



Workplace bullying in primary schools: teachers' experience of workplace bullying; an organisational response perspective

Kathleen Fitzpatrick

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UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Workplace Bullying in Primary Schools:

Teachers' Experience of Workplace Bullying; an
organisational response perspective

Kathleen Fitzpatrick

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Supervised by:

Professor Patricia Mannix-McNamara & Dr. Sarah MacCurtain

Submitted to the University of Limerick, October 2011

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that:

My submission as a whole is not substantially the same as any that I have previously made or am currently making, whether in published or unpublished form for a degree, diploma, or similar qualification at any university or similar institution. I am the author of this thesis.

Signature: _____ Kathleen Fitzpatrick

ABSTRACT

The aim of this doctoral research is to contribute to the growing body of knowledge concerning workplace bullying by considering the help-seeking experiences of targets of bullying and organisational responses to their complaints. A phenomenological research design was adopted. Twenty-two Irish primary school teachers (7 male, 15 female) self-selected for interview. Data were analysed utilising an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis framework.

All those interviewed had made complaints in accordance with the nationally agreed procedures stipulated to address workplace bullying in their schools. Redress procedures comprises several stages. All had engaged in stage one and two of the official complaints procedures; and all had availed of counselling, with most engaging with the recommended employee assistance service (formerly known as 'Care Call' now Medmark). Some participants had ceased engagement at stage 2, while others participants who had proceeded to stage three, ceased engagement at this juncture. Further participants proceeded to stage 4, of whom two are currently proscribed from returning to their posts due to ongoing disputes based upon retaliation for complaints, which comprised challenges to their fitness to work.

It is significant that no participant expressed satisfaction with the outcome of exercising agency and engaging with redress procedures. In fact, complaints procedures served as technologies of power for bullies who launched counterattacks. This doctoral study traced the pre-action, action, response, and overall consequences for the teacher as the target of workplace bullying describing targets' resistance within the context of complex social interactions and considered possible supportive, preventative, and resolution strategies.

The resultant approach has wide-ranging implications for the present pernicious practices and it identified a number of proposals for professional practice and modifications in the way in which workplace bullying may be countered and contained. This thesis contributes to discourses of agency in workplace bullying and challenges both researchers and policy-makers to fully elucidate the various issues surrounding pathways to redress for bullying. In addition through its emphasis on the power dynamics which characterize redress it extends the limited available literature in the substantive area about the ineffectiveness of complaints procedures

Moreover, despite the research limitation respecting the modest scale of the study involving self-selecting teachers, the richness of the data elicited underscores the problematic and contingent assumptions underpinning anti-bullying policies and procedures which purportedly address workplace bullying within small organisations.

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I wish to acknowledge and thank everyone who helped, contributed, and supported me through to the completion of this thesis.

My continuing passion is to part a curtain; that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other's presence, each other's wonder, each other's human plight (Eudora Welty).

I must firstly express my sincere gratitude to Professor Patricia Mannix-McNamara and Dr. Sarah MacCurtain who share my belief in raising awareness of the phenomenon of workplace bullying and oversaw my learning journey. Throughout the entire process you helped, encouraged, and guided me through times of bewilderment and uncertainty, and when it was necessary to “let go”. Your joint expertise, which helped to sharpen my focus and guide me in my pursuit of truth, was also a constant, motivating reminder of my goals to raise awareness of the issue of bullying amongst teachers, to encourage further debate on the issue, to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge, and to carry out meaningful research in the area of the aftermath of bullying complaints. Thank you both.

I am greatly indebted to the teachers who were willing to come forward; their contribution to this study is enormous. Your bravery is a crucial part of a movement to raise awareness, and to address and ultimately eliminate workplace bullying from our primary schools. You generously shared your personal insights, anguish, distress, isolation, and at times, harrowing accounts, of a lonely journey in search of redress and acknowledgement. Your passion for teaching was palpable throughout the interview data, as was your concern and regard for your students and colleagues. Your desire to prevent bullying from taking place and to improve how we deal with complaints of bullying for future generations of teachers is greatly appreciated. I fully believe that your abiding concern for those who are being bullied or may be bullied in the future, and your desire to improve conditions and support, will help to transform professional practice.

I want to thank my friends, especially Paul and John, who share my sense of outrage at the phenomenon of workplace bullying, and what we regard as grave injustice, inequality, and breaches of human rights. We cannot remain silent on issues of moral and professional conscience and yet we constantly question our own autobiographies at length. Thank you for your views, deliberations, proof-reading efforts, and enlightened advice. We are well overdue a tune.

I am deeply grateful to my husband Declan, my children, Kate, Sean, and Aoife, and my dad Brendan, who have loyally and lovingly supported me throughout this journey; putting up with me and all my clutter through all the ups and downs, and encouraging me to follow my dreams. You made it all possible.

And, last, but never least, I dedicate this study to the memory of my wonderful mum, Rita.

You made *me* possible.

The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall (Nelson Mandela).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

I thought of how unfair it was to have spent so many years in a state of depression and thought 'oh! how much time was lost where I could have been a happy wife and mum (Eleanor).

The foregoing statement illustrates how bullying affects everyone, not only the target but all those who interact with him/her; colleagues, friends, partners, children, family and, in the case of teachers, students as well. “Stress that bullied targets bring home affects their children and spouses in the form of displaced anger” (G. Namie 2007; Namie and Namie 2011, p.25). Over the past three decades the phenomenon of bullying has received increased attention from policy-makers but “only those who have suffered it fully appreciate the sheer awfulness of daily unremitting abuse that has no answer, no reason, no value and no end” (T. Field 1996, p.1). In tandem, research on bullying has grown rapidly and while much of this originated in the context of schools it has now evolved to include bullying in a variety of other settings, including that of the workplace. “Studies on workplace bullying now emerge from countries all over the world” advancing our knowledge considerably with remarkably consistent findings and outcomes (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018, p.71). They show that the issue of workplace bullying is not exclusive to any society, occupation or institution, or to any particular personality type. “Only people-free zones are immune” (T. Field 1996, p.13). A statement from an Taoiseach Leo Varadkar highlights this fact;

“I don’t think that anyone can ever tolerate systemic bullying or harassment or physical or sexual assault in any workplace whether it’s the arts, or the Oireachtas or anywhere else”.

He added;

“I am encouraged by the fact that more people are willing to come forward and tell their stories” as a means of changing *“the culture around these issues”*.
(Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Irish Independent 7th November 2017)

“Workplace Bullying is an increasingly pervasive issues in the workplace resulting in damage to the employees and the organisation with evidence linking such work

behaviours to mental illness, inability to work and suicide” (Holland 2019, p.129). Described in various studies as psychological or emotional abuse, terror, mobbing, aggression, harassment or violence, workplace bullying can have a profound effect on the health of a target and result in significant damage to an individual’s psychological, emotional, and physical well-being (Leymann and Gustafsson 1996; Lutgen-Sandvik 2007; Keashly and Jagatic 2011). No matter which term is used the negative effects of bullying have been well documented in the literature (Brodsky 1976; Zapf *et al.* 1996; Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2003). A close perusal of the literature highlights that the term ‘workplace bullying’ does not refer to a unitary construct but rather “embraces a multi-faceted phenomenon” (D’Cruz and Noronha 2019, p.3).

The extant international literature indicates that bullying can have “serious negative effects on the health and well-being of targets” (Annie Hogh 2011, p.112). In extreme cases it can even lead to breakdown or suicide (Leymann 1990; Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2003; Minton *et al.* 2008; Namie and Namie 2011; Stevens 2013). The enduring effects of bullying have also been well documented and attest that bullying can damage or terminate careers, “impair health, impede and destroy lives and livelihoods” (T. Field 1996, p.xviv). In fact, “the process of rebuilding a shattered confidence is a long and painful one, and even with professional help, can take years” (T. Field 1996). Research to date has largely focused on bullying behaviours as well as on victim and bully profiles. More generally, bullying research has focused on how bullying can affect the productivity of an entire organisation and incur financial costs to employers and to the national economy as a whole (Employment 2012). Workplace bullying is also widespread in schools impacting upon everyone in the work environment and causing “considerable damage to the education profession itself” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.152). However, reduced job engagement following exposure to bullying may be counteracted if employees perceive that the ability of the organisation to handle conflicts is predictable and to be trusted (Einarsen *et al.* 2017). Even if there were no financial cost involved “the problem should be challenged on the grounds of fairness and equality” (Einarsen *et al.* 2020, p.227).

Research indicates that public sector institutions are “high-risk settings for workplace bullying” (Hutchinson and Jackson, 2014, p. 13). Education is included as a high-risk profession (T. Field 1996; O’Connell *et al.* 2007; Fahie 2013). “Schools are curious places as they are typically not characterised by the discourses of ‘workplace’, yet this

does not inure them from being the sites of significant workplace bullying” (Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2018, p.83). Findings from the ESRI National Survey on bullying reveal that “education is the highest of all the professions listed in the survey results” (ESRI, 2007, p. 38). As such, education is an unsafe profession where “bullying is a reality in the staff room, as well as in the playground” (Minton and O'Moore 2004, p.93). While school workplace bullying may not be a new problem few “conversations regarding the bullying of teachers occur” (Orange 2018, p.390). However, the limited research available in this area does point to a greater prevalence of the issue than the number of complaints would indicate (Fisher *et al.* 1995; I.N.T.O 2000). Though estimating the real costs of school workplace bullying is inherently problematic, it is clear that if teachers in schools cannot be creative and productive because of workplace bullying, “the bottom line of student achievement is impacted” (Wiedmer 2011, p.39). Therefore, concentrated positive steps need to be taken to address workplace bullying in schools.

A universal definition of bullying continues to elude researchers and to date no single definitive coherent definition has been applied to the phenomenon (Chirilă and Constantin 2013). This may be because bullying is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon which encompasses a wide range of factors including intent (Björkqvist *et al.* 1994), duration (Vartia 2003), frequency (Einarsen *et al.* 2003) and a power imbalance (Salin 2003). Definitions identify four broad features that have been extracted to define workplace bullying, these features include frequency, persistency, hostility, and power imbalance (Samnani and Singh 2012). Many studies refer to workplace bullying as being characterised by persistent negative behaviour in the context of an unequal power relationship. It can involve “subtle and/or obvious negative behaviours embodying aggression, hostility, intimidation and harm” (D'Cruz and Noronha 2013, p.325). Thus, through the myriad of forms which bullying can take, workplace bullying of staff in schools can occur at the personal level, professional level, or a combination of both. Typically there is evidence of a power imbalance, or indeed, what may be considered to be an ‘abuse of power’, which is mainly horizontal or top-down. It is unsurprising then that “the principal is most frequently cited as the bully” (Duncan and Riley 2005, p.53). Research findings indicate that leadership plays a crucial role in reducing bullying behaviour (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.134).

An I.N.T.O. Report (2000) made a substantial contribution to raising awareness of bullying in the teaching profession and of the “paucity of material regarding the bullying of teachers in schools” (I.N.T.O 2000, p.2). Management were advised to assure employees that bullying is taken seriously by making a clear commitment to preventing bullying. Presently, Health and Safety legislation demands that management put in place a policy which outlines clear procedures for addressing bullying. However, “while policies do provide a protective effect, they are weak” (Hodgins and McNamara 2017, p.193). Evidence suggests that those in position to act move to protect the organization at the expense of employee well-being (Harrington *et al.* 2015). Accordingly, studies indicate that “a new independent role may be needed to deal with claims of bullying” (Harrington *et al.* 2015, p.384).

The extant literature focusses on negative behaviours, prevalence, impact on the organization and on the individual, definitions and on the various means of addressing workplace bullying. However, there is limited empirical research on the experiences of targets who have made complaints, their thought processes, decision making, perceptions of the efficacy of the complaint process and their perception of management's response. What is interesting is that people really “don't fully understand or comprehend” the severe negative impact of bullying until they experience it (Tracy *et al.* 2006, p.148). Power, as it operates within institutions, has received little critical attention in workplace bullying literature (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015). Although there have been notable studies in this area the literature reveals a “lack of research on organisational action against bullying” (Parzefall and Salin 2010, p.765). This study explored the lived experiences of teachers in the primary school sector, who experienced workplace bullying and made a complaint, with specific focus on the managements' response and the complex dynamics of power operating within the primary school system. Accordingly, is hoped that in addressing the important questions which this phenomenological study raises, knowledge in respect of workplace bullying and the practices of power within primary schools as public sector institutions will be enhanced.

1.1.1 Background to the study

The first large scientific study of workplace bullying in the U.S., the WBI-Zogby survey (2007), found that bullying was a substantial problem of epidemic proportions. “It affects half (49%) of American adults, 71.5 million workers” (Namie 2007, p.4). An

alarming finding is that bullying occurs with near impunity, that 40% of targets never complain, and even when they do in “62% of the cases, when made aware of bullying, employers worsen the problem or simply do nothing” (Namie 2007, p.1). The literature discloses that 71% of targets were not believed when they complained of bullying (Namie and Christensen 2013). A striking issue in some workplaces is that bullying behaviour is so typical and familiar that it almost becomes invisible and so goes undetected and undeterred. This can be an issue in education where “workplace bullying tends to be a hidden practice in schools” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.xviii).

However, if procedures and policies are perceived to be fair and effective and conflict is handled correctly then bullying and its negative effects can be reduced (S. Einarsen *et al.* 2011). When a climate of conflict management is created then “less bullying is taking place, work engagement is strong” (Einarsen *et al.* 2018, p.561). Therefore, the response of management to complaints of bullying can influence the action of those who engage in bullying as well as those affected by bullying (D’Cruz and Noronha 2010). In contrast, the inaction of management can send a clear signal to targets, bullies and witnesses that bullying is tolerated and possibly rewarded (Paull *et al.* 2019). Because the manifest behaviours of bullying are conveniently ignored, are unclear, or have become embedded in the school culture bullying can become normalised or it may be to the “culture of silence around bullying which prevails in Irish society” (O’Moore and Stevens 2014, p.1). In many past cases, bullied teachers simply left their school to teach elsewhere without explanation. Due to the loss of income and positional status incurred by teachers who leave their current employment, many suffer the abuse for longer (Hall 2005). In reality, the universal reluctance to make a complaint or to “tell”, whether as a victim or onlooker, poses a real challenge to tackling bullying in Irish primary schools. Yet studies have found that “if the organisation and those who are in positions of power within it are perceived as unsafe and unsupportive, individual witnesses of bullying are less likely to intervene” (MacCurtain *et al.* 2018, p.7). Bullying then becomes normalised to such a degree that targets and witnesses see “little value in taking action against it” (MacMahon *et al.* 2018, p.485). A ‘workplace bullying acceptance climate’ is then created which is a considerable organizational stressor (Vukelić *et al.* 2019).

Research suggests that it is possible to dispel the many myths surrounding bullying behaviour and achieve a situation of zero tolerance of bullying through good leadership and management. In order for this to take place principals must be fully aware of the various behaviours which constitute bullying and never discount claims of bullying. However, this is predicated on the assumption that those in leadership positions are themselves exempt from being bullies or targets. The myth that toxic practices and workplace cultures are nothing more than strong management styles is merely bullying masquerading as a style of leadership. Debunking the myths that surround bullying along with the idea that hierarchical or authoritarian practices, such as those associated with bullying, result in greater performance, would be helpful. However, “rank is quite clearly related to bullying; the stereotype of a bullying boss is not a myth” (Namie and Namie 2011, p.18). Ethical leadership, defined as the ability to deal with complex dilemmas that involve competing values in sociotechnical choices, might provide the solution. Ethical maturity is achieved when a leader is able to make these choices without being influenced by his or her own bias (Monahan 2012).

The researcher contends that policy-makers and researchers play a key role in effecting change and in promoting debate regarding workplace bullying in the public domain. Research studies have provided considerable evidence of workplace bullying and evaluated the causes and conditions that produce such toxic working environments. The more that is known about the nature, causes, effects, consequences, and efficacy of anti-bullying policies, the more likely it is that workplace bullying will be eradicated from the workplace. Furthermore, as policy-makers and management better understand the devastation and harm which arises from ignoring workplace bullying in schools, the greater resolve the powers that be may have in improving policies and codes of practice which prevent or deter bullying and provide support and/or redress opportunities for targets of workplace bullying. The inconsistencies between teachers’ right to a workplace experience in which they feel valued and respected and the reality that schools are toxic workplaces needs to be further investigated (Kirsten *et al.*). The literature on the “lived experience of workplace bullying from the frame of reference of those who are targeted is sparse” and needs to be explored (Ahmad and Sheehan 2017, p.78). The researcher maintains that teachers themselves have a responsibility to confront issues of workplace bullying. They have “been ignored for too long and commitment to eliminating it rests with the teaching profession” (Riley *et al.* 2012,

p.157). While much of the research to date has focused on the individual as the main unit of analysis, framing the issue as interpersonal, this study takes a critical management approach focusing on the role of organisational processes and structures in responding to complaints and in perpetuating norms and values. The critical management approach brings into view the organisational power balance that generates a school environment which may mirror the oppressive impact of these power structures.

1.1.2 Statement of the Problem

The quality of teaching is determined not just by the 'quality' of the teachers - although that is clearly critical - but also the environment in which they work. Able teachers are not necessarily going to reach their potential in settings that do not provide appropriate support or sufficient challenge or reward (OECD, 2005:9).

Workplace bullying has been defined as “the persistent and systematic victimisation of a colleague or a subordinate through repeated use of various kinds of aggressive behaviours over a long period of time and in a situation where victims have difficulty in defending themselves” (Ståle Einarsen *et al.* 2011, p.32). It is a “mode of behaviour which can be wielded against any individual if allowed” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.162). The research problem of this study addresses the fact that when workplace bullying occurs in schools, both victims and witnesses, including students, are all adversely affected by the behaviour. Furthermore, “when bullying is not addressed in a school, emotional and physical damage to those being bullied is inevitable” (Gray and Gardiner 2013, p.841). Given the level of damage that workplace bullying causes and the accompanying consequences within organisations, “it may be one of the most serious problems facing modern public sector organisations” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.20). Research has been conducted in different countries, in various cultural settings and the suggestions for further research are widespread. However, the issue of bullying in Irish primary schools, the different forms and means of investigation and redress as well as the institutional power dynamics need further exploration and research.

Bullying in education is an on-going problem that has yet to be appropriately acknowledged by governing and professional bodies, along with policy-makers and department officials. Abusive behaviour, whether psychological or emotional, is not

acceptable in any career and educators are no exception. In Ireland, there is “ambivalence and lack of condemnation of bullying in society that is reflected in our schools” (Mona O'Moore 2000, p.99). Indeed, studies suggest that the issue of workplace bullying in schools “could be a missing piece to understand student bullying” (Gray and Gardiner 2013, p.841). Moreover, despite an advancement of theory in terms of negative behaviours, effects and the various factors involved in the workplace bullying process, “a more complete description of the conscious experience lived by the individuals who were targeted” is lacking (Ahmad and Sheehan 2017).

In order for the problem to be effectively tackled research is needed. This study addresses an important issue, the ease with which teachers access the complaint process and the obstacles which pertain to seeking redress. Bullying may be reduced or perhaps eliminated by changing the existing culture in schools to one which promotes positive environments wherein mutual care and good will are paramount (Giovazolias *et al.* 2010). Because the school environment is governed by norms, rules and regulations then it is “vital that the role of power in negotiating and enforcing these rules is considered” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.120). However, targets tend to lack power and job security whilst bullies are often in positions of power (De Wet 2014). The dialectic nature of abuse and resistance is currently under-theorized therefore an examination and understanding of micropower is essential. (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.120). It is hoped that the findings of this study will inform existing investigative or preventative strategies.

Purpose of the Study

Many studies have presented key findings on workplace bullying which has resulted in an increased and improved understanding of the factors leading to the creation of a bullying culture. However, the main focus of any research study is to attempt to understand the phenomenon, increase awareness of the phenomenon and to seek to prevent or address difficulties such as those encountered by targets of bullying. The focus of this particular study was to understand the experiences of those who sought to resist bullying by seeking redress. Legislative reform derives from increased awareness and research findings. Significantly less research attention has been devoted to identifying the various means of resisting or addressing the phenomenon, redressing injustices, or the exploration of intervention strategies necessary to eliminating

workplace bullying. As such, increased efforts are needed to advance knowledge concerning workplace bullying in schools. This can be achieved by identifying the central elements involved, developing greater conceptual clarity, assessing and identifying effective agentive practices and developing new strategies and tools. While this study specifically deals with workplace bullying in education, the topic under inquiry is also of particular interest to all companies, organisations and institutions seeking to attract high-quality, skillful personnel, and to increase morale, productivity, and employee satisfaction. Increased understanding and knowledge about workplace bullying should result in the development of improved methods and procedures for addressing the problem and advance knowledge in formulating for change.

A fundamental element of any definition of bullying is power (Einarsen 1996, Olweus 1993) yet no study to date has sought to explain the role of power in school workplace bullying. Therefore, a broader understanding of power as it operates in primary schools is required. It follows then that there is a pressing need for an evidence-based examination of the complex interplay between targets of bullying and organisational procedures to address complaints. Such empirical research is critical to provide credible and authoritative analysis of the pertinent issues which inform both public debate and official policy. The purpose of any research study on workplace bullying is to find appropriate means to tackle the phenomenon. With this in mind, this study seeks to extend the view of workplace bullying in primary schools by viewing the role of organisational practices in facilitating or contributing to the problem. It is hoped that the study being undertaken by this author will also make a significant contribution to the evolving discourse and policy in this area.

1.1.3 Rationale and Justification

Research demonstrates that school workplace bullying stifles creativity and employee commitment (Hall 2005; Power *et al.* 2013). This has implications for students since teacher performance inevitably impacts pupil achievement (Darling-Hammond 2000; Hattie 2008). It has been widely accepted that when staff are in conflict the work of educating students becomes “clouded by the discord” (Gray and Gardiner 2013, p.841). Further studies contend that it is often the most talented and creative employees who are “frequently chased away” (Namie and Namie 2011, p.32). Accordingly, bullying must be researched and explored as measure to merely retain an adequate workforce

(Simons 2008). Yet school workplace bullying is frequently “unreported” and “sometimes ignored” (Riley et al., 2012, p.133). In consideration of the above, the Irish education sector must make every effort to ensure the wellbeing of its employees and its students in order to staunch the unnecessary attrition of valuable and talented teachers. However, education remains “the sector where it [bullying] continues to thrive and flourish” (O'Moore and Stevens 2014, p.1). It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the discourse on workplace bullying in schools and increase understanding and awareness around a phenomenon that costs schools in terms of both human capital and the delivery of a quality education and “causes considerable damage to the education profession itself” (Riley et al., 2012, p. 152).

It is especially important to study workplace bullying in teaching as teachers themselves serve as role models. While “teachers are in a position of considerable responsibility, not just in terms of imparting information to pupils, but also in shaping *attitudes*” the problem of bullying continues to be widespread in Irish schools (Minton and O'Moore 2004, p.93). The apparent disconnect between what teachers teach in terms of anti-bullying and what they exhibit or model in practice, has “profound implications for schools world-wide as they endeavour to tackle the issue of school-based bullying amongst both children and adults” (Fahie and Devine 2014, p.14). As long as teachers themselves “engage in either the bullying of their peers or their pupils, they are unlikely to be able to effectively deliver anti-bullying content effectively or convincingly” (Minton and O'Moore 2004, p.93). Therefore, the findings of this study may help school leaders, teacher unions, and the Department of Education and Skills to instantiate positive social change in educational organisations. In the past schools have ignored workplace bullying and “the bullying of staff in schools is rarely discussed or researched” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.xii). By reviewing the existing literature on bullying at work in terms of the present study, key developments are discussed and a justification for this study presented. The topic addresses a gap in the knowledge by exploring the issue of redress in workplace bullying in Irish primary schools, from an organizational response perspective, with a view to gaining further insights into the experiences of teachers who have encountered the phenomenon and attempted to address it through the recommended procedures. It also contributes to the growing body of knowledge by considering the effectiveness of the range of strategies, procedures, and the options

available to address such unsafe work environments. In short, it elucidates the experiences of bullied teachers' endeavors to seek help and redress.

Both researchers and practitioners agree that the effective prevention and management of workplace bullying represent significant challenges for a number of reasons. Workplace bullying, including the poorly defined and/or the subjective nature of workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik 2008; D'Cruz and Noronha 2010) may be impeded by a lack of awareness and information on prevention (Vartia and Leka 2011) and/or by an inconsistent implementation of the agreed procedures and interventions (Salin 2008; Woodrow and Guest 2014). Research reveals that management can engage in bullying behaviour but even where management are not involved they have a role to play in "facilitating the normalisation of bullying through 'destructive leadership' whereby bullying is tolerated" (MacMahon *et al.* 2018, p.476). Further research is required to increase knowledge about the phenomenon, the processes and procedures to monitor and control bullying as well as workplace bullying programs (Carden and Boyd 2013). Ultimately, research on workplace bullying presents an expectation of a deeper understanding which in turn provides hope and potential for the development of new methods to confront and prevent the emergence of a bullying culture among staff. At present, there is a paucity of research on the evaluation of prevention and intervention strategies (Cooper and Hoel 2003; Di Martino *et al.* 2003; Cowan 2011). There also appears to be a dearth of academic literature that examines the issue "at the level of lived experience from the frame of reference of the individuals who were targeted for bullying" so this study seeks to contribute to addressing this deficiency in the literature (Ahmad and Sheehan 2017, p.75). In addition, research on organizational responses to bullying complaints as well as how organisational support mechanisms operate are scarce (Parzefall and Salin 2010, p.765; Nielsen and Einarsen 2018). As research in the area of school workplace bullying remains conspicuously scarce, the findings from this study are expected to extend the body of knowledge on workplace bullying in schools. Since, the literature underscores the reality that bullying is now a broad social problem the topic must be refined in terms of focus and the scope. Yet "bullying literature provides scant evidence that people resist, fight back, or formally complain, and even less evidence of a link between resistance and subsequent change" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.88).

This study explores the lived experiences teachers, in the Irish primary sector, of workplace bullying with a particular focus on power and the organizational response to complaints. With this in mind, a number of research sub-questions were ultimately considered and devised. The justification of this study is based on the devastating effects of workplace bullying in the teaching profession and the novelty of applying an organisational perspective to analyse the perceived successful handling of workplace bullying complaints.

Social Learning Theory suggests that individuals learn and emulate subsequent adult behaviours based upon their surroundings (Bandura, 1973, 1986). If bullying becomes an accepted part of school culture then it creates “fertile ground for bullying of staff to thrive” (Riley *et al.* 2011). This in turn influences the “attitudes and beliefs the students hold towards violence and bullying” (Giovazolias *et al.* 2010, p.2209). Bullying destroys lives and reputations, and can “hurt everyone in its wake, especially the children” (Duffy and Sperry 2011, p.19). Teachers have an important role to play in teaching and implementing anti-bullying interventions and in shaping the attitudes of their students towards bullying and aggressive behaviours, which in turn, shape social attitudes towards violence and aggression (Giovazolias *et al.* 2010). The effect of school culture cannot be underestimated and positive school climate is associated with lower perceived incidents of bullying and harassment (Nansel *et al.* 2001; You *et al.* 2014; Cosgrove and Nickerson 2017). In fact, schools are “the most powerful force in the normalization of students’ lives” (Crownover and Jones 2018, p.24). Modelling respectful behaviour transfers beyond the classroom, therefore, teachers’ behaviour as educators is important in terms of their interactions with colleagues (Lucas 2012, p.14). If a bully-free workplace for school staff is to be achieved the phenomenon needs to be studied and researched because then “there is a greater chance that students too will enjoy a bully-free culture” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.146).

1.1.4 The Irish context

Ireland has had schools of one kind or another for many centuries. The present structure of the Irish National school system, established in 1831 by the Chief Secretary for Ireland, E.G. Stanley, is based on the provisions of ‘The Stanley Letter’ which outlined the provision of a network of primary schools with local patronage/management.

“Public funding would be available on certain conditions, which included the involvement of the local clergy in the provision of the schools” (CPSMA 2007, p.5). Both Protestant and Catholic wished to retain schools for children of their own faith and so modifications were introduced so that a network of schools was established, each with its own schools for children of their own faith.

For over 140 years Catholic primary schools were managed by the local priest with monastery and convent schools managed by the religious orders. The vast majority of schools were and still are under the management of one church, the Catholic Church. The Rules for National Schools reflect the fact that they are largely denominational schools. These schools are organised on a diocesan basis with the diocesan secretary acting as the link between the school and the Bishop. When the system was originally set up there was no legislation governing how they were to be run and circulars and rules issued from the relevant department. The question of ownership of primary schools is unique and complex. The responsibility for governance of primary schools is delegated to voluntary boards of management. Historically, the church was content to allow the state to lay down regulations with regard to curricula, examinations and the like while it retained control of teacher appointments and school ethos. For the majority of Irish schools today this continues to be the status quo. Schools are therefore privately owned and managed, but State funded leading to a situation whereby the employer, is not the paymaster or regulator of the professional conditions of its employees. The ethos is dictated by the owners but operating rules are largely set by the State.

At present primary schools operate under the Education Act, 1998, other relevant legislation and the Rules for National Schools. They have had boards of management since 1975 but The Education Act 1998 that put the operation of primary schools on a statutory basis and under Section 15, set out the responsibilities of the boards. The patron of the school has the right to decide whether or not to have a Board of Management (BOM) but in practice most schools have. The board is appointed by the patron. In making appointments, the patron must comply with Ministerial directions and the board is accountable to the patron and the Minister for Education and Skills. The board's main function is to manage the school on behalf of the patron, for the benefit of the students and to provide an appropriate education for each student at the

school. Whilst it is recommended that board members have a clear understanding of their governance role and responsibility and avail of training opportunities this duty is discretionary. The school principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school and is accountable to the board.

Ireland has a high proportion of primary schools relative to its population and the primary school plays an important role in local communities. There are almost 560,000 children enrolled in 3,305 primary schools in Ireland taught by 32,489 teachers. Over 90% or 505,000 children attend Catholic schools, under the patronage or management of the Catholic Bishops. Over fifty percent are considered small schools, having four or fewer teachers, one fifth of schools having an enrolment of less than fifty pupils. The board is accountable to the Bishop who has certain rights and responsibilities in relation to ethos, the appointment of the BOM, the appointment of chairpersons, the appointment of staff etc. The patron appoints the chairperson of the board. For the past 140 years Catholic primary school boards were chaired by a religious, the local priest and were, for the most part a 'parish school'. Since 1975, primary school boards have increasingly been chaired by lay people with the local priest remaining as a board member. The size of the board is determined by the size of the school, but all schools of more than one teacher have eight members on the board comprising:

- Two direct nominees of the patron
- Two parents of children enrolled in the school (one mother and one father) elected by the parents
- The principal
- One other teacher elected by the teaching staff.
- Two extra members agreed by the representatives of the patron, teachers and parents.

The term of office for a board is 4 years and members are eligible for reappointment when their term of office expires. The primary school is an organisation that is removed from outside scrutiny. The only instrument of scrutiny is the Department of Education and Science (DES) whose only involvement relates to educational matters. By and large the DES do not restrict or obstruct boards of management in their affairs.

Traditionally, policy development was initiated at state level in the DES or through agencies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) or the inspectorate. Policy initiatives were then distributed and supported nationally through the support services funded by the DES. Recently, an alternate plan for policy development has emerged. The present Minister for Education, Minister McHugh, launched the *Action Plan for Education 2018* (DES, 2018) and *Action Plan for Education 2019* (DES, 2019). They comprise numerous targets related to school performance and reflect a shift towards the global education reform movement (GERM) and the importance of economic capital (Sahlberg 2007). A bottom-up approach to policy development, “from below with support from above” is now becoming a fundamental part of the Irish primary school structure which requires school leaders to enthusiastically move towards initiatives and activities which involve organic and democratic models of leadership (King and Stevenson 2017).

The Board of Management

The board of management is the body of persons appointed by the patron to manage the school on behalf of the patron. All primary schools operate under the Education Act, 1998 other relevant legislation, circulars of the Department of Education and Skills and the Rules for National Schools currently applicable. The functions of the Board are set out in section 15 of the Education Act, 1998. The board of management is the employer of teachers and other staff of the school, under section 24 of the Education Act, 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act, 2012). The main responsibility of the BOM is to manage the school on behalf of the Patron and as such it is obliged to consult with and keep the Patron informed of key decisions and proposals. It is accountable to the Patron and to the Minister for Education. Its main responsibility to the Patron involves upholding the school’s characteristic spirit as well as planning, developing, implementing and reviewing policies regarding admission to and participation in the school life. The Board has overall responsibility for school policies which may include the Admission Policy, School Plan, Child Protection Policy, Code of Behaviour/Anti-Bullying Policy, Complaints Procedures, Health and Safety Statement etc. In addition, the Patron has a specific role in nominating members to interview selection boards and in the prior approval of appointments.

The chairperson

The chairperson of the board of management is appointed by the patron and his or her authority derives from that appointment. Every BOM has a chairperson, who is entitled to vote. In the event of a tied vote the chairperson has a casting vote. The Board can authorise the chairperson to act on its behalf in respect of particular functions. The chairperson acts on behalf of the BOM in certifying the school returns and other official forms as required. The Rules for National Schools recommend that the chairperson should visit the school regularly in order to satisfy him/her self that the Rules are being complied with. The chairperson may at any time call a meeting of the Board. The responsibilities of the chairperson include: chairing BOM meetings; official correspondence on behalf of the school; liaising with the principal between meetings; recruitment and employment related issues for all school staff; capital projects; signatures for cheques with other members of the BOM (CPSMA 2007). The chairperson can authorise any board member, including the principal, to act on behalf of the board.

The principal

It is important to mention that “leadership practice in Irish schools continues to be influenced by policy development at the macro level” (King 2019, p.57). The principal has a responsibility for the quality and effectiveness of education and the management of staff in a school as set out in the Education Act 1998. Every teacher is personally accountable for his/her own behaviour and work performance. As part of the principal’s responsibility in the day-to-day management of the school he/she is held responsible for guiding and directing the teachers and other staff. Other responsibilities include: the day-to-day management of the school, staff and pupils; professional educational issues; providing leadership to the overall school community; monitoring and preparing the annual budget. The principal reports to the BOM on a wide range of issues and it is recommended that the relationship between the board and the principal is one of “openness and of mutual loyalty” (CPSMA 2007, p.39). As outlined in Sections 22 and 23 of the Education Act 1998, the principal has responsibility for the provision of leadership and the creation of an environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of teachers. The *‘Governance Manual for Primary Schools (2019- 2023)* identifies high quality

leadership as crucial in the achievement of high quality educational outcomes for pupils. *'Looking at Our School, 2016 – a Quality Framework for Primary Schools'* provides a common understanding and language around the organisation and practice of leadership and management roles in Irish schools. The main purpose of school leadership and management is to “create and sustain an environment that underpins high quality pupil care, learning and teaching. Good leadership increases the overall effectiveness of the school generally but is particularly important in the context of the effective delivery of the curriculum, policy development and implementation, school self-evaluation and the creation of a positive school culture and climate for all pupils and staff” (Skills 2019, p.8). The Education Act provides also that the principal shall have all and such powers as are necessary or expedient in that regard to the competence of teachers. The Principal is, therefore, “in the best position to identify when professional competence issues arise in a teacher’s work” (Circular 60/2009, p. 5).

