considered the most effective organisational responses.

Table 7
Means (standard deviations) of work-related variables for participants witnessing and not witnessing bullying in the last 6 months.

	Witnessed bullying	Not witnessed bullying	t
Constructive leadership	2.43 (1.49)	3.08 (1.38)	2.41*
Laissez-faire leadership	1.35 (1.12)	1.01 (1.12)	−1.58
Manager behaviour	2.93 (1.32)	3.64 (1.17)	3.09**
Supervisor support	3.41 (1.27)	4.23 (1.32)	3.25**
Colleague support	4.05 (1.20)	4.41 (1.13)	1.64*
Effectiveness of organisational strategies	2.70 (1.45)	4.44 (1.52)	5.23***
Organisational SUPPORT	4.23 (1.73)	5.32 (1.52)	3.72***
Stress (GHQ)	1.53 (0.62)	1.23 (0.52)	−3.02**
Emotional wellbeing	3.07 (0.99)	3.68 (1.06)	3.05**
Self-rated performance	7.51 (1.02)	7.76 (1.24)	1.07
Citizenship − interpersonal	4.14 (1.02)	4.40 (0.98)	1.38
Citizenship − organisational	3.43 (0.99)	3.65 (1.06)	1.09
Affective org. commitment	4.28 (1.51)	5.12 (1.41)	3.08**
Turnover intention	3.85 (1.67)	2.72 (1.54)	−3.80***

other actions (Table 6). Many respondents (almost 70% for some items) indicated that they did not know, or had no opinions about the effectiveness of organisational responses, suggesting that many employees may not be aware of how their organisation deals with bullying.

As evident in Table 6, ineffective approaches were perceived to be: to increase awareness among employees about bullying, establishing consequences for bullies, reviewing procedures for dealing with bullying and developing policy about bullying. Overall the more effective approaches tended to be aimed at interpersonal interactions while less effective ones tended to focus on underlying factors that were assumed to be causes of bullying.

3.7. The negative impacts of witnessing bullying

Bullying may have negative impacts not only for those who are targets of bullying but also for those who witness bullying. The analysis compared those who reported witnessing bullying at their work weekly or more frequently against those witnessing it less frequently than this, or not at all. For the majority of variables those witnessing bullying had a more negative perceived experience of work (Table 7).

Compared to non-witnesses, witnesses perceived leadership as more laissez-faire and less constructive, and perceived lower levels of supervisor and colleague support, and that organisational policies against bullying were less effective. They also reported higher stress (GHQ), poorer emotional wellbeing, lower (self-rated) performance, lower affective commitment to the organisation and a greater intention of leaving. Interestingly, those who witnessed bullying were also those reporting higher levels of citizenship behaviour to others and the organisation, implying that they had remained positively motivated towards their colleagues.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Despite the relatively stringent measure of workplace bullying used in this study, more than one-in-ten of the New Zealand travel sector workforce were found to have experienced bullying at work. While 'self-reported' bullying was very low among this industry sector, this follows the pattern observed from the wider research programme and the research literature (see for example, Agervold, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Nielsen et al., 2009; Salin, 2001) and is likely to be largely a consequence of employees not wanting to self-label as being bullied. The fact that the prevalence of reported negative acts was

lower than those observed for other industry sectors included in the wider study, should not be taken as a reason to ignore the bullying problem in the travel sector. Indeed, international research has shown the health and education sectors to be associated with a higher risk of exposure to bullying (Zapf et al., 2011). What the travel industry findings suggest is that the problem of workplace bullying is of significance, affecting not only those who are targeted by bullying but also those who witness bullying. This study found that witnesses to bullying (9% of the sample), reported similar outcomes to those who were personally bullied − including higher levels of stress, lower emotional wellbeing, lower performance and higher absenteeism and turnover intention.

Of particular note was the finding that individuals working within the business travel sub-sector appear at greatest risk of being bullied, with this sector experiencing an 18% prevalence level. While this finding comes from a relatively small cohort working within the business travel sub-sector, it is a strong indicator that particular attention needs to be directed at this group. The pressure evident in the work of those within business travel organisations is likely to be a key contributory factor to this finding. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between poor work organisation factors, job stress and bullying in the workplace (Cassitto et al., 2004; Hauge et al., 2007).

Workplace bullying is a major source of stress with targets of bullying significantly more likely to experience higher strain and lower emotional wellbeing than non-targets. Levels of stress were markedly high for the travel sector, in line with the other sectors included in the wider study, suggesting an unhealthy psychosocial environment and the need for management and employers to address the workplace bullying and stress problem in their organisations if they are to fulfil their duty of care towards employees under New Zealand legislation (Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Act, 2002).

