The relationship between workplace behaviour policies and experiences of workplace bullying

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION

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A review of literature examining the relationship between workplace behaviour policies

and experiences of workplace bullying

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Abstract

Workplace bullying is a global phenomenon, associated with significant negative individual and organisational consequences. Workplace behaviour policies represent a commonly promoted prevention and intervention method. However, research examining the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and bullying experiences is limited. Accordingly, this systematic review examined available research in this area, identifying what is known, what remains unknown and the requirements surrounding future research. Results revealed that studies which have attempted to explore the relationship are marked by limitations, significantly restricting their implications. Ultimately, it is unclear whether the presence of a workplace behaviour policy reduces the experience of workplace bullying. The implications of these results are discussed and directions for future research are outlined.

Workplace bullying has received considerable attention in recent times, both within the academic literature (Neall & Tuckey, 2014; Samnani & Singh, 2012) and organisations (Lamia, 2017; Powell, 2016). Anywhere between 2-17% of workers may be experiencing workplace bullying at any one time (Nielsen, Notelaers & Einarsen, 2011). Further, the effects of workplace bullying are not confined to direct victims but are also felt amongst bystanders (Cooper, Hoel & Faragher, 2004) and, accordingly, the proportion of workers affected by the phenomenon is likely to be underestimated.

Workplace bullying is one of several types of negative workplace interaction which have been addressed within the academic literature; others include harassment, abusive supervision, incivility and discrimination (Neall & Tuckey, 2014). While definitions of workplace bullying vary, researchers agree it is distinguished from other forms of negative interaction according to the presence of two core features: a power imbalance between the victim and perpetrator; and persistence over at least six months (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011).

Workplace bullying exposure has been linked to a range of adverse outcomes, for individuals (e.g., insomnia, depression, anxiety and reduced self-esteem) and organisations (e.g., decreased organisational commitment, and increased turnover and absenteeism) (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper & Einarsen, 2011). Notably, the Productivity Commission (2010) estimated that workplace bullying within Australia costs $6 - $36 billion annually, through a combination of lost productivity, staff turnover costs and legal and compensation costs. Accordingly, the prevention of workplace bullying is of great interest to organisations.

A wide range of strategies have been adopted by organisations in their attempt to prevent workplace bullying (see Rayner & McIvor, 2008). In particular, the implementation of a workplace behaviour policy has been endorsed by researchers, scholars and practitioners

(e.g., Beirne & Hunter, 2013; Einarsen, 1999; Hubert, 2003; iHR Australia, 2014; Rayner & Lewis, 2011; Vartia & Leka, 2011) and is now commonplace within organisations worldwide. In a study of higher education institutions in the UK, for example, 93% had a specific policy for bullying, harassment, or dignity at work (Rayner & McIvor, 2008). Similarly, Salin's (2008) study of Finnish municipalities reported that the introduction of an anti-bullying policy was the measure most commonly adopted to address workplace harassment, as per the requirements of the country's 'Occupational Safety and Health Act'. Typically, scholarly books addressing workplace bullying will include a section regarding policy development and implementation (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2011; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003), positioning policies as a foundation of the successful management of workplace bullying. Furthermore, fact sheets or informational brochures addressing workplace bullying will also typically refer to workplace behaviour policies (e.g. iHR Australia, 2014; Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland, 2014)

Workplace behaviour policies serve multiple functions in organisational settings. First, policies serve as an organisational statement of commitment and intent to minimise the occurrence and effects of negative workplace interactions. Secondly, they act as an informational source, providing direction to organisational members as to what constitutes workplace bullying and how to address the behaviours when they occur (Rayner & Lewis, 2011; Richards & Daley, 2003; Vartia & Leka, 2011), and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of certain organisational members (e.g., HR professionals) within this process. While workplace behaviour policies may take the form of specific anti-bullying guidelines, bullying behaviour may also be addressed under an 'anti-harassment' policy or a more positively oriented 'dignity at work' policy, which provides proscriptions for positive behaviour (Rayner & Lewis, 2011).

While it is recommended that workplace behaviour policies are tailored to suit the specific organisation in which they exist (Salin, 2008), there is a general consensus within the literature regarding the fundamental elements to be included: a statement regarding the organisation's opposition to bullying and their commitment to reducing its occurrence; a definition of bullying and related examples; a description of the informal resolution options, as the preferred course of action; a description of the formal resolution options, in the case that informal options are unsuccessful; detailed information regarding the roles and responsibilities of, as well as the support available to, all parties involved; and links to relevant legislation (e.g., European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2002; Pastorek, Contacos-Sawyer & Brennan, 2015; Rayner & Lewis, 2011; Rayner & McIvor, 2008). Additionally, the literature suggests that policies should be concise and reader friendly, enabling accessibility for all employees (Rayner & Lewis, 2011).

As outlined above, research suggests that organisations implement workplace behaviour policies to manage and prevent and manage instances of workplace bullying. However, few studies have examined the relationship between workplace bullying policies and organisational outcomes in order to determine whether the presence of a workplace behaviour policy empirically affects bullying outcomes. While research has afforded us a comprehensive insight into the organisational antecedents of workplace bullying, an understanding of the relevant risk controls is needed to more completely understand the phenomenon. Given workplace behaviour policies may represent one such risk control, clarifying and extending our knowledge in this regard will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding regarding the effective prevention and management of workplace bullying.

Further, knowledge of the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and workplace bullying experiences is also likely to yield considerable practical implications. Importantly, it may indicate whether the adoption of workplace behaviour policies has any

empirical grounding. In turn, this will contribute to a greater understanding of the most effective preventative strategies for workplace bullying, allowing organisations to more accurately and confidently direct their resources and thereby create a positive workplace environment. Given the aforementioned theoretical and practical implications, the present review aims to examine the available research regarding the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and bullying experiences.

Method

Identification of sources in this review involved several stages. Initially, sources were identified through an online search of the Business Source Complete, PsycINFO, and ProQuest databases. The search terms used within each database varied slightly (see Appendix A) according to the requirements of that database, however all terms were derived from the study's main concepts: 'work', 'bullying' and 'policy'. The searches were conducted such that every result was required to include one term relating to each of these three concepts. The terms were selected through a review of existing workplace bullying research, as well as the database's thesaurus tool. In addition to the three databases, a Google Scholar search was also conducted using the main search terms. The first 100 articles in this search were assessed, however none of these met the aforementioned inclusion criteria; given Google Scholar orders results according to relevance, it was assumed that the remaining results would also fail to meet the criteria.

A total of 9,184 results were available for review (see Figure 1 for details of the search process). During stage one, results other than primary empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals or scholarly books were removed, leaving 9,087 results. Non peer-reviewed sources were excluded in an attempt to ensure that all results constituted high-quality, reliable research. For example, Berlingieri's (2016) doctoral thesis, while relating to workplace bullying, had not been peer-reviewed and was therefore excluded. Stage two involved the

removal of duplicates, leaving 8,874 results. Titles were then assessed during stage three, and sources with titles which did not contain at least one word or phrase from each of the following two categories were removed: ['work', 'workplace', 'organisation', 'organisational', 'business', 'co-worker', 'managerial', 'professional', 'work environments', 'occupational' and 'worker']; and ['bullying', 'bully', 'bullies', 'aggression', 'harassment', 'mobbing', 'violence', 'uncivil', 'incivility', 'mistreatment' and 'abuse' (excluding drug, alcohol, substance, sexual and racial abuse)]. Following stage three, 336 results remained. During stage four, abstracts were assessed; abstracts which indicated the article was not relevant to the review question were removed, and 86 results remained. For example, Djurkovic, McCormack and Casimir's (2008) peer-reviewed article titled 'Workplace bullying and intention to leave: The moderating effect of perceived organisational support' explored the relationship between workplace bullying and intention to leave the organisation, but did not investigate the involvement of policy specifically and therefore was excluded. Finally, during stage five, full text sources were assessed and those which were not relevant to the review question were removed. For example, Bruce and Nowlin's (2011) study 'Workplace violence: Awareness, prevention, and response' addressed the effect of workplace violence policies, however their conceptualisation of workplace violence did not align with conceptualisations of workplace bullying and therefore the article was excluded. At the end of stage five, three results remained.

Following the identification of the initial narrowed sample, a 'snowballing' technique was utilised. This process involved searching reference lists of the 86 results that remained following the abstract assessment (i.e., stage four), for any other references which met the inclusion criteria. This process identified a further two results, yielding a total of five sources. These five sources are distinguished by an asterisk in the reference list.