A new model of leadership is envisioned that proposes a democratic and more organic model of teacher leadership that emerges from below with support from management (King and Stevenson 2017). Such a model would see leadership shared among colleagues rather than linked to roles or hierarchical position. However, such a vision would require that those in management positions endorse a model that demands that principals learn to “let go” and adopt shared leadership models of practice. (King and Stevenson 2017). However, despite these aspirations leadership is still “described as hierarchical and aligned with that of formal ‘roles’ and positions” (King 2019).

Towards 2016 Revised Procedures for Suspension and Dismissal of Teachers Section 24(3) of the Education Act (1998)

The procedure relating to professional competence involves a staged process which moves from the informal to the formal and “may at the end of the process have recourse to disciplinary action (up to and including dismissal)” (Circular 60/2009, p.4). Disciplinary procedures also advance from informal to formal stages, a five-stage process which culminates in a teacher’s entitlement to an appeal. All procedures take account of employment legislation and the Labour Relation Commission’s Code of Practice on Disciplinary Procedures. Appealing against a proposed disciplinary action “in the case of a sanction being imposed at stage 1 the appeal will be to a nominee of the board of management. In the case of a sanction being imposed at Stage 2 and/or

Stage 3 of these procedures such an appeal will be heard by the board of management. In the case of a sanction being imposed under stage 4 of the procedure an appeal will be to a disciplinary appeal panel appointed by the board of management” (Circular 60/2009, p. 17). Having availed of the appeal process “the final decision in respect of the appeal panel recommendation rests with the board of management” (Circular 60/2009, p.20). However, even though the BOM is the employer and therefore has the responsibility for any potential legal liability, it is the principal who initially deals with issues as an agent and member of the board.

The inspectorate

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) inspectorate division is responsible for the evaluation of primary schools. Inspectors also provide advice on a range of educational issues to policy makers in the DES and to the wider educational system. The function of the inspectorate is to provide quality assurance and public accountability in the education system. All inspections are carried out in accordance with section 7(2)(b) and section 13(3)(a)(i) of the Education Act 1998. The main objective of the school inspection is to evaluate the school as a learning environment and to report on curriculum provision, teaching, learning and assessment. A range of inspection models have been put into practice. They range from one-day, unannounced incidental inspections, to more intensive whole-school evaluations (WSE) and inspections that follow-through on how schools have implemented recommendations made in previous inspection reports. All inspections, with the exception of incidental inspections, result in the issuing or publication of an inspection report which augments the oral feedback provided to the school community. The inspectorate also provide advice to policy makers in the Department of Education and Skills.

The Irish National Teachers’ union (INTO)

The Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) is the largest teachers’ trade union in Ireland with a total membership of 47,719 (August 2019). It represents 40,633 teachers at primary level in the Republic of Ireland and 7,086 teachers at primary and

post-primary level in Northern Ireland. Members pay a subscription to their trade union, the usual contribution is at a rate of .5% to 1% of gross salary per year.

According to the INTO its objectives include: To unite and organise the teachers of Ireland and to provide a means for the expression of their collective opinion on matters affecting the interests of education and of the teaching profession; To safeguard and improve the conditions of employment of its members, and to promote their interests; To regulate the relations between members and their fellow members, and between members and their employers; To afford advice and assistance to individual members on professional matters; To promote the principle of equality in all aspects of education and the teaching profession. Members who need information, advice or assistance from the INTO are advised in the first instance to consult the relevant section of the INTO website. The website is a resource and information service for members. Secondly, to seek the advice and assistance of the school's INTO Staff Representative or to contact an officer of the branch. Finally in the case of any serious or urgent matter to contact their district representative on the Central Executive Committee. If all of these actions fail to resolve the matter members can contact INTO Head Office. The Organisation's monthly magazine InTouch carries important updated information. In relation to bullying the INTO concurs with management, in line with current legislation, in advising that each board of management/school adopt a policy and procedure on bullying, which would include a clear statement that any such behaviour is not acceptable within the school.

Employee Assistance Service (EAS)

The Employee Assistance Service (EAS), formerly known as Carecall, provides teachers and their immediate family members with access to confidential counselling and it assists teachers in coping with the effect of personal and work-related issues. The service is free and confidential and available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to teachers in schools. An external provider, Inspire Workplace Services, have been contracted by the DES to deliver mental health and wellbeing support. The service includes 24 hour confidential telephone counselling which is delivered by qualified and experienced Counsellors who will provide immediate telephone counselling, support and assessment for up to one hour.

Mediation

The INTO and management stress the importance of workplace culture, they promote collaborative approaches that facilitate open and constructive dialogue that allow for difficulties to be addressed. Therefore, school culture should enable issues to be aired in a transparent and fair manner. Should this prove difficult the INTO in collaboration with management bodies have developed a specific procedure to address staff relations difficulties or conflicts. This procedure comprises a mediation facility whereby a trained mediator from the INTO or management panel can work with the staff of a school in order to reach a framework to resolve any issues. Teachers are required to obtain prior written approval from INTO Head Office and from the office of the school's patron or the local CPSMA Representative/Diocesan Secretary. The service is paid for by INTO and management jointly. The INTO district representative must obtain approval of head office and the chairperson of the BOM must obtain approval of the office of the patron and they liaise with their respective headquarters in order to agree the name of a suitable mediator for the mediation. The mediator may be informally provided with background information by the INTO district representative, the chairperson of the board of management or a management representative. Initially the mediator reviews all documentation and meets the parties before deciding if it is possible to reach agreement. Before beginning the process members of staff are required to verify that they will participate constructively in trying to achieve resolution and that they will accept the recommendations of the Mediator. A process of meetings and negotiation ensues and the process culminates in the drafting of a framework for resolution of the difficulties. Follow-up meetings by a mediator with staff are recommended but limited to two.

The OHS (Medmark)

Medmark is the official Occupational Health Service (OHS) for schools. It provides schools and teachers with a medical assessment system so that the health and safety of those working within the teaching system can be ensured. It also works with the Department of Education and Skills to ensure that their duty of care under the Safety, Health & Welfare at Work act 2005 is met and adhered to. It offers professional occupational health advice on employee medical fitness under the following headings: pre-employment health assessments, illness absence assessment, fitness to return to

work, ill health retirement and critical illness leave. If a teacher is absent for over twenty eight days in a twelve-month period the board must make a non-discretionary referral to the Medmark. The school must provide a copy of the referral to the teacher. Medmark then make contact with the teacher to discuss the nature of their illness and complete an Occupational Health Assessment Form over the phone. The teacher may be asked to attend an appointment with a doctor from Medmark. As an employer, the BOM has the discretion to make a referral to Medmark at any stage if they have a reasonable concern about a teacher's fitness to work.

1.1.5 The Legislative framework

In order to provide further insights into the phenomenon of bullying and redress procedures it is necessary to provide an overview of the law in relation to workplace bullying. Globally countries have either adopted a statutory tort approach to the problem or a workplace safety regulatory approach. European countries such as Norway, Sweden, and the UK have introduced new legislation or have incorporated new provisions into existing legislation (Hanley and O'Rourke 2016). Australia and France are the only countries so far to criminalise bullying behavior.

In Ireland, the predominant regulatory approach to adopt some legal or policy response to workplace bullying, has been in the area of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) law. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to describe the intricacies of OHS legislation suffice to say that the main requirement under the law is that employees and employers to draw up agreed policy statements reflecting the need to eliminate bullying behaviours from the work environment. They were also required to put in place an agreed procedure for dealing with complaints. In 1998 the health and Safety Authority launched a document 'Bullying at Work' which endeavored to raise awareness about workplace bullying. Since then many trade unions have initiated campaigns. Each of the unions have produced guidelines and recommendations and they called on. The INTO publication '*Staff Relations*' (2000), a report on adult bullying in schools, highlighted the importance of ensuring that a bullying culture does not develop in schools.

Schools are microcosms of society and at times, they can reflect the unacceptable in addition to the acceptable values of that society. There is a need for schools to examine their own value systems and to ensure that every member of the school community is treated with dignity and respect (I.N.T.O 2000).

The above statement highlights the need for schools to create an anti-bullying environment which pertains to the whole school community and to ensure that all adults and pupils are treated with dignity and respect. It focuses attention on the importance of bullying prevention and on the necessity for all staff to be apprised of policies, procedures, and possible sanctions. ‘The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act (1989)’ places an onus on employers to ensure the safety, health and welfare at work of all employees. The general duties imposed by the Act, extend to the protection of the psychiatric health of employees and comprehend the obligation to provide systems and measures which safeguard the employee against psychiatric injury induced by the stress and pressures of the employee’s working conditions and workload. An employer must take care not only of the physical health of their employees, by providing safe equipment, but must also take reasonable care to protect them against mental injury. Therefore, the BOM as an employer, has an obligation to prevent their employees from such that would cause mental injury, i.e. stress, harassment and bullying in the workplace. It is the duty of the employer to take necessary measures to ensure the safety and health protection of employees, including the mental conditions which incorporate the stress which many victims of workplace bullying suffer. The Act imposes general and specific obligations on employers with regard to occupational risks and hazards in the workplace and one such requirement is that of the development of an adequate prevention policy in relation to safety, health and welfare at work. In short, Safety, Health and Welfare legislation requires boards of management to adopt a code of practice, to have a Safety Statement in place as well as an Anti-bullying policy and procedures for dealing with complaints of bullying. There are a number of in-house procedures available to primary teachers to address workplace bullying: The Bullying and Harassment Procedure; The Procedure to address Staff Difficulties; The Grievance Procedure; Mediation. All procedures follow a form of escalating formality from informal, to formal and culminate in an independent process. The principal and/or chairperson is involved in all stages of the process.

The European Union, of which Ireland is a member, has recognised the significance of workplace bullying. In 2002, the European Parliament endorsed the development of antibullying legislation (European Parliament 2002) and in 2007 an agreement, designed to prevent and manage problems of workplace bullying. The ‘Framework

Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work' (2007) directed organisations to adopt zero-tolerance policies towards offending behaviours such as workplace violence, and to develop in-house procedures to address issues that arise. The National Task Forces on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying and an Expert Advisory Group on Workplace Bullying was set up in 1999 and 2004 respectively and were charged with addressing the issue. The National Health and Safety Authority (2007) then issued a Code of Practice for the Prevention and Resolution of Workplace Bullying. In addition Labour Relations Commission (2002) in response to the National Task Force report issued their Code of Practice Detailing Procedures for Addressing Bullying in the Workplace. The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act (2005) increased emphasis on employer responsibility to provide safe working conditions and the prevention of bullying. This led to the requirement for policies and procedures to prevent bullying to be instituted in workplaces.

The Report of the Task Force on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying (2001) identified some employment and industrial relations statutes that have a bearing on workplace bullying however they concluded "there is no specific legislation on the topic" (Bullying 2001, p.13). It analysed existing legislation relating to workplace bullying and considered the need for new or amended dedicated anti-bullying legislation. It found that the existing employment and industrial relations legislation was adequate and decided "not to recommend that new or amending legislation be introduced" (Bullying 2001, p.vii). However, it did propose that workers in Ireland may not be aware of the full range and scope of legislation that has a bearing on the topic of workplace bullying (Bullying 2001).

Even though there is no specific legislation on workplace bullying there are a number of statutes that have a bearing on bullying. The main statutes identified by the Task Force were: Industrial Relations Acts, 1946 to 1990, Unfair Dismissals Acts, 1977 to 1993, Employment Equality Act, 1998, Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 1989. However, despite the various pieces of legislation it appears that there are no regulations specifically covering stress in the workplace or bullying in particular. The safety and health legislation does not provide a forum of redress for those who feel they have been bullied. If one feels they have been bullied in the workplace and they feel there is no system for the prevention of bullying in the workplace, they may make a complaint. The Labour Relations Commission was set up to improve Irish industrial relations by providing a range of services to employers, trade unions and employees.

As part of its remit it helped in the prevention and resolution of disputes through its conciliation service or by referring matters to the Labour Court. It also provided an advisory service which facilitated resolutions to internal problems such as bullying. The Industrial Relations Act 1969, resulted in the establishment of the Rights Commissioner Service, that dealt with the vast majority of bullying issues that were dealt with by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC). In October 2015, under the Workplace Relations Act 2015, the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) was established and it took on the functions of the National Employment Rights Authority, the Labour Relations Commission and the Director of the Equality Tribunal (EAT). The appeal functions of the EAT were transferred to the Labour Court which is now the single appeal body for all workplace relations appeals. The determination of the Labour Court is binding. A target of bullying can bring a claim to the Labour Court under Section 13(9), Section 20(1), or Section 26(1) but in the case of Section 20, which deals with most of the bullying cases, the recommendation is not enforceable against the employer. Similarly, under Section 26 where both parties request the court to investigate an issue and make a recommendation the recommendation is not legally enforceable.

Certain legal and quasi-legal documents have a role to play in bullying cases; the Constitution; the European Convention on Human Rights; EU directives incorporated into Irish law; some statutes and documents issued by The DES. Article 40: Personal Rights: Right to one's good name & Right to fair procedures or natural justice. However, "despite overwhelming evidence of bullying behaviour in Irish society, there still exists no specific legislation" (O'Moore and Stevens 2013, p.2). Therefore, it is left to the various management authorities at local level, to devise and implement policies in relation to bullying. There is the potential for considerable variability in respect to the way bullying is addressed in schools. Even though the Scandinavian countries 'paved the way' in enacting laws to protect workers from abusive misconduct and many EU countries have now passed anti-bullying laws "available statistics reveal, however, that bullying has not been redressed adequately in various EU countries especially Finland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland and France" (Hanley and O'Rourke 2016, p.362).

Legislation in relation to workplace bullying and work related stress

While the option of going to court is expensive, time consuming and beyond the means of most teachers, there is also the choice of taking a personal injuries case against the employer the BOM. Case law in Ireland highlights the complexity of litigation in relation to stress related illness due to bullying behaviour. The legal definition of work-related stress is “the emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological reaction to aversive and noxious aspects of work, work environments and work organisations” (Eardley 2002). Clearly there are two aspects to work-related stress: (a) stress-inducing factors, or “stressors”, in the work environment; and (b) the response of the worker to those stressors. Stress is characterised by high levels of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping. A plaintiff cannot succeed in a claim of workplace bullying unless he can also prove that he suffered damage amounting to personal injury as a result of his employer's breach of duty. Where the personal injury is not of a direct physical kind, as in the case of bullying, it must amount to an identifiable psychiatric injury.

In order to bring a successful case of workplace bullying a teacher must prove negligence, that a BOM breached its duty of care. In order to defend a case of bullying a board would have to identify and prove what steps it took in order to prevent the situation being complained of by the teacher. Similarly, the target would need to provide evidence of a personal injury and of having raised a concern of the matter complained of. However, given that there is no liability in law to general stress and anxiety unless these aggregate to a recognised psychiatric disorder such disorder must be established by expert evidence. Even if a teacher can verify that they are suffering from an identifiable psychiatric disorder/injury it is difficult to establish whether the stress and anxiety is work related or personal. Once a complaint is received the BOM is obliged to bring the appropriate procedures to the attention of the teacher and to draw their attention to the Employee Assistance Scheme (EAS). The board is entitled to refer the teacher for a medical assessment to Medmark. The myriad of avenues for taking a bullying action and their restrictions in defending the rights of employees has left Irish law in a very unsatisfactory position with respect to bullying claims.

Unlike countries such as Australia, Sweden, France and Belgium, the UK and Irish Governments have so far resisted introducing general legislation aimed at incidents of workplace bullying (Di Martino *et al.* 2003). Instead, it is considered that current legislation and other available legal remedies are adequately able to deal with such

cases (Einarsen and Nielsen 2004, p.115). While these problems may in part be ameliorated by virtue of the enactment of EU legislation (Article 13 EU treaty) requiring specific and common definitions of “harassment” in the areas of discrimination on grounds of race, disability, religion, and sexual orientation in general, Irish law discloses no coherent approach to workplace bullying and harassment. A national survey on Bullying in the workplace (2000), found that 96.9% of respondents were in favour of introducing legislation to make bullying/harassment an offence in the workplace. O’Moore (2010) queries why policymakers worldwide are not investing more effort into tackling the problem, particularly as the WHO World Report on Violence and Health emphasized that “upstream investments bring downstream results” (O’ Moore 2010). “One of the main areas the report draws attention to is investment in primary prevention” (Krug *et al.* 2002, p.1087).

The international legal framework

The Dutch introduced legislation on workplace bullying as part of ‘The Working Conditions Act’ (Arbowet). It specifically refers to emotional abuse within and outside the organisation. Under the public law Act Dutch employers are legally obliged to carry out primary, secondary and tertiary intervention, which include preventive methods, protection and support measures and punitive actions for bullies. The Act conceptualises workplace bullying in line with standard definitions and its purpose is to facilitate the protection of targets of workplace bullying without having recourse to legal action. The Act facilitates mediation, psychological and medical advice, engagement with counsellors, supervisors and HR managers and it enables targets to lodge formal internal complaints, without involving trade unions or legal consultants. It also provides targets with the prospect of relief, redress and rehabilitation. The role of Dutch legislation, as a means of mitigating workplace bullying from the perspective of legislative intention, processes and outcomes, was recently reviewed. The efficacy of state regulation in establishing a climate of prevention and redress was examined and the findings point to the importance of state involvement, organisational commitment and collective action in reducing workplace bullying. Therefore, active involvement of the state, in addition to employers’ initiatives, is necessary for any anti-bullying legislation to be successful. “The presence of legislation signals national intolerance of the issue, indicating that the state recognises workplace emotional abuse as a problem”

(D’Cruz *et al.* 2019, p.16). Fundamentally, the introduction of an Act such as *Arbowet* conveys the unacceptability of workplace bullying and it signifies that the state has lent legitimacy to the issue.

The implementation of state-wide policy “has the potential to affect school climate, bullying and harassment incidents, prevention and intervention efforts, and the general perceptions of educators on effectiveness and needed improvement” (Cosgrove and Nickerson 2017, p.540). The Scandinavian academic interest in adult bullying is matched with strong public awareness and reflected in the establishment of laws specifically against bullying/mobbing in Sweden in 1993 and Norway in 1994 (Rayner and Hoel 1997). The funding of considerable research by government, with trade union participation, has yielded much research in Scandinavia.

New legislation introduced in Australia, *Fair Work Act 2009 (FW Act)* seeks to protect employees from workplace bullying. Since January 2014, a worker who reasonably believes that he or she has been bullied at work can apply to the Fair Work Commission for an order to stop the bullying. If the Commission is satisfied that a valid application has been made, the Commission is empowered to make an order it considers appropriate to prevent the worker from being bullied. The Commission can make orders pursuant to section 789FF of the FW Act to stop the bullying. Section 789FF of the FW Act confers on the Commission very broad powers to make “any order” is considers appropriate, excluding monetary orders and orders for reinstatement (Australia 2009). This legislation reflects the intention of the legislature to make the new jurisdiction remedial in nature and one which addresses the issues in the workplace between the bully and the bullied worker. In the final analysis the literature suggests that different countries with robust anti-bullying laws promote better mechanisms to tackle and eliminate workplace bullying.

1.2 Research Question

Using the power lens, the underpinning research question guiding this study was:

What is the lived experience of teachers who have initiated informal or formal complaints of bullying?

1.2.1 Emerging questions

An additional number of research sub-questions emerged from the main question as follows:

- *What factors, dynamics and features of organisational power are evident in the response of management to complaints of bullying?*
- *What support is provided to staff to prevent or deal with workplace bullying?*
- *What are teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the complaints procedures for dealing with workplace bullying?*

Consistent findings across bullying research which demonstrates that target reluctance to complain or to tell, whether as a victim or onlooker, pose a real challenge to tackling bullying (Dowd 2010; DeLara 2012; Riley *et al.* 2012; Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2018). The rationale for this hesitancy is a challenge, as is ensuring that teachers have confidence in the process of dealing with complaints of bullying (Kelly 2005).

The main research question examined teachers' experience of engaging with the complaints process in an attempt to deal with workplace bullying. It documented their reluctance to speak out and the difficulties they encountered when attempting to make a complaint by engaging with complaint procedures. Barriers to engagement included lack of awareness of workplace bullying, deficiencies in support, inability to openly discuss the phenomenon, the existence of a bullying culture, bystander behaviour, problematic procedures and the exercise of power within schools. This study also examined managements' responses with a particular focus on the power dynamics that influence that response. To this end, it focused on the experiences of teachers who had proceeded with complaint protocol and how management reacted in line with policies and procedures. Research confirms that bullying flourishes when it provokes no response from management and when is not subject to sanctions (Langlois 2011). The issue of organisational systems addresses a gap in the understanding of what actually takes place when targets decide to complain. The literature reveals that in some workplaces bullying behaviour is so typical and insidious that it almost becomes imperceptible and as such, it goes unchallenged, undetected, and undeterred (Kelly 2005; Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a). The research sub-questions investigated management's response and the level of support targets receive when they complain. They also assesses whether the present procedures are effective in dealing with complaints of abusive behaviour. The effectiveness of preventative procedures from target

perspectives is also explored, as are the consequences of making a complaint of workplace bullying.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Workplace bullying has recently become a much researched topic with a wide range of books and articles in occupational health, medicine, epidemiology, psychology and management, in fact the field of study has exploded exponentially. While much research to date has focused on prevalence, cost, behaviours, effects and consequences, far fewer studies have sought to explore the role of the organisation and the efficacy of the procedures deployed to either prevent it or to manage it. Few studies have established the efficacy of anti-bullying procedures or “the extent to which *the handling* of workplace bullying is perceived as successful” (Einarsen *et al.* 2017, p.38). Research indicates that many targets believe the investigation of their complaint to be unfair (Institute and <http://> 2007). In addition, many employees opt to resign from their job rather than face up to bullying and/or disclose their experiences (Zapf and Leymann 1996; Djurkovic *et al.* 2008; D’Cruz and Noronha 2010). In some instances “it is an ‘undiscussable’ topic at work because of its career-jeopardizing potential” (Institute and <http://> 2007, p.6). Given that shame might even prevent some targets from taking the story home (Namie and Namie 2011), it is imperative to ascertain what becomes of those who engage with the recommended procedures to challenge the behaviour. Targets may need to tell their story but feel anxious confronting the negative behaviour in the workplace. Self-blame can be reduced through the validation of target experiences of bullying (Namie and Namie 2011). However, evidence suggests that procedures to address bullying can be used by management to further suppress agency, rather than being a justice mechanism they can become “almost the opposite” (MacMahon *et al.* 2018, p.476). Managerial power structures can determine what can and cannot be addressed and this can effectively result in a situation where management can “deliberately fashion a climate of silence in organisation” (Donaghey *et al.* 2011, p.57). Targets then may choose to “shut up and put up” (Hodgins 2008).

The overarching purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore target agency, the role of the organisation, the effectiveness of the present complaint procedures and to initiate dialogue. Furthermore, the presence of a voice mechanism is usually equated with voice utility but this may not be the case and the presence of a

“union as a vehicle for voice may be substantially hindered if that union is weak or ineffectual (Gollan *et al.* 2005). Therefore it is important to ascertain if teacher voice and school actions to combat bullying behaviours are effective. It is evident that management, unions, and the DES play an important role in devising and implementing policies, procedures, and codes of practice. However, research is needed to assess their effectiveness. “Employees are the judges of procedural fairness and credibility” (Namie and Namie 2011, p.142). The main objective is to identify the complex problems encountered by victims in reporting bullying and in so doing contribute to the prevention and constructive management of the problem. The ways in which such knowledge may be translated into effective practice is paramount, and while beyond the direct scope of the present study, the conclusions and recommendations provide several suggestions for further development and improvement.

Nationally and internationally, the issue of response to workplace bullying complaints, particularly in education, has been relatively under-researched and there is a current paucity of published studies on the topic. Research studies in the past have used power models to examine workplace bullying: (Hutchinson *et al.* 2010b);(Fahie and Devine 2014); (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015; D’Cruz *et al.* 2018); (Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2018); (Vickers 2012). Examining the power dynamics in bullying situations with contextualized models of power, such as Foucault (1977; 1982), Weber (1978), Giddens (1982; 1984) and Clegg (1989), offers new insights into targets’ access to resources of power and provides a lens to examine power dynamics in organisations. The researcher believes that exploring the key theories on power and how it is used in workplace bullying situations, should add to our understanding of why organisations respond in the way they do when targets try to resist workplace bullying. Research on the experiences, opinions and thought processes of targets who have made complaints and experienced managements’ response is scarce. Moreover, no study to date has explored the role of power structures or power relations in workplace bullying in schools. There is an urgent need for an evidence-based examination of the complex interplay between targets of bullying, management and the procedures to address their complaints. Such research is critical, as it provides credible and authoritative analysis of the pertinent issues, informing both public debate and official policy. It is hoped that the study being undertaken by this author, will contribute significantly to the evolving discourse and policy in this area. This research study gave rise to a number of important conclusions which are examined in the following chapters. Identification of the

knowledge gap as well as the key findings in the context of present research and the research questions are summarised in appendix 1. A discussion of suggested procedural changes and legislative policy changes is also provided. Finally, the contributions to the field and limitations of the study are delineated, and recommendations for further research presented.

1.4. Thesis Outline

1.4.1 Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter reviews the relevant literature in relation to workplace bullying in general and in education. It explores the challenges associated with reporting bullying in the workplace and the role that power plays in individual and organisational responses. The limited literature available on the topic of seeking redress is presented and the focus of power within the relevant literature highlighted. Literature searches reveal surprisingly little attention to school workplace bullying while research on and school (pupil/student) bullying has developed into a coherent body of literature, and is used by many studies for “the base it provides in researching bullying amongst adults at work” (Hoel and Rayner 1997). The literature searches for ‘workplace bullying’ reveal common descriptive factors such as: negative behaviours, frequency, imbalance of power, and intent. Research on factors associated with resistance to workplace bullying, such as denotive hesitancy, avoidance, fighting back, enablers and procedures for dealing with the problem are also explored. Organisational responses to complaints of workplace bullying are reviewed as is the process for policy development. The theoretical framework focused on power and its impact on resistance and on organizational responses to complaints of bullying. Since bullying is seen to occur in hierarchical relationships these theories are central to the discourse on the problem of workplace bullying in schools .

1.4.2 Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides a description of the data collection and methodology. Justification for the employment of a qualitative approach to answer the research question is also presented as is the researcher’s positionality. Further, the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is discussed with reference to the

teachings of Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). The chapter includes a description of the recruitment process, relevant details on the participants, and elucidates the researcher collection and analysis of the interview data. Relevant ethical issues are also discussed.

1.4.3 Chapter 4: Results

The results chapter presents the findings from an IPA analysis of the twenty-one interviews conducted. Four superordinate themes were identified and discussed: namely, pre-action; action; perceived response to complaint; and consequences. A number of subordinate themes were identified within each of the four themes. The superordinate and subordinate themes illuminate the lived experiences of teachers who attempted to resolve bullying issues within their schools by making a complaint, and are illustrated by relevant participant quotes. The researcher's interpretation of the themes is included in this chapter and the challenges associated with entering the complaint process presented.

1.4.4 Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter Five offers a discussion on the research findings. The relevant academic literature is considered in light of these findings. In addition, the research limitations, application to practice, and suggested future research directions is presented. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study and reflections on the research project overall.

1.4.5 Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The final chapter suggests a way forward to establishing a bully-free workplace by promoting good practice in terms of prevention and awareness raising strategies amongst staff to enable teachers to identify a culture of bullying within their schools. Based on the data analysis in this study, the main recommendation is for principals, management, and colleagues to listen, support, and act upon allegations of workplace bullying. It further suggests improved strategies for responding to complaints, providing supports for both targets and witnesses, and a framework for eliminating staff bullying. The chapter concludes with a number of recommendations which the

participants regard as essential in order to respond effectively and sympathetically to complaints of bullying.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Humanity has always been beset by bullying, and until recently, society has tacitly accepted the practice (Field 1996, p.xviv).

The escalation and prevalence of the behaviour over the past two decades “has created widespread concern across most countries and communities internationally” (Ryan 2013, p.2). Consequently this counterproductive behaviour, known as workplace bullying, “has captured the attention of researchers in recent years” (Porter *et al.* 2018, p.119). It was Adams (1990) who first highlighted that workplace bullying was emerging as a topic for further investigation and study but it was Namie & Namie who introduced the term “workplace bullying” to the U.S. in the press in 1998. Since then workplace bullying has become a phenomenon that has attracted much attention at both a national and international level. Many researchers use different terms to refer to “what are essentially the same phenomenon” (Fritz 2014, p.4). For the purpose of this study it will be referred to as ‘workplace bullying’, a phenomenon that has now evolved to become more “devious and ruthless than ever before” (Ryan 2013, p.6). This chapter explores the workplace bullying literature and it addresses the main elements of this study which focuses on school workplace bullying. Searches reveal that research on resistance to bullying is limited. Even though there has been much publicity about the personal and financial cost of workplace bullying, little has been discovered about the organizational power structures and practices and their impact on redress processes. Moreover, “there has been given scant focus on the nexus between workplace bullying and institutional failures” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.23). Whilst targets of bullying often experience passionate need for redress a critical examination of the procedures is necessary, as the procedures for dealing with bullying can be even more stressful for targets.

Research to date has outlined the effects of bullying behaviour on the individual, the organisation and the cost to society as a whole (Hoel *et al.* 2003; O'Connell *et al.* 2007; Rockett 2015). It reveals negative outcomes that result in “high costs in financial and human terms” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.13). Given that studies “rarely investigate struggles against hostile, abusive treatment at work” the focus of this study is on the experience of seeking help through the recommended redress procedures available to targets in Irish primary schools (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.407). Indeed, “the dialectic character of resistance and material risks resistance involves are, at times, given only cursory examination” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.407).

The overview of the literature presented draws on many areas of bullying literature and it provides an in-depth presentation of the central elements involved. Firstly the concept of bullying is introduced, its prevalence, consequences, cost, the varied terminology and elusive definitions associated with it. Its development is mapped from being a taboo subject in organizational research and life to the ‘research topic of the 1990s’ (Hoel *et al.* 1999). Its foundations in school bullying amongst students is explored and its development over the past three decades is tracked, leading to a broad conceptualization of the phenomenon of workplace bullying. The literature, as it specifically relates to education, is explored as are the studies that address the various means of responding to bullying under the current policies and procedures. From the literature review it is evident that power is an important feature, accordingly its manifestation and how it relates to the common organisational responses to complaints is explored. The foundations of bullying are then expanded on as workplace bullying is viewed through an organisational power lens. Finally, the main theoretical framework that underpins this study which comprise power, resistance and agency is presented.

2.1.1 Historical overview

Research on bullying has its origins in the study of bullying behaviours amongst school children. Seminal studies in bullying were conducted by Dr. Dan Olweus, who in the 1970’s initiated the first systematic research study in the world on problems associated with bullying. Up to the 1990’s there was very little attention to and research on the topic of bullying outside of Scandinavia (Olweus and Limber 2007). Research on bullying in education has focused mainly on the bullying of students by fellow students. However, after comparing school based bullying to workplace bullying, “it appears that

these phenomena are one and the same other than in school bullying the bully is in a school or academic setting” (Ricks 2015, p.22). According to Cemaloğlu the topic of workplace bullying has received little attention. “In the business arena, anecdotal articles generally prevail, while in the social science literature school bullying is by far the most frequently reported” (Cemaloglu 2011, p.499). For this reason it is important to refer to this “coherent body of literature” [viz., on the bullying of students in schools] for the base it provides in researching bullying amongst adults at work (Cemaloglu 2011, p.499). However, adult bullying at work presents the researcher with considerably more difficulties than that of student school bullying (Hoel and Rayner 1997).

The history of workplace bullying is relatively short since the phenomenon has only become the focus of research studies over the past thirty years. The delay in research was probably due to the secrecy associated with the phenomenon (Adams 1992). Carroll Brodsky (1976) prompted the discourse in America and his book *The Harassed Worker*, the earliest examination of workplace bullying, made a vital contribution to the body of knowledge on the topic. Following on from this Heinz Leymann, a Scandinavian psychiatrist who coined the term ‘mobbing’, founded the first international anti-bullying movement and he gave credence to the systematic exploration of workplace bullying as a suitable research topic. Hospitals, schools and religious orders were identified as having the highest incidence of workplace aggression (Leymann 1996). Anti-bullying legislation has since been introduced in many countries (Leymann 1990, 1996). Much of the early research literature on workplace bullying, which emanated during the 1990’s from Scandinavian countries, raised awareness of the issue of bullying among adults in the workplace. This increased public awareness and ultimately led to the introduction of legislation specifically dealing with bullying. Research as well as practical knowledge in the field is still developing but bullying has now emerged as a distinctive conceptual framework. “Research on workplace bullying has grown, matured, and developed extensively in a relatively short amount of time and bullying is now considered as one of the most detrimental stressors in contemporary working life” (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018, p.79).

2.1.2 Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying, a complex and dynamic phenomenon, arises worldwide,

comprises a range of behaviours that can be direct or indirect and is a “chronic social stressor” that can be persistent, pervasive and can cause serious, long term detrimental health effects (Rex-Lear *et al.* 2012, p.219). Workplace bullying can incorporate a range of inappropriate behaviours which range from low intensity to highly aggressive (Lindy and Schaefer 2010). Previous research has yielded numerous conceptualisations that have illuminated the phenomenon, its intensity, its causes and its impact. All of them refer to the profound effect on all aspects of a person’s health as well as their work and family life, undermining self-esteem, productivity and morale. For some, it can result in “permanent departure from the labour market and in extreme cases, suicide” (Employment 2012, p.2). The literature also reveals that it is a process which is intentional, repeated and systematic (Nielsen 2009). It is “an intentional effort to undermine, disparage, or injure” targets either physically or professionally and it has been described as morally reprehensible (Lutgen-Sandvik *et al.* 2009, p.100). Workplace bullying has now become the focus of increased attention from academics, trade unions and professional organisations.