Further motivation to address these problems in the travel and wider tourism sector comes from knowledge about the organisational impacts of bullying. The present study, consistent with considerable other research, indicates that bullied employees have lower performance than non-targets and are more likely to leave their current employment. As described in the introduction to this paper, the individual and organisational costs of managing workplace bullying poorly can be considerable.

What then can be learned from the present study towards the future prevention of workplace bullying in the travel and wider tourism industry? Firstly, it is important to note that only organisational initiatives can effectively control the bullying problem. Indeed, the literature reviewed in the introduction to this paper suggests that individual coping strategies alone are likely to be ineffective, reinforcing the need for the organisation to develop primary prevention measures to tackle workplace bullying. Leadership style and the degree of organisational, supervisor, and colleague support appear to be important factors in determining whether a person experienced bullying in this sector. While non-targets had managers who exhibited constructive leadership, characterised by being people-centred, production-centred and change-centred (Hauge et al., 2007), bullied staff were more likely to report having laissez-faire leaders. Laissez-faire leadership is characterised by Hauge et al. (2007) as an absence of leadership whereby the supervisor avoids making decisions, fails to provide employees with feedback, or fails to recognise or intervene in ongoing interpersonal conflicts or bullying cases.

Secondly, respondents in our study reported that the encouragement of open and respectful communication and appropriate ways for people to interact with their colleagues were the most effective organisational strategies for the successful management of workplace bullying. These strategies must be led by senior management, and our findings reinforce the crucial role leadership and culture play in the

control of bullying. The findings of the present study are in agreement with the literature which has indicated strongly that leadership is a critical factor in the prevention of bullying (Needham, 2003, 2008; Yamada, 2008). Leaders therefore need to act as role models and exhibit open, honest and respectful communication, and lead the establishment of a bully-free culture (Cassitto et al., 2004; Duffy, 2009; Needham, 2003; Yamada, 2008). Crucially, it is the responsibility of leaders to put in place policy and systems to allow the effective reporting and investigation of complaints of bullying. They must also ensure the effective application of human resource practices within the organisation designed to support the management of bullying control alongside the application of necessary secondary and tertiary level prevention methods, including coaching, counselling and performance management options for both bullies and targets of bullying.

This study is subject to a number of limitations. The Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ − R), used in this study to operationalise/ measure bullying prevalence, has been criticised by researchers on a number of grounds. As Salin (2001) explains, the NAQ-R is not exhaustive of all bullying behaviours, nor can the individual behaviours be regarded as being of equal severity. Salin (2001) argues that the target's ability to defend themselves or tolerate a situation is also not taken into account − that is, there is no opportunity for the respondent to rate the perceived effect of the exposure (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). As Salin (2001) points out, some behaviours (e.g. been given an unmanageable workload, or being ordered to do work below your level of competence) can be experienced on a regular basis without being perceived as bullying while others which are experienced only occasionally can produce long-lasting effects (see also Agervold, 2007; Hoel et al., 2004; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). Consequently, the NAQ-R, which was designed to avoid the problem of under-reporting, may actually over-report it (Agervold, 2007). Authors such as Agervold (2007), Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) and Salin (2001), contend that this problem is exacerbated by the reliance on a criterion of one behaviour to define bullying. Agervold (2007, p. 171) argues that the 'Leymann criterion' of exposure to one negative act is "too broad." Instead, Agervold (2007, p. 171) suggests that at least three or four negative acts a week should be the criterion. Similarly, Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007) adopt a two-criterion operationalisation for the same reasons.

Despite these criticisms, the NAQ-R remains the most widely used inventory to examine the prevalence of workplace bullying with 47% of behavioural experiences studies using a variation of this instrument (Nielsen et al., 2011). The NAQ has also been validated in several studies and countries (Nielsen et al., 2011), with the psychometric properties of the NAQ-R showing high internal stability and excellent criterion and construct validity (Einarsen et al., 2009; Nielsen et al., 2011). Indeed, the use of a well-validated instrument provides the opportunity for comparison with international samples. A further concern relates to the lack of data on ethnicity in the present study, as it is possible that cultural factors play an important role in the perception of bullying in organisations, while certain ethnic groups in New Zealand are more likely to be employed in lower status roles. This should be addressed in subsequent studies.

A key focus for future research is the development of effective interventions to prevent workplace bullying within the travel and tourism sectors. This must occur in partnership with the industry if it is to be relevant to the industry context and if a high uptake of its recommendations is to be achieved. Clearly, developing effective and ethical leaders is crucial to the industry, as is the development of training and other measures to promote a bully-free culture and appropriate management and communication styles across the industry. It is hoped that the present study will provide the impetus

towards these goals as the industry seeks to better understand and manage this costly and damaging problem.

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