Additional records identified through Google Scholar search *n* = 0

Records identified through database search (*n* = 9,184)

PsychInfo *n* = 5,423
Business Source Complete *n* = 2,328
ProQuest *n* = 1,397

Additional records identified through snowballing *n* = 2

Removal of non-journal articles and book chapters *n* = 9,087

Removal of duplicates *n* = 8,874

Title screen *n* = 336

Removal of sources whose title did not contain one word from each of three categories: (work, workplace, organisation, organisational, business, managerial, professional, co-worker/s, work environments, occupational, workers) AND (bullying, bully, harassment, mobbing, violence, incivility uncivil, mistreatment, aggression, bullies, abuse (other than drug abuse, alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, racial abuse or substance abuse))

Abstracts assessed for relevance *n* = 86

Full text sources assessed for relevance *n* = 3

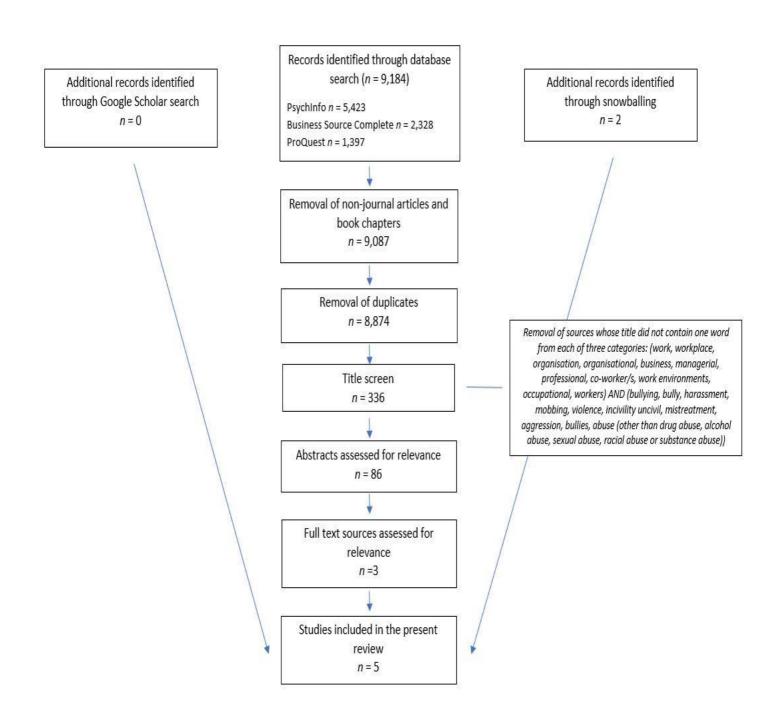Studies included in the present review *n* = 5

Figure 1. Schematic representation of the literature search process.

The five sources identified for inclusion in the review were then coded using a standardised template; the following data was extracted: study design; reporting method; participants; study aims; measurement; outcomes; and methodological limitations (see Appendix B for full template). Most coding was exhaustive to ensure the data were summarised in the most detailed and accurate form possible. For example, measurement of bullying was coded exhaustively to reflect the multitude of ways bullying incidents can be measured.

Results

Overview of Studies

Research examining the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and bullying experiences is limited. The five studies included in the present review were published across several industries, including business, organisational psychology, human resources and health management, indicating that knowledge regarding workplace bullying policies is being broadcast across, and is relevant to, multiple disciplines. Additionally, all the studies were published between 2010-2013. While research on workplace bullying in general continues to increase at a steady rate (Neall & Tuckey, 2014), research examining the effect of workplace behaviour policies on workplace bullying experiences does not seem to follow the same trend.

The following sections present the findings of the present review; specifically, what approaches have been utilised to understand whether workplace bullying policies are effective in reducing perceived bullying experiences, and what these approaches have revealed about the relationship between policy presence and perceptions of workplace bullying.

Methodological Approaches to Exploring Workplace Bullying Policies

Study design. All five sources included in the current review were quantitative in nature. Three of the sources adopted a cross-sectional design, measuring the variables of interest at a single time point. The remaining two studies each measured an organisation's attempt to address bullying and harassment via a longitudinal case study. Specifically, Meloni

and Austin (2011) assessed the implementation, and outcomes, of a multi-faceted zero-tolerance bullying and harassment program within an Australian Capital Territory hospital. Data was collected using Employee Satisfaction Surveys, administered at three-time points: 2005 (baseline), 2007 (following partial program implementation) and 2008 (post-intervention). The review of the workplace bullying policy was conducted in 2008. Additionally, Pate and Beaumont's (2010) study also described the implementation, and outcomes, of a multi-faceted 'Dignity at Work' intervention within a UK Public Sector organisation. In this case data was collected using Employee Attitude Surveys; three of these surveys were administered by the organisation from 2001-2003, prior to the implementation of the intervention, and the remaining two were administered by researchers in 2004 (again, prior to the implementation of the intervention) and 2007 (post-intervention). The introduction of the organisational 'Dignity at Work' policy occurred during 2005.

The cross-sectional nature of studies included in the present review has implications for our understanding of the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and workplace bullying experiences. Specifically, it is unfeasible to establish a causal relationship between the variables based on data collected at a single time point (Thelle & Laake, 2015). Further, although the present review included two longitudinal studies, these involved the collection of data prior to the implementation of the anti-bullying program and then at only one time point following the implementation of the workplace behaviour policy. While such approaches are more informative than a cross-sectional study design, 'true' longitudinal studies, in which data is collected over a greater number of time points, are required to provide a clearer and more definitive understanding of the relationship, if any, between workplace behaviour policies and perceived bullying experiences.

Additionally, although the cross-sectional data included in the present review indicate that levels of perceived bullying are lower following the introduction of a multi-faceted

intervention (of which a workplace behaviour policy is part), and that a behaviour policy is perceived to be an effective means of addressing workplace bullying, it is unclear why this is so. For example, research has not yet identified what aspects of the policy are particularly impactful, or whether there are additional factors, external to the policy, which may also contribute to a reduction in workplace bullying experiences. Additional longitudinal case study research, such as that conducted by Meloni and Austin (2011) and Pate and Beaumont (2010), is necessary to identify the factors contributing to any change, as well as examine the impact of specific elements of policy.

Method of reporting and study participants. All five sources relied on self-reported participant data collected using questionnaires to address their research aims. In total, 12 questionnaires were completed by 3,654 participants across 86 organisations, in four countries.

The organisations within the studies ranged in size; one study included small to medium sized organisations (i.e., 1-99 employees), while the two case studies examined policies from medium (i.e., 200 employees) and large (i.e., 1200 employees) organisations. The remaining two studies did not specify the sizes of the organisations included. This mixture of differently sized organisations is incongruent with the representation found in the countries in which the studies were conducted. For example, organisations employing between one and four people constitute 70% of employing businesses within Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). This discrepancy is problematic given the workplace behaviour policies commonly adopted within small organisations are likely to differ considerably from those adopted in large organisations, in terms of level of detail and provision of formal procedures, which is in turn likely to affect the perceived influence they exert in bullying situations. Accordingly, this discrepancy creates an issue of sample representativeness, as the results of the present review may not be generalisable to the general population of Australian organisations. Further, within the single study which did examine small to medium sized organisations, the organisations

were Flemish, again raising questions as to the generalisability of the findings to an Australian, or broader international, population. Specifically, a question remains of how, if at all, the reported relationship would be affected if the host country of the participant organisation was different.

Organisations were recruited from a variety of sources. The relationship between workplace behaviour policies and bullying experiences was most commonly examined within the healthcare industry ($n = 3$); education, and hospitality and travel industries were also explored. Two studies did not specify the industries to which the organisations they examined belonged. The healthcare industry's representation within the studies reflects the fact that, as of 2017, healthcare and social assistance was the main industry in which Australian workers operated (Parliament of Australia, 2018). Given the unknown origin of participant organisations in the remaining studies, however, the generalisability of their results to the broader Australian, and international, working population is unclear. Again, the question must be asked as to how, if at all, the reported relationships would be affected by the industries in which the participant organisations operate.

Relationship Between Workplace Behaviour Policy and Workplace Bullying Experiences

Overall, the results of the studies identified for this review revealed that: (a) participants rated bullying policies to be one of the most effective approaches used to address workplace bullying within their organisation, (b) fewer participants considered bullying and harassment to be a problem within their organisation following the implementation of a workplace bullying program, in comparison to baseline measures, and (c) an anti-bullying policy shared a significant negative association with self-reported workplace bullying.

Study aims. To understand the reported relationships between workplace behaviour policies and workplace bullying experiences, it is necessary to examine the aims of the studies included in the present review. Two of the studies aimed to examine participants' perceptions

of the effectiveness of workplace behaviour policies as a response to bullying within their own organisation. In both cases, participants rated the effectiveness of 13 organisational approaches commonly used to address workplace bullying, identified from the literature, on a 6-point Likert Scale. In each instance one of the 13 approaches was deemed to be relevant to the current review: the development of a bullying policy. Another two of the studies each aimed to examine the implementation of a multi-faceted organisational anti-bullying program, comparing participants' responses to an item within an employee survey prior to and following the implementation. In both cases the programs involved several initiatives, including either the development and implementation, or review and re-launch, of the organisation's workplace behaviour policy. There was only one study, however, which explicitly examined the relationship between workplace behaviour policy and bullying experiences. In this study, participants from 39 organisations completed the Negative Acts Questionnaire, which has traditionally been considered an 'objective' measure of bullying (Notelaers et al., 2006), and a self-constructed seven item scale designed to measure anti-bullying policy at the same time point; the presence of any relationship was explored. Given the prevalence of workplace bullying, as well as its well-established association with numerous and significant negative outcomes, a lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of one of the most commonly adopted approaches is likely to have far-reaching and substantial consequences, both for organisations and individuals.