Research on workplace bullying is problematic. Problems with definition occur because of its verbal as opposed to physical nature, the greater prevalence of indirect bullying makes it more difficult to identify and the fact that “in the workplace there is considerable scope for a wide range of subtle tactics” (Hoel and Rayner 1997, p.183). Like Riley (2012), Rayner (1997) grouped the most prevalent behaviours into categories: threat to professional status, threat to personal standing, isolation, overwork, destabilisation but elements of these may be evident, to some degree, in all bullying situations. Many studies focus on the impact of bullying on the individual “the victim must feel harassed, their work be affected, and there must be a measure of frequency to the action” (Rayner 1997, p.183). Most studies rely on a list of prevalent behaviours as a means of validation for workplace bullying but this cannot be exhaustive as bullies can be very creative in devising new tactics. It is generally accepted that the behaviours that constitute workplace bullying are offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting and are often accompanied by an abuse of power and/or of unfair penal sanctions, which causes the target to suffer stress, reduced self-confidence, low self-worth and increased sense of vulnerability as well as feelings of guilt and self-contempt (Hoel *et al.* 1999; Annie Hogh 2011; Duncan *et al.* 2011; Hogh *et al.* 2012).

2.1.3 Proliferation of Terms

At times researchers use several different terms interchangeably but fail to refine them, distinguish between these terms or indeed decide as to the best term to use. In fact the “kaleidoscopic terminological array” that characterises this problematic behaviour in the workplaces, to all intents and purposes refer to the same phenomenon. (Fritz 2014, p.4). “The growing body of research on what is variously termed workplace bullying, mobbing, psychological abuse, and/or harassment reflects a growing problem of conflicting terms and definitions” (Crawshaw 2009, p.263). These terms are used to highlight the hurtful and repeated mistreatment of people at their place of work and differences in the use of the terms may be related as much to “cultural differences in the phenomenon in the different countries rather than to real differences in the concepts” (Di Martino *et al.* 2003; Einarsen *et al.* 2003, p.25). The various other terms that encompass the range of behaviours are: violence, mistreatment, psychological terror, emotional abuse, petty tyranny, abusive supervision, social undermining, revenge and retaliation, counterproductive, unreliable and deviant workplace behaviour, delinquency, organizational misbehavior, workplace deviance and incivility (Fritz 2014, p.6). The term ‘bully’ has evolved in line with the growing intolerance towards this type of behaviour but it may be possible that “we need to abandon the term bullying and work to a more complex taxonomy” (Hoel and Rayner 1997, p.189). Some researchers make the case for defining bullying within the context of the problematic behaviours that are relevant to each particular workplace (Saunders *et al.* 2007; Salin 2008; Duncan *et al.* 2011). Others highlight the continuous nature of activities, the duration (statistical definition: at least once a week) and over a long period of time (statistical definition: at least six months of duration) (Leymann 1990, p.120).

When the literature is examined, one finds that the term ‘mobbing’ is often used instead of ‘bullying’, particularly in Scandinavian countries, as well as some European countries such as Germany and France. In these countries bullying is frequently reported to be perpetrated by a group of bullies, rather than a single bully (Hoel and Rayner 1997; Saunders *et al.* 2007). Researchers see mobbing as distinct from bullying in that there is a ‘ganging-up’ process (a group dynamic) in which the organization plays a role, as compared with bullying, which has been understood to involve actions by a lone perpetrator (Sperry 2009). Mobbing is also understood to refer to the action

by weak individuals coming together, pooling power resources, to commit negative, destructive and hostile acts. Theorists perceive mobbing as inferring a sense of helplessness and perceived lack of recourse to retaliation (Brodsky 1976; Leymann and Gustafsson 1996). Indeed the issue of power or powerlessness is a recurring element in accounts of bullying which perceive the target as “helpless and defenseless” (Leymann and Gustafsson 1996, p.252).

On the one hand the confusion over the multiplicity of terms, definitions and descriptions can hamper research (Fox and Stallworth 2009). On the other hand it may provide an opportunity for developing greater conceptual clarity as we tease out the differences between the constructs (Duffy and Sperry 2011). Nevertheless, “literatures are moving towards increased connection and cohesion and that attempts at integrative work are beginning to succeed” (Fritz 2014, p.7). “In short, the terms *bullying* and *target* appear to be useful to the broader public and help affected workers name and make sense of their experiences in preferred ways. In using these terms, we follow the lead of international researchers who are aiming toward a common language” (Tracy *et al.* 2006, p.152). “Conceptually, it is the persistency, the systematic nature, and the feeling of being trapped and victimized by the harassment, which distinguishes bullying from other forms of aggression and mistreatment in the workplace” (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018, p.73).

Whilst various authors have endeavored to distinguish between terms and have provided descriptions and definitions, what is important is that bullying and mobbing are relatively new constructs and definitional clarity will only come through further research development. Nonetheless, the terms, though often confused, share a number of common characteristics but are distinguished by the complex interplay between individual, group, organisational and social system dynamics. A key ingredient in many organisations is a pervading sense of power or permission to act aggressively. “Without this sense of permission, individuals who undertake to harass others will themselves become the victims of ostracism by other co-workers” (Duffy and Sperry 2007, p.399). Organisations prone to mobbing or bullying have been characterised as places where “genuine due-process is lacking, investigating procedures are skewed in the direction of protecting the organisation and finding a scapegoat” (Duffy and Sperry 2011, p.9).

2.1.4 Defining bullying

Definition is one of the fundamental issues in the study of bullying and it is central to any investigation. Much of the research into bullying has focused primarily on the experience and perceptions of the individuals involved, thus creating parameters to its many definitions. As well as individual perceptions, definitions tend to stress the effects of bullying: “persistent criticism and personal abuse in public or private, which humiliates and demeans the person” (Adams and Crawford 1992, p.1). Yet a universal definition remains elusive, largely because workplace bullying is not instantly recognisable, incorporates a myriad of inappropriate, negative behaviours, which occur to varying degrees in a variety of workplaces and the elements used to define it can be very subtle (Hoel and Rayner 1997). The range of terms used in research studies to describe ill-treatment and abuse at work is difficult to discern, even for academics (Keashly and Jagatic 2002). Perhaps due to its multicausal nature, “researchers and practitioners struggle to develop an ‘agreed to’ definition of what constitutes workplace bullying” (Hanley and O'Rourke 2016, p.354). For example some studies include intentionality as part of the theoretical definition (Keashly & Harvey 2005) whereas others do not (Einarsen 1999). Individuals can be slow to identify that they are being bullied and can vary in their understanding and response to bullying behaviours based on the context. Significantly, an “individual employee’s response to abusiveness in a workplace setting is influenced by individual dynamics, group dynamics, and organizational dynamics” (Sperry 2009, p.199).

The “quality of research is often described by the concepts of reliability and validity”, high definitional validity requires consensus in terms of how bullying is defined and measured (Nielsen 2009, p.10). Thus, Moreover, as long as “no uniform definition of the phenomenon is agreed upon and several different operationalisations are utilised in different kinds of samples, there are grounds for assuming that the nature of the findings are so different that they cannot be directly compared” (Nielsen 2009, p.27). Researchers have stressed the need for an agreed definition so that levels of bullying and interventions can be more accurately monitored (Barker *et al.* 2013). Moreover, an agreed definition would enable researchers and practitioners to work from a common starting point, especially in regard to formulation of workplace policies, intervention and prevention strategies, and legislative frameworks (Nielsen *et al.* 2011). Definition is important as it is “central” and to some extent influenced by the legal perspective

(Rayner and Hoel 1997). Therefore, a clear, unambiguous definition of bullying is important if not crucial where redress or litigation is involved.

Saunders (2007) contends that the “discrepancies between organisational and employee definitions of workplace bullying” can influence the level of reporting as well as the negative effects on targets and the organisation (Saunders *et al.* 2007, p.352). Perhaps each organisation should develop its own particular definition comprising employees’ personal definitions and organisational definitions that may include “examples of bullying behaviour, both direct and subtle, to ensure that their definition more closely coincides with that of their employees” (Saunders *et al.* 2007, p.352). An example of such a definition of bullying in a school setting might go as follows: “any behaviour – verbal, nonverbal, and physical (excluding physical violence)- that, in the teacher’s perception, causes psychological- emotional, physical-physiological, personal, and/or professional harm to oneself” (Blase *et al.* 2008, p.265). Therefore, a means of resolving the arguments that surround the problem would be for each workplace to create a definition that reflects “aspects which are relevant to the specific workplace” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.106);

Regardless of whom is being bullied – principal, executive, teacher or support staff member – it is important to recognise that if a staff member perceives they are being bullied, then that is reality for them and they will react accordingly. In fact the phenomenon of bullying rests to some degree on the perception of individuals (Riley et al. 2012, p.136).

All studies refer to bullying as a complex phenomenon but ultimately at its basic level it is about the “systematic mistreatment of a subordinate, a colleague, or a superior, which, if continued and long lasting, may cause severe social, psychological, and psychosomatic problems in the target” (Einarsen 2011, p.4). Many competing terms and concepts refer to “what are essentially the same phenomena” whose meanings are only slightly different (Lipinski and Crothers 2013, p.4). “As long as we are talking about repeated events over a period of time that leave a person feeling powerless, and that they are harmed physically or psychologically. That, as far as we are concerned, is workplace bullying” (Employment 2012, p.14). For now, from the various definitions offered, a clear picture of the phenomenon has emerged. Adult bullying at work or workplace bullying is a pattern of persistent, hostile discursive and non-discursive behaviour that targets perceive as efforts to harm, control, or drive them from the

workplace (Einarsen *et al.* 2003; Rayner *et al.* 2002). Even though there are differences in conceptual starting points the end results of the definitions are generally consistent (Bennett and Robinson 2003). The term ‘bullying’ should be considered an umbrella term (Hoel *et al.* 2001, p.462). In most research, including the present study, the term ‘perpetrator’ is commonly used to refer to the bully whilst the literature uses the term “target, as opposed to victim to shift focus from self-blame or victim-blaming to point to perpetrator responsibility” (Lutgen-Sandvik and Scheller Arsht 2014, p.53).

‘The International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment’ (IAWBH 2014) provides the most recent definition:

Workplace Bullying is repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons (targets) by one or more perpetrators. It is abusive conduct that is ; threatening, humiliating, or intimidating, or work interference – sabotage – which prevents work from getting done, or verbal abuse (IAWBH).

An even more recent definition forefronts the imbalance of power component by defining teacher bullying as:

A pattern of conduct, rooted in a power differential, that threatens, harms, humiliates, induces fear, or causes students substantial emotional distress (McEvoy and Smith 2018, p.10)

The Department of Education (1993, p.2), define bullying as “repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against others.” The INTO policy document ‘*Staff Relations: a Report on Adult Bullying in Schools*’ relies on the definition that bullying is “repeated aggressive behaviour of a verbal, physical or psychological nature”. Management and INTO have adopted the definition of bullying set out by the Health and Safety Authority and all significant studies conducted in Ireland, including the present study, have used this adapted definition of bullying (*Health and Safety, 2002, p.5*);

Workplace bullying is repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work or in the course of employment, which could be reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual’s right to dignity at work (Bullying 2001, p.5).

Regardless of the preferred definition, a common feature is the importance of understanding bullying in the context of power differences, specifically the imbalance of the power relationships between the parties involved (Liefoghe and Mac Davey

2001; Ahmad and Sheehan 2017). A pre-existing, evolved imbalance of power between the parties is considered central to the bullying experience, as this may limit targets' ability to retaliate or successfully defend themselves. The view of power adopted in definitions of bullying, focusing on the hierarchical system, is typically sovereign power. "Power in organisations must concern the hierarchical structure of offices and their relation to each other" (Clegg 1989, p.189). Therefore, the imbalance of power may simply mirror the formal power-structure of the organizational context in which the bullying scenario unfolds, as would be the case when someone is on the receiving end of negative acts from higher up in the organizational hierarchy (Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2006). Because those in higher positions have legitimate power arising from the formal power structure of the organisation, downward bullying should be viewed more as an abuse of this power (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, the power implicit in bullying scenarios is "illegitimate power, as opposed to the power that would be regarded as legitimate—the prerogative to manage" (Liefvooghe and Mac Davey 2001, p.377)

Alternatively, the source of power may be informal and related to factors such as knowledge and experience as well as access to social support (Einarsen *et al.*, 2003). Most importantly, the nature of the bullying experience in terms of its frequency and long-term duration of exposure to negative acts tends to drain the coping resources of the target, thus in itself emphasizing the increasing powerlessness of targets (Leymann, 1996). Understanding the practices of power in primary schools provides a useful lens to examine workplace bullying and it will be dealt with in more detail later in this chapter.

2.1.5 Prevalence of Workplace Bullying

Despite increasing attention among researchers over the past three decades, the prevention, management and eradication of workplace bullying continues to be challenging and "the reported levels of bullying have remained stubbornly high" (Guest and Woodrow 2012, p.115). More than "90% of adults experience workplace bullying; that is, psychological and emotional abuse, at some stage during their working career" (De Wet 2011, p.450). It is believed that bullying has now reached "epidemic"

proportions in organisations and is causing significant damage to both the individual and the organisation (Kingsley 2009). “Bullying affects nearly half of U.S. working adults — an estimated 71.5 million workers - epidemic proportions by any indicator” (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.358). A Samaritans’ survey across Ireland and Britain found that 4 out of 5 workers perceived themselves to have been bullied during their careers (Legal Island). It is widely acknowledged that workplace bullying is a significant phenomenon that has global prevalence (Lutgen-Sandvik 2007; Ståle Einarsen *et al.* 2011). Alarming, research has uncovered the reality that almost half of the working population experience ill-treatment in their workplace (Zapf *et al.* 2011). Evidence from the literature on workplace bullying suggests it is a “global problem with no country as yet successful in substantially reducing its occurrence” (Hanley and O’Rourke 2016, p.363). Indeed, during one’s working life the “majority of employees will have experience of bullying either directly or indirectly” (Hoel *et al.* 2001, p.457).

Studies reveal that bullying is more likely to occur in large organisations, in public administration, education, and health and social services sectors (O’Connell *et al.* 2007; Parent-Thirion *et al.* 2012). In fact, public sector institutions and health-care are now considered “high-risk settings for workplace bullying” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.13). Astonishingly, up to 85% of nurses are now witnessing or have experienced bullying (Hoban 2004). Research studies and surveys indicate that bullying also exists among teachers (Bullying 2001; Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2003; McKay *et al.* 2008; Riley *et al.* 2009; Riley *et al.* 2011). In fact, studies remark on an over-representation of bullying in the educational sector with the teaching profession having one of the most prevalent environments of bullying (Leymann 1996; Cooper and Hoel 2003; Cemaloglu 2007). Studies carried out in Canada, Australia, the US, Croatia, Finland, Turkey, Wales, the UK and Ireland also reveal that the teaching profession and the education setting have been identified as one of the environments in which bullying is most prevalent. (Hoel and Cooper 2000; Cemaloglu 2007; O’Connell *et al.* 2007; Ferris and Kline 2009; Duncan *et al.* 2011; Malahy 2015). McEvoy *et al.*, (2018) estimate that 10 per cent of teachers are bullies. Therefore, bullying is a reality in the staff room, as well as in the playground (O’Moore and Minton 2004) and it now appears that “acts of bullying are rapidly becoming a common type of behaviour in school organizations” (Cemaloglu 2007, p.797). In some schools bullying has become so pervasive that “school staff may not realise that some of their behaviour, or that of their colleagues,

may constitute workplace bullying” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.xii). Research points to specific factors that interact to “produce the kinds of leadership that seriously damage teachers, teaching and student learning” (Blase and Blase 2004, p.245). The damaging effects of mistreatment on teachers’ professional and personal lives leaves them unable to take action to protect or defend themselves (Blase and Blase 2004). Research points not only to the detrimental health effects of bullying but it also raises concerns over teachers’ productivity and to the quality of their work (McKay, 2008).

In trying to determine the cause of the high incidence of bullying in both the teaching and nursing professions, researchers have identified a number of links viewing both as having a vocational element as well as a strongly hierarchical management structure (Tattum 1989; Patrick 2015; Namie 2013; Field 1996). Because education and healthcare professionals are motivated to help and teach others, are focused on their work, see the good in others and are blind to the politics and abusers in the workplace, they are more vulnerable to attack (Namie & Christensen, 2013). There is also the potential for conflict due to motivational divergence of people drawn to positions of power and those drawn because of their strong empathic skills (Field 1996, p. 12). The gender-balance of workplaces is also an important factor as gender has also been found to be “related to aggression” (Lipinski and Crothers 2013, p.230). In the Republic of Ireland, women dominate the primary teaching profession with over 86 per cent of the INTO’s members being female. In societies where there is predominantly high levels of inequality between males and females, “being bullied by a female might be especially humiliating or traumatic for males” (McCormack *et al.* 2018, p.274). Moreover, research reveals that targets in “within-gender dyads report higher frequencies of overall workplace bullying than do targets in between-gender dyads” (McCormack *et al.* 2018, p.271). In female-dominated workplaces, conflicts will often be harsher and even more difficult to solve (Björkqvist 1994). It is also noteworthy that in certain situations “women have been found to be more aggressive than men” (Schimmel and Nicholla 2014, p.230). In female-dominated working groups “an un-reflected ‘group-think’ or a common social norm of ‘likeness’ seem to occur to keep the group together and to protect the group from internal and external threats” (Strandmark and Hallberg 2007, p.339). Deviation from the accepted ‘norm of likeness’ can include those with superior qualifications, competence or even personal strength giving rise to the notion that success can aggravate envy causing such individuals to be

targeted. In such environments it appears that the prevailing attitude is that no one should be superior in terms of competence and colleagues are “assumed to feel the need to weaken strong individuals to avoid competition and criticism themselves” (Strandmark and Hallberg 2007, p.337). Women are more dependent on the supportive group dynamics at work so “in situations of aggression and conflict, women try to cause psychological rather than physical harm to their opponents” (Hyde 1984). Even though “our knowledge of the effects of gender and bullying behaviour is mixed” the covert, indirect nature of bullying appears more appealing to women (Lipinski and Crothers 2014, p.230). Individuals may choose aggressive strategies based on an assessment of the effect/danger ratio, since bullying is a covert, indirect strategy it can be considered “as effective as possible, while at the same time exposing the individual to as little danger as possible” (Björkqvist 1994, p.185).

However, research in the area of education shows that bullying in the workplace may be more prevalent than the numbers who complained in the past would indicate (I.N.T.O 2000). In fact, the true extent of bullying is considered to be underreported (Fisher *et al.* 1995). In attempting to understand the reasons for the high incidence and underreporting of bullying researchers have attributed the cause to an organizational climate that tolerates bullying and where reports are trivialized or disbelieved (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a). In fact there is the perception among nurses that violence and aggression are simply ‘part of the job’ (Fisher *et al.* 1995). It is important also to examine the culture created within the organisation that allows bullying to take place and allows circuits of power to remain unchanged. “School cultures have unique ways of introducing new employees to the ‘way we do things around here, good or bad’” (Gruenert 2006, p.61). Bullying may begin at the top and all those in subordinate positions may adopt that behaviour because they see that it is acceptable. “So pervasive is some bullying behaviour that it is often considered the norm within schools and results in a toxic workplace culture which impacts adversely upon the school and its employees” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.xii). These norms of acceptable or unacceptable behaviours are not only allowed by the leaders but are also passed on by them (Van Fleet and Griffin 2006). If the behaviour modelled by the leaders is aggressive then it becomes the norm and individuals who observe, learn and may respond in kind (M. Harvey *et al.* 2007). It is feasible therefore that, through association with other actors who are willing to tolerate or engage in bullying, individuals may be socialized into norms tolerant of the behaviour (Hutchinson *et al.* 2010b). Bullying is then embedded

in culture leading to the creation of an environment of tolerance for bullying (Heames *et al.* 2006; Giorgi *et al.* 2015). A number of underlying organisational forces may predispose schools to creating bullying environments: role conflict, stressful environment, organisational cultures that embrace extreme conformity, cultures that accept bullying and autocratic/authoritarian leadership styles (Salin and Hoel 2003).

2.1.6 Consequences of workplace bullying

“The consequences that workplace bullying can have on targets are numerous” (Samnani 2013a, p.293). It impacts negatively on health, self-esteem, stress levels, job performance, careers, relationships, job satisfaction and it poses a risk to those individuals exposed in terms of health and safety (Hogh *et al.* 2012; Vickers 2012). It is a strong predictor for psychological distress and is “independently associated with poor mental health among teachers” (Bernotaite and Malinauskiene 2017, p.638). The negative impact of bullying on teachers include decreased self-esteem and job satisfaction, depression, distrust, health issues, poor workplace environments and inferior classroom instruction (De Wet 2010). It has a ‘ripple effect’ adversely affecting everyone close to the target, including colleagues, friends, spouses, children and family (Leymann 1992). Targets’ work productivity and personal relationships also flounder when they are subjected to constant abuse” (Lutgen-Sandvik and Scheller Arsht 2014, p.55). “It can also destroy the workplace itself” (Field 1996, p. xvii). Witnesses or bystanders also report suffering significantly more general stress and mental stress (Vartia 2001; Harthill 2008; Hogh *et al.* 2012). In fact, witnesses may even have worse mental and physical effects than those who experience bullying (Hoel *et al.* 2001). Whether as a target or a witness, bullying in the education setting negatively affects teaching and learning as the “relentless bullying of educators results in escalating apathy and disempowerment, to the detriment of their professional and private wellbeing” (De Wet 2014, p.13).

“Unaddressed bullying creates a working climate drenched in dread, fear, and hypervigilance” (Lutgen-Sandvik and Scheller Arsht 2014, p.56). Deetz (1992) observed the shifting interaction of the family, the community, and workplace how each is “structured around the demands of the workplace” (Deetz 1992, p.25). “Given the centrality of work to the construction of self-identity and a sense of ontological security, it is not surprising that bullying shakes the very foundations of targets’ lives” (Lutgen-

Sandvik 2005, p.72). For targets who strongly identify with their jobs or professions, the experience can be particularly shocking and devastating as they do not expect their organisations to be abusive, isolating and cruel. This is why bullying is so damaging: “it rends asunder targeted workers’ life narratives. Self-narratives are, in a sense, anchors that ground human actors in a world that is in constant flux. When this narrative is deeply disrupted, persons lose their moorings and are cast adrift” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2008, p.116).

2.1.7 Cost of workplace bullying

Research studies have endeavored to calculate the cost of bullying to the individual, to the institutions and to society as a whole. Beyond the enormous personal and organisational costs it has been estimated that “workplace bullying costs the Australian economy between \$6 billion and \$36 billion annually” (Employment 2012, p.ix). Taking into account the figures for absenteeism, turnover, performance and productivity the costs of bullying for organisations in the UK was “estimated at approximately £13.75billion” (Giga *et al.* 2008, p.3). The annual financial cost of workplace bullying in Ireland has been estimated at €3bn (Legal Island, 2019). However, there are also “intangible costs of workplace harassment and bullying” (Hudson 2015, p.1). These might include the many negative effects that result from working in a toxic environment such as stress and anxiety, low morale, decreased productivity, increased employee turnover and illness leave as well as costly lawsuits. In Ireland over one hundred suicides per annum have allegedly been attributed to bullying (Legal Island, 2019).

Few studies have investigated the impact of school workplace bullying even though national and international research has consistently cited education as a ‘high risk’ profession in terms of its prevalence (Zapf and Einarsen 2003; O’Connell *et al.* 2007; Zapf *et al.* 2011). Whilst much research has focused on the individual effects of being exposed to bullying and on the economic consequences, comparatively little attention has been paid to assessing the organisational or educational consequences or costs. Because bullying tends to occur more often in the public sector the costs do not impact on productivity in an economic sense (Zapf 2000). Economic and non-economic costs associated with bullying, applicable to education, might include costs related to: high turnover, anti-productive behaviour, time wasted in dealing with the problem, increased

illness and sick leave due to anxiety and stress, increased workload for fellow employees, lowering of morale and loss of job performance impacting on student experience as well as the damage to efficiency and commitment to the organization. Counterproductive behaviour or dysfunctional behaviour allso result in decreased productivity and creativity (Wu and Hu 2009; Harris *et al.* 2011; Lewis and Malecha 2011; Hershcovis *et al.* 2012; MacIntosh 2012). “Fundamentally, bullying behaviours between adults impacts negatively on schools and schooling” (Fahie and Devine 2014, p.13). Quality education does significantly contribute to overall national economic growth and disruption to its delivery occurs when teachers suffer ill health causing them to take illness leave or leave the profession altogether. Hence, “adverse psychological working conditions lead teachers to poorer mental health, which in turn affects educational process of new generations” (Bernotaite and Malinauskiene 2017, p.638). Given that the education sector is particularly susceptible to workplace bullying, using the growing evidence base from numerous research studies, a strong case can be made for tackling workplace bullying (Rockett 2015; Einarsen *et al.*, 2003; Namie, 3003; Salin, 2003; Neeham 2003).

However, in comparison to other workplaces “far fewer conversations regarding the bullying of teachers occur” (Orange 2018, p.390). A failure to fully investigate school workplace bullying and the means of redress allows mistreatment to continue without challenge and without hope of improvement (Blase and Blase 2004). The cost to the student in terms of quality and quantity of instruction resulting in student/teacher disengagement is often overlooked and must also be considered (Rockett 2015). If school workplace bullying occurs then students’ attitudes to are affected (Giovazolias *et al.* 2010). The contagion effect, whereby mean behaviour by teachers encourages students to be mean, can do enormous damage to students, to the school’s instructional mission and so must also be considered a cost. “A small number of bullies can do enormous damage to a school’s effectiveness” (McEvoy and Smith 2018, p.10). Therefore, tackling the problem of workplace bullying in schools would “enable interventionists in the field to address this phenomenon in the education sector, possibly contributing to the health of teachers and school organisations, as well as economic growth” (De Vos and Kirsten 2015, p.1).

2.2 Individual Responses to bullying - A power perspective

Current research on workplace bullying points to the many negative physical, psychological, emotional and social effects, driving targets to a point whereby they are no longer able to defend themselves, a position of powerlessness. Because of his concern with rational-legal power in institutionalised systems and bureaucratic organisations as sites of social domination Weber's theories are important in trying to understand the nature of resistance and the repressive nature of power. Weber (1978) conceptualised power as the probability of forcing one's will on the behaviour of others, or the ability to "determine the will of another power" (Brennan 1990, p.72). The literature portraying the bullying scenario as involving two unequally matched actors, targets as power-deficient or depowered individuals and bullies as powerful and controlling, points to this classic conceptualisation of power (Clegg 1989; Blase and Blase 2004; Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011). Both Foucault (1972, 1977) and Arendt (1970) challenge this one-sided view of power, claiming that power and resistance are simultaneously present and mutually constitutive, power is a requirement for the realisation of agency. Power is never completely relinquished or resigned (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006; Fahie and Devine 2014). Targets do fight back through multiple micro-practices in which the behavioural reaction employed is directly related to the type of bullying to which they are subjected (Djurkovic *et al.* 2005; van Heugten *et al.* 2018). In order to examine power or the abuse of power, it is insufficient to merely focus on targets as submissive or passive individuals incapable of action. Hence, the demonstration of a range of counter-actions in an attempt to resist the negative behaviours associated with bullying would be expected. Accordingly, "the escalatory nature of bullying in the face of continued attacks and the mutually escalatory power mounted against acts of resistance when such resistance moves into the public transcript" can be explained (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.65).

Agentive practices can be defined as "any discursive or non-discursive act of commission or omission that counters, disrupts, or defies the bully or erodes the bully's material or symbolic base of influence" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.411). For Weber 'power' means getting your own way, it refers to the ability to have, or to force, one's will carried out despite the resistance of others, "the overcoming of resistance is a necessary feature of power" (Barbalet 1985, p.534). Yet, studies on bullying "rarely investigate struggles against hostile, abusive treatment at work" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006,

p.406). By taking a critical management approach, focusing on the role of organisational power and its impact on targets' response to mistreatment, this study brings the influence of organisational power structures to the fore. Exploring the key theories on power should add to our understanding of why organisations respond in the way they do when targets try to resist workplace bullying.

2.2.1 Denotive hesitancy

Research indicates that targets of bullying experience denotive hesitancy, an initial delay in describing, identifying, naming and consequently in resisting bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). In order to identify workplace bullying it is often “necessary for participants to describe the entire set of behaviours and their interrelationships” (Keashly and Jagatic 2002, p.42). Among targets, particularly teachers, the identification, recognition and comprehension of workplace bullying is problematic within organisations (Leymann 1990; Lewis 2006). “Behaviours are often difficult to identify” (Samnani 2013a, p.294). During the first stage abusive tactics can be subtle, difficult to describe and appear trivial. Targets experience increased unease but are “unsure whether they were being targeted or were misinterpreting what was happening” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2008, p.104). “It was only in retrospect that they were able to identify when the experience of bullying began” (D’Cruz and Noronha 2010, p.109). If employees delay in identifying bullying behaviour then their ability to react can be limited (Liefoghe and Mac Davey 2001; Samnani 2013a). Subtle bullying behaviours are more likely to induce weaker reactions and greater misinterpretation from targets so even when targets realise that they are being bullied they have great difficulty stopping abuse once it has started (Einarsen 2011; Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper 2003; Zapf & Gross 2001). Surprisingly, teachers are “the least capable of identifying bullying in the workforce”, blaming themselves for the problems, they are therefore less likely to confer with other teachers (Hall 2005, p.47).

Weber (1978) drew attention to the way people behave, how their actions influence wider society, in the creation of social structure. He sought to understand the motivation, ideas, values and beliefs that cause people to interact in certain ways. How that process of interaction influences society and society in turn influences the individual was central to Weber’s understanding of the exercise of power. “People

create institutions, institutions also influence people” (McDonald 2014, p.36). Weber’s rule-based conceptions of authority considered that if a social group or society approves of the exercise of power in a particular way, that power is legitimate authority. In this way the willingness of the subordinates or colleagues, to accept and obey, create levels of legitimacy that become established over time. In so doing authority maintains power and people accept domination as a structured phenomenon. For Weber obedience is associated with domination and relationships, characterised by domination, become successively structured thus ensuring continued unquestioned obedience, compliance and the acceptance of subordination. Consequently speaking out about sensitive issues, such as bullying, becomes unacceptable and when this becomes normalised and embedded it can be extremely difficult to counteract.

Both Clegg and Giddens articulated a distinction between power as having a social and system integration function. “Social integration was the web of personal relations and interaction (e.g., friendship) in a social order, whereas system integration was the nexus of systemic relationships among roles and functional structures and processes” (McPhee 2004, p.131). For Clegg the system of authority is itself “saturated and imbued with power” to produce “mechanisms of dominance, strategies of power and regimes of control” (Clegg 1989, p.190). Versions of rationality need to struggle for legitimacy and individuals in positions of dominance have the greatest influence on what is accepted as legitimate. Bullies can “forbid or punish peer communication networks that might serve as hidden spaces for resistance” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.33). Speaking out can often cause relationships to deteriorate leaving the individual isolated and without support. Studies confirm that silence is often the best option as those who exercise voice often suffer negative consequences such as retaliation, reputational damage and further mistreatment (Jermier *et al.* 1994; Donaghey *et al.* 2011; MacMahon *et al.* 2018). However, “Perceptions of powerlessness should not be confused with failure to act or the absence of resistance” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.49).

Believing that a moral imperative is involved in speaking out, “most people who experience bullying practise at least some form of resistance” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.4). Even though, for Weber, it is rational that modern society assents to discipline “individuals are never totally programmed to submit to orders” (Brennan 1990, p.84). The concept of resistance encompasses “practices in which workers engage in efforts

to rebalance justice and resist the degradation of personal and professional self-esteem” (van Heugten *et al.* 2018, p.3). This embodies the many ways, overt and covert, in which individuals or groups act in order to resist bullying. For Weber overcoming resistance, a necessary feature of power, draws attention the reality of ‘power’ and the ways in which “some people secure domination over others” (Wallace and Wolf 2005, p.73). He believed that it was necessary for some people to have more power than others but he contended that those who gain power use it to protect their own interests.

The factors that impact on targets’ decisions to act can be grouped into: target-related, bully-related, bystander-related, organisational-related and extra-organisational factors (D’Cruz *et al.* 2016). Responses are generally classified as either avoidance or fighting back (Wilkin 2010) or as covert and overt resistance (Van Heugten *et al.*, 2018). Avoidance or covert may include seeking confidential advice, talking to family and friends, taking notes and work to rule tactics. Fighting back or overt resistance can involve confronting the bully, making informal or formal complaints or leaving. For the purpose of this study these two main categories have been identified and expanded on.

2.2.2 Covert

Empirical research on targets’ coping strategies “highlights the predominance of emotion-focussed, passive and avoidant strategies, generally considered to be maladaptive and destructive” (D’Cruz and Noronha 2010, p.102). In fact the most common reaction to bullying is avoidance (Jóhannsdóttir and Ólafsson 2004; Djurkovic *et al.* 2005; D’Cruz and Noronha 2010). “Within the avoidance category, ignoring the offender was found to be most common” (Djurkovic *et al.* 2005, p.452). Targets resort to ignoring the behaviour in the hope that it will stop (Rayner 1997). Multiple reasons exist as to why targets avoid making complaints, some suggest it may be due to stress, targets become so overwhelmed by the experience that they feel unable deal with further conflict by defending themselves (D’Cruz *et al.* 2016). Studies investigating the passive responses of targets to bullying in the workplace highlight an underlying motivation for victims to conserve remaining resources (Whitman *et al.* 2014; Rai and Agarwal 2018).

Another explanation for responding to bullying covertly is “its connection to schoolyard bullying can be stigmatizing through association with childishness or weakness” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.20). This connotation of bullying as a children’s developmental issue means that addressing adult bullying issues is “often negatively perceived” (Misawa and Rowland 2015, p.3). Hence, targets can be embarrassed to admit they are being bullied and struggle to go on (D’Cruz, 2012; D’Cruz & Noronha, 2010). The literature suggests that targets rarely report or retaliate against mistreatment because of the perpetrator’s superior organisational position, as such the “power difference is considered one of the most important reasons for influencing employee silence” (Rai and Agarwal 2018, p.229). Moreover, some researchers believe bullying is greatly under-reported because “targets withdraw believing that they are at fault” (Kelly 2005, p.7). Studies indicate that fear of being regarded as a troublemaker or a whistle-blower, or “fear of their complaint being dismissed silences them” (Kitt 1999, p.30). Those who confront the bully are often called liars (De Wet 2010; Koonin and Green 2004). Given that “bullied workers in subordinate positions are rarely believed” it is understandable that targets respond in such a way (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.111). Unfortunately, if bullying goes unrecognised, unreported and ignored it can become accepted, embedded within the culture of an organisation as “spiralling fear and copycat behaviours develop so that under-reporting occurs simply because employees accept it as the norm” (Kelly 2005, p.8).