Study outcomes. Within the two studies which aimed to explore the extent to which participants perceived certain approaches as effective in addressing workplace bullying within their own organisation, the development of a bullying policy was rated in the top three, out of the possible 13, most effective approaches. Within O'Driscoll et al. (2011), participants rated the item "develop bullying policy" to be the third most successful approach within their organisation, with a mean score of 3.9 out of a possible 6. Within Cooper-Thomas et al. (2013),

results were separated according to participants who had been victims of bullying in the past six months and those who hadn't. The item "develop a workplace bullying policy" was rated by all participants as having been the most effective response to workplace bullying within their organisation, with mean scores of 3.09 and 4.31 respectively. Although the abovementioned outcomes support the value of workplace bullying policies, they are only able to provide evidence that workers *perceive* bullying policies to be an effective method of addressing workplace bullying. Less clear from these results, is whether bullying experiences are actually *reduced* as a result of workplace behaviour policies.

Pate and Beaumont's (2010) case study (which explored the extent to which a 'Dignity at Work' program successfully addressed issues of bullying), reported 52% of survey respondents ($n = 126$) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel bullying is a problem within the organisation" at the 2004 baseline survey; a mean score of 3.5 out of a possible 5. In 2005, a multi-faceted anti-bullying program was implemented. This involved extensive staff training regarding workplace bullying, the dismissal of several employees who were identified as perpetrators of bullying, and the development and implementation of the 'Dignity at Work Policy', which outlined the concepts of bullying and harassment and provided detail as to its handling and resolution. During 2007, 22% of survey respondents ($n = 120$) either agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement, equating to a mean score of 2.66. A two-sample t-test indicated that this change was significant. Further, data from both time points revealed that none of the additional variables measured (i.e., age, gender, length of service and department) explained variations in the perceptions of bullying. Within Meloni and Austin's (2011) case study organisation, a multi-faceted Zero Tolerance of Bullying and Harassment program was carried out in several stages between the years of 2005-2008. The program involved: (i) circulation of a statement from the CEO, affirming her commitment to eliminating bullying and harassment, (ii) comprehensive training of a number of employees as Workplace

Equity Officers, whose role to support victims of bullying and harassment was widely promoted, (iii) creation of anti-bullying and anti-harassment posters and newsletter messages, and (iv) a review of the organisation's Zero Tolerance of Bullying and Harassment policy, as well as the inclusion of a section relating to bullying and harassment within the compulsory Orientation Program and Manual. The authors reported that during 2007, prior to the organisational policy review, 68% of survey respondents ($n = 660$) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "My workplace is free from bullying and harassment from my manager". During 2008, following the policy review, 74% of respondents ($n = 710$) agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement. No indication was provided as to whether this increase was statistically significant.

Based on the outcomes of their case studies, Pate and Beaumont (2010) and Meloni and Austin (2011) concluded that bullying was reported by workers to be less of a problem following the implementation of a multi-faceted workplace bullying intervention, of which the development or review of a workplace behaviour policy was part. Accordingly, although both studies reported more favourable survey responses following the development or review of the workplace behaviour policy, it was not necessarily the policy alone which resulted in this change, but rather the policy implementation or review in combination with other approaches. Furthermore, Meloni and Austin's (2011) findings are further restricted in that the survey item they assessed only captured a reduction in perceptions of bullying perpetrated by the respondent's manager, as opposed to incidences of workplace bullying more generally.

Finally, within the only study which explicitly examined the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived bullying experiences, a regression analysis revealed a significant negative association between anti-bullying policy and self-reported workplace bullying ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < .001$). This outcome, however, was subject to several methodological and sample limitations discussed above, including a cross-sectional study

design, homogenous sample in relation to participant organisation host country and a lack of information regarding the industry of participant organisations. Ultimately, although the outcomes of the studies included in the present review support the value of workplace behaviour policies, they are unable to provide explicit support for a relationship between policies and a reduction in workplace bullying experiences.

Discussion

Workplace behaviour policies have been widely promoted as a means of preventing and managing workplace bullying, however research regarding their effect is limited. The present study meets a theoretical gap within this area by providing a systematic review of the current literature regarding the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived workplace bullying experiences. Overall, the review highlights that the relationship between policies and perceived workplace bullying experiences is largely unknown, with the implications of any existing literature restricted by various limitations. This finding gives rise to several theoretical and practical implications, as well as generating directions for future research.

The findings of this review bear several theoretical implications. The review is the first, to our knowledge, which has attempted to explore and consolidate findings regarding the effect of workplace behaviour policies on workplace bullying experiences. Overall, the findings of this appraisal serve to extend our knowledge regarding the utility of workplace behaviour policies, supporting the popular belief that these are associated with a reduction in perceived workplace bullying experiences. The review does highlight, however, that the exact nature of this relationship, for example in terms of strength and the mechanism by which it occurs, is yet to be clarified. Second, while the organisational antecedents of workplace bullying are well understood (e.g. Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994; Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland & Hetland, 2007; Vartia, 1996), the findings from the

present review have emphasised that the risk controls are not. Organisational antecedents represent those organisational factors which are likely to give rise to workplace bullying, while risk controls are those measures which, if implemented, are likely to reduce the risk of workplace bullying instances occurring or escalating. Accordingly, an understanding of the risk controls is arguably as important. Through its systematic appraisal this review has brought us one step closer to a clear understanding of the risk controls associated with workplace bullying, and in turn has extended our understanding of the phenomenon as a whole, as well as highlighted the requirement for further exploration.

Given the lack of empirical support for the utility of workplace behaviour policies in reducing workplace bullying experiences it is currently unclear as to whether policies are indeed of any practical value. The uncertainty in this regard is problematic in the context of the substantial number of organisations adopting workplace behaviour policies to prevent and manage instances of workplace bullying. As with any organisational resource, the development of a workplace behaviour policy necessitates the commitment of time and money. Online policy templates are available, providing organisations with a generic policy document which requires them only to enter their own name (e.g. Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018; Business Victoria, 2013). While this approach which would arguably be both time and cost efficient, in order to be most effective, it is recommended that workplace behaviour policies are tailored to the needs of the organisation in which they exist (Salin, 2008), necessitating a significantly greater resource commitment. Given the lack of evidence to support the utility of such policies in reducing bullying behaviour, the question must be asked as to whether such an investment is justified.

Alternatively, it is possible that the implementation of workplace behaviour policies does in fact not represent a genuine desire to reduce workplace bullying experiences, but rather constitutes a case of signalling (Spence, 2002). In this event, through the implementation and

promotion of the policy, organisations are aiming primarily to communicate that they do not tolerate workplace bullying and, more broadly, that they provide a safe and positive work environment for employees. Should this be the case, the utility of workplace behaviour policies relies not on their relationship with a reduction in workplace bullying experiences, but rather on their ability to effectively signal the desired message to employees. Accordingly, to understand the practical significance, and implications, of the findings of the present review, it is essential to understand the precise goal of workplace behaviour policies within organisations. Exploring these goals could represent an opportunity for further research.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

There are several factors relevant to the present review which must be considered when utilising the aforementioned conclusions and recommendations. Notably, only literature from scholarly published books or peer-reviewed journals was considered, with unpublished articles, conference papers, and dissertations excluded from review. Similarly, sources published in a language other than English were also excluded. Accordingly, it is possible that additional findings exist in relation to the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and bullying experiences, but remain unpublished or have been published in a language other than English. Furthermore, a publication bias for significant findings may have resulted in an over-inflation of the general connection between workplace behaviour policies and positive workplace bullying outcomes.

The use of a systematic review represents a significant strength of the present research. The employment of a structured and transparent literature search process ensures that, as far as is reasonably possible, all existing evidence regarding the subject of interest is explored. This is in comparison to a traditional literature review where the inclusion and exclusion of information is driven, at least to some extent, by the researcher's existing knowledge and preconceived ideas. As such, this structure also enables future replication of the research.

Further, coding the literature collected according to characteristics such as sample, data collection method and study aims facilitated critical engagement with the literature, whereby assessments regarding the strength of findings were incorporated into the understanding of their implications.

In order to address the knowledge gap identified by the present review, further research is needed to establish whether there is in fact a relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived bullying experiences. Such research should adopt a longitudinal design, in which data is collected over a series of three or more time points, therefore providing a more precise insight into any causal relationship, or lack of, between workplace behaviour policy and perceived bullying experiences. Furthermore, given a workplace behaviour policy should not be introduced in isolation (Guest & Conway, 2011; Richards & Daley, 2003; Woodrow & Guest, 2014), further research conducted in the form of longitudinal case studies, which could include qualitative elements, would also capture the effect of any additional factors, external to a policy, simultaneously contributing to a change in perceived bullying experiences.

Another important, and similarly unexplored, question is whether perceived bullying experiences differ according to the type of workplace behaviour policy in place and, if so, which policy elements contribute to these differences. This question is particularly relevant given organisations' common adoption of more general code of conduct policies in response to the issue of bullying (Cowan, 2011; Rayner & McIvor, 2008), and therefore warrants further research.

Conclusion

Workplace bullying is considered a serious "psychosocial hazard" (Vartia & Leka, 2011 p. 35), and a worldwide phenomenon which has been linked to numerous and significant individual and organisational consequences. Workplace behaviour policies constitute one of the most commonly promoted, and adopted, methods of prevention and management.

However, the results of the present review demonstrate that the relationship between policies and workplace bullying experiences remains largely unexplored. Further, those studies which have attempted to explore any relationship are marked by limitations, significantly restricting their implications. This uncertainty is problematic in the context of the many organisations devoting considerable resources to the development and implementation of workplace behaviour policies in an attempt to prevent and manage workplace bullying. In order to address this identified knowledge gap and its associated practical implications, further exploration, in the form of longitudinal and longitudinal case study research is required; this will provide a more precise insight into any causal relationship, or lack of, between workplace behaviour policy and bullying experiences.

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The relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived workplace bullying experiences within an Australian context

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The relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived workplace bullying experiences within an Australian context

Workplace behaviour policies are one of the most commonly promoted methods for the intervention and prevention of workplace bullying. Despite their popularity, however, research examining the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and workplace bullying experiences is limited. Accordingly, this study sought to explore the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and experiences of workplace bullying within an Australian context. Workplace behaviour policies, either in the form of specific bullying policies or general behaviour policies (e.g. Code of Conduct), were collected from 39 Australian organisations and matched to data regarding perceived workplace bullying experiences from 426 individuals, employed within those same organisations. These organisations operated across the health and community services, education, government administration and defence, electricity, gas and water supply, communications, mining, retail trade and transport industries. Levels of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and magnitude of workplace bullying experiences reported by participants, by way of questionnaire, within organisations with a specific bullying policy were compared to those with only a general behaviour policy. Additionally, Cluster Analysis was used to group specific bullying policies on the basis of their features. Levels of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and magnitude of workplace bullying experiences associated with each cluster were then examined. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between the perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and magnitude of workplace bullying experiences within organisations with general behaviour policies in comparison to those with specific bullying policies. A discriminant analysis revealed that the four perceived bullying experience variables were unable to successfully predict membership within the three policy clusters, indicating there were no significant differences in perceived bullying experiences according to policy features. Despite their popularity, the results of the current study suggest that workplace behaviour policies, in isolation, may not share any meaningful relationship with perceived workplace bullying experiences. Further research is required, however, to confirm and build on the limited base of existing literature. Specifically, research which considers the utility of workplace behaviour policies within the context of broader workplace bullying prevention and intervention programs is needed in order to further contribute to our understanding of the most effective ways of preventing workplace bullying. Ideally, such knowledge will, in turn, improve outcomes for individuals and organisations within Australia.

Keywords: workplace bullying; workplace policy; workplace bullying policy; organisational behaviour; anti-bullying, preventing workplace bullying.

Over the past two and a half decades the issue of workplace bullying has been the focus of considerable attention, both within organisations (iHR Australia, 2014; Lamia, 2017; Powell, 2016; Safe Work Australia, 2016) and the academic literature (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Quinlan, Robertson, Miller & Robertson-Boersma, 2014; Samnani & Singh, 2012). Cultural and social nuances (e.g., collectivist cultures) have been associated with decreased reporting among bullied workers, meaning that the frequency of workplace bullying varies greatly between countries (Harvey, Treadway, Heames & Duke, 2008). Accordingly, accurate prevalence rates are difficult to establish. It has been suggested, however, that anywhere between 2-17% of the employed population may be experiencing workplace bullying at any one time (Nielsen, Notelaers & Einarsen, 2011). Further, the effects of such workplace bullying are not confined to direct victims, but are also felt amongst bystanders and witnesses (Cooper, Hoel & Faragher, 2004). Accordingly, the proportion of workers affected by the phenomenon is likely to be underestimated.

Workplace bullying is one of several types of negative workplace interaction which have been addressed within the academic literature; others include abusive supervision, discrimination, harassment and incivility (Neall & Tuckey, 2014). While exact definitions of workplace bullying vary, researchers tend to agree it can be distinguished from these other types of negative interaction according to the presence of two core features: a power imbalance between the victim and perpetrator; and persistence over an extended period - at least six months (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011). Further, workplace bullying does not include discrimination, that is negative behaviour perpetrated because of a legally protected characteristic, for example sex or race (Cowan, 2011).

The incidence of workplace bullying has been linked to numerous and varied adverse outcomes, both at the level of the individual (e.g., reduced self-esteem, anxiety, depression and insomnia) and the organisation (e.g., increased absenteeism and turnover and decreased

organisational commitment) (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper & Einarsen, 2011; Hogh, Mikkelsen & Hansen, 2011; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Notably, the Productivity Commission (2010) has estimated that workplace bullying within Australia drains between $6 - $36 billion annually, through a combination of lost productivity, staff turnover costs and compensation costs. Accordingly, the prevention of workplace bullying is of great interest to organisations.

Prevention and intervention of workplace bullying: the role of policies

A wide range of strategies have been adopted by organisations in their attempt to prevent workplace bullying (see Rayner & McIvor, 2008). In particular, the implementation of a workplace behaviour policy has been endorsed as a key strategy by researchers, scholars and practitioners (e.g., Cowan, 2011; Einarsen, 1999; European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2002; Hubert, 2003; iHR Australia, 2014; Rayner & Lewis, 2011; Richards & Daley, 2003; Vartia & Leka, 2011) and is now commonplace within organisations worldwide. In a study of higher education institutions in the UK, for example, 93% had a specific policy for bullying, harassment, or dignity at work (Rayner & McIvor, 2008). Similarly, Salin's (2008) study of Finnish municipalities reported that the introduction of a written anti-bullying policy was the measure most commonly adopted to address workplace harassment, as per the requirements of the country's recently introduced 'Occupational Safety and Health Act'. Typically, scholarly books which address workplace bullying will include a section regarding policy development and implementation (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2011; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003), positioning policies as an essential foundation of the successful management of workplace bullying. Furthermore, workplace bullying fact sheets or informational brochures will also typically refer to workplace behaviour policies. Within such resources policies are generally either the sole, or one of the first, interventions presented, again implying their status

as a primary approach to preventing and managing workplace bullying (e.g., Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland, 2014; Safe Work Australia, 2016).

While it is recommended that workplace behaviour policies are tailored to the needs of the specific organisation in which they exist (Salin, 2008), there is a general consensus within the literature regarding the fundamental elements to be included: a statement regarding the organisation's opposition to bullying and their commitment to reducing its occurrence; a definition of bullying and related examples; a description of the informal resolution options, as the preferred course of action; a description of the formal resolution options, in the case that informal options are unsuccessful; detailed information regarding the roles and responsibilities of, as well as the support available to, all parties involved; and links to relevant legislation (e.g., European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2002; Pastorek, Contacos-Sawyer & Brennan, 2015; Rayner & Lewis, 2011; Rayner & McIvor, 2008; Richards & Daly, 2003; Vartia & Leka, 2011). Additionally, the literature suggests that policies should be concise and easy to read, enabling accessibility for all employees (Rayner & Lewis, 2011).

Well-constructed workplace behaviour policies typically function to both prevent, and intervene in, cases of workplace bullying. First and foremost, policies serve as an organisational statement of commitment and intent to minimise the occurrence and effects of negative workplace interactions. Secondly, they act as an informational source, serving two primary functions: (i) provide direction to organisational members as to what constitutes workplace bullying and how to address the behaviours when they occur (Rayner & Lewis, 2011; Richards & Daley, 2003; Vartia & Leka, 2011); and (ii) clarify the roles and responsibilities of certain organisational members (e.g., HR professionals) within this process.

Within workplaces, behaviour policies may take the form of specific anti-bullying guidelines or bullying behaviour may be addressed within a more general behaviour policy, such as a 'code of conduct' or a more positively oriented 'dignity at work' policy, which

37

provides proscriptions for positive behaviour (Rayner & Lewis, 2011). Although common, general policies are reportedly less effective due to their ambiguity, in particular their frequent failure to clarify the characteristics necessary to classify bullying (i.e. power imbalance and persistence) and to outline the appropriate action when bullying is identified (Cowan, 2011). Such ambiguity is problematic as it requires organisations to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether behaviour constitutes bullying and how it should be addressed, often resulting in inconsistent and less than ideal responses to the phenomenon.