The “efficacy of authority is not simply based on formally sanctioned rules and positional power, but also socially constituted norms” (Gordon *et al.* 2009, p.17). Well-established informal power structures or ‘rules of work’ function to normalise bullying and adherence to the rules maintains the accepted order “with a silent tolerance of abuse and hostility viewed as part of that accepted order” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2010a, p.35). The literature on employee silence is a relatively new phenomenon, it has been defined as: “a person’s withholding of genuine expression about behavioural, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of organizational circumstances to persons perceived capable of effecting change or redress” (Pinder and Harlos 2001, p.334). The literature suggests that expectations of how management will react can act as a signal to targets whether or not speaking up with respect to bullying is likely to be effective (Lewin 2014). Management may in fact create a ‘climate of silence’ in order to gain more power (Cullinane and Donaghey 2014). Many studies focus on target-silence as communicative choice but this view may overlook “the significant power-centred role

of management in structuring employee silences on a range of issues in the employment relationship” (Donaghey *et al.* 2011, p.63). A sense of futility can be perceived by some targets, that rather than being effective in addressing bullying, anti-bullying policies and procedures merely express a desirability that is “hypothetical in the face of real-life, day-to-day managerial discourse that sustained a contradictory reality” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.17). Thus, while official documents appear to prohibit it, bullying can thrive openly as those in positions of power engage in abusive behaviour or turn a blind eye and support their own whilst the target is seen as trouble maker for reporting (Hutchinson and Jackson 2014, p. 18). In such instances, “bullying can be attributed to the organization and its practices” (Liefoghe and Mac Davey 2001, p.377).

Weber’s theory of traditional authority resonates within the employee silence literature. It refers to power legitimized on the basis of long-standing customs and the legitimacy of those exercising authority or those capable of effecting change. Traditional authority is unchallenged, established and embedded in society’s tradition, customs and beliefs and it is assigned to specific individuals. For Weber traditional authority provides the means by which “inequality is created and preserved” (Weber 1999). The concept of patriarchy, which plays a key role in Weber’s sociology, refers to the authority of the father, the elder or the rule of the master/principal, chairperson and patron. Weber viewed this as the most important type of domination as those in positions of power are able to exercise power without restraint, in fact he is “free to do as he likes” (Swedberg and Agevall 2016, p.247). The source of such power derives from commonly accepted customs or religion and there are few limits to domination. An individual granted traditional authority can be fair or arbitrary but receives the authority just the same because of custom and tradition. On this basis resistance can be seen as futile. Because the implementation of policies and procedures rests with those who have the power to exercise authority, without restraint, rather than providing a means of redress and protection, policies can be “enmeshed within institutional power plays” to such an extent that they operate as a technology of power increasing the vulnerability of targets (Hutchinson and Jackson 2014, p. 18). Hence workplace bullying “can foster silence and can be treated as an antecedent of silence” (Rai and Agarwal 2018, p.243). Employee silence about workplace bullying thus appears widespread and “mounting evidence of its deleterious effects includes impairments to well-being and productivity” (Harlos and Knoll 2018, p.2).

Weber accepted that rules and norms are necessary within organisations so that behaviour is regulated but it was the capacity for bureaucracy to operate as a tyrannical or oppressive system of social domination that most concerned him (Weber, 1947, 1968). Bureaucratic control, which was hierarchically organized, could become a threat to human autonomy by subordinating the interests and welfare of the masses (Weber, 1948). In cases of workplace bullying, hierarchical power can mute employees (Lutgen-Sandvik 2003). A “spiral of silence” can occur in organisations where the victims are too afraid to speak out (Adams *et al.* 1997; M. Harvey *et al.* 2007). Targets keep quiet in order to protect themselves from further abuse because when targets speak out and report, they become ‘visible’ and can be subjected to further abuse, or socially ostracized (Keashly 2001; Gary Namie 2007). Where a culture of ‘high power distance’ or hierarchical differences prevail, targets are less inclined to challenge more powerful superiors because speaking up is considered as challenging the status of the superior (Porter *et al.* 2003). In such organisations employees view “silence as a way to survive” (Rai and Agarwal 2018, p.244).

Both Weber and Foucault see power in modern society, as ‘disciplinary power’, the “subtle constraint of continuous visibility” or “a machine, the function of which is that of the anonymous and continuous exercise of power” (Brennan 1990, p.87). Foucault emphasised how disciplinary practices is well suited to the education sector because of its wider acceptance. “Our reliance upon and belief in norms circulates through our language and politics; deviations draw public attention and arouse concern” (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.247). Foucault (1977) viewed social regulation or control as the organisation of social space (institutional enclosure), activity (timetable), behaviour (lessons) as techniques or principles which facilitated the operation of these mechanisms of disciplinary power. This efficient model of social control, according to Foucault led to belief that any crime became a crime against the whole social body and offenders became the enemy of society. This gave rise to the notion that those who offended against society were either mad or bad. Targets commonly fear that resistance might provoke such retaliation, “a fear of being judged incompetent had silenced participants, and had led to a sense of being trapped with nowhere else to go” (van Heugten 2006, p.18).

Targets use more passive and avoiding strategies as the power of the bully and the bullying behaviour intensifies and solutions remain elusive. Pinder and Harlos (2001) proposed two forms of silence as responses to perceived injustices: quiescent and acquiescent. Quiescent silence involves a sense of fear that speaking up will result in further negative consequences resulting in a conscious decision to remain silent. Acquiescent silence refers to a submissive state where employees experience a sense of futility believing that speaking up will have no effect. Weber was concerned about the potential for bureaucracy to operate as an oppressive system of social domination. Teachers withdraw both emotionally and physically from social and professional activities in order to avoid further mistreatment (Blase and Blase 2003; Duffy and Sperry 2007). Targets who have families to support and mortgages to pay tend to keep quiet perhaps because they cannot risk financial insecurity. Transferring or taking sick leave can be a successful avoidance tactic for targets (Zapf 1996). In an effort to keep a low profile teacher targets remain silent to protect themselves from further abuse “the majority of the victims opted not to confront their bullying principals” (De Wet 2010, p.1457). “One of the most difficult and debilitating aspects of workplace abuse is that the victim is often seen as the problem and may take responsibility for the abuse” (Koonin and Green 2007, p.71). But organisational efforts to address and prevent bullying become limited when targets remain silent.

Resistance can also be linked to the degree to which workers feel protected in the workplace and this influences the type of resistance strategies employed. “Bullies work together in networks of power, and in those networks, they are able to use organizational systems to effect and affect discipline to effectively quash resistance” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a). Research studies confirm that organizations may retaliate with further bullying or with threats of discipline or dismissal against employee resistance (D’Cruz and Noronha 2010; D’Cruz and Noronha 2011). This can happen because the bully is frequently in a superior position in an organisation and therefore has power to influence organisational decisions especially in relation to disciplinary or dismissal procedures. “Any defiance or resistance to employment-linked authority risked workers’ income, and by association, the ability to meet basic human needs” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.133). Hence targets miss work or leave to avoid the bully (Djurkovic *et al.* 2005). In cases of workplace bullying “hierarchical power mutes affected workers who struggle with a choice between staying silent or speaking up and

being accused of insubordination or mental illness (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.59). The literature confirms that bullying is most often perpetrated by those in positions of authority (Hoel et al., 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003b; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2005; Namie, 2003b; Rayner, 1997). Therefore, managers or those in positions of authority can quite easily justify their actions as necessary supervision or surveillance (Brodsky 1976). However the literature also confirms that “the power of the bully lies in making people remain silent through fear” (Adams *et al.* 1997, p.178). The ‘bullying-silence’ relationship whereby employees employ passive coping strategies such as intentionally withholding information, ideas and opinions about organisational issues results in “a process of resource loss” (Rai and Agarwal 2018, p.227). However “while strain and powerlessness are undeniable consequences, these are usually accompanied by attempts at agency” (D’Cruz and Noronha 2013; D’Cruz *et al.* 2016). How the bullying victim responds to the situation can be either detrimental or beneficial to the organisation” (Jung and Yoon 2018, p.1454).

2.2.3 Overt

A typical feature of workplace bullying is that target testimonies allude to an inability to stop bullying or defend oneself against it (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Leymann, 1996). Foucault proposes that we are all subjects who may resist power, the extent of the resistance depends on our inner resources. Resistance imposes certain limits on power, “it is through its limitation on power that resistance contributes to the outcome of power relations” (Barbalet 1985, p.531). As oppression increases so too does resistance, they act in tandem “each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal” (Foucault 1982, p.794). This push pull interaction of power and resistance should reveal how targets act to interrupt bullying by seeking redress.

Therefore, as bullying behaviour becomes more intense, targets may use more overt actions such as confronting the bully, making informal or formal complaints or leaving the workplace (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). Considerations of overt resistance commonly give rise to fears of retaliation, punishment or of losing one’s job. Giddens’ concept of *fateful moments* put forward the notion of turning points in the process of bullying where covert acts of resistance are more likely to move into the public realm. The decision to make an informal or formal complaint brings increased stress and can “often mark a no-turning-back point in which actions are irreversible” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005,

p.74). Such overt actions often generate increased abuse, intensive efforts to oust the target, resulting in even more destructive, harmful consequences for targets' security and welfare (Zapf and Gross 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik *et al.* 2010; Namie *et al.* 2010). The ultimate threat of unemployment can be crucial in shifting the balance of power in favour of management and may "encourage managers to believe that they can bully some workers with impunity, with workers just putting up with it as a result and looking for a job elsewhere if they can" (S. Einarsen *et al.* 2011, p.298). Giddens proposed a 'stratification model of the agent' in which he promotes the idea that a sense of security or confidence in reality, is only achieved through behavioural norms and habits. These practices of behavioural routines give individuals a sense of confidence as future prediction is possible while "being part of a process that is outside of one's control challenge individuals' sense of security and trust" (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.304). Therefore, the consequences of past actions influence or control future actions. Giddens alludes to an escalation of events or a turning point for individuals "that are particularly consequential for their ambitions, and more generally for their future lives" (Giddens 1991, p. 112). In such cases workplace bullying becomes so destructive to targets' lives that it threatens their ontological security and they are forced to make decisions that cannot be reversed.

Giddens (1984) views human agency as enabling, even to those who appear powerless. He proposes that an individual still has the ability to resist processes controlled by people in positions of authority. "Power and resistance stand in a relationship to each other. One rarely has one without the other" (Clegg 1989, p.208). In agreement with this theory studies confirm that when targets take action it often stimulates "escalated abuse, increased efforts to drive the target out, and progressively detrimental effects on targets' well-being" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.74). Those who act assertively by actively resisting bullying are often labelled trouble-makers and even mentally ill (Leymann 1996a; Namie & Namie 2000; Zapf & Gross 2001). Resistance to bullying is therefore frequently transposed into insubordination and considered grounds for termination of employment which in turn acts to deter further resistance (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). The workplace as "an integral component of self-identity should not only be physically safe but psychologically safe as well" (Ferris 2009, p.186). Since bullying clearly damages perceptions of ontological security (Giddens, 1991), it threatens target identity "as equilibrium is lost and a reasonably stable sense of self,

both personal and professional, becomes fragmented” (van Heugten *et al.* 2018, p.15). The outcome, target alienation from sense of self, increasing distrust of colleagues and managers, and withdrawal from social interaction (Fahie and Devine, 2014; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). ‘Gaslighting’, a form of psychological abuse referred to in the literature, is often used to bombard targets with fake or false information in which incidents are distorted and complaints are trivialized or re-labeled. This practice “completely disorients the victim, making them doubt their own memory and perception of reality of what happened” (Ryan 2013, p.66). Without the support of witnesses, targets are left with nothing to “reinforce their own view of the truth, except the account given by management” (Ryan 2013, p.66).

Studies often consider agency to mean ‘free will’ or as a synonym for resistance but it has also been defined as “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001, p.112). Giddens’ (1984) claim that there is a rational link between action and power argues that as long as an actor has agency he/she can take action. Giddens proposes that agency involves having the choice to act but a person who has no feasible options “is no longer an agent” (Giddens 1995, p.63). The constraint imposed by a fear of unemployment, losing the most basic of human needs, reduces an individual to one possible option meaning that in effect he has no option. Giddens distinguishes between ‘option’ and ‘feasible option’ and he proposes that any individual with a ‘feasible option’ is an agent. “All options are ‘feasible options’ in the sense that they are conditional upon the wants and desires of the agents” (Held and Thompson 1989, p.74). Accordingly, an individual who has a desire to have a certain standard of living, may have only one feasible option that is acceptable to them. For such individuals who depend on their employment as a means of subsistence, staying silent might be the only feasible option if they are to continue in their current employment. As with the constraining qualities of sanctions, structure places limits “upon the feasible range of options open to an actor in a given circumstance or type of circumstance” (Giddens 1979, p.176). Considering the limits or constraints imposed on individuals who become the targets of bullying, who may not have alternative employment opportunities, then the options for action to resist also become restricted. This uneasy power relation, “such as in cases of workplace bullying, calls workers’ tacit acceptance of supervisory power into question” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.70).

“The notion that workplace bullying is an individual, psychological issue or a set of interactions solely between the bully and target are myths” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.361). Bullying is a complex phenomenon that involves bullies, bullies’ accomplices, passive enablers, bystanders and organizations. This may explain why individual efforts rarely end workplace bullying (Lutgen–Sandvik, Namie, & Namie 2009; Richman et al. 2001). Even though the bully tries to orchestrate the isolation of an individual, it is a strategy that will not work unless others are involved (Zapf et al 1996). However, the power dynamic involved in bullying can manipulate reputations and influence relationships within the workplace thus normalising the isolation of individuals. Witnesses can even enable bullying, as bullies make people do things that “they are not aware that they’re doing” (Namie and Namie 2011, p.63). Bullies often pit workers against one another and deter peer communication in an effort to close down opportunities or support for resistance (Tim Field 1996; Crawford 1999; Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). The presence of a bullying culture manifesting in patterns of non-intervention can impact on targets’ decision to take further action. The power of the bullying is grounded in “the ability to informally delegitimize actors in the ‘eyes’ of others” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.19). Targets and witnesses can perceive passive bystanders as a silent majority acting in collusion with the bullies (Cowie 2000). For this reason some individuals may inadvertently play an active part in the bullying of others (Hoel and Cooper 2000). This can affect how targets respond to bullying as witnesses fear of having their reputation damaged by this “subtle but powerful form of vilification” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.19). When witnesses are fearful of getting involved, their inaction enables bullying by indirectly and perhaps unknowingly indicating consent or ensuring toleration (Hodson *et al.* 2006). When witnesses remain silent and disengaged, their failure to confront bullying creates a culture of bullying so they are perceived as playing an active part in the bullying. “It is, therefore, possible that colleagues, who fear becoming targeted themselves, may decide not to get involved and may be seen as taking the side of the bully in the eyes of the target” (Hoel and Cooper 2000, p.14). “In environments that lend themselves to a tolerance of bullying, bystanders often feel isolated, unsupported, and up against a culture they are left to challenge on their own” (Ryan, 2013, p. 10). “Undoubtedly, multiple perpetrators makes resistance, reporting, and responding far more difficult and risky” (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.361). It is in this way that the power and oppression involved in workplace bullying implicate targets, bullies, witnesses, and upper managers. This

acts to deter further resistance unless “the system includes avenues of legitimate complaint” (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005, p. 80).

Collective action, on the other hand, if available, provides support and possibly provides some protection (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006; Van Heugten 2009). However, if complaints are ignored or management takes no action “which is often as damaging as punitive responses, since doing nothing is never really doing nothing” then witnesses may remain silent, “their voices are muted, along with the power to be found in collective voices” (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.346). Witnesses or colleagues’ responses to bullying, such as fear-induced silence or by-standing, target blaming, or siding with abusers, dispels the potential for collective voice or action leaving targets to face abuse on their own. “Allegiances easily shift, and someone who had supported them in the past suddenly sides with what may look like a dominant actor or group” (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.349). Colleagues who stand by and watch bullying occur tend to avoid or shy away from the target as if somehow there is “guilt by association” even if they were formerly friendly with the target (Duffy and Sperry 2007, p.401). In fact, “non-intervention can become the norm over time” (MacCurtain *et al.* 2018). There are many factors likely to influence individual responses to events to which they are a witness but often their inaction is due to the perceived high cost of involvement (D’Cruz and Noronha 2011). The inaction response “may be a product of fear, powerlessness or organisational culture” (Paull *et al.* 2019, p.18). In any case, when witnesses and other employees observe that management condone bullying it has the effect of disciplining and silencing them, and possibly driving them out of the workplace also. Resignation can act as a “third-order control that retarded action by characterizing action as fruitless” (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011, p.357).

Subordinate staff do have access to the rules and resources of power (Giddens, 1982, 1984), even if they do not feel they have such access. Even though clear procedures for addressing bullying appear to provide a means of resolving conflicts, this does not guarantee that targets will engage with the process. “If management are perceived not only to inadequately respond to complaints but also to use bullying as a tool to control labour, then the efficacy of bullying procedures is undermined” (MacMahon *et al.* 2018, p.474). It was Giddens that linked agency to structure through his discussion of rules and resources (Ahearn 2001, p.117). He outlined how social structures, social behaviour

that is organised according to a discernible pattern or structure, become established over time. His theory of structuration proposes that the actions of individuals or human practices produce and reproduce social life and institutions through uniform types of conduct. Eventually these human practices require little enforcement as customs become established. Giddens' theory is based on the assumption that social action and social structure are interconnected, "action is never independent of structure and structure depends on action for its reproduction" (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.301). However, customs can become the basis of rules which may attract sanctions such as disapproval, discipline or ostracism.

Giddens proposed that unintended consequences can become an unrecognised stimulus or discouragement for future action. It is in this way that action is linked to structure as the agent, in pursuing a course of action, while drawing upon the rules and resources which comprise structure. Rules, which are regularly applied and tacitly accepted, may not be overtly stated or codified in policies or procedural documents, however, they become important in the formation of the social order through their habitual application. The second dimension of structure, 'resources' represents various facets of power and domination. For Giddens this power can be applied in an authoritative manner, by controlling individual action, or in the dissemination of goods. Giddens distinguished between conceptualising structure as being involved in producing action rather than as a barrier to action. Structural constraints are not insignificant and of particular importance are those that derive from social structure. He suggests that action may be considered or conceptualised in terms of "a stratification model that takes account of the reflexive monitoring of action" which we routinely and unintentionally engage in, in order to rationalise and then motivate for further action (Held and Thompson 1989, p.71). The notion of a duality of structure is central to Giddens' theory of structuration "structure is instantiated through action, but action is conditioned by structure and incorporates structure" (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.303). One might conclude therefore that, whether at the individual level or larger structural dimension of society, structure is both enabling and constraining, it facilitates and conditions action. This results in a situation where "structure and agency no longer appear to be the complementary terms of a duality but the antagonistic poles of a dualism, such that structural constraint may so limit the options of the individual that agency is effectively dissolved" (Held and Thompson 1989, p.73).

Studies concur that by confronting the bully directly, going to the bully's superior or to the union representative, the most common outcome was that nothing would happen (Rayner 1999). When these fail, targets resort back to avoidance behaviours or covert actions (Jóhannsdóttir and Ólafsson 2004). "When the organizational culture is such that problematic situations are left unattended, organizational members see the situation as hopeless" (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011, p.357). Throughout the process targets experience feelings of helplessness "a progressive deterioration of the bullying situation, greater distress and more extreme (albeit ineffective) remedies to attempt to tackle it" (Jóhannsdóttir and Ólafsson 2004, p.329). From the literature it appears that targets first employ "constructive coping strategies (voice and/or loyalty), but after perceiving that problem solving was not possible, they resorted to destructive strategies (neglect and/or exit)" (D'Cruz and Noronha 2010, p.103). Targets of bullying may employ overt strategies in their attempts to resist bullying but ultimately end with a more covert approach, leaving either temporarily or permanently being the ultimate avoidance strategy (Zapf and Gross 2001).

2.2.4 Leave

When targets attempt to resist bullying, assert their autonomy and seek to maintain their integrity it does not necessarily bring an end to bullying "except as a result of the target leaving the organization" (van Heugten *et al.* 2018, p.4). The most common advice from bullying-affected workers to targets, is to leave the organisation (Zapf and Gross 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). However, resignation should not be viewed as a personal failure framed in defeat but as an act of resistance. Given that work provides one's livelihood and a majority of one's identity, leaving "should be fore fronted as resistance" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.207). This is not generally the case as targets frequently feel shame about being bullied and being unable to stop it. As such, they participate in "self-blame, even while fighting to negate blame from others" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2008, p.101). Targets who leave their jobs suffer loss of self-esteem and a sense of regret and shame that "they had been overpowered and were incapable of successfully fighting injustice" (D'Cruz and Noronha 2010, p.116). Targeted workers may "grieve the loss of their jobs and reputations in the same way others grieve losing good health, loved ones or marriages" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2008, p.114).

2.3 Organisational response to seeking redress - A power perspective

A number of key challenges remain within the field of workplace bullying research, one crucial issue is the role the organisation plays in responding to complaints of bullying (D’Cruz and Noronha 2010). Because workplace bullying occurs in the workplace, in front of and involving many people, it must be considered “a systemic issue instead of an individual, psychological issue” (Lutgen-Sandvik and Scheller Arsh 2014, p.53). However, studies of specific organizational responses to bullying acts are not abundant (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018). Studies examining how organisational support mechanisms may influence perceptions and experiences of bullying and “negative consequences of these” are also in short supply (Parzefall and Salin 2010, p.765). Therefore, rather than being solely a phenomenon “perpetrated by individuals” workplace bullying is often a symptom of management in organizations (Harrington *et al.* 2013, p.368). In fact it could be argued that management cause all bullying by initiating it, allowing it to continue or failing to prevent it (Brodsky 1976). Because workplace bullying is circular “without intervention [it] will continue to result in a negative and deteriorating workplace culture” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.13). The introduction of workplace policies and anti-bullying procedures presupposes a genuine approach to tackling workplace bullying but this expectation is not borne out in practice as a “sustained power dynamic of distortion, competing truth claims and silencing” pertains (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.16).

Notwithstanding, a frequent means for dealing with bullying in the workplace is to provide a ‘worker voice mechanism’ in the form of a policy, supported by a procedural complaint mechanism (Lutgen-Sandvik *et al.* 2010; MacMahon *et al.* 2018). The effectiveness of implemented anti-bullying policies should mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and employee outcomes (Sheehan *et al.* 2018). On the contrary, the extant literature identifies unsupportive HR policies and practices as well as lax attitudes on the part of management (Lewis and Rayner 2003; MacMahon *et al.* 2018; Rai and Agarwal 2018). Studies reveal that policies fail and employees remain silent due to fear and a sense of futility (MacMahon *et al.* 2018). “If the injured person then tries to obtain redress through the ‘justice’ system, they are likely to suffer further injury from the system itself- in some cases, more severe and damaging than the original one” (Lennane 2000). Management’s responses to employees in claims of bullying are

frequently “inaction, denial, target-blaming or management complicity (Harrington *et al.* 2013, p.383). Limited research on school workplace bullying highlights how complaints are routinely played down by management with managers or principals “rarely brought to account” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.112).

Weber differentiated between power and authority, power that people accept because it comes from a source that is perceived as legitimate he labelled ‘authority’. In his book ‘*Economy and society*’(1978) he viewed legitimate authority as power whose use is considered just and appropriate by those over whom the power is exercised. In the school setting policies derived from and ratified/sanctioned by the board, regarded as legitimate power, are seen as bearing authority. On the other hand power utilised in bullying instances is ‘illegitimate’. “This power is seen as located within the individual, and the illegitimate use of it explained through calling on the individual’s aggressive nature” (Liefoghe and Mac Davey 2001, p.377). For Weber (1978), the significance of legitimate domination, “the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons”, focused on how it facilitates organisational control (Weber 1978, p.212). The power relation associated with dominance may include the employer-employee relationship, which in the case of primary schools is board-teacher, principal–teacher, the teacher-student, parent-child or the relation between priest and church member. “The existence of domination turns only on the actual presence of one person successfully issuing orders to others” (Weber 1978, p.53). Power can be enacted through the *discourse* surrounding organizational practices that privilege management whilst muting the voice of the employee (Liefoghe and MacKenzie Davey, 2001). Weber referred to three pure types of legitimate domination on which the validity of claims to legitimacy are based: traditional grounds, rational-legal grounds, and charismatic grounds. Rational-legal authority, the most common form of legitimacy today, refers to power that is legitimised by rules, regulations, and laws. This type of authority is concerned with the political order, it is based on the belief in legality, that those in authority have the right to issue commands under the rules, to make decisions and enact policy. In the case of schools rational-legal authority power resides in the office or position that an individual holds such as the patron, principal, chairperson or board member. Power is given to elected representatives of the board and the rule of law, in the form of policies and procedures, are outlined in the school documents, legal documents and are reinforced by the

delineation of the functions of the board as set out in section 15 of the Education Act, 1998. Though it may not necessarily require an administrative staff or an organisation, it is more common for domination to require a considerable number of people, a staff, “a special group which can normally be trusted to execute the general policy as well as the specific commands” (Weber 1978, p.212). For Weber those actors “who stand in a favourable relationship to the prime resources of that society” are the dominating actors (Brennan 1990, p.80). As stated, in the context of the Irish primary school the prime resources of power reside with the principal, the chairperson and the patron. Weber noted that if domination continues for a considerable period of time, it becomes a structured phenomenon and the forms of domination then become the social structures of that society (Weber 1999). Domination is accepted and considered desirable or at least bearable and not worth challenging (Weber 1999).

Rational-legal authority is therefore a structure for making decisions, and the legitimacy of the structure results in a legal code. For Weber this legal code is founded on natural law, a form of non-religious morality and it provides the most efficient form of administration. Hence, people are expected to behave in a particular way according to a set of written rules, policies or procedures. Weber viewed the system of rational-legal authority or domination with its formal procedures, as being sustained by a belief in formal legality which can at times moderate equity and justice (Weber 1978). The intricate processes through which power structures are used to protect the organisation and maintain the existing power balance, such as bureaucratic hierarchical power, and how they come to be regarded as normal relations of power and authority were the focus of much of Weber’s work. In the case of workplace bullying each school board, seen as having legitimate authority, is obliged, under Health and Safety legislation, to have in place an anti-bullying policy supported by a clear complaints procedure.

2.3.1 Policy and Procedure

Studies claim that workplace bullying may be resolved in its “early phases by means of organizational interventions or by initiatives from those involved or other concerned parties” (Hoel *et al.* 2001, p.4). The most common measure adopted by organisations to counteract bullying is the introduction of written anti-bullying policies, procedures and the provision of information (Salin 2008). These policies are intended to provide a formal voice structure; “a direct and individual mechanism that employees use for the purposes of expressing dissatisfaction and attempting to improve their working

conditions” (MacMahon *et al.* 2018, p.474). Equally important, workplace bullying policies should emphasise the importance of “professional and respectful behaviour in the workplace” (Saunders *et al.* 2007, p.352). Efforts such as this should provide a clear and transparent means of addressing bullying and represent managements’ concern for its employees. The implementation of anti-bullying policies and procedures should promote the experience of “fair conflict management when disputes and conflicts develop” (Einarsen *et al.* 2018, p.563).

The establishment of ethical infrastructure can prove valuable as an organizational response to the challenges that bullying poses (Einarsen *et al.* 2017). In particular it suggests establishing and reinforcing ethical principles regarding workplace bullying by employing and communicating written codes of ethics, policies, procedures for handling complaints, training programs and the use of formal sanctions against unethical behaviour. This model suggests that in organizations with robust formal ethical systems, members are well-informed and know how to act if bullying occurs. In addition, those who have been trained to handle bullying incidents are expected to be acquainted with organizational policies and procedures (Einarsen *et al.* 2017). Management have legitimate power to enact policies, influence culture and lead the effort in enforcing anti-bullying policies. Effectively implemented anti-bullying practices should “buffer the relationship between workplace bullying and negative employee outcomes” (Sheehan *et al.* 2018, p.5). “At an institutional level, policies around respectful and dignified treatment of all individuals exist in most organisations” (Ferris and Kline 2009, p.11). But the mere presence of policies does not guarantee that employees will engage with procedures. Employees’ perceptions of the organisation’s intention to prevent negative employee behaviours (bullying) only have their desired effect “when policies are perceived to be implemented effectively” (Sheehan *et al.* 2018, p.27). By focusing on how to “deal fairly and effectively with interpersonal tension and conflicts” the organisation can reduce bullying and ensure high employee work engagement (Einarsen *et al.* 2018, p.565).

Research on the extent of workplace bullying policies is scant and tends to focus on “prescriptions for organisational policy” rather than suggesting that organisations actually use this advice (Cowan, 2011, p. 309). In a properly functioning supportive organisation, complaints of bullying would be accepted, acted upon and the status of

the complainant would be either unaffected or enhanced. However, whether or not the policies and procedures are correctly implemented can in itself be reflective of a power imbalance. Significantly, research suggests that the introduction of anti-bullying work practices alone does not reduce workplace bullying. But their effective implementation is associated with less bullying and the “adverse organisational outcome effects associated with bullying” can be mitigated (Sheehan *et al.* 2018, p.27). Therefore, the effective implementation of policies is inextricably linked to how competently those in positions of authority perform the task. “Employees must perceive that these policies and practices simply do not remain in the HR handbook but become reality through effective implementation” (Sheehan *et al.* 2018).

In contrast, the literature discloses that the chief motivation for developing policies and procedures for dealing with workplace bullying is primarily “legislative compliance and following guidelines” (Rockett 2015, p.73). Absence of an anti-bullying policy can be interpreted as organisational approval and “a possible perpetrator will perceive the costs and dangers of bullying as very low” (Salin 2003, p.1220). As stated earlier low perceived cost to the perpetrator is a prerequisite for bullying to take place (Salin 2003). However, rather than focusing on strategic initiatives aimed at improving the psychosocial environment, obligatory organisational interventions, purporting to reflect managements’ concern for its employees by prohibiting bullying and providing a clear and transparent means of addressing it, simply lack authenticity and resolve (Lewis and Rayner 2003; Salin 2003; Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a; Rockett 2015). Anti-bullying codes and procedures are employed as a form of ‘impression management’ rather than a genuine effort to address the issue and as such they have the effect of maintaining control whilst outwardly giving the impression of legitimacy (Hutchinson *et al.* 2014). In fact, simply stressing what is protected by law could leave one with the impression that “only those being harassed because of a protected class are covered by the policy” (Cowan 2011, p.321).

Policy Development

The process of developing and implementing the policy is as important as the actual contents (Salin 2008). “For an anti-bullying policy to be successful the text itself—i.e. the very existence of a written statement about the unacceptability of bullying and recommended procedures against it—is not enough” (Salin 2008, p.223). Policies tend

to contain general statements referring to codes of conduct but they don't include a list of prohibited behaviour (Richards and Daley 2003; Duncan and Riley 2005; Cowan 2011). Studies advocate that organisations should include a list of examples of bullying behaviours to ensure that their definition more “closely coincides with that of their employees” (Saunders *et al.* 2007, p.352). While many generic issues of organisational dysfunction can arise, the way to address it must be unique to the specific workplace and its culture (Ramsey *et al.* 2018).

In reality, research points to the presence of a ‘one for all’ ‘copy and paste’ type wording which are not adapted to specific organisations (Salin 2008; Cowan 2011). “The most striking impression lays in the similarity between many of the policy documents” (Salin 2008, p.227). Evidence suggests that such policies lack the “detail to address bullying” and so are considered too general and ambiguous to provide assistance to a bullied employee (Cowan 2011, p.309). Such practice indicate “imitation— rather than genuine organizational necessity” (Salin 2008, p.229). If policies do not have personal meaning for employees, but only contain the most common definitions of bullying, such as the ‘copy and paste’ type policy, it may result in under-reporting (Saunders 2007). Therefore, the ‘copy-paste’ type practice is a “possible sign of low commitment” rather than a process driven by an organization’s own needs and circumstances (Salin 2008, p.228). In general such policies tend to comprise definitions of workplace bullying “prevalent in the scientific and professional communities,[which] differ from employees' definitions in several respects” (Saunders *et al.* 2007, p.353). If employees’ personal definitions differ from those advocated by the organisation they may be reluctant to report bullying because it does “not meet all the definitional elements contained in the workplace policy definition” (Saunders *et al.* 2007, p.352).

Similarly, policies accentuating legal language and definitions which turn on a point of law do not offer much protection to bullied workers (Cowan 2011). They do however constitute an “insurance policy for organizations, offering a legal minimum against potential lawsuits” (Vickers 2012, p.545). In many cases procedural support is merely espoused but “in reality, it is merely a promise that will not be honored (Vickers 2012, p.540). It is noteworthy also that the legal stance on workplace bullying is in its infancy as are the “promise and limitations of this particular form of intervention” (S. Einarsen

et al. 2011, p.482). Therefore, asking for support or assistance can make the situation worse for targets and could result in negative consequences such as threats of dismissal (Rayner 1998).

2.3.2 Response of Management

As stated above the literature identifies that it is insufficient to simply have a policy aimed at eliminating a bullying culture, it must actually be implemented (Riley, 2012). Studies make the distinction between the successful implementation of policies which are designed to support targets and those that are rendered ineffective due to the fact that management frequently “have discretion (real or imagined) in their implementation” (Vickers 2012, p.544). “Many organisations might well have policies that would appear to oppose bullying and yet have cultures that encourage it” (Hood *et al.* 2011, p.36). A frequent experience of targets is that their formal or informal complaints are ignored or dismissed (Archer 1999; Riley *et al.* 2012). There are a number of possible reasons for this. Complaints may not be taken seriously because “complaints often sound trivial when taken out of their original context” (De Wet 2010, p.1457). When managers are uncomfortable with complaints they may choose avoidance “enabling negative behaviours to fester and negatively affect future relationships in the workplace” (Vickers 2012, p.541). Managers do not understand the concept of mobbing and as a result react in disbelief or denial when presented with allegations of such behaviour (Davenport *et al.* 1999). Managers decline to assist with conflict to avoid their own embarrassment about their misuse of power (Wyatt and Hare 1997). Efforts to stop bullying fail also when managers are too cowardly to confront aggressive actors or too “emotionally involved (cause) with actors to protect workers (effect)” (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011, p.358). “Fear, intimidation and the seemingly unlimited power of principals often result in a culture of silence surrounding workplace bullying” (C. De Wet 2011, p.76). When targets take action to seek redress their complaints are routinely set aside or “sequestered in some way by their employers and union representatives” (Thirlwall 2015, p.147).