The Effectiveness of Workplace Bullying Policies in Reducing Negative Behaviour

In comparison to other methods of workplace bullying prevention and management, workplace behaviour policies are associated with several unique advantages and these are likely to be significant contributors to their popularity. Most notably, workplace behaviour policies are inexpensive to create and enforce; online policy templates are readily available, providing organisations with a generic document which requires them only to enter their own name (e.g. Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018; Business Victoria, 2013). Further, the written form of policies means that they provide a consistent and readily accessible organisation-wide reference point, in relation to appropriate behaviour and the management of any violations. Finally, the indisputable existence of a policy, and its specific proscriptions, offers organisations a degree of legal protection in the case that an incident of workplace bullying is reported to authorities. However, despite these advantages, only a handful of studies have explored the utility of workplace behavioural policies in explicitly preventing and reducing workplace bullying within organisations (Baillien, Neyens, & De Witte, 2011; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013; Meloni & Austin, 2011; O'Driscoll et al., 2011; Pate & Beaumont, 2010). For example, a study by Baillien et al. (2011) examined the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived bullying experiences, reporting a significant negative association. This outcome, however, was subject to several methodological and

sample limitations, i.e., cross-sectional study design and homogenous sample. Findings from other studies support the perceived face value of anti-bullying policies as a method of prevention and management, but fail to provide evidence that workplace bullying is actually reduced when a policy is in place. Accordingly, it is currently unclear whether workplace behaviour policies empirically affect bullying outcomes. Further, given the various types of workplace behaviour policies implemented within organisations, an equally important, yet also untested, question is whether specific workplace bullying policies have a different effect on bullying experiences in comparison to general behaviour policies, such as a 'Code of Conduct' or 'Dignity at Work' policy, and, if so, which policy features in particular contribute to these differences.

Current study

The workplace bullying literature holds considerable gaps specifically in relation to the utility of workplace behaviour policies as a whole, and of certain policy features, in the prevention and reduction of workplace bullying. Thus, the current study aims to explore the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and experiences of workplace bullying within an Australian context. The exploratory study, which extends the findings of the single existing investigation into the relationship between workplace bullying policies and perceived bullying experiences, will address two aims:

Research aim one:

Determine whether the perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of workplace bullying experiences among organisations with a specific bullying policy is different to that of organisations with a general behaviour policy.

Research aim two:

Determine which specific features of workplace bullying policies are associated with the lowest perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of workplace bullying.

Furthering our knowledge in relation to the impact of workplace behaviour policies will have significant theoretical implications. While research has afforded us considerable knowledge regarding the organisational antecedents of workplace bullying (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994; Jennifer, Cowie & Ananiadou, 2003; Quine, 2001; Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland & Hetland, 2007; Vartia, 1996), a more complete and definitive understanding of the relevant risk controls affords further unpacking of a complex phenomenon. Organisational antecedents represent those organisational factors which are likely to give rise to workplace bullying, while risk controls are those measures which, if implemented, are likely to reduce the risk of workplace bullying instances occurring or escalating. Specifically, workplace behaviour policies may represent one such risk control (Safe Work Australia, 2016), however an understanding of their effectiveness in preventing and managing workplace bullying is critical in consolidating this knowledge. In addition to providing greater awareness regarding the risk controls, such understanding will also, in turn, have broader theoretical implications in relation to existing understandings of the factors which give rise to bullying (Neall & Tuckey, 2014), and whether these are primarily individual or organisational. Finally, research has not yet fully explored the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived bullying experiences within an Australian population (O'Driscoll et al., 2011). Knowledge of this relationship is of particular relevance within the context of the recent parliamentary enquiry into workplace bullying and will form part of an evidence base that may be of practical value to legislators in determining legislative organisational requirements.

In addition, knowledge of the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived workplace bullying experiences is also likely to have considerable practical implications. Given the significant financial burden that workplace bullying places on an organisation (Productivity Commission, 2010), coupled with the widespread adoption of workplace behaviour policies as a method of prevention and intervention (Rayner & McIvor, 2008; Salin, 2008), a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of various policy types will have important implications for decisions regarding courses of preventative action. Knowledge regarding specific policy features associated with the most positive outcomes may also assist in informing organisations about optimal policy design, in turn creating the greatest opportunity to reduce perceived bullying experiences. Ultimately, greater knowledge regarding the impact of workplace bullying policies, and the mechanisms by which this impact occurs, will contribute to an improved understanding of the most effective prevention and management strategies, allowing organisations to more accurately and confidently direct their resources (Einarsen et al., 2011). This in turn is likely to correspond with more positive outcomes, both for individual employees and entire organisations, reducing the incidence of the significant and damaging consequences that are associated with workplace bullying.

Materials and methods

Sample and procedure

Data collection occurred over two stages. In the first stage, permission was sought to view and utilise archival survey data from the Australian Workplace Barometer (AWB) Project. The AWB Project aims to 'provide science driven evidence of Australian work conditions and their relationships to workplace health and productivity, through a national monitoring and surveillance system' (Dollard et al., 2012, p. 5). Specifically, the project collected data, using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) system, from working individuals across

six Australian states and territories: South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Tasmania, Northern Territory and Western Australia. The CATI system operates in conjunction with an interviewer, immediately entering interviewee responses into the database and rotating response options to minimise bias. The demographic characteristics of the AWB sample were compared to that of workforce statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, revealing that the AWB sample was representative of the Australian working population in relation to a range of factors (Dollard et al., 2012). The AWB questionnaire has been administered at three time points (2009, 2010/2011 and 2015/2016), with data collected from approximately 4,000 participants at each time point. The current study utilised data from the second wave of data collection (i.e., 2010/2011). One of the work characteristics measured by the AWB questionnaire is workplace bullying. Employees from 2,026 organisations responded to wave two of the AWB questionnaire. However, utilising data from employees of organisations which had fewer than three questionnaire respondents would have created the potential for misleading results, as conclusions regarding the prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying within an organisation would necessarily be drawn based on only one or two individuals' responses. Accordingly, data from employees of organisations for which less than three respondents completed the questionnaire was excluded. This left 98 organisations that matched the criteria.

In the second stage of data collection, workplace behaviour policies for each of the 98 organisations were sought. The process for identifying, collecting and analysing the workplace behaviour policies is outlined below (see *Workplace behaviour policies*). The final participant sample consisted of data from 39 policies (collected and analysed by the researcher), and data regarding bullying exposure from 331 individuals, employed within those same 39 organisations (obtained from the archival AWB dataset). These organisations operated across

the health and community services, education, government administration and defence, electricity, gas and water supply, communications, mining, retail trade and transport industries.

Materials

Measure of workplace bullying

The AWB questionnaire assessed exposure to workplace bullying using three items; these were based on the QPS Nordic (Lindstrom et al., 2000), 'an internationally recognised and psychometrically validated' measure (Dollard et al., 2012, p. 25). This tool is commonly used within Nordic working environments to measure 'psychological and social factors in working life' (Lindstrom et al., 2000 p. 7). Participants were first provided with an explanation of what constitutes bullying behaviour, as per the QPS Nordic questionnaire (see Appendix C). The perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of participants' workplace bullying experiences were then measured; these variables are collectively referred to as providing a representation of 'perceived workplace bullying experiences'. Specifically, participants indicated whether they had been subjected to bullying at the workplace within the last six months ('yes' or 'no'). These responses formed the 'prevalence' variable. Those who responded 'yes' then indicated how often they were exposed to these bullying behaviours ('daily'; 'at least once per week'; 'at least once per month'; 'rarely'; 'never'; or 'refused') and for how long they were exposed ('less than 1 month'; '1-6 months'; '7-12 months'; '1-2 years'; 'more than 2 years'; 'refused'), using 6-point scales. These responses formed the 'frequency' and 'duration' variables respectively. Participant responses regarding the frequency and duration of bullying behaviours were multiplied to generate the variable 'overall bullying magnitude'.

Workplace behaviour policies

For each of the 98 organisations identified in stage one of data collection (i.e., the AWB dataset), workplace behaviour policies, either specific bullying policies, more general

behaviour policies which referenced workplace bullying or both, were sought. First, an online search was conducted for those policies which were publicly available. This yielded a total of 12 workplace bullying policies and 19 general behaviour policies. Next, the researcher sought to obtain bullying policies from those organisations which did not publicly display any workplace behaviour policy, or only provided a general workplace behaviour policy (i.e., if an organisation provided only a general behaviour policy via public mediums, contact was made requesting that a specific bullying policy be provided, should it exist). Organisations were contacted by email, or through their website online feedback form if no email address was listed. Within this email, organisations were provided with information regarding the research and invited to participate through the provision of their workplace behaviour policy. Five additional bullying policies and one general behaviour policy were obtained as a result of this initial contact. Two weeks after the initial contact a follow-up email was sent to the remaining organisations. One additional general behaviour policy and one bullying policy were obtained as a result of this secondary contact. Organisations that did not respond following either of the two contact attempts, or who indicated at either stage that they were unable to provide their policy, were removed from the research. All contact with organisations was made using publicly available contact details.

Ethical Considerations

This study received ethics approval from the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee. Notification of this approval was then submitted to, and subsequently approved by, the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee.

Analysis

All analyses were performed using SPSS 24.0 for Windows. Upon collection, workplace behaviour policies were identified as either specific bullying policies or general

behaviour policies which referenced bullying (e.g. code of conduct). This identification was based on policy title and content.

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was then used to determine whether any differences existed in terms of the perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of workplace bullying experiences within those organisations from which a specific bullying policy was obtained in comparison to those for which only a general behaviour policy was obtained. An alpha level of $p <. 05$ was adopted to indicate statistical significance.

In order to determine which workplace bullying policy features were associated with the lowest levels of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying, workplace bullying policies were coded according to their inclusion or exclusion of a set of features (see Appendix D for coding template). For nine of the 39 policies, this coding process was completed by a secondary researcher at an earlier date. A hierarchical cluster analysis, using Ward's Minimum Variance Method as supported by Punj and Stewart (1983), was utilised to group together organisations, whose workplace bullying policies had the greatest similarity in terms of included features. A stepwise discriminant analysis was then conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between each of the clusters in terms of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying experiences.

Finally, a qualitative exploration of the workplace bullying policies was conducted to investigate which policy features were central to membership within each of the clusters. This exploration involved determining which features most frequently appeared within each cluster and where the greatest between-cluster discrepancies existed in terms of these frequencies (see Table 3 for summary). This frequency data was then interpreted in the context of the perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying experiences associated with

each cluster, in order to understand which policy features are likely to be most, or least, beneficial.

Results

Means, Standard Deviations and Minimum and Maximum Scores

Descriptive statistics for each of the four perceived bullying experience variables (prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying), overall and according to policy type, are summarised in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Preliminary Analyses

Data was first screened to determine its suitability for parametric testing. Both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk statistics indicated that the assumption of normality had been violated in relation to the perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of workplace bullying experiences among both policy type groups. Due to the equality in group sizes, however ($n = 163$ and $n = 168$), and the fact that the smallest response category contained at least 20% of all responses, the *F*-statistic was considered robust enough to be relied upon (Donaldson, 1968; Lunney, 1970).

Within the preliminary analysis of the organisations, clustered according to their workplace bullying policy's features, the Dendrogram indicated that one case may represent a possible outlier. This was considered problematic as the chosen method of hierarchical cluster analysis, Ward's Minimum Variance Method, is particularly sensitive to outliers (Punj & Stewart, 1983). However, the fact that the data was standardised meant the influence of this possible outlier was likely to be significantly reduced (Punj & Stewart, 1983). For the sake of certainty, however, once the results of the primary cluster analysis had been the obtained, the possible outlier was removed and the analysis was repeated; the result, in terms of the cluster

membership of all other cases, was identical to that produced when this case was included and, accordingly, the result was assumed to be stable.

Hypothesis Testing

A series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine whether the perceived prevalence, frequency, duration, and overall magnitude of workplace bullying experiences among organisations with a specific bullying policy is different to that of organisations with a general behaviour policy. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between policy types on levels of perceived prevalence (F (1, 329) = 0.08, p = .78, w = -.00), frequency (F (1, 329) = 0.02, p = .88, w = -.00), duration (F (1, 329) = 0.10, p = .75, w = -.00), and overall magnitude (F (1, 329) = 0.35, p = .55, w = -.00) of workplace bullying experiences (refer to Table 1). This indicates that the level of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying experiences does not vary according to policy type.

A second set of analyses sought to determine which specific features of workplace bullying policies are associated with the lowest perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of workplace bullying. Accordingly, a subset of the original data set, containing only those organisations who possessed specific bullying policies (n = 18), was coded according to their policy's inclusion or exclusion of 17 identified policy features (0 = feature absent, 1 = feature present). These organisations were then grouped into clusters based on the coding results. While all workplace behaviour policies currently in place within an organisation were sought by the researcher, only one policy was returned per organisation. Accordingly, clusters essentially constituted groups of organisations, but also represented groups of organisational policies. This clustering was conducted using Ward's Minimum Variance Method of hierarchical cluster analysis (Punj & Stewart, 1983). Ward's Minimum Variance Method of hierarchical cluster analysis aims to group together cases, in this case organisations, such that the within-cluster variance is minimised (Field, 2017). Preliminary

investigations into the number of likely clusters present within the data, by way of examination of the resulting Dendrogram, supported a three-cluster model. Descriptive statistics for each of the four perceived bullying experience variables - perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying - according to cluster membership, are summarised in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

A stepwise discriminant analysis, using the Mahalanobis method as suggested by Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2013), was conducted to determine whether the four perceived bullying experience variables were able to successfully predict membership within the three identified clusters; that is, whether significant differences existed between the clusters of organisations, created based on policy features, in terms of their associated perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying experiences. A stepwise discriminant analysis operates such that, at each stage, the variable which maximises the difference between the two closest clusters is entered. The goal is to achieve maximal separation between the groups (Field, 2009). None of the perceived bullying experience variables reached significance, indicating that they were unable to successfully predict cluster membership.

Despite the failure to predict cluster membership, an observable pattern was identified within the three clusters in terms of their associated perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying experiences. Specifically, Cluster One was associated with the highest rates of each of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude, Cluster Two was associated with the moderate rates and Cluster Three was associated with the lowest rates of each of the four perceived bullying experience variables.

A subsequent qualitative exploration of the policies, according to cluster, revealed which policy features which were central to membership within each of the clusters (see Table

3 for summary). Within Cluster Three, which was associated with the lowest rates of each of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying experiences, 100% of the organisations' policies ($n = 9$) provided a definition of bullying, as well as explicitly stated that compliance was expected from all employees. 100% of policies within Cluster Three also provided instructions regarding suggested action, both when a worker believes they are being bullied, and believes a co-worker is being bullied. This percentage is considerably greater than that within Clusters One (25% and 25% respectively) and Two (60% and 20% respectively). Further, within Cluster Three, all organisational policies provided a specific reporting option (e.g. a person or role) for cases of bullying, in comparison to 75% and 60% in Clusters One and Two respectively. The organisations' policies in Cluster Three were also more likely to reference informal mechanisms for the handling of bullying (89%), in comparison to those in Cluster One (0%) and Cluster Two (40%). The organisations' policies within Cluster Two, which were associated with the moderate rates of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude, were mainly characterised by an explicit statement that compliance was expected from all employees and mention of the fact that disciplinary action following a policy breach was possible (100% of policies, $n = 5$). All policies in Cluster Two also mentioned termination of employment as a possible punishment for breaching policy, in comparison to none in Cluster One and only 33% in Cluster Three. Finally, within Cluster One, which was associated with the highest rates of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude, the organisations' policies were mainly characterised by the provision of a definition of bullying, as well as examples (100% of policies, $n = 4$). Policies in Cluster One were the least likely (50%) to mention the possibility of disciplinary action following a policy breach, in comparison to 100% of policies in Cluster Two and 67% in Cluster Three.

[Table 3 about here]

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived experiences of workplace bullying within an Australian context. First, a comparison of general behaviour policies against specific workplace bullying policies was undertaken, examining differences in perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of workplace bullying experiences between the two types of policy. Results revealed no significant difference between the two types of policy. The study then examined which features of specific workplace bullying policies were associated with the lowest levels of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of workplace bullying. Organisations were grouped together in one of three clusters, based on the features present or absent within their policy, and such that the variance within each cluster was minimised. An observable pattern emerged regarding the relationship between policy features and perceived bullying experiences, however, the differences between the clusters were not statistically significant.

These findings suggest that an organisation's decision to adopt a general behaviour policy or a more specific bullying policy is unlikely to significantly affect their employees' perceived workplace bullying experiences. Similarly, the finding of no statistically significant difference between the three clusters, in terms of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of workplace bullying experiences, suggests that the specific features included in, or excluded from, a workplace bullying policy may not affect employees' bullying experiences. In practical terms, these findings suggest that workplace behaviour policies, specifically the type of policy an organisation adopts or the features included in that policy (e.g., the level of proscription provided or the presence of bullying examples), may not share any meaningful relationship with workplace bullying outcomes.

This study is the first, to our knowledge, to specifically examine differences in perceived workplace bullying experiences according to policy type or policy features. The

findings are in contrast with existing literature, which supports the notion of workplace bullying policies as an effective measure in the prevention and management of workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2011; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013; Meloni & Austin, 2011; O'Driscoll et al., 2011; Pate & Beaumont, 2010).

Theoretical implications

The present study represents the first exploration of the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived workplace bullying experiences within an Australian context. Accordingly, the results have considerable theoretical contributions in terms of their capacity to unpack the complex phenomenon of workplace bullying, particularly in terms of the relevance and utility of workplace behaviour policies as a method of prevention and management. As outlined in the literature review, existing findings suggest that policies are, and are perceived to be, associated with reductions in workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2011; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013; Meloni & Austin, 2011; O'Driscoll et al., 2011; Pate & Beaumont, 2010). However, the results of the present study suggest that neither the type of workplace behaviour policy, nor the features included within a specific bullying policy, are likely to be associated with perceived bullying experiences. An understanding of the ways in which this relationship, when compared to that reported within existing research, may or may not be unique will further our understanding of workplace bullying as a phenomenon.