Studies point to the practice of sending targets back to managers to deal with bullying “which was viewed as counterproductive as the managers were frequently the perpetrators of bullying activities (Namie & Namie 2003; Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper 2002; Salin 2008). In the school setting principals are most often reported as perpetrators of bullying so is difficult then to see how targets could hope for satisfactory

redress (Lutgen-Sandvik 2007; 2011; Namie 2007). Sending targets back to managers, when managers are frequently the perpetrators of bullying, leads to an unjust system whereby managers are judge and jury combined (Lewis and Rayner 2003; Salin 2008). Even when a complaint is taken seriously a common outcome of internal complaints processes is that the alleged bully remains in place “while the target was relocated or resigned their position” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.20). Considering the harmful effects on the target and indeed on the organisation as a whole, this leaves targets with little hope of redress as they do not have viable opportunities for recourse and “often lack social and/or professional support at work” (De Wet 2011, p.463). In contrast to the literature promoting organisational interventions (Zapf & Gross, 2001) the literature also discloses the dearth of organisational support, the despair and the isolation targets experience when they encounter bullying, attempt to complain, or engage with redress procedures (Cemaloglu, 2011; Blasé, Blasé & Du, 2008; Fahie, Grey & Gardiner, 2013). The ways that more senior members of the organisation respond to bullying sets the tone for others. When they ignore bullying or are unresponsive it suggests that the issue is unimportant. This in turn allows an organisational culture to develop in which bullies can act with impunity, the “embedding of aggression and bullying” (Lutgen-Sandvik and Scheller Arsht 2014, p.53). “Upper management may also be active accomplices in bullying situations by not only siding with bullies but also interacting with targets in a hostile, denigrating manner that blames targets for being abused, casts targets as mentally ill, or accuses targets of being problem employees” (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.344).

2.3.3 Leadership

Research indicates that in education, leadership plays a key role in workplace bullying (De Wet 2010; Riley *et al.* 2012; Rockett 2015). “Principal mistreatment seriously damaged in-school relationships, damaged classrooms, and frequently impaired all-school decision making” (Blase and Blase 2003, p.368). Research identifies many forms of destructive leadership; abusive, autocratic, tyrannical and toxic leadership. In fact associations have been found between “high occurrence of bullying and leadership style, role conflict and work control” (Hoel and Rayner 1997, p.185). Bullying behaviours are seen to occur in hierarchical relationships, with the person in a higher position bullying subordinates (Rayner, 1997). The focus on the school as an

organisation relates to the fact that those in management or leadership positions are often identified as perpetrators of bullying (Zapf 1999; Namie and Namie 2011). Policies claim to direct school leaders to take action to support targets and resolve difficulties once they become aware of bullying in the workplace. Therefore, the importance of leadership in relation to the prevention, resolution and eradication of bullying cannot be over emphasised (Blase and Blase 2004; Einarsen *et al.* 2007; Cemaloğlu 2011). Leadership is “critical in either eliminating bullying of staff or at least reducing it” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.134). The focus of leadership in this study is on toxic, laissez-faire, ethical and moral leadership and the effect these styles have on workplace bullying.

“With managers in positions of power often identified as perpetrators, a scrutiny of the impact of different leadership styles on bullying appears to be essential” (Salin and Hoel 2003, p.212). Research confirms that leadership “is a powerful force in shaping employee behaviour” (Porter *et al.* 2018, p.121). It follows then that leadership is fundamental to workplace bullying (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018). Ineffective leaders create a milieu of stress, conflict, bullying, and incivility in their organisations, therefore effective leaders need to provide mechanisms to reduce workplace conflict and bullying (Rockett 2015). Over the past thirty years researchers have produced numerous studies in the field of educational leadership, many of these focused on the role and contribution of effective leadership (Blase and Blase 2001; Blase and Blase 2007; Harrison and Killion 2007; Harris 2009; Eyal and Roth 2011; Green 2014). However, research in the field of education has “failed to address the destructive problem of principal mistreatment of teachers” (Blase and Blase 2004, p.265). Leadership is a critical factor in eliminating the bullying of staff in schools with principals in a key position to take positive action, thereby reducing or eliminate bullying of staff (Riley *et al.* 2009). In spite of this, research confirms that those in higher positions such as principals or management are “persistently and frequently” found to be perpetrators, who are rarely brought to account for their behaviour (Riley *et al.* 2009, p.21). Two leadership styles have been identified, authoritarian and laissez-faire, as being associated with bullying and they also influence managerial response to complaints of bullying.

The most significant task for leaders is to acknowledge that bullying does in fact occur in their schools, to raise awareness amongst staff that bullying behaviour is of concern and that it is their responsibility to address it. An awareness of the presence of bullying by those in leadership positions “should mean some action can be taken to rectify the situation” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.134). However, authoritarian or ineffective leadership has been linked to poor responses to workplace conflict, which in turn leads to fear of repercussions in seeking to raise concerns (Jackson *et al.* 2013).

Toxic leadership

A great deal of Scandinavian research has focused on the importance of the work environment, its core beliefs and values and the role of leadership in the creation of a toxic environment. The Principal is most frequently perceived as the bully and research indicates that those in positions of authority play a significant role in tolerating, sanctioning, permitting or reducing bullying behaviour in the school community (Bush 1995; Blase and Blase 2003; Blase and Blase 2004; Riley *et al.* 2012). “Principals who create a negative organizational environment contribute to workplace bullying in educational organizations” (Cemaloglu 2011, p.507). Work environment theory discourses propose that: “the organisational dynamics, especially an organisation’s culture and leadership, encourage and reinforces workplace bullying” (De Wet 2010, p.1454). For bullying to thrive in an organisation, the culture must allow and sanction such behaviour; and insofar as that is the case, a sense of permission is conveyed to the perpetrator (De Wet 2010). In such circumstances low perceived cost to the perpetrator is also a prerequisite for bullying to take place (Salin 2003). Studies suggest that “tyrannical behaviour may be legitimized by organizational norms and values” and this plays a key role in shifting the focus away from bullying as interpersonal (Liefvooghe and Mac Davey 2001, p.376).

Bullying prevails in schools that are hierarchically, bureaucratic and rule orientated where “ineffective leaders often bully their subordinates” (De Wet 2010, p.1458). Authoritarian leadership or style of management may also create a climate of fear, where there is “no room for criticism and where complaining may be considered futile” (Salin and Hoel 2003, p.213). Research indicates that “bullying is often associated with an autocratic, insensitive and even abusive management style” (Hoel and Cooper 2000, p.27). Bullying principals display the kind of leadership that seriously damages

teachers, teaching and student learning but complaints about such abuse “usually result in (a) no action, (b) efforts to protect an abusive boss and/or (c) reprisals against the victim for registering the complaints (Blasé & Blasé 2004, Rayner, 1998, Keashly, 1998, Keashly et al., 1994, Namie 2000, Namie & Namie 2000). Consequently abusive principals’ behaviours are “extremely harmful to teachers’ professional and personal lives” (Blase and Blase 2004, p.253). Moreover, “principal mistreatment significantly damaged teachers affectively, cognitively, behaviorally, and physically, and such mistreatment also resulted in considerable adverse effects on classroom teaching” (Blase *et al.* 2008, p.269). “When describing destructive leaders, the focus has mainly been on *active* and *manifest* destructive behaviours as compared to *passive* and *indirect* forms” (Skogstad *et al.* 2007, p.80).

It is important to note also that the culture created within the school by toxic leaders allows bullying to take place and circuits of power to remain unchanged. “School cultures have unique ways of introducing new employees to the ‘way we do things around here’, good or bad” (Gruenert 2006, p.61). Research indicates that bullying may begin at the top and all those in subordinate positions may adopt that behaviour because they see that it is acceptable. “So pervasive is some bullying behaviour that it is often considered the norm within schools and results in a toxic workplace culture which impacts adversely upon the school and its employees” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.xii). These norms of acceptable or unacceptable behaviours are not only allowed by the leaders but are also passed on by them (Van Fleet and Griffin 2006). If the behaviour modelled by the leaders is aggressive then it becomes the norm and individuals who observe, learn and may respond in kind (M. Harvey *et al.* 2007). It is feasible therefore that, through association with other actors who are willing to tolerate or engage in bullying, individuals may be socialized into norms tolerant of the behaviour (Hutchinson *et al.* 2010b). Bullying is then embedded in culture leading to the creation of an environment of tolerance for bullying (Heames *et al.* 2006; Giorgi *et al.* 2015).

Social/emotional contagion can also occur whereby entire organisational culture can become abusive (Harvey 2007). The observation of bullying behaviour provides the means of adapting, adjusting, and absorbing negative behaviours and incorporating them into employees’ behavioural repertoire. Accordingly, participating in a workplace where bullying is ‘normal’ “would likely lead one to also bully others” (Porter *et al.*

2018, p.123). “By mimicking the informally sanctioned bullying behaviour, a culture of abuse can be propagated throughout a global organization” (M. Harvey *et al.* 2007, p.2588). The contagion effect has been attributed to hierarchical position (Westhues 2002). Duffy and Sperry (2007) and Salin (2003) confirm that bullying thrives in organisations that are hierarchic, bureaucratic and/or rule-orientated. Additionally, from targets’ perspectives “hierarchical position likely affects sources and degrees of support” (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.349). “Authoritarian leadership has a negative effect on many desirable employee behaviours” particularly those related to “employee voice behaviour” (Li and Sun 2015, p.174). Since primary schools are “controlled by more than one hierarchy”, this may account for the over-representation of bullying in this educational sector (Leymann 1996, p.176).

Laissez-Faire leadership

Leadership theory generally characterizes laissez-faire leadership as either benign or simply ineffective, where the leader still occupies the position but has relinquished responsibilities. However, laissez-faire leadership may be more of a “counterproductive leadership style than a zero type of leadership style” as it can foster interpersonal conflicts (Skogstad *et al.* 2007, p.89). Weak or inadequate leadership is a common enabler of workplace bullying (Einarsen *et al.* 1994; Leymann 1996). There is a clear relationship between laissez-faire leadership, lack of conflict confrontation and raised levels of bullying (Skogstad *et al.* 2007). Research confirm that laissez-faire leadership style is destructive by allowing bullying behaviour to develop, to escalate and to thrive (Hoel and Cooper 2000; Skogstad *et al.* 2007). In such cases the leadership style of those in charge “can also be seen as an enabling process when that leadership is weak or inadequate” (Porter *et al.* 2018, p.123). Moreover, if leaders allow bullying to continue unchecked it becomes normalised and self-perpetuating (Hoel and Rayner 1997). Thus, an unwillingness to act against bullying co-workers, “perpetuates educator-on-educator bullying” (De Wet 2011, p.462).

Leaders have the responsibility to manage conflict and handle interpersonal conflict but laissez-faire leaders “are unlikely to respond at all, and by failing to respond, inadvertently support bullying (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.360). The absence of such proactive behaviour is therefore not a “zero state of leadership but represents the nonfulfillment of legitimate expectations, which may be negatively associated with

subordinates' role stress" (Skogstad *et al.* 2007, p.87). Laissez-faire leadership, has been documented to be a strong predictor of bullying at work (Einarsen 1999) so unaddressed conflicts "may even escalate into bullying, resulting in high levels of psychological distress among those involved and even among those observing the bullying" (Skogstad *et al.* 2007, p.89). These patterns of behaviour cannot occur without the agreement of management so the inaction of management to bullying gives a "sense of permission to harass" (Brodsky 1976, p.84). Therefore bullying is not an isolated set of interactions between the bully and target, it cannot happen without the agreement of management and so it involves other actors. The responses of these others to bullying behaviours, communicate the organisation's (in)tolerance for such treatment (Ferris 2004; Heames *et al.* 2006). The presence of bullying leads to deductions about organizational values and the "underlying assumptions driving both practices and values" (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011, p.357). Effectively the organisation can enable bullying, "the organisations culture must 'allow' or sanction such harassment" (De Wet 2010, p.1454). If management does not respond through some form of action to counteract the development of these norms, such as those associated with a bullying culture, it is likely that they become implicitly validated by virtue of inaction (Aquino and Lamertz 2004).

Educational organisations are frequently dominated by cultures in which conflict is strenuously avoided, "such an approach consumes no time and energy, it fails to solve the problem that led to the conflict" (Blase and Blase 2004, p.265). Research reveals that, unfortunately, when most leaders are notified about bullying incidents, they "either ignore it or worsen the situation by fostering retaliation against the complainant" (Duncan *et al.* 2011, p.7). Leaders have a responsibility to manage conflict so the presence of bullying reflects incompetence, its very existence points to "managements' global inability to lead" (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011, p.357). When the sanctions against organisational bullying are low, or when bullying is "permitted or encouraged more bullying will occur "(Brodsky 1976; Salin 2003; Hood *et al.* 2011).

Effective leadership

Leaders have the main responsibility for creating, maintaining and communicating culture within the organisation and this is "regarded as a central feature of effective leadership" (Bush 1995, p.138). There is "a negative relationship between the

transformational leadership acts of principals and workplace bullying” (Cemaloglu 2011, p.p. 495). Transformational leadership encourages intrinsic motivation, empowerment, promotes the positive development of followers and is regarded as the best leadership style for leading complex organisations in the present day (Bass and Riggio 2006). More importantly, workplace bullying does not occur where principals exhibit a transformational leadership style. These results suggest the desirability of principals striving to improve transformational leadership behaviours in order to develop their schools as healthy organizations and to solve the problem of bullying therein. The knowledge base on leadership provides evidence of the importance, and the challenge of “developing a climate of openness and trust” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.137). “Effective principals develop positive relationships based on mutual trust, respect, openness, support and understanding” (Blase and Blase 2004, p.246, 2001). In a climate of openness and trust amongst staffs, matters can be discussed and deliberated upon.

Moral and Ethical leadership

More recently a complex and relatively new field of study, ethical leadership, has evolved. “The field of ethical leadership is ever evolving as ethical dilemmas force leaders to re-evaluate existing paradigms” (Monahan 2012, p.63). Drawing upon leadership literature and its relation to ethics it is clear that many leadership styles overlap by sharing a common concern for a moral dimension. For example moral, ethical, spiritual, authentic, and transformational leaders share a common concern for people and the broader society. Leaders’ personal traits, character, and altruistic motivation compel them to behave ethically in their personal and professional lives. Ethical leadership is defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown *et al.* 2005, p.120). Ethical leaders are characterized as honest, caring and principled individuals who make fair and balanced decisions (Brown and Treviño 2006). Ethical leaders also frequently “communicate with their followers about ethics, set clear ethical standards and use rewards and punishments to see that standards are followed” (Brown and Treviño 2006, p.597). In the final analysis “ethics comes down to a choice to influence oneself and others in doing the right thing” (Monahan 2012, p.59).

Employee communication or voice means providing all employees with the opportunity to ‘call-out’ bullying behaviour without fear, which can be a “powerful channel in dealing with this behaviour at the outset or reporting on-going behaviour” (Holland 2019). Ethical leaders demonstrate superior ethical and moral conduct and as such they do the right thing when required to (Avolio 1999). Accordingly, “ethical leaders set ethical standards and communicate them to followers” (Brown and Treviño 2006, p.607). Ethical leadership includes both traits and behaviours, that ethical leaders work by and also encourage employees to follow (Avey *et al* 2012). Brown (2005) identified three constructs in organizational behaviour that are associated with ethical leadership, they include honesty, charisma and fair treatment. Ethical leaders demonstrate integrity and high ethical standards whilst exhibiting fair and considerate treatment of employees and hold “employees accountable for ethical conduct” (Brown *et al.* 2005, p.130). Social learning theory suggests that ethical leadership has a positive influence on employees’ conduct because leaders act as legitimate models who convey the importance of ethical behaviour. Moreover, when a leader is perceived to be an ethical leader, by providing ethical guidance, employees are more willing to engage in proactive helpful behaviour such as reporting problems. Such a trust based relationship would see management and employees engage in open discussion and communication and by default employee voice would be encouraged and facilitated. “The presence of direct-only voice arrangements is more likely to be associated with favourable employee perceptions of the industrial relations climate” (Pyman *et al.* 2010, p.470). In contrast, However, a management intolerant of genuine voice has several avenues to close it down (Pyman 2010). The erosion of the ethical environment, as exhibited in a bullying culture, can deter targets and witnesses from reporting bullying thereby impeding the ability of institutions to fulfil their objectives (Jackson *et al.* 2013). “Bullying can become an entrenched feature of power dynamics within institutions, which has the potential to erode ethics and safety culture” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.20). An examination of the literature reveals how corrupt conduct through bullying can become a form of institutionalised, familiarised behaviour that thrives unchecked (Archer 1999; Samnani 2013b). Therefore one of the most pressing challenges for teachers, in particular teacher leadership, may be to understand the power dynamics of schools and develop ethical leadership so that principals have the “moral courage to act in ways that sustain moral identity, offer avenues for resistance and a

concern for care and justice” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.23). Ethical leadership provides a means of using the leader's “proactive efforts to influence followers' ethical and unethical behaviour” (Brown and Treviño 2006, p.597).

2.3.4 Power

The concept of power is central to the definition of workplace bullying (Leymann 1996; Einarsen 2011; Samnani and Singh 2012). In fact, it is not possible to understand bullying without “giving consideration to the concept of power” particularly power as it operates within institutions (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.120). Yet there is no singular phenomenon called ‘power’ and no absolute power situations exist in modern workplaces (Foucault 1977; Giddens 1982). Understanding the use and exercise of power within bullying relationships is complex and problematic (Einarsen, Raknes, Matthisen *et al.*, Leymann, Zapf). Therefore, research into staff perspectives can “further strengthen our understanding of the use of power in workplace bullying” (Patterson *et al.* 2018). Whilst discussions and definitions of workplace bullying refer to ‘imbalance’ of power there are various ways of looking at power (Beale 2011; Keashly and Jagatic 2011). In fact, “to generalise that the exercise of power is always subtle or always hierarchical is to do an injustice to the inherent complexities regarding power” (Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2018, p.81).

Oade (2015) contends that it involves the bully seeking to remove or take power, personal power that makes a person feel confident and capable in their job or it could be organisational power (Oade 2015, p.32). The dominant understanding of the theories of Foucault and Clegg reside in “thinking of power as a phenomenon which can be grasped only relationally” (Clegg 1989, p.207). Similarly, Foucault (1972, 1977) proposes that power is diffuse and invisible, both productive and repressive, as a force which is dispersed within social networks. Therefore, the use and abuse of power is more often linked to the relations between individual and organisational factors (Leymann 1990; Andersson & Pearson 1999). Another underlying theme of workplace bullying is abusive power (Einarsen *et al.* 2003). Abusive or destructive power is associated with negative behaviours that if employed, contribute to workplace bullying. Power relationships between bullies and targets are often unequally weighted and often “characterised by an imbalance of power” (De Wet 2011, p.456). The imbalance of power often may “mirror the formal power structure of the organisation” (Einarsen *et*

al. 2020, p.17). This is the case when a person experiences bullying behaviour from a person in a superior position in the organisational hierarchy. In contrast, studies have also investigated the use of power in cases of upwards bullying by examining the source of power that staff members use to create power imbalances (Patterson *et al.* 2018). In the bullying scenario this real or perceived ‘imbalance of power’ implies that the aggressor or group of aggressors is more powerful in some way than the person they are targeting. Hence power disparity, rather than solely power, is central to most definitions of bullying (Leymann 1996; Lutgen-Sandvik 2003; Vartia 1996). Many theorists have adopted this explanation, but it does raise questions regarding the source of such power imbalances, how to assess differences in power that are real or perceived, personal or organizational and the legitimate, or indeed the misuse of legitimate power, which are relevant to bullying. Accordingly researchers have continued to investigate and debate the manifestation of power, who is wielding it and for whose benefit they employ it.

Power is often treated as synonymous with authority. However, Weber distinguished between the two terms purporting that power is an abstract term while authority denotes concrete roles and relationships which produce behavioural effects. Weber (1978) referred to many different types of power such as hierarchical, political, social, financial and so on. He suggested that ‘power’ should be replaced by a more precise term ‘domination’, of which there were two types; authority and possession. Weber viewed authority as existing because “one commands and one obeys” and domination occurs when one pursues their own interest (Barbalet 1985, p.536). One type is founded on the possession of resources and the second is grounded in an “absolute duty to obey, regardless of personal motives or interests” (Weber 1978). The element of legitimacy is vital to the notion of authority and is the main means by which authority is distinguished from the more general concept of power. Authority is the “probability that a command with a specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons, despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which that probability rests” (Uphoff 1989, p.301). The central term in this theory of authority is “group”. If power comes from a source that is perceived by the group as legitimate, it is considered authority. Moreover, any debate about authority must also consider the basis of gaining compliance, both motives and means. “Submission or compliance may be voluntary only in the sense that a person chooses to avoid deprivation or injury” (Uphoff 1989, p.301). Therefore, those

in authority may demand voluntary compliance on the basis of legitimacy, while maintaining a threat of penalty, which may be in the form of economic or social sanction, or a promise of reward.

In Clegg's *Frameworks of Power* (1989) a model of power is introduced which views power as essentially circulatory and relational. Clegg drew attention to the association between power and structure, what he considered 'legitimate power'. Whether or not a person, exercising authority, is obeyed or not depends on whether or not this person's 'right to power' is perceived as legitimate (Clegg 1989). Weber also considered classes, status groups and parties to be manifestations of the distribution of power, they are associated with power in that they attempt to achieve their will even when faced with opposition or resistance. Status groups exercise power or authority by maintaining the privilege that pertains to the group, in the case of primary schools status groups may include principals' networks, board members, professional status groups or religious groups. The status group may be closed, with privileges available only to those in the group, and denied to those outside the group (Weber 1999). According to Weber "classes, status groups and parties are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community" (Weber 1978, p.927). For Weber, domination relies on discipline. "Discipline is the probability that by virtue of habituation a command will receive prompt and automatic obedience in stereotyped forms, on the part of a given group of persons" (Weber 1978, p.53). Prompt action by a given group of individuals, to commands 'from above', termed obedience, requires one to become "the instrument of another's will" (Brennan 1990, p.84). In order for a command to be obeyed therefore the individual must relinquish the ability to act of his own accord. Weber portrays the disciplined individual as one who acts submissively, subserviently, unquestioningly and consistently. Some targets report being bullied because they refuse to be subservient (Namie 2000) and this refusal is a distinctive and perhaps typical target characteristic (Field 1996). From Weber's perspective the only one who acts in such a scenario is the individual with the authoritarian power to command.

Yet power "is not simply conceived as being vested in a specific person or agency, or located within individuals who have legitimate authority or sovereign power" (Hutchinson *et al.* 2010b, p.32). Rather power is a constitutive force of specific alignments of social relations operating in complex flows of micropower (Clegg, 1989).

Foucault proposed a notion of power that is employed through a network of hierarchical relations of power within organisations. From Weber's perspective systems of domination can become so protected by the leader, staff and subordinates that security is assured and any pretence of a claim to legitimacy can be abandoned. In such cases "the ruled have been totally conditioned to subservience" (Brennan 1990, p.89). The bullying literature also refers to 'illegitimate' power, as power which is not sanctioned by formal position. Using the framework of Clegg, it can be seen that power is resource dependent, it is a "capacity premised on resource control" (Clegg 1989, p.190). In contrast, these resources are unavailable to subordinates. Power disparity in the context of resource control or availability in bullying scenarios signifies that "targets nearly always feel helpless or unable to defend themselves against attack or to end the abuse" (Lutgen-Sandvik and Scheller 2014, p.52). The problematic nature of power was captured in Lord Acton's (1948) adage that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". There is a tendency for some people in high places to adopt an 'above the law' attitude or to use strict adherence to rules and regulation to, control, reprimand or to admonish targets (Blasé 2004). Studies highlight how abusive principals often use official avenues, rules, tactics and systems, to form technologies of power (Stokes and Clegg, 2002) to bully teachers, and the use of official warnings and reprimands for minor transgressions were commonplace in some schools (De Wet 2010). Trivial incidents can be identified or contrived and "nominated as the basis for disciplinary proceedings" (Field 1996 p.36). "Fear, intimidation and the seemingly unlimited power of principals often result in a culture of silence surrounding workplace bullying" (De Wet 2011, p.76). "Some individuals may initially feel that they are as strong as their opponent, but gradually come to realise that their first impression was wrong, or that their own or opponent's moves have placed them in a weaker position" (Einarsen *et al.* 2020, p.18). Official recommended investigations and procedures can be permeated by relations of power as institutions undermine targets' credibility in order to uphold their public image (Hutchinson and Jackson 2014).

For Foucault, power works in "multifaceted and multidirectional ways to mobilize subjects of action, always in relation to various local techniques of domination, normalization, or, perhaps, subjectification" (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.255). Power can arise from sources other than organisational hierarchy (Einarsen *et al.* 2003). Within organisations, bullying may emanate from relational power which can be exercised

when “bullies do their utmost to form alliances with their principals” (De Wet 2011, p.456). As such power can operate through social relationships as complex circuits of power. Foucault also emphasised human agency proposing that there is always the possibility of resistance in all relations of power. His alternative model of power viewed power not only as constraining but as enabling “diffuse and capillary, omnipresent, and both productive and repressive” (Allen 2002, p.134). For Foucault, power and oppression should not be reduced to the same thing because to do so would “assume that power is exercised from one source” (O’Farrell 2005, p.101). Like Foucault, Arendt’s view of power is not as a possession but as a force that develops between men when they interact together and ceases to exist when they disband (Arendt and Canovan 2013). Power can also emerge through collective action, “the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” and so power is realised by acting together in the public, political sphere (Arendt 1970, p.44). Moreover, “agency may be evident in any circuit in a network of practices” and in such instances the circuit is normally human but sometimes departmental (Clegg 1989, p.200). Because of agency control cannot be totally secured “it will be open to erosion and undercutting by the active, embodied agency of those people who are its object: the labour power of the organisation” (Clegg 1989, p.193). Many questions remain about the role of power, or perceived power, and its manifestation within organisations (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a; Hutchinson *et al.* 2010b; Hutchinson and Jackson 2015). The present study, investigating the manifestation of power in primary schools, draws on the legacy of key theorists, Weber, Foucault, Giddens and Clegg, who have made major contributions to our understanding of the theory of power.

2.3.5 Organisational response and intervention

When employees speak up or make complaints the issue ends up with those who have the authority or power to bring about resolution. Therefore, of central importance to dealing with or ending workplace bullying are “organizational responses and interventions when workers report bullying” (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.349). However, research reveals that management routinely play a negative role and employ ‘organisational sequestering’ in its approach to complaints (Thirlwall 2015; Vickers 2012). In the majority of studies, targets have typically reported that organizational or management authorities “took no action to stop abuse, ignored their complaints, or

sided with the bullies” (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.349). This results in a situation whereby targets have no confidence that “management or other third parties would resolve their bullying issues” (Djurkovic *et al.* 2005, p.455). Without the intervention of relevant authorities, targets are left to combat bullying alone. How organisational representatives respond to bullying situations is likely to have a “significant influence on the degree of harm experienced by the organisation and the individual” (Ferris 2004, p.394).

Research suggests that there may be a “deliberate effort to deny the existence of bullying” (Thirlwall, 2015, p.150). Indeed, limited research reveals that the traditional organisational response to workplace bullying is to regard the complainants as the cause of the problem (Vickers 2012). “Worker dissent is easily reframed as deviant behaviour by those for whom the resistance is threatening” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.429). Clegg (1989) informs that it is not so much power but domination that results in such a process. He proposed that, in the struggle for legitimacy when domination is at play, those entities in a position of dominance are freer to legitimize their version of rationality. Individuals in positions of dominance have greater influence on what is accepted as legitimate. In this sense, not only does domination facilitate the rationalization of what is taken to be rationality but it also “facilitates the legitimization of what is taken to be legitimate” (Gordon *et al.* 2009, p.32). From Clegg’s perspective the production of power in organisations is “resource dependency” and he referred to those in authority as having power based “on resource control” (Clegg 1989, p.190). “Premised upon the assumption that the power deployed in bullying is characterised by legitimate authority or control of resources, actors are thought to misuse their positional power illegitimately for the purpose of bullying” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2010b, p.29). Therefore in organisations characterised by bullying, opportunities exist for the misuse of legitimate power, as an unease within the structure of dominancy, and abuse of personal power.

Weber suggests that it is futile to resist rational-legal bases of power, evident within hierarchical organisations such as schools. Both bullies and targets accept the notion that “power is embedded in bureaucratic workplace organizing through authority in hierarchical positions” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.80). Frequently targets who challenge the bureaucratic structure and report abuse to management or external bodies are often labelled as troublemakers, mentally ill, and problem-employees (Lutgen-Sandvik 2003). In fact, organizations gather incredible resources to discount, shame, and

disgrace those who speak out (Miethe and Rothschild 1994). In the workplace bullying scenario the target is redefined through accusations or allegations of insubordination, as a 'bad employee' (Foucault 1984). This conflicts with the perception of one's ideal ethical self, particularly if natural justice and fairness are fundamental values. Psychological abuse in the form of false information where accounts are distorted and reputations manipulated results in the managements' account claiming priority (Ryan 2013). It is notable that while the careers of targets are frequently disrupted or terminated, "bullies rarely suffer career setbacks because the bully's supervisors have been found to either side with the bully or ignore the evidence" (Kelly 2005, p.5).

However, any bureaucratic organisation may be regulated and limited by "agencies which act on their own authority alongside the bureaucratic hierarchy" (Weber 1978, p.271). The DES and the INTO are charged with the task of acting to restrict the school organisation in line with rules and regulations. Their main functions include supervision of adherence to the rules, creation of the rules which govern the action of officials, thus defining the limits of their independent authority and, in the case of the DES, by having a monopoly of the granting of necessary resources for administration (Weber 1978). However, the literature demonstrates that bullying is poorly managed by trade unions (D'Cruz and Noronha 2010). As discussed, the unique and complex nature of the operation of Irish primary schools has led to a situation where they are privately owned, governed and managed by voluntary boards of management but State funded and regulated. DES regulation extends to curricula, examinations and the monitoring of standardisation of educational matters. As such the primary school is an organisation that is not restricted or obstructed by outside agencies.

Weber asserts that individuals come together and create a shared system of legal norms by dint of mutual consent and "any given legal norm can be considered legitimate by virtue of mutual agreement among the relevant parties, or by virtue of promulgation by an authority which is regarded as legitimate" (Brennan 1990, p.81). Any agency, deemed legitimate, can authorise and enforce or 'impose' an order on all individuals even though it is only the majority that acquiesce. It was Weber's view that social order is forced on the minority, leaving them no choice but to submit resulting in a state of affairs whereby "the legality of a procedure produces legitimacy in modern society" (Brennan 1990, p.82). The current complaints procedure, deemed acceptable by all legitimate agencies, and agreed by all the relevant parties, provides the mechanism for

resolving complaints of workplace bullying. Employees expect certain standards in the workplace with regard to appropriate behaviour, providing a “professional workplace free of disrespectful and harassing behaviour” (Saunders *et al.* 2007, p.352). It is not irrational then for teachers to expect the implementation of agreed anti-bullying policies. However, anti-bullying policies and procedures have been branded a ‘sham’, “it is a deception, and all the more horrible because it is encountered by workers when they need help, perhaps are experiencing extreme distress arising from negative workplace behaviours, and when evidence confirms that genuine organizational support can ameliorate the outcomes” (Vickers 2012, p.540). Research identifies many organisational responses to complaints of bullying: taking no action; admitting there was a problem with the manager but doing nothing about it; promising action but with no discernible outcome; attributing the problem to a personality conflict; asking the target to work around the problem; directing some change in the target’s behaviour; minimizing the target’s complaint while building up the abuser’s abilities and value to the organisation; branding the target as a troublemaker or insubordinate; retaliating against the target; and, in some cases, formally disciplining or removing the abuser (Keashly 2001). Responses such as these, identified in the literature as ‘*reframing*’ and ‘*rebuffing*’ have the effect of moving “any imperative for action from the organisation and places it back with the target” (Thirlwall 2015, p.149). “Unchallenged naturalization of bureaucratic power and the implicit or explicit expectation of rational subjects both serve to problematize workers’ acts of resistance against bullying and change efforts” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.61). Targets then tend to “look toward legal action once they understood they would not receive active support from their organisation” (Ferris 2004, p.392).

Cultural and environmental factors may provide important insights into the study of bullying (Giorgi *et al.*, 2011). Organisations that tolerate or ignore bullying are *amoral organisations* (Hood 2011). In such organisations, bullying is neither condoned nor condemned but their culture permits goals to be reached in whatever way is most effective. Perhaps, “bullying is effective from the organisation’s perspective” and if this is the case then bullying is tolerated (Hood *et al.* 2011, p.36). Some schools may promote a culture which serves to ignore conflicts, in the hope that they will resolve themselves (Warwick *et al.* 2004). In the final analysis, targets of workplace bullying seldom have feasible opportunities for redress (De Wet 2010). Studies call for leaders

to ensure that anti-bullying policies are being implemented effectively (Duncan *et al.* 2011, p.136). In addition, avenues external to the organisation must be made available to victims for lodging their bullying complaints (Djurkovic 2005). Counselling, provided to stressed targets, should include preparation for “negative organisational responses if the employee is considering approaching the organisation for help” (Ferris 2004, p.393). For some organisations referral to the EAP and mediation constitutes assistance but “due to power differentials between the employee and the bully” it is frequently unsuccessful (Ferris 2004, p.392). The best strategy for dealing with workplace bullying involves both effective interventions to help prevent and address bullying in the workplace and “strong legislative mechanisms to allow for restitution and compensation” (Meglich-Sespico *et al.* 2007, p.31). However, until the general cultural norms either “change dramatically or organizations better understand the enormous personal and financial consequences associated with workplace bullying, little will be done to effectively deal with this onerous phenomenon” (Meglich-Sespico *et al.* 2007, p.40).

2.3.6 Cultural norms: the Role of power

In order to understand the organisational responses to seeking redress, it is important to understand the role played by cultural norms in primary schools. The importance of leadership in regulating norms of behaviour has been dealt with in section 2.3.3 above. Bandura (1978) promotes the notion that the people with whom we regularly interact with, determine the types of behaviour that we will observe and emulate. “Each individual or group of employees will come to the organization with culture-bound standards as to what is acceptable behaviour in the workplace” (M. Harvey *et al.* 2007, p.2579). However, once inside the organisation “people can fall quickly into adopting roles as they think they are expected to do, as if they were in a play” (Namie and Namie 2011, p.65). The learning that takes place after an individual enters an organisation includes how the culture or patterns of behaviour, considered the correct way to perceive, think and feel, are taught to new members (Schein 1990). Once developed, culture consists of the “values, beliefs, and rituals” that uniquely define that organisation (Duffy and Sperry 2007, p.399). The overall literature on workplace bullying supports the notion that bullying can occur in environments that are accepting

of negative or hostile behaviours (Brotsky 1976; Salin 2003; Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Vartia 1996; Zapf et al. 1996; Riley et al. 2012).

Social or emotional contagion can occur whereby entire organisational culture can become abusive (Harvey 2007). The observation of bullying behaviour provides the means of adapting, adjusting, and absorbing negative behaviours and incorporating them into employees' behavioural repertoire. Cultural and environmental factors influence the perception of negative behaviours as bullying and also play a part in the delay or failure to identify bullying (Giorgi *et al.* 2015). Thus it poses a serious ethical challenge by “sending messages about appropriate conduct within the organization's culture” (Porter *et al.* 2018, p.119). Accordingly, “integrating oneself into an organization where bullying is ‘normal’ would likely lead one to also bully others” (Porter *et al.* 2018, p.123). “By mimicking the informally sanctioned bullying behaviour, a culture of abuse can be propagated throughout a global organization” (M. Harvey *et al.* 2007, p.2588).