The aforementioned advancement regarding the utility of workplace behaviour policies also has broader implications for our knowledge of the factors which give rise to workplace bullying. Traditionally, workplace bullying has been considered an interpersonal issue (Hutchinson, Wilkes, Jackson & Vickers, 2010; Neall & Tuckey, 2014) and this philosophy is reflected in the construction of policies. For example, 72% of workplace bullying policies included in the present study provided instructions for workplace bullying victims, outlining how to deal with the issue from an individual perspective, while only 33% included any

discussion regarding the ways in which the organisation manages the risk of bullying. Furthermore, no policies referred to the organisational factors which are associated with workplace bullying. However, recent research has determined that organisational factors (e.g., role ambiguity, job control) are more important determinants of workplace bullying than individual target characteristics (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Einarsen et al., 1994; Jennifer, Cowie & Ananiadou, 2003; Quine, 2001; Skogstad et al., 2007; Vartia, 1996). This correlation is loosely supported by the pattern of results observed in relation to research aim two within the current study. In this case, although the differences between clusters in terms of perceived bullying experiences were not significant, the cluster which was associated with the lowest levels of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of workplace bullying contained the greatest number of policies which referred to the ways in which the organisation manages bullying risk. Ultimately, the policies associated with the most positive perceived bullying outcomes were more likely to, in some capacity, address organisational-level risk factors, a finding which supports the relevance of such factors in terms of the occurrence of workplace bullying.

Practical implications

The present study is one of the first to examine the effectiveness of workplace behaviour policies as a method of prevention and management for workplace bullying. This knowledge, in turn, may carry considerable practical implications for decision making regarding courses of preventative action. Research suggests that many organisations adopt workplace behaviour policies as their primary method of prevention and management (Salin, 2008). However, the finding that neither the type of workplace behaviour policy, nor the features included within a specific bullying policy, alone are likely to be associated with perceived bullying experiences suggests that organisations should re-consider the investment of their resources in response to this problem. Specifically, given workplace bullying policies,

in isolation, may not share any meaningful relationship with workplace bullying outcomes, it would likely be of benefit for organisations, in their effort to create a more positive workplace environment, to place greater emphasis on additional alternative risk controls.

Further, it is possible that workplace behaviour policies are commonly implemented, not due to a genuine desire to reduce workplace bullying experiences but rather to signal (Spence, 2002) that the organisation does not tolerate workplace bullying and, more broadly, provides a safe and positive work environment for employees. Should this be the case, the utility of workplace behaviour policies relies not on their relationship with a reduction in workplace bullying experiences, but rather on their ability to effectively signal the desired message to employees. Arguably, existing research suggests that workplace bullying policies are effective in achieving this aim, with studies by O'Driscoll et al. (2011) and Cooper-Thomas et al. (2013) reporting that participants rated the development of a bullying policy within the top three, out of a possible 13, most effective approaches used within their organisation. Accordingly, in terms of practical implications, this use of policies to signal would further support the suggestion that a policy in isolation is not sufficient to prevent and manage instances of workplace bullying, rather it should constitute the guidance document which contributes to, and informs, a much broader risk management strategy. Finally, in addition to their value for individual organisations, the aforementioned knowledge developments may also have practical implications for legislators, as they determine organisational requirements in relation to workplace bullying. This is of particular relevance within the context of the recent Australian parliamentary enquiry into workplace bullying.

Ultimately, knowledge regarding the utility and relevance of workplace bullying policies will allow organisations to more accurately and confidently direct their resources in their attempt to prevent and manage instances of workplace bullying. Given the wide range of significant and damaging consequences that are associated with workplace bullying, this

should, in turn, correspond with more positive outcomes, both for individual employees and entire organisations.

Strengths, limitations and future directions

The present study contributes to the growing, but limited, literature concerning the effect of workplace behaviour policies in terms of workplace bullying. The study's main strength lies in the fact that it is exploring a relationship which has not yet been examined in great detail: the relationship between workplace behaviour policies and perceived workplace bullying experiences. Further, the study is the first to do this within an Australian context.

Another strength of the study relates to the use of a participant sample which is representative of a broad range of industries (health and community services, education, government administration and defence, electricity, gas and water supply, communications, mining, retail trade and transport industries). The only other study located which explored the association between workplace bullying policies and perceived workplace bullying experiences was limited by a lack of information regarding the industry of participant organisations. Additionally, the present study's utilisation of multi-source dataset represents a strength, in that the individuals reporting the perceived workplace bullying experiences were separate from those writing the policies which were analysed.

Despite the aforementioned strengths, however, there are several factors relevant to the present study which must be considered when utilising the aforementioned conclusions and recommendations. First, while the second wave of the AWB survey was completed in 2010/2011, the workplace behaviour policies utilised in the present study were collected during 2018. As we cannot be sure whether these policies were in place at the time that participants reported the given levels of perceived prevalence, frequency, duration and overall magnitude of bullying, any conclusions regarding the effect of general behaviour policies or specific bullying policies must be made with caution.

Secondly, it was not viable to collect additional information from organisations regarding whether their workplace behaviour policy exists in isolation, or in the context of a broader workplace bullying prevention and intervention program. This omission of data is relevant given multiple recommendations that the introduction of a workplace behaviour policy does not occur in isolation (Guest & Conway, 2014; Richards & Daley, 2003; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Future research could collect this information and cluster organisations according to the features of their overall prevention and intervention program, exploring any between-cluster differences in levels of perceived bullying experiences. This would constitute a more meaningful exploration of the utility of workplace behaviour policies as they are commonly employed – within the context of a broader strategy - as well as facilitate the exploration of the effect of prevention and management programs as a whole. While, within this study, policies alone did not share a meaningful association with perceived workplace bullying experiences, it may be the case that intervention programs as a whole have the potential to affect perceived workplace bullying experiences and, further, that workplace behaviour policies are an integral component of such programs. Alternatively, research in the form of a longitudinal case study, such as that conducted by Meloni and Austin (2011) and Pate and Beaumont (2010), would allow for the exploration of the effect of any additional factors, external to a workplace behaviour policy, simultaneously contributing to perceived bullying experiences.

Another limitation, specifically in relation to research aim two (e.g. analysis of policy features), is the small number of organisations for which a specific workplace bullying policy was obtained ($n = 18$). The restricted sample size limits the likelihood that the results obtained are representative of those which would be found given the entire population of Australian workplace bullying policies, and therefore limits the conclusions which can be drawn regarding the effect of workplace bullying policies. However, as outlined in the method above, the

researcher took considerable steps to obtain the largest sample possible, while the impact of this smaller sample size is also minimised by the study's exploratory nature. Ideally, future research would involve the collection of a larger sample of organisations with specific workplace bullying policies.

A final consideration, relevant to the interpretation of the present study's results, relates to the measurement of workplace bullying. As noted within 'The Australian Workplace Barometer: Report on Psychosocial Safety Climate and Worker Health in Australia' (Dollard et al., 2012), the definition of bullying utilised by the AWB (see Appendix C) may have limited participants' reports of workplace bullying and, accordingly, the resulting data may not capture the spectrum of potential risks associated with the phenomenon. For example, instances in which individuals were able to defend themselves or the distress experienced by witnesses of workplace bullying may not have been captured. Accordingly, Dollard et al. (2012) caution that the AWB data should be viewed as a conservative estimate of workplace bullying.

Despite the abovementioned ideal regarding increasing the sample of organisations with specific bullying policies, the fact that a greater number of general behaviour policies were provided, in comparison to specific bullying policies, is of itself informative. Although it cannot be confirmed, this suggests that this is the favoured policy format within Australia. Furthermore, the fact that so few organisations responded to the researcher's email request to provide their policy does suggest that perhaps many organisations do not have official bullying documentation in place.

As suggested above in relation to the practical implications, it may be the case that the primary role of workplace bullying policies, as one component of a broader anti-bullying program, is not to reduce workplace bullying experiences, but rather to signal to employees that bullying will not be tolerated and that specific risk controls are in place. In addition to the avenues for future research identified within the context of the present study's findings and

limitations, future research which aimed to explore the precise purpose of workplace behaviour policies would have useful practical implications; specifically, clarity of purpose would inform decisions regarding elements to be included and the amount of resources to be invested.

Conclusion

The present study addressed a significant gap in the workplace bullying literature; it is the first, to our knowledge, to specifically explore differences in perceived workplace bullying experiences according to workplace behaviour policy type or included policy features. Findings suggest that neither the type of workplace behaviour policy an organisation adopts, nor the features included in that policy, are likely to share a meaningful association with perceived workplace bullying experiences. This finding has theoretical implications in terms of our knowledge of the phenomenon, as well as practical implications for decision making regarding the most effective courses of preventative and management action. Additional research, specifically that which considers policies within the context of broader workplace bullying prevention and intervention programs, will work to strengthen conclusions regarding the utility of workplace behaviour policies. The present study, however, begins the journey to better understanding the relationship between workplace bullying and one of the most commonly adopted interventions. Ultimately, it is hoped that this improved understanding may correspond with more positive outcomes, both for individual employees and entire organisations, reducing the incidence of the significant and damaging consequences that are associated with workplace bullying.

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Appendix A

Database Search Terms

PsychInfo		
Work	**Bullying**	**Policy**
work$.tw	bully$.tw OR Bullying.sh,tw OR * Harassment.sh,tw OR * Abuse of power.sh,tw OR harass$.tw OR Negative behaviour.tw OR Abus$.tw OR * Violence.sh,tw OR * Aggressive behaviour.sh,tw OR * Workplace violence.sh,tw	polic$.tw OR Code of conduct.tw

* = subject term in PsychInfo

Business Source Complete		
Work	**Bullying**	**Policy**
Work	Bully OR Bullying OR Harassment OR Abuse of power OR Harass OR Negative behaviour OR Abus OR Violence OR Aggressive behaviour OR Workplace violence	Polic OR Code of conduct

ProQuest		
Work	**Bullying**	**Policy**
Workplace OR Work	Bully OR Bullying OR Harassment OR Abuse of power OR Harass OR Aggressive behaviour OR Workplace violence	Polic OR Code of conduct

Appendix B

Literature Coding Template

Facet of Reference	Exclusive vs. Exhaustive Coding
Article / study title	Exhaustive
Authors	Exhaustive
Year	Exhaustive
Research question / aim of study	Exhaustive
Study design	Exhaustive
Participants: - Number - Generated from where - M:F - Any other relevant sample characteristics	Exhaustive
How was bullying measured (e.g. self-report, number of incidents reported etc.)	Exhaustive
What information was collected re: policy (e.g. simply presence of policy – yes/no)	Exhaustive
Correlation or causation investigated	Exclusive
Additional methodology notes (e.g. was there an intervention)	Exhaustive
Significant finding – yes/no	Exclusive
What was the actual finding / variables between which there was a correlation or causal relationship	Exhaustive
Implications of finding	Exhaustive
Any study limitations	Exhaustive
Any limitations in terms of the capacity of the results to answer the present study's research question	Exhaustive
Any additional relevant information	Exhaustive

Appendix C

Explanation of Bullying Behaviour

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 the approximate equal "strength" are in conflict or the incident is an isolated event. (Lindstrom et al., 2000).

Appendix D

Workplace Bullying Coding Template

Overall Aspect	Sub-Aspect	Answer Format
A) Presence of organisational bullying policy	1. Organisation doesn't have a bullying policy.	List 1 Number
	2. Organisation has a bullying policy, incorporated within a general behaviour policy (e.g. Code of Conduct).	
	3. Organisation has a separate policy which specifically addresses bullying.	
	4. Bullying is referenced within the general Code of Conduct.	
	5. Bullying is referenced within the Work, Health and Safety Policy.	
	6. Bullying is referenced within the Equity and Diversity Policy.	
	7. Bullying is referenced within the Respectful Behaviour Policy Directive.	
B) Disciplinary action specified	1. Disciplinary action is mentioned for breaching policy.	Yes/No
	2. The policy mentions termination of employment as a possible punishment for breaching policy.	Yes/No

	3. The policy stipulates a list of examples of possible consequences for breaching policy.	Yes/No
C) References to outside legislation	1. The policy includes references or links to state or federal legislation regarding bullying/safe workplaces.	Yes/No
	2. The policy stipulates that bullying is against the law.	Yes/No
D) Reporting procedure	1. A specific reporting option (person/role) is given in cases of bullying.	Yes/No
	2. Informal mechanisms through which bullying can be handled are provided (e.g., talk to the bully, talk to someone you trust).	Yes/No
E) Definition and examples of bullying	1. Definition of bullying is provided.	Yes/No
	2. Examples of bullying are provided.	Yes/No
F) Responding to bullying and prevention	1. Instructions are provided regarding suggested action when a worker reasonably believes they themselves are being bullied.	Yes/No
	2. Instructions are provided regarding suggested action when a worker reasonably believes a co-worker is being bullied.	Yes/No
	3. Policy stipulates that, when reported, instances of bullying will be investigated and dealt with quickly.	Yes/No

	4. Policy stipulates the confidentiality and privacy of people involved in bullying complaint or investigation, stating that information is only to be disclosed on a need to know basis.	Yes/No
	5. Organisational factors which may give rise to bullying / antecedents of bullying are mentioned.	Yes/No
	6. Policy mentions how the organisation manages the risk of bullying.	Yes/No
	7. Policy stipulates a step or stage process for dealing with a bullying complaint.	Yes/No
G) General facets of the policy	1. Policy explicitly stipulates that all employees are expected to comply.	Yes/No

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum scores for perceptions of bullying experience variables among organisations with general behaviour policies and those with specific bullying policies.

Bullying Experience Variable	General Behaviour Policy		Specific Bullying Policy		Total	
	M (SD)	Score range (min – max)	M (SD)	Score range (min – max)	M (SD)	Score range (min – max)
Prevalence	0.09 (.29)	0 - 1	0.08 (.28)	0 - 1	0.09 (.28)	0 - 1
Frequency	0.20 (.70)	0 - 4	0.21 (.75)	0 - 4	0.21 (.72)	0 - 4
Duration	0.25 (.88)	0 - 5	0.29 (1.04)	0 - 5	0.27 (.96)	0 - 5
Overall Magnitude	0.60 (2.41)	0 - 20	0.77 (3.03)	0 - 20	0.69 (2.74)	0 - 20

Note. General Behaviour Policies $n = 21$; Specific Bullying Policies $n = 18$. Participants whose perceived bullying experience data was linked to General Behaviour Policies $n = 163$; Participants whose perceived bullying experience data was linked to Specific Bullying Policies $n = 168$. Score range = range of scores reported by participants. For all variables, higher scores are indicative of higher levels of the construct being assessed.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for perceptions of bullying experience variables according to cluster membership.

	Cluster One	Cluster Two	Cluster Three
Bullying Experience Variable	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Prevalence	.15 (.36)	.09 (.29)	.04 (.19)
Frequency	.35 (.93)	.24 (.78)	.12 (.58)
Duration	.55 (1.45)	.26 (.96)	.12 (.64)
Overall Magnitude	1.42 (4.19)	.74 (2.80)	.35 (1.93)

Note. Cluster One *n* = 4 organisation's policies; Cluster Two *n* = 5 organisation's policies; Cluster Three *n* = 9 organisation's policies. For all variables, higher scores are indicative of higher levels of the construct being assessed.

Table 3. Qualitative exploration of workplace bullying policies according to cluster membership.

Policy Feature	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Total
Disciplinary action is mentioned for breaching policy	P (50%)	Y (100%)	P (67%)	72%
The policy mentions termination of employment as a possible punishment for breaching policy	N (0%)	Y (100%)	P (33%)	44%
The policy stipulates a list of examples of possible consequences for breaching policy	N (0%)	P (60%)	P (11%)	22%
The policy includes references or links to state or federal legislation regarding bullying/safe workplaces	P (50%)	P (20%)	P (89%)	61%
The policy stipulates that bullying is against the law	N (0%)	P (40%)	P (22%)	22%
A specific reporting option (person/role) is given in cases of bullying	P (75%)	P (60%)	Y (100%)	83%
Informal mechanisms through which bullying can be handled are provided (e.g., talk to the bully, talk to someone you trust)	N (0%)	P (40%)	P (89%)	56%
Definition of bullying is provided	Y (100%)	P (80%)	Y (100%)	94%
Examples of bullying are provided	Y (100%)	P (40%)	P (56%)	61%
Instructions are provided regarding suggested action when a worker reasonably believes they themselves are being bullied	P (25%)	P (60%)	Y (100%)	72%
Instructions are provided regarding suggested action when a worker reasonably believes a co-worker is being bullied	P (25%)	P (20%)	Y (100%)	61%
Policy stipulates that, when reported, instances of bullying will be investigated and dealt with quickly	P (50%)	P (60%)	P (39%)	67%
Policy stipulates the confidentiality and privacy of people involved in bullying complaint or investigation, stating that information is only to be disclosed on a need to know basis	P (75%)	P (80%)	P (89%)	83%
Policy stipulates a step or stage process for dealing with a bullying complaint	P (50%)	N (0%)	N (0%)	11%
Policy explicitly stipulates that all employees are expected to comply	P (75%)	Y (100%)	Y (100%)	94%
Organisational factors which may give rise to bullying / antecedents of bullying are mentioned	N (0%)	N (0%)	N (0%)	0%
Policy mentions how the organisation manages the risk of bullying	P (25%)	N (0%)	P (56%)	33%

Note. Y = present within all policies / N = present within no policies / P = present within some policies. % represents the percentage of organisational policies within which that feature is present.

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