The literature also indicates that bullying thrives in organisations that are hierarchic, bureaucratic and/or rule-orientated (Duffy and Sperry 2007; Salin (2003). Additionally, from targets' perspectives “hierarchical position likely affects sources and degrees of support” (Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010, p.349). In fact, the over-representation of bullying in the medical and educational sectors has been attributed to the fact that they are both “controlled by more than one hierarchy” (Leymann 1996, p.176). Each profession therefore, develops its own culture which exerts a stronger impact than the influence of national culture (Gerhart 2003). According to Clegg's theory, in order to maintain a large number of routines, or culture, authority needs to be delegated. The delegation of authority, not power, depends on the delegated agent acting ‘obediently’. Thus, authorities are inhibited from becoming powers in their own right by restricting their actions to those that are ‘obedient’. “The power of an agency is increased in principle by that agency delegating authority; the delegation of authority can only proceed by rules” (Clegg 1989, p.201).

Displays of bullying behaviour or aggressive acts may be “understood differently in differing cultural contexts” (Jacobson *et al.* 2013, p.50). The prevalence of bullying within the wider culture, local, regional, national, and by extension within organisations located in that culture, also affects “myriad social phenomena” (Jacobson *et al.* 2013,

p.52). Individuals bring their own cultural background to the setting and national culture influences organizational culture, which “diffuses downward in terms of expectations of behaviour, rewards, and guidelines for interactions” (Jacobson *et al.* 2013, p.54). Culture determines whether bullying is tolerated or prohibited within the organisation (Hutchinson 2006; Riley 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik 2014; Namie 2010; Milley 2017). Organizational culture is thus an enabling structure with respect to the emergence or repression of bullying (Salin 2003; Aquino and Lamertz 2004; M. Harvey *et al.* 2007; Porter *et al.* 2018). Even though bullying behaviours may be shaped by the specific national culture, this cannot occur without the agreement of management. Inaction of management in cases of bullying can give a “sense of permission to harass” (Brodsky 1976, p.84). Therefore bullying is not an isolated set of interactions between the bully and target, it cannot happen with or without the agreement of management and so it involves other actors. The responses of these others to bullying behaviours, or their lack of response, communicate the organisation’s (in)tolerance for such treatment (Ferris 2004; Heames *et al.* 2006). Effectively the organisation enables bullying when the organisation’s culture ‘allow’ or “sanction such harassment” (De Wet 2010, p.1454). If management or those in influential positions do not respond through some form of action to counteract the development of these norms, such as those associated with a bullying culture, it is likely that they become implicitly validated by virtue of inaction (Aquino and Lamertz 2004). Then to step outside what is considered “culturally acceptable” and make a complaint “requires courage to step outside the norm” (Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2018, p.83).

Foucault, Weber and Clegg draw attention to the micro-technologies of power, or disciplinary practices, often viewed as ‘normal’, that have the effect of increasing control over organisation members’ behaviour, dispositions and embodiment. These disciplinary practices, made possible by networks of alliances, though not always immediately obvious, constitute a formidable force in influencing rule fixing, relations of meaning and membership (Clegg 1989). Clegg (1993) referred to agency or sovereign power as a force that co-ordinates people, gets them to do what they would not otherwise do. They are supervised through power and as such power does not reside in individuals but operates in complex social networks. In Clegg’s circuits of power model the social integration circuit is the domain that defines relations of meaning, rules of practice and membership. Bullying practices leads to conclusions about

organisational values and the “underlying assumptions driving both practices and values” (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011, p.357). Adult incivility is embedded in the competitive nature of school culture: “the need to dominate others is something our culture regards as an artefact of success” (Gruenert 2006, p.61). The true extent of bullying in education is considered to be underreported, this is attributed to an organisational climate that tolerates bullying (Fisher *et al.* 1995), where complaints are trivialised or disbelieved (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a). In cultural conditions where sanctions against bullying are low and where bullying is permitted or encouraged more bullying will occur (Brodsky 1976; Salin 2003; Hood *et al.* 2011). Until the general cultural norms either “change dramatically or organisations better understand the enormous personal and financial consequences associated with workplace bullying, little will be done to effectively deal with this onerous phenomenon” (Meglich-Sespico *et al.* 2007, p.40).

2.3.7 Conflict escalation

Bullying appears to be an ‘escalating conflict’ rather than an either-or phenomenon (Zapf 2001). Researchers generally agree that bullying usually is a process which develops in intensity and effects, and escalates over time if unimpeded (Leymann 1990; Björkvist 1992; Einarsen 2000; Zapf and Gross 2001; Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik 2007; S. Einarsen *et al.* 2011). The bullying literature refers to bullying as charting a typical process which parallels with various conflict escalation models in conflict research (Zapf and Gross 2001). Empirical studies indicate that bullying has many phases which can have “devastating effects on the victims’ lives” (Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2003, p.88). The situation is further complicated in organisations, like schools, whereby a complaints procedure pertains, which must be reported through ever-increasing stages from informal to formal and from the principal to the board of management, that has no other channel of reporting available (Ryan 2013). Such staged processes culminate in a final stage whereby the target is left “in a powerless situation where he or she cannot successfully apply coping strategies which might end the conflict situation” (Zapf and Gross 2001, p.501). In organisational environments where abuse is condoned, either explicitly or tacitly, targets become disempowered because the “lack of legal protections for targets of bullying renders them helpless if the organizational culture/environment and values reinforce this destructive behaviour”

(Porter *et al.* 2018, p.120). Theorists have identified between 3-5 stereotypical stages in the bullying process (Lutgen-Sandvik 2008, Einarsen 2011, Leymann 1996). The process draws to a close when “from the point of view of the management, it is often easier to get rid of the victim” (Zapf and Gross 2001, p.500). The final stage, expulsion, is hastened by a deterioration of the target’s health culminating in “expulsion from life-long work” (Leymann 1996, p.171). In the final stages the target begins to act emotionally and irrationally and is finally “forced to admit that their mental health is impaired” (Field 1996 p. 135). Both Field (1996) and Leymann (1990) added an extra stage to their models, that of ‘misdiagnosis’. If an employee takes a period of illness leave, management can exercise their right to request an independent medical assessment. In cases of workplace bullying “medical assessments are increasingly conducted by forensic psychiatrists” (Ryan 2013, p.47). However, “the subjected person can be very easily incorrectly diagnosed by some professionals who do not believe the victim” (Zapf and Gross 2001, p.500). Physicians can develop diagnoses such as “general anxiety disorder” and attribute blame to the target for the development of bullying (Zapf 1999, p.71). “The most incorrect diagnosis so far are paranoia, manic depression, or character disturbance” (Leymann 1996, p.172). Employers readily accept this interpretation, making it easier from the perspective of the organisation, as the target is eliminated through dismissal, ill-health retirement, enforced early retirement or resignation (Leymann 1996). As people get older their ability to find new employment diminishes thereby exacerbating the effects of bullying to such an extent that the target may never work again. “Expulsion from employment may easily turn into a situation in which the individual in question is unable to find any job at all, which means that he or she is essentially expelled from the labour market” (Leymann 1996, p.174). Allegations of misuse of the mental health assessment referral power signify that “there is a need to monitor how that power is used and how often there are reviews on the grounds of misuse” (Employment 2012, p.100).

An Australian report (2012) highlighted abuses of power or more precisely the misuse of power in the public service, with management forcing workplace bullying complainants to attend mental health assessments. The tactic “was being used to intimidate or further bully workers who made complaints about workplace bullying or other working conditions” (Employment 2012, p.2). In such circumstances a bully can abuse their position, and the associated power, to compel the target to attend. The target risks two unfortunate outcomes; the stigma of a psychiatric diagnosis and the trauma of

reliving negative experiences, causing further distress. The target is then “pushed into positions from which they have no avenue of escape” (Lennane 2000, p.100). The report stated that the misuse of the mental assessment referral power indicates that there is a need to monitor how power is used (Lennane 2000).

In examining the literature on management’s response to complaints by targets, there are numerous ways in which “complaints about workplace bullying were reframed as personal issues” (Thirlwall 2015, p.149). Responses appear to be ineffective, inadequate and at times appear to “blame the complainant’s vulnerability and implies that other issues are at the root of the complaint” (Thirlwall 2015, p.149). ‘Sequestering’ the issue as a personal matter rather than as organisational problem removes the need for action and provides a defense should a legal case arise. In this way the use of the referral, for medical assessment or for counselling to ascertain the level of the ‘psychiatric illnesses’, obfuscates the role of the workplace in causing the problems being responded to, and the organisation’s responsibility to provide and maintain a safe environment. In such circumstances “there is a huge disincentive for victims to report bullying mainly due to a fear of further retribution” (Hanley and O’Rourke 2016, p.363).

2.4 Theoretical framework

Bullying can be conceptualised in many different ways, the reasons for and impact of workplace bullying are complex and “several scholars have specifically developed theories regarding employers’ abuse of their subordinates” (De Wet, 2010, p. 1451). The application of social learning theory, social power (Lamertz and Aquino 2004), maladministration (Milly 2016), supervisory disrespect or symbolic interactionism (Blasé & Blasé 2004), ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979), expectancy theory (Nasri, 2012) oppression theory (Smith 2011), attachment theory, organisational justice, social cognitive theories and social exchange theory (Arendt) have given rise to much discussion and debate. Yet “much of the research on bullying links the occurrence of bullying to power” (Lipinski and Crothers 2013, p.322). However, there has been little research “focusing specifically on the critical role of the dynamics of power in the development and maintenance of bullying dynamics” (Fahie and Devine 2014, p.5). Power pervades our lives; “We hunger for it, fear it, revel in it, and abuse it” and we quickly learn “the subtle dance done by two people occupying different levels of it”

(Blase and Blase 2004, p.253). A review of the literature reveals that power is a fundamental aspect of all human relationships (Blase and Blase 2004). However, “any generally applicable theory of power must also be a theory of organisation” (Clegg 1989, p.17). The role of management, authority, resistance, agency and the complex manner in which power is exercised within bullying relationships, particularly within the Irish primary school, requires further examination. Therefore, in understanding the reasons why bullying is so pervasive and why targets respond in the way they do, it is necessary to consider the factors that have been found to play a pivotal role. Workplace bullying emanates from a power struggle due to conflicting values which is caused by poor psychosocial work environments, “a long-standing struggle for power precedes systematic bullying at the workplace in the public sector” (Strandmark and Hallberg 2007, p.338). Power struggles arise when individuals deviate from the norm, particularly those who are competent and strong, who have “no fear of authority and who dared to stick out their necks” by refusing to surrender (Strandmark and Hallberg 2007, p.338).

In order to answer the research questions it is necessary to examine the contributions of critical theorists’ conceptualisations of power, authority, agency and their relationship to resistance to workplace bullying. Research identifies those in positions of authority as the perpetrators of bullying, often linking ‘top-down’ bullying to organizational structures. “A target’s powerlessness, in this case, results from the imbalance of power seen in the organizational hierarchy (Barker *et al.* 2013, p.283). “If we accept that behaviour within organisations is governed by rules and norms, then it is vital that the role of power in negotiating and enforcing these rules is considered” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.120). A number of scholars have integrated various conceptions and views on the nature of power in organisations and notable work by Weber, Foucault, Giddens and Clegg have developed contemporary thinking on the complexity of power and its constitution within institutions. Their theories provide useful frames with which to explain, describe and possibly predict how power and resistance, as features of workplace bullying, operate within organisations. By adapting and applying these theorists’ ideas regarding power, agency and resistance, one can construct a nuanced theory of power dynamics, organisational practices and resistance to workplace bullying in schools.

2.4.1 Resistance/Agency

An important distinguishing feature of most theorists is the contention that power and resistance are interdependent yet independent aspects of the power relation. For Weber, resistance is vital to our understanding of power, he proposed that in order to understand power relations it is necessary to explore the concept of resistance. “Power relations imply acceptance on the part of those subject to them. They also imply resistance” (Barbalet 1985, p.531). Even if actors accept the legitimacy of power over them they can also attempt to moderate its effects. Therefore, “an acceptance of power does not preclude resistance” (Barbalet 1985, p.531). “It is through its limitation on power that resistance contributes to the outcome of power relation” (Barbalet 1985, p.531). Weber contends that it is not necessary for resistance to be present but that the ability to overcome resistance is required in power situations. Even though power is accepted, it can be restrained by resistance and it is this resistance to power that leads to conflict. “Resistance is built into Weber’s conception of conflict” (Brennan 1990, p.78). Weber considered conflict essential in power relations because power and conflict are linked when resistance needs to be overcome. “A power situation cannot be identified where there is no visible conflict” (Brennan 1990, p.78). Like conflict, resistance can take many forms, it is not confined to overt conflict. “Viewing power relationships as dialectical and shifting highlights spaces of resistance, up to and including resistance that ultimately interrupts current bullying and retards future bullying” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.72).

Like Weber, Foucault promotes the idea that in order to understand what power relations are about, “we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations” (Foucault 1982, p.780). Studies on resistance to bullying have found that bullying escalates when targets speak up or complain thus emphasising Foucault’s theory that “resistance and control are coproduced” (Mumby 2005, p.31). Foucault interrogated the limits of the exercise of power and he proposed that “resistance existed wherever power was exercised” and resistance was everywhere and at every level (Foucault 1977, p.407). The difficulty lies in understanding “how resistance could not be compromised, since in effect it could only ever be the mirror of the power being exercised” (O’Farrell 2005, p.99). Indeed the significance of certain forms of resistance may not be clear to “either the workers engaged in them or the

managers trying to attenuate their effects” (Mumby 2005, p.31). Foucault was concerned with the possibility of resistance in all relations of power and how it becomes a “confrontation between two adversaries” (Foucault 1982, p.794).

Foucault (2002) views resistance as essential to the process of change and as a “catalyst which brings to light power relations, locates their position, finds out their point of application and the methods used” (Allen 2002, p.329). Foucault surmised that people will always try to modify the actions of others (exercise power) and people will always resist these attempts. Foucault further contends that to “ignore unjust practices within the social body is to tolerate them and perpetuate their existence” (O'Farrell 2005, p.109). Individuals who enjoy management positions and access to resources, benefit from enhanced organisational power which becomes significant when targets seek redress within the organisation. Foucault also argued that power could only be exercised over subjects who had the freedom to react in different ways and that a power relationship could not exist where subjects had no autonomy or capacity to refuse. “The relationship between power and freedom's refusal to submit cannot, therefore, be separate” (Foucault 1982, p.790). The most important relationship is between power relations and confrontation strategies: “at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, then there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight” (Foucault 1982, p.794).

An exploration of workplace bullying literature reveals that “whether resistance was collective or disorganized coaction, participants perceived it as high risk” because the bully was usually in a higher position (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.413). Therefore, targets believe that bullies possess or have access to a greater degree of organisational power which has the potential to cause them harm. Giddens (1984) linked the power dynamic between people to the resources that they bring to the interaction and this is significant to the understanding of bullying. Studies indicate that bullies often have access to superior managerial personnel and so “bullies were often able to undermine their [targets] ‘versions of the story’ by reframing the material interactions, as well as the symbolic meanings of those actions, to organizational authorities” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.414). “Bullying-affected workers might frame their resistance as a moral imperative, essential defensive responses, or efforts to be treated with the basic

minimum of human decency” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p. 409). Bullies and their supporters, on the other hand, might frame these same messages and actions as insubordination, disloyalty, and troublemaking. “Abuse and resistance produce an ongoing struggle to stress different agendas and push them to the forefront” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.409).

2.4.2 Imbalance of power

“A bully-victim relationship is characterised by an imbalance of power” (De Wet 2011, p.456). “Power in organisations must concern the hierarchical structure of offices and their relation to each other” (Clegg 1989, p.189). Definitions of bullying invariably refer to a real or perceived imbalance of power with the presence of a power imbalance to be “found in many instances of bullying behaviour” (Riley *et al.* 2009, p.15). Studies documenting targets’ actions to resist bullying, draw attention to a growing sense of powerlessness and helplessness. Over time as targets’ actions fail to effectively end abuse their plight is further compounded by the apparent unwillingness of co-workers to become involved and upper-management’s ambivalence in dealing with the situation (Davenport *et al.* 2002; Keashly 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik 2003a). Even though power is present in all social interactions theorists point to imbalances in power that can shape the role of agency.

The literature indicates that most incidents of bullying emanate from the top down (Keashly 1994; Blasé & Blasé 2004). Indeed bullying is overwhelmingly enacted by those in management positions (Field 1996; Rayner *et al.* 2002; Cowan 2011). Studies repeatedly report that there is more bullying of subordinates than there is of peers (Owoyemi 2011; O’Moore *et al.* 2003). In Ireland it was found that the largest percentage of victims were bullied by one person (61.5%) who was more senior to them (O’Moore *et al.* 2003). British studies have found that superiors (74.7%) are the most frequent perpetrators of bullying (Einarsen and Skogstad 1996; Hoel, Cooper and Faragher 2001; G. Namie and R. Namie 2000; Quine 1999; Rayner, Hoel and Cooper 2002). Therefore, “bullying can be considered primarily to be a top-down process” (Hoel *et al.* 2001, p.459). Notwithstanding, “the primacy of managers’ over workers’ interests, although experienced as oppressive and abusive, came through as inevitable” (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011, p.357). Power imbalances are generally

accepted as forming a natural part of all organisations but to a greater extent in those organisations that require a strict code of discipline or adherence to orders so that the primary objectives are achieved. It follows then that “managers do behave in a way they perceive to be expected of them by the organisation” and that power imbalances are necessary to achieve the primary objectives of the organisation (Archer 1999, p.97). Archer’s work informs that if these leadership styles and structures, that are required in times of strict conformity, become part of the organisation culture, then workplace bullying is more likely to occur. “The use of authoritarian practices and organisational desire to emphasise conformity can create an environment that tolerates or even condones workplace bullying” (Radliff 2014, p.170). Power imbalances contribute to the use of confrontation, intimidation, or strength to maintain order and when these leadership practices become part of the culture a climate of bullying is more likely (Radliff 2014). In most organisations bosses and supervisors have various degrees of authority and control over subordinates, but some organisations, like schools, have a more defined hierarchical structure. One might conclude therefore that “the imbalance of power often mirrors the formal power structure of the organizational context in which the bullying scenario unfolds” (Ståle Einarsen *et al.* 2011, p.15).

“Several potential power bases exist among employees, the most apparent being position within the organizational hierarchy” (Cortina *et al.* 2001, p.66). In the primary school setting it could be argued that a persistent positional power imbalance exists between assistant teachers, principals, post holders, substitute teachers and those members who are in management positions. Power imbalances can also evolve over time, “the bullying process itself may give rise to further increasing power imbalances” (Salin 2003, p.1216). Power can also derive from someone who has access to support from influential people (Hoel *et al.* 2000). The literature also suggests that in some cases subordinates, if acting in a group, may gain enough power to bully a superior (Leymann 1990; Zapf and Leymann 1996; Salin 2003). For the most part we assume that power refers to persons in a more senior or supervisory position over another person but loyalty to the group, that has critical links to management, brings with it increased power and “considerable protection for bullies” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006b, p.4). Research studies reiterate the strong correlation between bullying, power imbalances and autocratic leadership or management (Hoel and Cooper 2000; M. O’Moore 2000). Power disparity means that “targets nearly always feel unable to fully

defend themselves against attack or end abuse” (Lutgen-Sandvik and Scheller 2014, p.52).

2.4.3 Abuse of Power

Research evidence shows that as well as an imbalance of power, workplace bullying can involve an abuse of power (Einarsen et al. 2003; Hodson et al. 2006; Keashly and Jagatic 2003; LaVan and Martin 2007). Abuse of power is a distinctive characteristic of workplace bullying environments (Wollan 2014). The role of power, and the manner in which that power is exercised in schools, plays a significant part in school workplace bullying and abusive principals, like abusive bosses in general, engage in similar behaviours (Blase and Blase 2004). Abusive supervision’ can be a catalyst for bullying, without the sense of permission or acquiescence, bullies would not engage in such behaviour (Wollan 2014). Gaining positions of power, or attaining some degree of power, can lead to a false sense of authority. The transformational effect of increased power can influence a person’s belief and understanding leading them to consider that the normal rules of behaviour do not apply to them. Failure to recognize the dual nature of power, constructive and destructive, “can affect one’s ability to stay in contact with reality ...often a person who at first sight seems to be well-adjusted changes for the worse when put in a position of power” (Blase and Blase 2004, p.254). “Power intoxication” occurs when senior personnel view themselves as “above precepts of right and wrong, and good and evil” based on “the belief that one is ‘chosen’ or ‘anointed’ and thus is above the ‘common herd,’ possessing the absolute moral and legal perception of right (Sorokin and Lunden 1959, p.44). By virtue of position and access to resources and influence that the position entails, the potential exists for the abuse of power (Cortina *et al.* 2001).

Much research on workplace bullying has focused on “supervisors/managers who inflict emotional abuse on subordinates” but this is not to say that upward and horizontal bullying is not also a reality (De Wet 2011, p.451). “The judicious use of power is crucial to creating goals and giving meaning to organizational life” (Blase and Blase 2004, p.254). The culture of a school is likely to be driven by the values of the interpreter, the leader who “has the main responsibility for developing and sustaining

its culture” (Bush 1995, p.137). Therefore, it is important to consider the link between power, quality and style of leadership and workplace bullying.

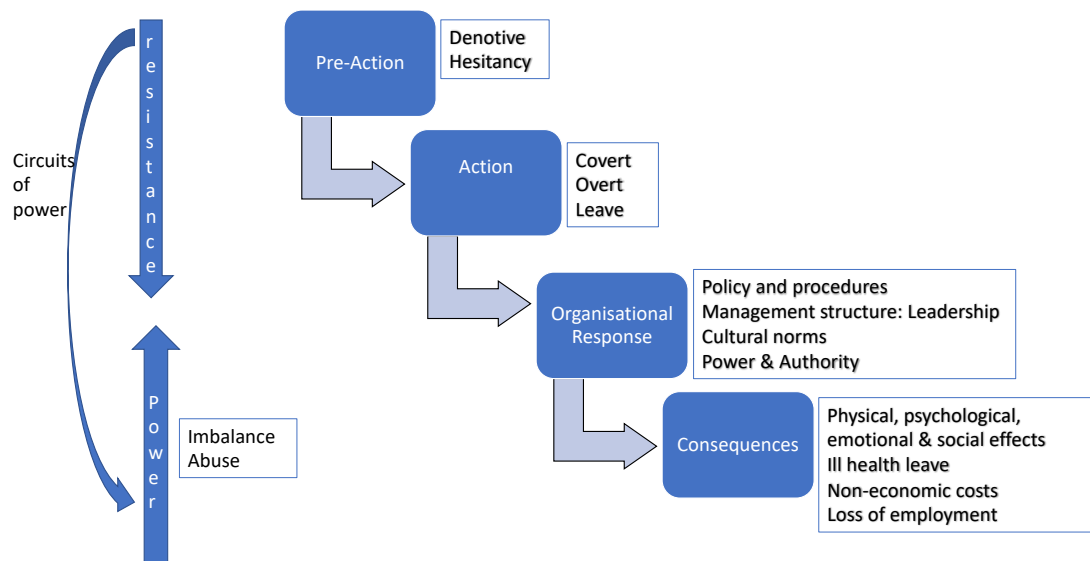
2.4.4 Conceptual framework

The key theories deemed appropriate to this study related to dealing with workplace bullying and seeking redress. Literature on bullying portrays bullies as powerful figures and targets as power-deficient, with the negative behaviours associated with bullying as an interaction between these two unequally matched players (Leymann 1990; Leymann 1996; Vartia 2001; Einarsen *et al.* 2003; Lewis and Rayner 2003; Salin and Hoel 2003). Examining the power dynamics in bullying situations with contextualized models of power, such as Foucault (1977; 1982), Weber (1978), Giddens (1982; 1984) and Clegg (1989), offers new insights into targets’ access to resources of power and provides a lens to examine power dynamics in the institution. The literature on bullying refers to the bully as being in a position of power over the target but power is a complex phenomenon, it can be used and abused. Notwithstanding, “the failure of the organisation to deal with bullying is an additional abuse of power, but significantly, a more subtle one” (Hodgins and McNamara 2017, p.201). The theories selected relate to power, resistance and agency. The themes incorporate theories which specifically engage with workplace bullying within the context of education and are axiomatic to the discourse of workplace bullying. Theories central to the discourse on the problem of workplace bullying in schools also involve conceptions and interpretations on the complexity and nature of organisational power. Theorists argue that individual autonomy is influenced by structure, but structure is influenced and maintained through the exercise of agency. Those in power have more agency, in fact “power is equivalent to human agency” (Brennan 1990, p.72). Theories attempt to understand human social behaviour by understanding the competing views of structure-agency. This study explores how targets reactions to being bullied, and the organisational response to their acts of resistance, may be understood as an issue of socialization (experience of the organisation’s structure/culture) versus individual autonomy in determining whether an individual acts independently/freely or in a manner dictated by organisational structure (and culture).

Giddens (1984) advocated a view of power as the ability of agents, within given structures, to summon specific rules and resources. The notion of an alternative reality has led to an acceptance that 'power' is not only something possessed by specific actors but also embedded in the social structures, traditions, and conventions. Both Foucault and Weber viewed power and resistance as complementary concepts, contending that "there is no power without the possibility of resistance/revolt" (Brennan 1990, p.76). Weber also insisted that an understanding of resistance was crucial to the understanding of any power situation. Foucauldian 'micro-politics', viewed power relationships as complex, where powerless actors exercise particular power over those conventionally seen as the dominators and where resistance – conventionally seen as a counter-force to power– are an inherent part of the construction of power relations. Foucault (1977, 1984) viewed social actors as being controlled and disciplined by social practices while Clegg viewed power as a "phenomenon which can be grasped only relationally" (Clegg 1989, p.207). Because power involves power over another, two agencies are implied and as such power summons resistance. Control can be challenged and weakened by the exercise of agency which can be evident in any network. Power flows in circuits that are fixed and when resistance is met, forces are deployed from within the circuit to overcome the resistance (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.121).

Clegg (1989) proposed a model of 'circuits of power' that demonstrates how power operates within organisations. In Clegg's framework the concept of 'disciplinary practice' or micro-techniques of power, control and regulate individuals within the organisation. "This means that those who are able to control meaning are thus in a position to render the others powerless, but also that people are not usually aware of this construction of reality" (Vaara *et al.* 2005, p.598). This points to a general acceptance of the idea that 'power' is not only something possessed by specific actors but embedded in the traditions, social structures and practices. However, "control can never be totally secured, in part because of agency (Clegg 1989, p.193). Clegg's circuits of power framework perceives power as a complex force which flows through "distinct circuits of power and resistance" (Clegg 1989, p.32). Employed by many studies to analyse the constitution of organisational power, this framework, underpinned by the moral issue of power and responsibility, synthesises contemporary thinking on power.

This research study traced the pre-action, action, response, and consequences for the teacher as the target of workplace bullying and considered possible supportive, prevention and resolution strategies. Unaddressed bullying can have a negative impact on the work environment creating a climate of fear and hypervigilance. Therefore, it was necessary to examine the area of organisational power systems and organisational responses to bullying complaints. The intervention of the organisation is an important factor if not crucial because not all responses are supportive and “some responses can further harm an employee” (Ferris 2004, p.389). Organisational policies, practices and procedures can be oppressive, demeaning, humiliating, and victimizing (Liefoghe and Mackenzie Davey 2001). “Power is embedded in the manner in which authors discuss actor motive as well as the vulnerability or protective factors for targets” (Keashly and Jagatic 2011, p.54). By focusing on power and resistance theory in this study, it is possible to elucidate the power implications as it relates to the ease with which targets can resist bullying, defend themselves and seek redress.



2.5 Conclusion

The content and emphasis of the literature on workplace bullying is largely focused on issues such as the costs of bullying, prevalence estimates and conceptual issues with respect to defining and measuring bullying. Presently, the literature regarding intervention procedures, targets’ efforts to resolve issues and the consequences of their efforts, is small and focuses predominantly on facilitating the development of policy

and procedure, increasing knowledge and encouraging the reporting of bullying. “In reality, most interventions implemented in organisations lack any specific involvement of theory governing behaviour change attempts” (Knott and Vikki 2004, p.71). The difficulties that targets encounter in resisting and dealing with bullying are less documented and the most frequently cited impediments to using the complaints process includes a “lack of trust in management, perceptions that nothing would happen and a fear of the consequences with colleagues” (Knott and Vikki 2004, p.72).

Although describing and naming bullying behaviour can be powerful and is an important first step, targets often believe that they are responsible for the behaviour because of their own failures and weaknesses. By describing bullying behaviours and its consequences, targets are reassured that their experiences and reactions are a ‘normal’ response to an intolerable situation. Unfortunately, targets are often left to deal with the negative behaviour by themselves and target-led interventions, such as confronting the bully and asking that the offending behaviour cease, rarely work and often lead to a worsening of the problem and further victimisation (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). Limited research on redress seeking by targets suggests that anti-bullying policies do not resolve bullying and that unjustified medical assessments and other abuses are at play that further oppress and disempower targets. Studies point to “knowledge gaps” in relation to workplace bullying, therefore new theoretical models that incorporate distinctive characteristics are needed (Nielsen and Einarsen 2018).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Having discussed workplace bullying and its many manifestations and with a clear understanding of the aims of this study, this chapter describes the methodology being employed. According to Cohen et al (2011) research methodology is not merely a mechanical exercise, it is a lot more intricate and complex, and it concerns our understanding of the world. Therefore, research methodology is a way of investigating or seeking answers to questions, but the questions themselves and our understanding of the questions are central to the study. Because decisions about research questions, design and methodology are “always theoretically loaded” it is important, at the outset, to outline the researcher’s ontological and epistemological assumptions (Silverman 2009, p.121). This study examines teachers’ responses to workplace bullying through a critical- interpretive perspective situated in the belief that people actively construct—through language—numerous, shifting, life narratives. Giddens (1991 p. 243) refers to damage to “ontological security: a sense of continuity and order in events,” that is caused by bullying and participants were eager to convey their experiences and pursue solutions to the destructive behaviour. The main research method in this study was in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews with targets of bullying who initiated complaints and sought redress. The analysis, interpretations, and conclusions were created through inductive interpretation based on the data—data that were generated through my interaction with individuals whose work lives had been devastated by workplace bullying.

The starting point for this chapter explains the theoretical stance adopted by the researcher, to frame and address the research questions. It then outlines the research methodology that was considered most suitable to achieve the aims of the study and it provides justification for the choice of methods employed. For this reason, the purpose of the study is restated incorporating the research problem and how it proposes to illuminate the phenomenon of bullying as it manifests in the teaching profession in Irish primary schools. The first stage, the design stage, comprises the explanation and

justification for the chosen approach as this phase established the steps that needed to be planned and prepared in order to draft the methodological procedure (Fink 2000). The research design includes a brief history of how interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) has evolved since its inception and how modern IPA pertains to the present study. As well as providing a detailed description of the methodology and research design for the study, this chapter outlines the recruitment process including demographic information relating to the research participants. It then presents the data collection method employed and it delineates the data analysis procedures. The process of initial coding and clustering will be outlined, and the identification of emergent themes will be presented. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of how quality was ensured and how ethical considerations were addressed.

According to Flick (2011) social research is increasingly conducted in practical contexts where the focus is on practices and conditions of work. As such, three main tasks are involved in the acquisition of social research knowledge: description, understanding and explanation. The task of this social research study was to explore the phenomenon of bullying in the teaching profession with a view to describing participants' experience of seeking redress, understanding and explaining their particular actions and assessing the effectiveness of the agreed procedures for dealing with workplace bullying. Flick affirms the view that the results of research of this kind "should become relevant for the practice field and for the solution of problems in practice" (Flick 2011, p.7). He also contends that the question of the usefulness of the research and its results for the participant becomes a main criterion (Flick 2011, p.7). Therefore, this study and its subsequent findings explicitly seeks to draw attention to teachers' acts of resistance despite public transcripts (organizational practices and outcomes) that highlight the futility of such acts. How this knowledge is translated into effective practice is paramount.

3.2 Role of the researcher

The origin of the research question, why the researcher is curious about it, the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of the researcher and design decisions are all interrelated. It is not possible to know the real world 'objectively' because there is a difference between the "real world and the way it is perceived by us" (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p.172). For this reason, the researcher's

perception of the world is merely how the world appears to her, filtered through a lens, that of a target of workplace bullying. It is therefore *a* truth as opposed to *the* truth. “Underneath any given research design and choice of methods lies a researcher’s (often implicit) understanding of the nature of the world and how it should be studied” (Moses and Knutsen 2007 p.2). Hence, the choice of methodology should reflect the nature of the research, analysis is subjective and truth claims must be tentative. Consequently, before embarking on this research journey the researcher came to understand and accept that her perception of society and the world, as influenced by her own direct experience, could be subjective and biased. Because this research study and the chosen methodology are inevitably influenced by the researcher’s ‘worldview’, this worldview needs to be elucidated in order to ensure the quality of the research design.

This worldview, which is based on assumptions, beliefs, biases and patterns of thinking, in turn influences ontology and epistemology. Cohen suggests that “ontological assumptions (assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of things) give rise to epistemological assumptions (ways of researching and enquiring into the nature of reality and the nature of things); these in turn, give rise to methodological considerations; and these, in turn, give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection” (Cohen 2011, p. 4).

Each of us brings to the analysis of data our biases, assumptions, patterns of thinking, and knowledge gained from experience and reading (Strauss 1998, p.95).

Indeed Marshall (1989) points out that our direct experience can stimulate our initial curiosity and that we need to link that curiosity to general research questions but “the researcher must demonstrate that the research contributes new information” (Marshall 1989, p. 23). This study seeks to explore a new, under-researched area, that of seeking redress, without influencing participants’ views or experiences and then present the findings as they are reported. My critical, social constructionist and interpretivist viewpoints inform my methods and analysis. First, the study challenges the notion that bullying is formally prohibited through the ratification of antibullying policies and procedures. Although policies and procedures for dealing with complaints of bullying may appear valuable and effective, studies have shown that “rather than offering protection to workers, it was said that anti-bullying policies were distorted to the point where there was no value in the policy and guidelines” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015,

p.17). This study illuminates the contested space between antibullying policies that prohibit bullying and the reality that workplace bullying is a “pervasive and harmful feature of modern workplaces” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.118). Hence, bullying may be formally prohibited in organisations while at the same time be openly displayed, tolerated and even rewarded. This intersection of competing truth claims reveals how resistance to bullying by targets using internal complaints mechanisms and involving unions or other external agencies converges with the resistance of people in authority failing to do anything about complaints.

As a social constructionist, the researcher recognises that even though people experience the same thing, they can yet perceive it differently and also have different outcomes. “Rather than uncovering *a* true account, constructivists seek to capture and understand the meaning of a social action for the agent performing it” (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p. 11). The researcher is not seeking to identify objective patterns of social phenomena but rather to understand and interpret. Having acknowledged the significance of the researcher’s own experience and how it has shaped her ‘world view’ a significant effort has been made to “understand the subjective world of human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated” (Cohen 2011, p. 17).

On the other hand Ray challenges us to consider Polanyi’s theory that “we are the subjects – not the objects – of our own experience” and that tacit knowing cannot be removed or overlooked (Ray 2009, p. 80). Consequently, the researcher’s experience cannot be eradicated as she tries to make sense of the data and ‘look through’ words to meanings (Ray 2009). Ray further suggests that knowledge is both experienced and transformed in the intersection between meaning-making and the environment, that is within particular cultural and historical contexts (Ray 2009, p. 80). Green (2007), also affirms that meaning does not lie in the objective world nor in the subjective mind but in the dynamic transactions between the two and the truth of the meaning is enacted in the consequences of the interaction. Accordingly, it is important to make explicit the specific paradigm which is based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher and the factors that may have played a part in its formation. “Our stories are inextricably intertwined: with themselves and with those of others” (Bolton 2010, p. 31). In the final analysis the researcher’s unique experience and ‘world view’

should be central to the research process, “it should be central in the analysis and the related presentation of the data. Interview-talk is produced in a specific context and an awareness of that context is vital in understanding the talk, and therefore the ‘data’, itself” (Rapley 2001, p.317).

3.2.1 Ontological Assumptions

The ontological perspective, the value base and ideology that the researcher brings to the research, “the study of being – the study of the basic building blocks of existence” is rooted in a belief in and a striving for justice, equality and fairness (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p. 5). However, Laden points out that “fairness is a desirable property and it should come as no surprise that most systems of rules are not fair” (Laden 1991, p. 197). In doing this research study the researcher seeks to make a positive difference by advocating change for social justice purposes. Denzin (2012), like Van Manen (1990), considered this quest for change and transformation, a caring act. The researcher identifies with the model put forward by him:

Qualitative research scholars have an obligation to change the world, to engage in ethical work that makes a positive difference. We are challenged to confront the facts of injustice, to make the injustices of history visible and hence open to change and transformation. (Denzin 2012, p. 86)

As a social constructionist the researcher believes that knowledge is a human product that is shaped by life experiences. As such the philosophical issues involved in this research comprise the researcher’s reflections on the “general characteristics of the social world” (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.8). As one moves to focus more attention on certain characteristics of the social world, given the researcher’s life experience of workplace bullying, it is understandable that the relational and structural aspects of power relations within organisations are, for the researcher, one of the “most basic and pervasive characteristics of social life” (Stones *et al.* 2017). The interrogation and analysis of these characteristics provide the foundation for this study of workplace bullying and allow the researcher to gain an insight into the “real world event or process” (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.11). Life experiences shaped the participants’ view of the world and their experience, as targets of bullying, were mediated through their thoughts resulting in multiple perspectives. The researcher’s interpretative perspective in turn, assumed multiple realities. This view has influenced the research design and it was clear that the researcher needed to speak to people who had experienced the phenomenon of bullying,

so as to understand their lived experiences, their perspectives and their actions. This research drew upon, what Geertz referred to as the “thick descriptions” and the subjective meanings participants provided during the interview process (Geertz 1994, p. 5).

3.2.2 Epistemology

By allowing ourselves to be known and seen by others, we open up the possibility of learning more about our topic and ourselves, and in greater depth (Etherington 2004, p. 25).

An alignment to a particular epistemological stance invariably affects how the researcher enquires into and investigates social behaviour. According to Moses epistemology “denotes the philosophical study of knowledge” and its basic question is “what is knowledge?” (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p. 5). It conveys the researcher’s stance on what is considered to be acceptable knowledge about the social world. Cohen informs that these epistemological assumptions concern “the very bases of knowledge - its nature and forms, how it can be acquired, and how communicated to other human beings” (Cohen 2011, p. 6). The researcher acknowledges that social science is fundamentally different from natural science and therefore requires “a different logic of research procedure” (Bryman 2008, p. 15). Because the researcher sees this knowledge, the understanding of human behaviour, as subjective, it “imposes on researchers an involvement with their subjects and a rejection of the ways of the natural scientist” (Cohen 2011 p. 6). To gain insight into the world of targets of workplace bullying it is necessary to talk to insiders in order to build up “pictures of how they see the world from their positions inside that society and culture, and at that particular point in history” (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.12).

The researcher’s worldview is also concerned with a sympathetic and empathic understanding of the human action rather than with the external forces or organisational structures that act upon it. As such a post-positivist stance was adopted. The researcher believes that her role was to “gain access to people’s ‘common-sense thinking’ and hence to interpret their actions and their social world, from their point of view” (Bryman 2008, p. 16). The epistemological stance adopted by the researcher in turn influenced how this knowledge was uncovered, in other words the research methods and practices. In the present study these methods and practices, the way in which the researcher

acquired knowledge, involved an interpretative stance that involved the investigation of the basic principles of reasoning on the subject. The researcher sought to study these as they pertain to the phenomenon of workplace bullying, the complaints procedures and the issues involved in dealing with the problem in primary schools.

We are challenged to confront the facts of injustice, to make the injustices of history visible and hence open to change and transformation. We write always against history, offering reactions to, not records of, history. As critical scholars, our task is to make history present, to make the future present, to undo the present. (Denzin 2012, p. 86).

3.2.3 Philosophical positioning

In his book *‘Researching Lived Experience’* Van Manen characterises phenomenological research as ‘thoughtfulness’ or as a ‘caring act: “we want to know that which is most essential to being” (Van Manen 1990, p. 5). He surmised that for us ‘a practical concern’ ignites our thoughts and our interest in doing phenomenological research and he challenged us to consider the important role of the researcher, that in our research “description carries a moral force” (Van Manen 1990, p. 4). For Moses “constructivists embrace the particular and use their knowledge to expand our moral sympathies and political understanding” (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p. 12). This study stems from the researcher’s concern and care for teachers who have been affected by bullying and the researcher aims to investigate the, as yet, under-examined area of seeking redress. Hence, the researcher believes that as teachers we have a practical concern for, and must act responsibly toward, all those with whom we have an educational relationship. Moreover, Bolton proposes that as teachers and as researchers we must “question critically the self-evident, disturb the habitual, dissipate the familiar and accepted, making the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (Bolton 2010, p. 49). This research study is an attempt to understand and interpret the familiar and accepted, the present complaints procedure for dealing with bullying, with a view to reviewing, identifying and highlighting “what is already working well and what is already known, as well as what is not working well and what is not known” (Marshall 1989, p.33). With this in mind the researcher’s interest in educational research lay in the basis it provides for developing new understandings in professional practice.

Husserl urges us to go back to *the thing itself* and that thing is the lived experience, not our philosophical reflections on the experience. “IPA is usually concerned with experience which is of particular moment or significance to the person” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.33). For any researcher, a phenomenological study entails doing a systematic and sustained analysis of a subjective experience of something as well as reflecting on the response to that experience. Given that IPA does not necessitate ‘insider status’ and one cannot have too much previous knowledge, the researcher is aware of her own preconceptions. Notwithstanding, the researcher was devoted to a level open-mindedness and endeavoured to ‘bracket off’ any preconceived ideas particularly during design, data collection and analysis stages. The researchers own experience of workplace bullying involves an element in data analysis and interpretation. What I identified with in participants’ accounts and what I deduced from the data are inextricably connected to my own experiences. Accordingly, the interview data is a “dynamic creation that weaves together the subjectivities of both researcher and participants” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.92).

As an interpretive researcher, I must incorporate my values, beliefs and experiences as stimuli that directed me towards workplace bullying as a topic, and patterned my interpretation of participants’ experiences. My interpretation is therefore moulded by my lived experiences. My life narrative includes experiencing workplace bullying and mistreatment of a kind which had profound physical, psychological, social and economic effects. It shaped and permeated my interpretations and it left me deeply questioning and concerned about its prevalence. As such I can identify with participants’ painful narratives and can understand the circumstances and events that led to their current situation. As a survivor of workplace bullying I am aware that school workplace bullying has significant consequences for targets, witnesses, as well as the school in which they teach. The moral imperative which guides my research concerns the “painful wound across the teaching profession in Ireland” (Fahie 2019). Therefore, the researcher, who undertook all of the interviews, identified with targets of bullying. She has experience of working in schools in Ireland in a variety of roles but maintained a silence about her experience when working in schools fearing being identified as a troublemaker. In the context of the research, reciprocity was felt to be ethically and methodologically important, the interviewer therefore disclosed her past experience with participants. It was found that this fostered a willingness to engage

with the research process and contributed to the basis of trust, which was so vital to the research project.

Flick (2011) exhorts us to conduct social research in practical contexts where the research question focuses on practices, such as the complaints procedures, and he rationalised that the main criterion of this type of research is the usefulness of the research and its results. Accordingly the focus of this study was on the participant's experience of engaging in the complaints procedures or "the specific conditions of work in these institutions" (Flick 2011, p. 7). The interpretative paradigm was chosen because it is characterized by 'a concern for the individual' and its purpose is to understand the subjective world of human experience: "its main focus is on 'action' or "behaviour-with meaning" (Cohen 2011, p. 17). In fact, Cohen postulates: "The central endeavour in the context of the interpretative paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within" (Cohen 2011, p. 17). An empathetic understanding of the subject and of the participants was vital to analyse, illuminate and make sense of participants' experiences and feelings. "Our 'empathic resonance' allows us to hear others' experiences" (Etherington 2004, p. 180).

Marshall argued that it is difficult for researchers not to interpret data in terms of their own feelings and attitudes, in other words their own phenomenology (Marshall 1989). On the other hand, any personal experience the researcher may previously have had of the phenomenon being investigated could be considered an advantage as the researcher seeks to elicit each individual's experience and interpretations of the same phenomenon. Marshall points out that in a situation such as this the researcher's prior experience can be an advantage when seeking to build rapport as both parties have a common subject for discussion (Marshall 1989). According to Savin-Baden et al (2012) this subjectivity and personal orientation is a common assumption in all qualitative research. Moreover, Erlandson (2004) anticipated that having a passionate interest in the research topic far from detracting from the study is an important determinant of success. The researcher's passionate interest in the topic stemmed from her experience as well as her knowledge of "data that show how often the problem occurs and how costly it can be" (Marshall 1989, p. 31). This researcher therefore sought to combine both stances, to be both questioning and empathetic so that sense is made of the

experience. Such research must embrace the caveat that ‘our attempts to understand other people’s relationship to the world are necessarily *interpretative*’ (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 21). It was the researcher’s view that an “insightful analysis of data from a sensitively conducted interview, on a topic of considerable importance to the participant, is making a significant contribution” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.38).

3.2.4 Reflexivity

For Etherington reflexivity refers to “the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry” (Etherington 2004, p. 32). As researchers we need to constantly ask questions of our everyday practices, to question critically the self-evident and to constantly take a step back to gain different perspectives. “Reflection and reflexivity critique anything taken for granted” (Bolton 2010, p. 48). Throughout this research process both participant and researcher were engaged in a continuous practice of reflection, scrutiny and interrogation of the data. The role of the researcher was not simply to report the facts but to actively construct an interpretation and to continuously reflect on how a particular understanding was arrived at. Reflexive research requires that the researcher is conscious of their role in the research process and that their actions should be subjected to “the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their data” (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, p. 274). For this reason, it was essential to acknowledge that the researcher was the primary instrument of data collection, so this research was necessarily ‘value bound’. But many sources overlook the significance of the interviewer’s role in producing the interview data in the first instance. Indeed Rapley (2001) views the interview as a social interaction and he proposes that in our analysis we should be sensitive to how the interviewer produces or co-constructs the data. The data is the ‘product’ of a ‘specific interaction’ therefore we should be mindful of how the data is generated by both the interviewee and interviewer: “talk in interviews is always locally collaboratively produced” (Rapley 2001, p.310).

Reflexivity should permeate every aspect of the research process as we draw on our own experience to make sense of what we observe or what people tell us, particularly if we have experienced what we are studying (Hertz 1997). The researcher views reflexivity not only as an examination of experience but as a “critically informed curiosity” (Bolton 2010, p. xviii). It is not only concerned with the production of

knowledge but with the research process as a whole: “it is the exploration of experience, knowledge, values, identity that matters, rather than any attempt to arrive at a ‘true’ account (Bolton 2010, p. 9). Reflexive bracketing “acknowledges that a phenomenon can be investigated and understood from multiple perspectives”. (Gearing, 2004, p. 1448).

This study focused on the experiences, values, views of the participants, their perspectives, meaning and interpretations so as to examine and analyse their multiple constructed realities. The study focused on exploring the phenomenon without influencing the participants’ opinions or explanations whilst showing respect for participants and engaging with them. Bolton suggests that those who engage in reflective practice cannot uncritically accept a situation and that their criticism cannot be “afraid of its own findings and just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be” (Bolton 2010, p. 56). Therefore, the practice of reflexivity infers action as it involves “a way of standing outside the self to examine, for example, how seemingly unwittingly we are involved in creating social or professional structures counter to our espoused values” (Bolton 2010, P. XI). By questioning the accepted procedures for dealing with complaints of bullying and by presenting the findings as they truly are, it is hoped that policies will be reappraised, updated and possibly improved to reflect this new knowledge.

3.3 Restatement of the Purpose

*Research is worth doing only if it explores some part of the research cycle that is unknown, that has not been explained well before.
(Marshall 1989, p. 23)*

Riley acknowledges; “It is very difficult to collect evidence of such things [as bullying] occurring as staff are unwilling and fearful of putting their experiences down on paper for fear of reprisals” (Riley *et al.* 2012, p. 14). Therefore, there is a paucity of research on workplace bullying in schools. Marshall’s work demonstrates that the researcher must show how the study “will provide information that will contribute to the solution of some real-world problem. The researcher must show that “practitioners need information that the research will provide” (Marshall 1989, p.33). Similarly, Cohen *et al* reiterates that it is important for research to be “original, significant, non-trivial, relevant, topical, interesting to a wider audience and to advance the field” (Cohen 2011,

p. 106). At present little is known about the incidence of staff bullying in Irish schools and even less is known about the reaction to bullying. Indeed bullying of school staff is rarely discussed or researched. This study planned to illuminate the phenomena as it manifested in the teaching profession in Irish primary schools.

3.3.1 Research Questions

The underpinning research question guiding this study was; *What is the lived experience of teachers who have initiated informal or formal complaints of bullying?* In addition, a number of research sub-questions have emerged from this question.

Emerging questions

- *What factors, dynamics and features of organisational power are evident in the response of management to complaints of bullying?*
- *What support is provided to staff to prevent or deal with workplace bullying?*
- *What are teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the complaints procedures for dealing with workplace bullying?*

3.4 Research Design

From Ragin's perspective research design is:

A plan for collecting and analysing evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed. The design of an investigation touches almost all aspects of the research, from the minute details of data collection to the selection of the techniques of data analysis. (Ragin 1994)

From Merriam's perspective, "The statement of the problem presents the logic of the study" (S. B. Merriam 2009, p.83). Therefore, "research methods should be chosen based on the specific task at hand" (Silverman 2009, p.9). The researcher's knowledge of the problem was key in deciding the territory to be investigated in order to answer the research questions particularly on matter such as the context, the gap in the knowledge and the rationale for the importance of addressing this gap through research. The research questions were chosen because of the dearth of literature examining the

role of power in the experience of targets following the initiation of a complaint of bullying and the methodology was tailored to meet this requirement. The researcher was convinced that a qualitative approach was best for the question at hand.

3.4.1 Rationale for Qualitative research

It appears that there is no commonly agreed upon definition of qualitative research, but it is a form of enquiry, employing various methods, that seeks to make sense of people's experiences and focuses on their interpretations of those experiences. One might conclude therefore that qualitative research is an umbrella term, a cross- and interdisciplinary term which encompasses diverse methods which resists easy definition (S. B. Merriam 2009; Savin-Baden 2012).

Studies on workplace bullying are usually undertaken using quantitative methods focusing on what happens and trying to explain associations between events. Other studies on bullying require a deeper exploration of meanings, such as thoughts, reactions, emotions and these are more difficult to detect at first hand. "Qualitative research has a different subject, and it tends to focus on meaning, sense-making and communicative action" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.45). The approach to data analysis, dictated by the research questions, was chosen based on what might constitute 'data' and what might be deduced from that data. Fahie and Devine observed that "increasingly, however, there have been calls for the use of qualitative methodologies to explore the phenomenon, especially given the sensitive nature of the experience" (Fahie and Devine 2014, p. 240). Qualitative research methodologies were deemed appropriate because the researcher was seeking to understand, discover, and interpret how the participants experienced and reacted to the phenomenon. Moreover, qualitative methodologies are "explicitly concerned with the particular situations and experiences of the individuals participating in the study" (Silverman 2009, p.9). The same point is made by Miles *et al.*, who found that a major feature of well-collected qualitative data is that they focus on ordinary events that occur in their natural setting, so that we have a sound sense of what 'real life' is like for those involved (Miles *et al.* 2013). The research perspective of this study, making sense of people's experiences, is consistent with a qualitative approach. Various established qualitative approaches were identified and considered. Grounded theory offers a well-defined, sequential model to data collection and analysis. Its aim is to generate a theoretical description of a particular

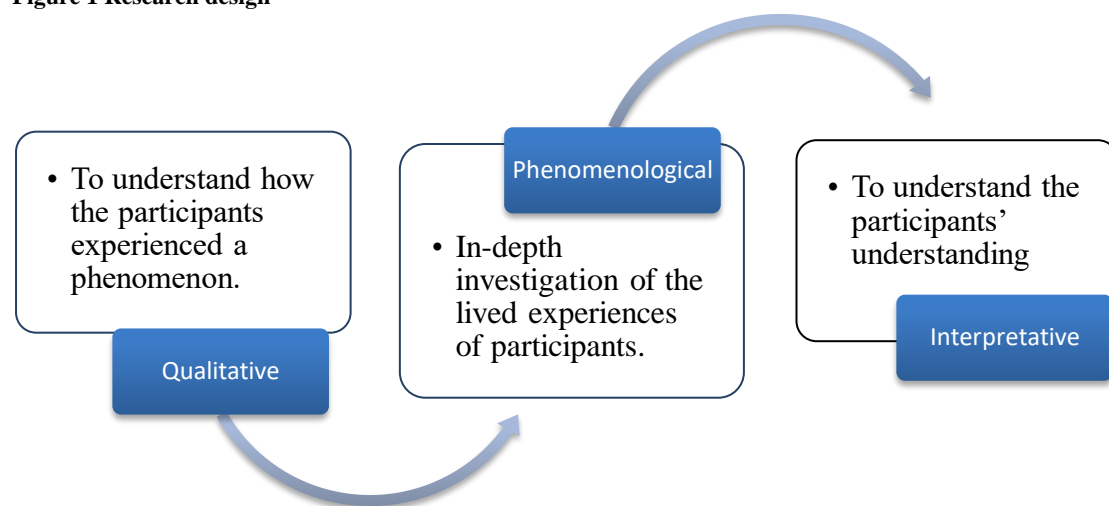
phenomenon culminating in the development of an explanatory level account. This approach was discounted as theoretical descriptions of bullying abound. Discursive approaches were also discounted as they focus on a body of knowledge or a way of understanding a topic. Smith *et al* (2009) suggest that the research question determines the method. The particular focus of the research is on teachers' personal meaning and sense making in the context of school workplace bullying, who share a common experience. Therefore, the prime reason for choosing IPA over any other qualitative approach is "because it is consistent with the epistemological position of your research question" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.46). The research design ensured that the data collection process elicited detailed stories about the phenomenon, as it occurred in the natural setting.

An additional distinctive characteristic of qualitative data is the rich data that are produced or generated, which provides the evidence about the participants' experience or multiple realities. Accordingly, the researcher sought to employ strategies that illuminated the social reality of the participants, their behaviours, perspectives and experiences. The decision to ask particular questions, to undertake the study of bullying in the first instance, has steered this researcher in a certain unique direction. The researcher focused on understanding participants' circumstances, understandings and interpretations and in so doing it has led to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon itself. Each participant added their own perception of reality and this study undertook the task of interpreting the various meanings attributed to their unique events and situations. Understanding the context was crucial to understanding the phenomena and this study involved teachers in their local settings, conveying their perceptions or interpretations of their own workplaces.

The researcher accepts, as previously stated, that this research cannot be value-free, so it was important that this subjectivity was acknowledged. The researcher endeavoured to connect with participants by adopting an empathetic stance while creating an environment of familiarity and trust. Hence, the qualitative research method allowed the researcher to be involved with the participant on a closer level "The research technique which the qualitative researcher uses is then to isolate and define phenomena/categories during the process of research in order to comprehend and learn" (Fink 2000, p. 3).

This study examined decision-making regarding particular actions, such as deciding on how to deal with bullying, whether or not to complain, as well as the thinking process involved in making those decisions. This entailed the complex process of the researcher trying to make sense of the participant’s account of his/her experience, which is itself the result of the participants’ attempts to make sense of the experience. Smith refers to this as the ‘double hermeneutic’: as well as attending to the participants experience, the researcher ‘is also seeing this through the researcher’s own, experientially informed lens’ (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 36). Smith further suggests that the researcher take the ‘centre-ground’ whereby a hermeneutics of empathy combined with a hermeneutics of ‘questioning’ serve to ‘draw out’ or ‘disclose’ the meaning of the experience (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 36). Therefore, the phenomenological approach was considered most appropriate as it is concerned with examining the type of subjective experience of ‘something’ and the ‘experience’, which is of particular moment or significance to the person’ (Smith *et al.* 2009).

Figure 1 Research design



3.4.2 Historical overview of Phenomenology

Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience.
 (Van Manen 1990, p. 9)

In order to have a full understanding of the phenomenological approach it is necessary to reflect on how the basic principles developed. Husserl, Heidegger, Van Manen, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are the most prominent proponents of phenomenological philosophy. Their work demonstrates that planning an IPA research study involves

“exploring, describing, interpreting and situating the means by which our participants make sense of their experiences” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 17).

For Husserl (1859-1938) phenomenology was considered to be the examination of human experience and he proposed that the perception of that experience should be examined in the way that it occurs. Essentially, he recommended a reflexive dimension and a way of self-consciously looking at our perceptions of the experience. The second step, referred to as phenomenological reduction, entails turning our attention toward the phenomenon as they appear (Gallagher 2003). Bracketing can be compared to a mathematical equation: “it suspends certain components by placing them outside the brackets, which then facilitates a focusing in on the phenomenon within the brackets” (Gearing 2004, p.1430). It is the description of what we experience, the lived experience or how things appear. This study was committed to exploring, describing, interpreting and positioning the means by which the participants made sense of their experiences.

Van Manen affirmed the idea that was advocated by Husserl. He believed that “one does not pursue research for the sake of research” and that “one comes to the human science with a prior interest” (Van Manen 1990, p. 1). Consequently, the act of researching is an intentional act. Heidegger, a student of Husserl, cast doubt on the belief that there was any knowledge except for that of an interpretative nature and he rejected the notion of bracketing declaring that it was neither “possible nor desirable for suppositions or the phenomenon’s context to be bracketed out” (Gearing 2004, p.1431). Heidegger built on the foundations of Husserl when he referred to *intentionality* as the relationship between the experience and our awareness of that experience. He developed the ‘phenomenological method’ that advocated abandonment of the ‘taken for granted’ world in order to concentrate on our perception of that world. Heidegger viewed the person as always a ‘person-in-context’ and he believed that our relation to the world was a “fundamental part of our constitution” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.17).

Merleau-Ponty promoted the idea that we see ourselves as different from everything else in the world; he focused on our relationship to the world and how we use our bodies as a means of communication. “The complex understanding of experience invokes a lived process, an unfurling of perspectives and meanings, which are unique to the

person's embodied and situated relationship to the world" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.21). Both Merleau-Ponty and Sartre challenged the conventional descriptive view of people as creatures in isolation and they promoted a more interpretative standpoint, which focused on our involvement in the world, in relationships, concerns, culture and in our relationship to the world. This study was concerned with our attempts to understand other people's relationship to the world, how they made sense of their experiences, their actions and how they reacted to the things that happened to them. Essentially, the result of this inquiry or the research findings, signify the researcher's interpretation of the participants' relationship to the world. This is the theory of interpretation, also known as hermeneutics, which gives rise to the interpretative phenomenological approach.

"Phenomenological researchers today face a rich diversity of empirical approaches from which to choose" (Finlay 2008, p. 3). Modern phenomenology, according to Smith (2009), is a philosophical approach to the study of 'experience'. He accentuated the key pivotal value of phenomenological philosophy: "it provides us with a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 40). Hence, phenomenology is now viewed more as a way of seeing things, as a methodology or as a set of methodological suggestions for conducting research. The modern method of phenomenological inquiry involves disregarding theories and concepts of how things are in reality but focuses instead on how we experience things. When people experience something major in their lives they then begin to reflect on what has just happened to them, "IPA research aims to engage with these reflections" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 3).

3.4.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Qualitative interpretative studies attempt to construct a framework by which we can make sense of the phenomenon being studied, termed 'social constructivism'. According to Smith, the "prime reason for choosing IPA over any other qualitative approach should be because it is consistent with the epistemological position of your research question" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 46). For this study the IPA approach was consistent with the research question because it required eliciting participants' views about the effectiveness of the complaints procedures and of the available supports. Those perspectives were then interpreted by the researcher with the ultimate aim of generating or constructing theory with regard to the research data. The

phenomenological design approach employed allowed for an in-depth investigation of participants' experience of the negative behaviours, engagement with the complaints procedures, how it affected participants, the school in general and the students.

In summary, this study sought to understand the experiences of targets of bullying, their attempts to deal with the negative behaviours and their efforts to utilise the recommended complaints procedures. "Phenomenology appeals to our immediate common experience in order to conduct a structural analysis of what is most common, most familiar, most self-evident to us" (Van Manen 1990, p. 19). This IPA research study was concerned with interpretation (hermeneutics), as well as experience (phenomenology).

3.4.3 Sampling

Nielsen (2009) advocates that when investigating workplace bullying, the sampling procedure should always be taken into consideration. In fact, the two most significant issues throughout the planning and implementation of any sensitive research involve sampling and access. Flick (2011) suggests that sampling concerns techniques or approaches to ensure that you have the 'right' cases for the study while Creswell (1998) reasons that qualitative research involves purposefully selecting 'informants' so as to ensure the research question will be answered. In this study the phenomenon of interest, the informant that could best answer the research questions, was the teacher who was/is a target of workplace bullying. Even though non-random samples may have limited external validity Nielsen (2009) proposes they "may be quite useful for investigating tendencies and phenomenological aspects of workplace bullying when representative prevalence rates are not a main objective of the study" (Nielsen 2009, p.56). Both Fink (2000) and Yardley (2000) give credence to limiting the sample size since "a sample size sufficiently large to be statistically representative cannot be analysed in depth" as it would yield vast amounts of data which would be too complex to analyse (Yardley 2000, p. 218). Fink declares that "a very large number of respondents could hinder the researcher's ability to get "in-depth" and miss the opportunity of getting an understanding of each respondent" (Fink 2000, p. 5). Yardley further suggests that "for qualitative research it is often preferable to employ 'theoretical' sampling of small numbers of people chosen for their special attributes; for example, those who are extreme or typical exemplars of the phenomena of interest" (Yardley 2000, p. 218).

Therefore samples are collected purposively since they offer the researcher “project insight into a particular experience” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.48).

Creswell reasons that “long interviews with up to ten people” is sufficient for a phenomenological study (Creswell 1998p. 65 & p. 113). For this qualitative study, typical cases were sought: teachers who had experienced workplace bullying and who had tried to deal with it by engaging, to some degree, with the complaints procedures. The effectiveness of this phenomenological study will be “judged by the light it sheds within the broader context” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 51). Because the focus of this study was to attempt to shed light on the phenomenon and nature of bullying the aim was not to provide population level information. Moreover, “self-labelling approach seems to be the most frequently used method” for assessing the prevalence of workplace bullying” (Nielsen 2009, p.42). However, Nielsen draws attention to possible problems or limitations with such self-selected reports; Acquiescence, the tendency to concur with what someone else says; “social desirability, which means that the participants give ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ answers based on the perceived purpose of the study, or the researcher’s expectations of certain results” (Nielsen 2009, p.57). Nonetheless, since participants must be selected on the basis that they can grant us a particular perspective on the phenomenon this means they represent “a perspective, rather than a population” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.49).

3.4.4 Inclusion criteria

1. *Teachers/Principals who had been subjected to workplace bullying and who had tried to deal with it through the recommended complaints procedures.*

In order to take part in the study participants were required to meet the inclusion criterion of having been a target of workplace bullying and made an attempt to deal with the problem. While the study sought to examine the testimonies of teachers who have made complaints or sought to address the issue, contact was also sought from teachers who decided not to formally complain. This was in order to give voice and to honour the courage it may have taken to make contact with an unknown researcher to be interviewed. No information relating to the school was collected in order to protect the privacy of the primary schools. The participants could therefore provide direct perceptions from concrete experience based on being a target of workplace bullying.

According to Moustakas “in phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (Moustakas 1994, p. 52). Hence, perceptions are a fundamental component and in order to elicit the most pertinent perceptions to answer the research question, adherence to the criteria was crucial and only those teachers who had experienced bullying behaviour first-hand were included. The primary aim of the inclusion criteria was to ensure that each participant would have sufficient experience, as a target of bullying, to draw upon during the interview process. Exclusion criteria included the disqualification of those who were not the direct target of workplace bullying. This sample of twenty-two teachers was predicted to achieve the required and most valuable data to answer the research questions.

3.4.5 Recruiting participants

The assistance of the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) was sought in petitioning members who had made complaints of bullying to participate in the study. To this end an advertisement was placed in the *Intouch* magazine, a monthly publication by the INTO, which is delivered to every member of the teachers’ union. A copy of this advertisement is in Appendix 1. It was anticipated that some teachers might be reluctant to grant interviews for fear of possible disclosure so safeguards were included to promote trust and alleviate such concerns. To this end ethical principles such as confidentiality and protection of identities was fully explained and strictly adhered to. Twenty-two teachers responded to the advertisement, twenty-one were interviewed and one teacher subsequently decided not to participate because of work and study commitments.

3.4.6 Demographic information

The teachers who chose to participate had, to varying degrees, attempted to deal with workplace bullying. The below table provides the demographic information on the participants. It includes their age, position and length of service in the school, present status, stage of complaint, the bully’s position within the school and the school size. The sample included seven male and fifteen female teachers.

Name	Gender	Age	Service	Position	Status of Bully	Present status	Complaint stage	School size	Medmark
Jack	Male	55	32	Teacher	Principal	In situ/bully retired	Stage 4	Small gaelscoil - Irish speaking school (4 teachers)	no
Sarah	Female	52	8	Teacher	Principal	In situ/bullying stopped	Stage 3	Special Needs School (22 teachers + 55 special needs assistants)	no
Patricia	Female	40	21	Teacher	Principal	In situ/bully retired	Stage 4	Large (18 teachers)	yes
Laura	Female	25	2	Teacher	Teacher	Resigned position	Stage 3	Medium 6 teachers)	no
Anthony	Male	55	26	Teacher	Principal	In situ/bully retired	Stage 2	Designated Disadvantaged School Large (24 teachers)	yes
Noel	Male	40	4	Teacher	Principal	Resigned position	Stage 4	Special Needs School (5 teachers)	twice
Rita	Female	37	10	Principal	Chairperson of School Board	Resigned position	Stage 4	Special Needs School (no. not given)	yes
Ben	Male	50	18	Teacher	Colleagues	Bullying is ongoing	Stage 3	Special Needs School (no. not given)	yes
Eleranor	Female	45	19	Teacher	Principal	Currently on sick leave	Stage 4	Medium (7 teachers)	yes fit/unfit
John	Male	39	6	Teacher	Principal	Resigned position	Stage 2	Gaelscoil –Irish speaking school (6 teachers)	yes
Jane	Female	57	35	Teacher	Colleagues	Retired early	Stage 3	Large (15 teachers)	no
Claire	Female	58	21	Teacher	Principal	Bullying is ongoing	Stage 4	Medium (6 teachers)	no
Clodagh	Female	50	3	Teacher	Special Needs Assistant	Applied for job share (reduced hours)	Stage 3	Special Needs School (8 teachers)	no
Tina	Female	55	18	Teacher	Principal	Career break (unpaid leave) Returned as principal	Stage 2	Medium (no. not given)	no
Mona	Female	57	37	Teacher	Principal	Resigned position	Stage 3	Small (2 teacher school)	no
Betty	Female	60	39	Teacher	Principal	Bully retired	Stage 3	Medium (no not given)	no
Frank	Male	55	34	Teacher	Principal	Bullying is ongoing	Stage 3	Gaelscoil –Irish Speaking Large (No. not given)	yes
Marie	Female	55	10	Teacher	Middle management x3	Currently on career break (unpaid leave)	Stage 3	Large (16 teachers)	no
Emma	Female	38		Teacher	Teacher	Bullying is ongoing	Stage 3	(No. not given)	
Seamus	Male	45	20	Principal	Staff	Career break (unpaid leave)	Stage 4	Medium (5 teachers)	no
Una	Female	53	38	Teacher	Principal	Bullying is ongoing	Stage 3	Small (2 teacher school)	no
Helen	Female	36	10	Teacher	2x Teachers	Bullying is ongoing	Stage 3	Medium (5 teachers)	no

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Interviewing

According to Flick (2011) there are three ways of gathering data in social research: “you can collect data through asking people (through surveys and interviews), observing, or studying documents” (Flick 2011, p. 104). In this study the researcher was interested in asking people about their experience, to examine the way they experienced bullying and the procedures for addressing it. Merriam further endorsed the interview approach: “in all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews” (S. B. Merriam 2009, p.87). The decision to use interviewing as the primary mode of data collection was also based on the requirement to actively listen, analytically observe and to respond sensitively and appropriately to participants’ accounts. Merriam observed that “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings or how people interpret the world around them” (S. B. Merriam 2009, p.88).

Creswell (2014) and Marshall (1997) both affirm this view and add that interviewing promotes interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Equally important, the interview approach generates data quickly, allows for a wide variety of information and for immediate follow-up questions. Silverman (2009) also exhorts us to use interviews as a way “to enable previously hidden, or silenced, voices to speak” (Silverman 2009, p.25). In the light of the above, interviewing was considered the logical and most appropriate method to uncover participants’ meaning perspectives. From Bloom and Crabtree’s perspective, “semi-structured, one-to-one interviews are often the sole source for a qualitative research project” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006, p.315).

3.5.2 In-depth, Semi-structured interview

Rapley (2001) contends that “interviewers have overarching topical control; they guide the talk, they promote it through questions, silence and response tokens and chiefly they decide which particular part of the ‘answer’ to follow-up” (Rapley, 2001, p. 315). IPA requires ‘rich data’ (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 56). “In-depth interviews can provide rich and in-depth information about the experience of individuals” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006, p. 319). The in-depth interview was considered most suitable as it can be responsive to the unique nature of each bullying situation recounted, it facilitates the discussion of relevant topics and it allows “the interviewer to delve deeply into the social and personal matters” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006, p. 315).

A qualitative research interview is often described as ‘a conversation with a purpose’. The purpose is informed, implicitly at least, by a research question. (Smith et al. 2009, p. 57)

Given that individuals have different ‘world views’ and so perceive and define the world in different ways, the semi-structured format allowed participants to articulate and describe their own unique experiences.

The semi-structured interview was particularly suited to unearthing the various aspects of the phenomenon in more depth because for the most part, the participant talks and the interviewer listens. Hence, they are particularly suited to obtaining in-depth information on the research topic that would subsequently answer the research question. Bloom and Crabtree acknowledge that “No interview can truly be considered unstructured; however, some are relatively unstructured and are more or less equivalent to guided conversations” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006, p. 319). With this in mind, an interview schedule was employed and operated flexibly.

3.5.3 Interview schedule

Corbin and Strauss (1998) advise creating a few open-ended, non-judgmental questions that encourage the participants to tell their story and be heard. Rubin et al direct our attention to the fact that “responsive interviews are built around main questions, follow-up questions, and probes that together elicit the rich data that speak to your research question” (Rubin and Rubin 2011, p. 116). With this in mind an interview schedule was

drawn up and employed (Appendix 2). It consisted of a loose agenda comprising a list of topics to be explored, which alerted participants to the topics to be discussed as well as alerting them to the possibility of sensitive issues. It focused attention on the pertinent subject matter to be covered and the need to plan for potential difficulties. Participants were provided with the tentative interview schedule during preliminary discussions in order to ease potential anxiety with regard to the interview process. The questions focused on a number of key areas: a) experience of workplace bullying and associated behaviours, b) the awareness and support of other staff, c) possible triggers, d) redress options open to teachers, e) immediate and long-term impact, f) supports, g) impact on the school, h) the effectiveness of the complaints procedures and finally participants were invited to propose i) possible measures to alleviate or resolve workplace bullying.

However, Rapley (2001) contends that the interview transcript is not simply the participant's perception or account but that the interviewer is central to the production and the construction of data. He argued that the interviews are "social encounters, dependent on the local interactional contingencies in which the speakers draw from, and co-construct, broader social norms" (Rapley 2001, p.303). The interview schedule employed in this study allowed further questions to emerge from the dialogue and, in the final stage of the interview process it was employed to probe possible data and ensure that all areas relevant to answering the research question were covered. The semi-structured flexible approach allowed for the exploration of sensitive data and emergent themes, as it allowed the interview to develop. It also allowed the interviewer autonomy in relation to the direction of the conversation so that there was the opportunity to pursue an interesting line of questioning should it arise. It facilitated those who preferred a more informal, open-ended conversation and this permitted interviewees to raise issues which they considered pertinent.

Another advantage of using the interview schedule was that it provided a consistent method of data collection and in so doing was useful in controlling external influences. Data was collected from all participants in the same way so that differences in results

could be attributed to the participants' attitudes and not to differences in the data collection approach. Allowing interviewees to become fully participative in the interview process enabled the disclosure of participants' subjectivities and this in turn informed the research. A copy of the interview schedule is located in the Appendix 2.

3.5.4 Procedure

After reading the advertisement, participants made initial contact through the researcher's student email address and they were responded to within a day. Prior to meeting, each participant was forwarded an information document by email. This document outlined: the focus of the study, participants' role or function, the possible benefits and risks of taking part in the study, participants' right to leave the study at any time, confidentiality and privacy issues, the data collection procedures and an outline of how the results would be used and disseminated. Participants were assured that their identity, and that of their school, would be protected and that they would remain anonymous throughout the study. Participants were given the option of seeking further information and then decided on the basis of the information given whether to proceed to the interview stage. Confidentiality was assured, and written consent was sought prior to conducting the interview.

Once participants confirmed their willingness to participate, a time and venue was decided upon. Further contact details were exchanged, and all participants were given the option of nominating a suitable venue where they would feel most comfortable and which would be most convenient. The researcher then met with participants, who were advised again of their right to withdraw from the study without prejudice. Having read the information sheet and having had all questions satisfactorily answered, voluntary informed consent was reaffirmed and participants were asked to sign a letter of consent.

The interviewer then proceeded, with the aid of the interview schedule, to discuss the problem of bullying in greater depth and to get an insight into each unique experience.

3.5.5 Interview with participants

DiCicco-Bloom suggest “the basic research question may well serve as the first interview question” and so with this in mind participants were simply asked to tell their story (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006, p. 316). Participants were invited to tell what it was like in their personal world and the interviewer only intervened to keep the conversation going. The aim of the interview process was to “enter the participant’s life world or allow the participant to recount their life experience” so as to gain a deeper understanding of this experience (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 58). Throughout the interview process the researcher sought to examine in detail each particular unique experience while at the same time exploring the similarities and differences between participants, “it is through the connection of many ‘truths’ that interview research contributes to our knowledge of the meaning of the human experience” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006, p. 316). As participants recounted their unique experience and their reflections, the researcher tried to gain a better understanding of events by posing follow-up questions.

The use of the semi-structured in-depth interview as the primary method of data collection resulted in rich, detailed, first-person accounts and reflective descriptions of experiences, which provided an understanding of the constructs involved in the research. Finally, the relatively unstructured nature of the interview allowed participants direct the interview to a degree, thereby giving greater insights into how participants viewed the world.

3.5.6 Recording and transcripts

Using a high-quality Olympus Digital voice recorder with low noise filter microphone, interviews were recorded. Reflective field notes were taken for the sake of triangulation. Interviews lasted between one-and-a-half hours and three hours and were transcribed verbatim. This resulted in almost 700 pages of raw data (interview transcripts and field notes).

From Smith's perspective "the first step of an IPA analysis involves immersing oneself in some of the original data" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 82). To facilitate this immersion the researcher decided to personally transcribe the recorded data. Analysis began during data collection and transcription, which enhanced understanding about the research questions. According to Merriam "collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research" (Sharan B. Merriam 2009, p. 169). In this way the interview data was analysed and formulated, meanings were clustered into themes allowing for the emergence of themes common to all of the participants' transcripts. The results were integrated into an in-depth description of the phenomenon. A qualitative design, using in-depth interviewing, ensured the comprehensive exploration of the issues relating to the lived experience of targets of bullying, their engagement with the complaints procedures, the obstacles and the supports they encountered, the effects of bullying and the ultimate consequences of making a complaint.

A recognised difficulty with transcript data is that it can be difficult to capture the nuances of the spoken work when it is in text form. To ensure accuracy during interpretation and analysis this was overcome by listening to the audio recording whilst reading the transcript data. This was found to be the best way to overcome omissions, repetition, sentence structure, punctuation and inference. Transcripts were redacted to reduce the possibility of identification. Redacted transcripts were then sent to participants for further verification and validation. Verbatim transcripts were imported directly into a qualitative software package. Field notes further supported the study and a questionnaire, listing negative acts, was used to confirm the occurrence of workplace bullying. The redacted transcripts, memos, consent form, negative acts questionnaire, participants' reflections and digital recorder are all stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home where they will remain for thirty-six months. At the end of this time the paper documents will be shredded, and the recordings will be erased.

3.6 Data analysis

IPA is not about following a set of instructions or steps and there is no clear right or wrong way of conducting data analysis (Smith *et al.* 2009). From Merriam's

perspective “data analysis is the process used to answer your research question” (S. B. Merriam 2009, p.176). Boeije affirms the view that ready-made answers do not simply evolve from the data but that analysis entails “segmenting and reassembling the data in the light of the problem statement” (Boeije 2009, p. 93). The researcher’s task, the transformation of the data into answers to the problem posed, is complex, it is concerned with making sense out of the data, focusing on personal meaning-making. The process involves ‘constructing’ meaning rather than ‘discovering’ meaning. Hence, data analysis utilising IPA entails “moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 79).

IPA researchers do not impose or prescribe any single method of data analysis. Analytic development is flexible yet focused on participants’ efforts and challenges in trying to make sense of their experiences. In order to understand behaviours and actions it was necessary to analyse the evolving accounts of how participants sought to manage and handle their situations in their own unique setting. “An awareness of this local context of data production is central to analysing interview data” (Rapley 2001, p.303). Data analysis involved uncovering, interpreting and identifying recurring patterns in participants’ accounts and it entailed an obligation on the part of the researcher to understand participants’ contexts and point of view. The result was therefore a reflective engagement with the interview data, a joint construction. Hence, “the truth claims of an IPA analysis are always tentative and analysis is subjective” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.80). Rapley (2001) highlighted a number of areas of concern in relation to the analysis of interview data such as sensitivity to the “accounting work of interviewees” and awareness of the “context of its production”. But the most important concern is to maintain an awareness, during the analysis, of “interviewers’ talk in producing both the form and content of the interview” (Rapley, 2001, p. 304).

Strategies, widely used in the IPA analytic process, were employed in this study. First, the researcher immersed herself in the data and a close line-by-line analysis of participants’ accounts, understandings, fears, claims and perceptions was carried out. Patterns and themes began to emerge from individual interview data (particular) followed by points of commonality (shared) across numerous cases. “The development

of a ‘dialogue’ between the researchers, their coded data, and their psychological knowledge, about what it might mean for participants to have these concerns, in this context”, gave rise to the development of an interpretative account (Smith *et al.* 2009, p.79). As relationships between various themes became apparent they were further organised and clustered giving rise to a final, distinctive structure which ultimately yielded a ‘full narrative’ (Smith *et al.* 2009). The narrative was supplemented with the researcher’s supportive interpretative comments, giving further clarification and observations on data extracts. The process, a theme by theme interpretation, further benefitted from reflective commentaries.

3.6.1 Selecting a Qualitative Analysis Method: Software

Considering the large volume of data involved in the study it was considered prudent to use a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. The selected method of data analysis for this study was MAXQDA 12. Important determinants were in terms of the amount of data to be handled, flexibility in handling data and in terms of interaction and reduction of data that was consistent with the methods employed. The program made data handling easy and it provided opportunities to look at data from different angles. It operated as a form of word-processing allowing for the detailed collection of quotes from all transcripts and ensuring a high level of consistency.

Verbatim transcripts were imported directly into MAXQDA 12. The transcripts were then analysed and formulated, meanings were clustered into themes allowing for the emergence of themes common to all of the participants’ transcripts. “One of the most basic functions of software for qualitative data analysis is the coding function” (Boeije 2009, p. 143). Data were coded using a paragraph-by-paragraph approach and organized into a structured code system based upon the emergent themes. An example of coding is located in Appendix 8. These patterns or themes, supported by the data, comprised the findings. Themes included bullying behaviours, school culture, consequences of bullying, dealing with bullying, engaging with the complaints procedures and suggested resolutions. MAXQDA allowed the researcher to select and award codes that could be ordered hierarchically in a coding system. These in turn were easily merged, split, renamed, deleted or moved to a different code. It was also possible

to assign more than one code to a fragment of text or to overlap codes. The interface allowed for a colour coded, code system that was displayed in the margins of working documents. Finally, the results were integrated into an in-depth description of the phenomenon.

Smith acknowledges that analysis is an “iterative process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 81). Active engagement with the data involved the listening, transcribing, redaction and coding of data. Repeated listening to the audio recordings and numerous readings and re-readings of transcripts ensured a growing familiarity with the text and led to a richer and deeper understanding of how the participants viewed the issue of bullying. Listening to the audio-recordings of participants’ voices, in which emotions were palpable, facilitated a more in-depth understanding and encouraged a reflective engagement with the participants’ accounts. Throughout the analysis records were made of the researcher’s impressions and these included the most striking observations and the most powerful statements. IPA requires that analysis is constantly open to change and can only become “fixed through the act of writing up” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 81).

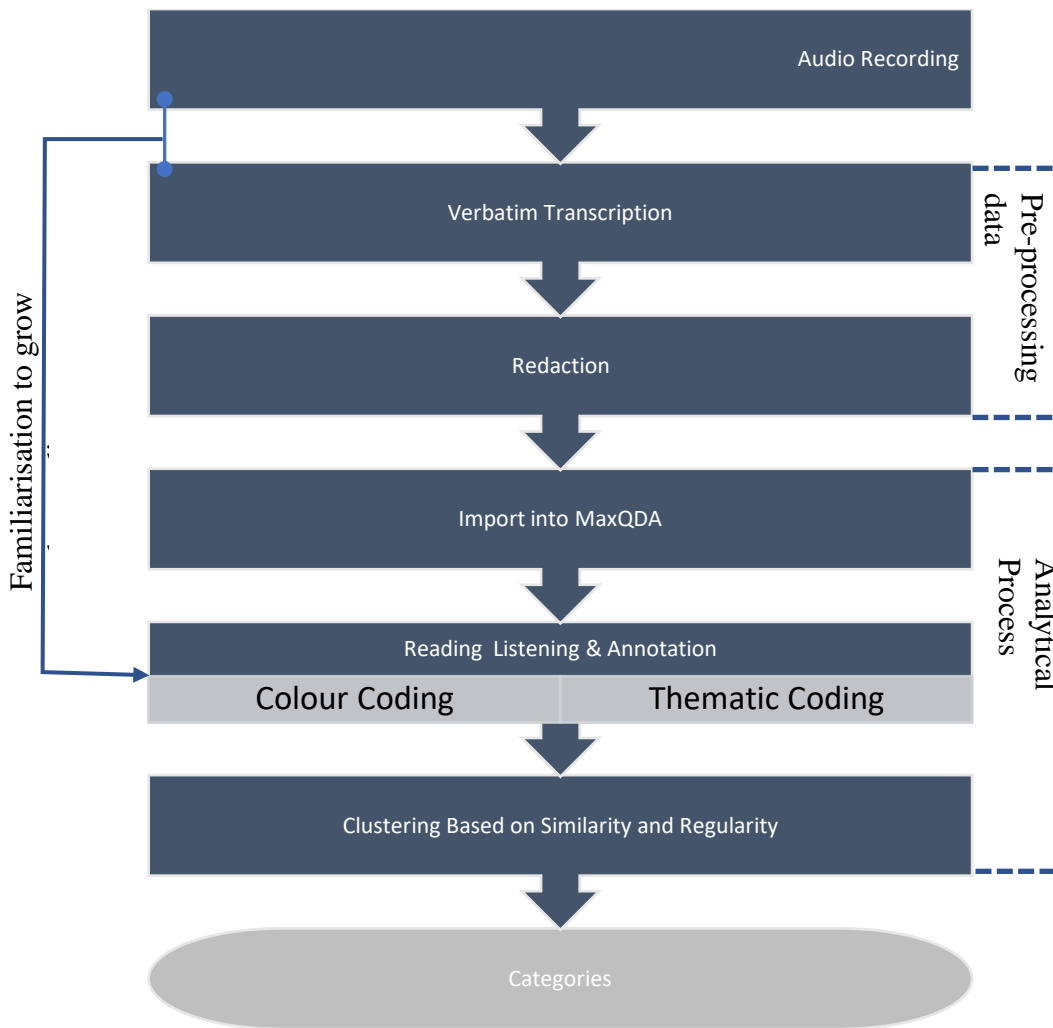


Figure 2 Analysis Flowchart

3.6.2 Retrieving data

The basic raw data in the form of field notes, audio recordings and transcripts were processed before analysis began. The ‘Colour coding’ text technique employed in MAXQDA was especially useful at the beginning of the analysis process. It was similar to the marking of text in a book with a highlighter. It allowed for the marking of passages that were particularly interesting when reading through the text for the first time. Before deciding which codes to use and before starting to analyse the text in categories, this technique allowed for the suggesting of what simply seemed important. Saldana (2015) proposes that this initial analysis should occur simultaneously with data collection.

The software system allowed for easy retrieval of coded segments. However, Boeije identified one of the shortcomings of coding with computer software: “retrieved fragments were decontextualized, that is, taken out of the situation or conversation they had taken place in” (Boeije 2009, p. 144). However, one of the advantages of MAXQDA was that retrieved segments connected back to the original text and so the segment’s origin, could easily be identified. This facility helped create the thick descriptions about the context that produced views, feelings or judgements, without which the findings could become unconvincing (Boeije 2009).

Miles proposes that there should be many cycles of coding and that through the many cycles of recoding the researcher further “manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes and concepts, grasping meaning, and/or building theory” (Miles *et al.* 2013, p. 8). This method resulted in highly effective visual data that was used in visual data representations.

3.6.3 Coding

A code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meanings to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building and other analytic processes. (Miles et al. 2013, p.72).

Cohen (2013) contends that the researcher must follow a certain process of construction in order to put the final narrative together. The first step involves assigning codes to data chunks, and assembling these chunks further condenses the data into units or themes. Miles promotes the idea that coding is actually an act of analysis, that it is merely the initial step toward a more rigorous analysis and interpretation for research findings (Miles *et al.* 2013, p.413). Codes were recovered from single documents or from all documents, which made it easy to get an overview of all retrieved segments. Codes were linked back to line numbers, which referred to the position within the specific document. The program counted the frequency of codes and this could be used to create group or per case visualisations. As the transcripts were read and re-read the

researcher became increasingly familiar with each account and a close analysis was conducted taking account of descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments.

Identified codes were then grouped into categories based on the criteria that were fit for the research purpose. This allowed the researcher to “analyse and interpret the text for meanings contained in it, develop hypotheses to explain what is taking place, check these hypotheses against the data, and the remainder of the text, see the text as a whole rather than as discrete units and ensure that different interpretations of the text have been considered and the ones chosen are the most secure in terms of fidelity to the text” (Cohen *et al.* 2011, p. 553). By following these key stages of text selection, analysis, interpretation and checking the narrative, analysis was constructed.

Codes were then assigned to particular segments of the transcripts resulting in a systematic content analysis of the text. The codes themselves were text strings containing up to three words, which were attached to segments of each document. These codes were like index cards with text and keywords. The name of the code was directly linked to the particular data summation generating categories, themes and concepts. Codes were reorganised and ordered into a hierarchical structure, a main code having several sub codes. A colour attribute was awarded to each code and this served as a text marker that produced specific background colours for the marked text. This method resulted in highly effective visual data that was used in visual data representation. In-vivo coding allowed for selecting and highlighting meaningful terms in the text and automatically adding them as codes to the code system while coding the text segment with the code. In MAXQDA it was possible to create code memos or “post-It” like notes with ideas, comments or impressions and to attach them to document segments, documents, or codes. The memos enabled the writing of short notes regarding various elements of the data such as the definition of the characteristics of the new code. Documents were analysed and coded, but they were not changed once the analysis had begun.

According to Saldana's theory, one uses "classification reasoning plus your tacit and intuitive senses" to decide which data is grouped together (Miles *et al.* 2013, p. 9). Codes were applied and reapplied to the data and this process resulted in the data being classified, separated, reclassified, grouped, regrouped, assembled, rearranged, clustered and finally organised into categories that shared the same characteristics. Saldana (2013) referred to this as 'analytic reflection' and he proposed that a theme is "a phrase or sentence describing more subtle and tacit processes" (Miles *et al.* 2013, p. 14). As coding and recoding progressed categories developed and became more refined.

A 'reflexivity approach', was adopted throughout and this involved thinking through a number of interpretative possibilities for assessing what the material was about and for what purpose it could be used. It was necessary to constantly question and review coded segments while keeping in mind the element of subjectivity involved in the interpretation of the data. Finally, the researcher endeavoured to "judiciously select good and appropriate illustrations for each theme" so that each theme was supported by quotes from a number of participants (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 182).

Figure 5 Categories and sub themes from analytical procedures

Denotive hesitancy	Delays in recognition of bullying contribute to manifestations of inertia "you're so paralysed..."
Fear in exercising agency	Fear as a characteristic emotion in subverting attempts to seek redress. Fear decreasing requisite energy needed to seek redress. Feeling trapped.
Regret	Increased locus of control when removed from bullying situation... "If I had the strength I have now..."
Lack of confidence in complaints procedures	Procedures requiring complainant to seek redress from the bully Put off by formality of procedures "I thought...this is far too jargony and legalistic..."
Procedures as technologies of power -revenge	Fear of reprisal. "They'll do it in senaky ways..." Concerns for safety for self or implications for others such as children in the school
Procedures as technologies of power -counter attacks	Counter attacks Ambushed in meetings Counter complaints levelled at complainant.

3.7 Validity, Reliability and Quality

While reliability is concerned with the accuracy of the actual measuring instrument or procedure, validity is concerned with the study's success in measuring what the researchers set out to measure (Nielsen 2009, p.11)

The canons by which quantitative studies are judged are inappropriate for judging qualitative research but the importance of making explicit the criteria used to judge the merit of a study is widely accepted (Strauss *et al.*, 1998, Merriam 1995, Guba 1981). Several terms have been put forward as presenting criteria for assessing the quality of

social research. This “is a question that has sparked much debate among qualitative researchers” (Strauss 1998, p. 265).

While qualitative researchers recognise the need to establish tentative agreement as to the validity and utility of a piece of research for a certain purpose, in a particular situation, and for a specific community of people, most reject the idea that there ever could or should be a universal code of practice for the use of qualitative methodologies (Yardley 2000, p. 217).

From Creswell’s (2012) perspective the most important criteria for judging qualitative research studies is credibility, transferability and dependability. A number of guidelines have been put forward for assessing validity or quality in qualitative research. For this study Yardley’s (2000) model has been adopted, it proposes four broad principles: Sensitivity to context, Commitment and Rigour, Transparency and Coherence, and Impact and Importance. Boeije asserts that the judgement of the quality of research is mainly concerned with “an assessment of the accuracy of the insights gained as a result of the research” (Boeije 2009, p. 168). Merriam affirms this view as she suggests that a true test of any research study involves the need to present accurate, credible insights but she contends that “there will be multiple constructions of how people have experienced a particular phenomenon, how they have made meaning in their lives, or how they have come to understand certain processes” (S. B. Merriam 2009, p.214). Nevertheless, every research study must be evaluated and therefore criteria to judge its quality are required.

From the researcher’s perspective it was important to illuminate participants’ stories, perceptions and interpretations; and to identify and understand their attempts to deal with the negative behaviour they encountered and their efforts to make complaints through the recommended procedures. In other words, to “explain what might happen in given situations” such as the consequences that may occur when a teacher makes a complaint of bullying (Strauss 1998, p. 267). Therefore, the main criterion used to assess the quality of this research study was its ability to “speak specifically for the population from which it was derived and to apply back to them” (Strauss 1998, p. 267). As this qualitative research study endeavoured to have an impact on the practice of resolving complaints of workplace bullying it was vital that it contributed knowledge that was believable and trustworthy. With this in mind, credibility and authenticity,

transferability, transparency, importance and commitment were significant considerations.

According to Merriam (1995) internal validity is a strength of qualitative research because “there are fewer levels between the researcher and phenomenon under investigation” (Merriam 1995, p.55). The key to internal validity is the notion of reality, it requires an examination of the findings in terms of consistency or how they correspond with reality. Participants’ experiences of bullying and their narrative do not represent a direct image of their experience, rather these views are negotiated in many different ways. In other words, qualitative research assumes that “reality is constructed, multi-dimensional, and ever changing; there is no such thing as a single immutable reality waiting to be observed and measured” (Merriam 1995, p.54). Hence, the findings in this study represent the researcher’s interpretation, of the participants’ interpretation of reality. As such the reality we accept as ‘the truth’ is only relatively true, and is therefore ‘a truth’. Accordingly, in situations of workplace bullying in schools, behaviour patterns emerge and are identified. Even though each participant recounted their own unique perspective, similarities and relationships were unearthed in their narratives. “The experience of bullying does not occur in a cultural or historical vacuum and is, in many ways, defined by the discourses—systems of meaning and relationships of power—within which employee abuse is nested” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.92).

Nevertheless, here is a need to ensure that the findings are valid according to participants’ reality, to control for extraneous variables. Merriam (1995) proposes a number of strategies that can be employed to strengthen internal validity; Triangulation, member checks, peer/colleague examination, statement of the researcher’s experience and submersion in the research situation.

Triangulation involves the use of multiple investigators, sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm findings. The researcher collected, assessed and reviewed abundant interview transcript data in addition to reading numerous pertinent papers and research documents before determining the authenticity of participants’ accounts. Member checks were achieved by sending interview transcripts, along with the researcher’s tentative interpretations, back to participants and requesting their opinion as to their plausibility. As an interpretive researcher, my beliefs, moral standard, sense of justice

and experiences guide the choice of subject and manipulate my interpretation of participants' experiences. The influence of my past experience on my interpretation has been covered previously under the heading philosophical positioning (section 3.2.3).

The sampling techniques employed in this study, purposive sampling, cannot be regarded as representative of the general population, each member of the population does not have the same probability of being selected as every other member. Hence, there is increased risk that the findings do not represent the general population. Therefore, the expectation regarding external validity is low and one might conclude that the findings are subjective and potentially skewed.

The overall validity of any research is dependent on the definitional validity or construct validity. This refers to the similarity between the theoretical definition and the operational definition of a variable. The greater the degree of agreement between the two, the better the definitional validity. Research on workplace bullying has employed a variety of theoretical definitions, measurement methods and study designs (Einarsen et al., 2003; Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002; Zapf et al., 2003). However, due to the plethora of definitions of workplace bullying “there is reason to believe that the validity of research on workplace bullying is affected by this inconsistency” (Nielsen 2009, p.12). High definitional validity requires “good agreement between how the bullying concept is defined and how it is measured” (Nielsen 2009, p.11). When investigating the respondents' exposure to specific bullying behaviour, “respondents are usually presented with an inventory that includes various types of behaviour that may be called bullying if repeated” (Nielsen 2009, p.21).

To achieve high definitional validity participants were given an explicit theoretical definition and a comprehensive inventory of behaviours associated with workplace bullying in schools. Prior to commencing the interview participants were offered the list/questionnaire, drawn up by the researcher, consisting of examples of general negative behaviours documented in the literature. While the behaviours were not the focus of the study, as with many studies, when they were asked if they felt they were being bullied they were asked both in terms of general definition of bullying and also

in terms of characteristic behaviours associated with bullying. The given examples of behaviours associated with workplace bullying, documented in the literature, comprised the main elements that define workplace bullying and participants were simply asked to give a yes or no response.

3.7.1 Credibility and Authenticity

Silverman defines credibility as “the extent to which any research claim has been shown to be based on evidence” (Silverman 2009, p. 433). The evidence presented to support the findings from the data analysis process was crucial to the credibility and authenticity of the study. The researcher presented the data in an honest and transparent manner and sufficient data extracts were presented to support the findings that emerged. Analysis should include interview extracts “in the context in which they occurred”, including interviewer questions that prompted the response, as a means of aiding the reader’s assessment of reliability (Rapley 2001, p.319). The researcher engaged in ‘constant comparison’ while coding and there was continuous interplay between inductive and deductive thinking. Relationships were exposed, verified and then supported in the actual data. Themes were supported with quotes from participants, so that the study described significant individual events as well as the importance of the themes they shared. Smith et al (2009) contends that a good IPA study “will always have a considerable number of verbatim extracts from the participants’ material to support the argument being made” so that interpretations can be checked (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 180). The researcher endeavoured to provide enough detailed description to enable readers to construct their own meanings so that “knowledge is accumulated, perception refined, and meaning deepened” (S. B. Merriam 2009, p.227).

Detailed extracts from the data analysis process have been provided in Appendix 8. These demonstrate the process of coding as themes and sub-themes emerged and evolved. Additionally, they confirm the co-occurrence of codes, which demonstrates that conclusions were based on rigorous analysis. The researcher endeavoured to state clearly the claims being made, to identify the underpinning data for such claims and to illustrate and support each claim with rich, appropriate data extracts. Participant recordings, redacted transcript data, reflection documents, negative acts list and field

notes are stored in the researcher's home and can be presented to support findings. "Credibility pertains to the validation of findings and results" (Seale *et al.* 2006, p.377). It is also worth adding that the data was analysed using Max QDA software: the data file can be shared should future researchers wish to examine it in full.

Authenticity refers to how well the findings match reality: whether they have captured what really happens when a teacher attempts to deal with bullying through the recommended procedure. The researcher has made an effort to demonstrate that the study was conducted in "such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described" (Marshall 1989, p. 145). To this end respondent validation was put forward as a means of achieving authenticity. Transcripts were forwarded to individual participants for verification and reflective views were sought. Examples of the verification letter, participants' response and reflective comments have been included in Appendix 9 and 10. Having received positive feedback no transcript was amended in any way. The researcher endeavoured to provide a complete and balanced account of participants' multiple realities, in context and in so doing to provide sufficient information, to convince the reader of its credibility and authenticity.

Silverman (2013) contends that making the theoretical stance explicit and the research process transparent ensures that the study is independent of accidental circumstances of their production. The process of constructing meanings and generating findings in this study were clearly elucidated throughout the research process. One might conclude therefore that purposely and methodically pursuing and tracking relationships, such as those of targets of bullying and the consequences of seeking redress, aided efficient analysis and allows the data to speak for itself.

3.7.2 Transferability

Smith contends that the "issue is quality, not quantity, and given the complexity of most human phenomena, IPA studies usually benefit from a concentrated focus on a small number of cases" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 51). Transferability or generalizability of the findings refers to whether they can be replicated or generalised beyond the specific

research context and if they hold true for other cases that were not examined. Accordingly, if findings are not externally valid, they only apply to the cases examined, but Boeije argues that findings “only need to be valid for the case(s) under study” (Boeije 2009, p. 180). Therefore, the researcher does not claim to give an account of all cultures but gives a detailed account and describes the view from within a particular cultural frame (Smith *et al.* 2009). The dominant understanding is that qualitative research is context dependent and case dependent and that the focus is more on interpreting and illuminating: “Qualitative research does not pretend to be replicable” (Marshall 1989, p. 148).

In addition, Yardley suggests that transferability may be inappropriate criteria “if the purpose of the researcher is to offer just one of many possible interpretations of a phenomenon, or to study a situation which is in the process of changing” (Yardley 2000, p. 128). In the same way Thomas (Thomas 2009) is convinced that reliability is irrelevant in interpretative research because it would be impossible to expect two interviewers to emerge with the same transcripts. Similarly, Cohen perceived that we should not strive for uniformity: “two researchers who are studying a single setting may come up with very different findings but both sets of findings might be reliable” (Cohen *et al.* 2011, p. 202).

For Smith IPA is concerned with understanding how “particular experiential phenomena have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context” (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 29). Using this framework the use of this small, “purposively-selected and carefully situated sample”, demands a different way of establishing transferability or generalisation (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 29). Cronbach (1975) offered an alternative view, that we should think in terms of a “working hypotheses-hypotheses that reflect situation-specific conditions in a particular context” (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 225). Each participant offered a unique perspective on their own personal experience of bullying in their own individual school and the ‘working hypotheses’, though not conclusions, were considered to be accurate for this particular study.

In the final analysis, “every case is, in certain aspects, like all other cases, like some other cases, and like no other case” (Wolcott, 2005, p. 167 as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 228). In fact, there are only “interpretations of reality; in a sense the researcher offers his or her interpretation of someone else’s interpretation of reality” (Merriam 1995, p.54). Nevertheless, adequate, rich or thick descriptions facilitate transferability and provide the reader with a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings (Bryman 2008; Merriam 2009). Therefore, it is up to the reader to decide if what is learned from the description of contexts and findings, from the unique cases in this study, is useful in understanding their own or other particular circumstances “leaving the extent to which a study’s findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations” (Merriam 2009, p. 226).

3.7.3 Transparency

Transparency refers to how clearly the stages of the research process were outlined. The stages of this IPA study were clearly elucidated; the process of recruitment was described; the interview process was outlined, and the various stages of the data analysis were made explicit. However, Silverman (2007) articulated a distinction between demonstrating validity by simply showing that proper research procedures were followed, and by clarifying and justifying the researcher’s judgements. In the same way, for Yardley the criteria of transparency is achieved not only by “detailing every aspect of the data collection process” but also by openly reflecting on how the researcher’s worldview may have influenced and affected the research study (Yardley 2000, p. 222). The researcher’s motivation and the purpose of conducting this study were clearly elucidated from the outset. The purpose was not simply to tell participants’ stories but to put forth an account of what happened, their version of reality. Therefore, how the story was told was an important part of its productive value:

A convincing account exerts its effect partly (or sometimes wholly) by (re)creating a reality which readers recognise as meaningful to them. (Yardley 2000, p. 222)

3.7.4 Importance

The decisive criterion by which any piece of research must be judged is, arguably, its impact and utility. It is not sufficient to develop a sensitive,

thorough and plausible analysis, if the ideas propounded by the researcher have no influence on the beliefs or actions of anyone else. (Yardley 2000, p. 223)

The ultimate value of this research can only be assessed in terms of its initial objectives, its application and those for whom the findings are relevant. The aim of this study was to establish whether the present complaints procedure is sympathetic of teachers' complaints, is successful in dealing with efforts to report staff bullying and is fit for purpose. A good understanding of the actions of teachers who had made complaints of bullying and their satisfaction levels with the outcomes of their complaints could only be achieved by conducting a research study such as this.

Smith et al. acknowledge that "a compelling and convincing IPA study is likely to have required the researcher to have shown the degree of sensitivity to context described in order to produce it" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 180). Sensitivity throughout the research process was considered fundamental, a core concern, and the entire process was characterised by the ethic of concern for the individual. First, the choice of IPA as a research methodology was based on the fact that bullying is a sensitive topic. Next, interviewing targets of workplace bullying is extremely sensitive, the interview style employed displayed sensitivity, empathy, recognition of the power differential and it resulted in a rich description of participants' life experiences. Yardley affirms the view that "it is difficult to overcome the inevitable imbalance in power relations between those who are selected for involvement in the study and the 'expert' whose role as an academic usually entails initiating, controlling and materially benefiting from the process of research" (Yardley 2000, p. 221). Sensitivity to context was demonstrated in the establishment of access and rapport, and participants were assured of the valuable contribution they were making to the study. Participants expressed trust interacting with a fellow teacher and this resulted in a greater sharing of information. The rich data, evident in the volume of transcript material and the large number of verbatim extracts, is evidence of the success of the interview process.

Finally, sensitivity to context was also applied to the data produced; it continued throughout the analysis, and it is evident in the written report. The findings focus our

attention on the damaging effects of bullying and the possible changes in the procedures for dealing with bullying complaints so that schools can assess, build and maintain a bully-free workplace culture. This study contributes to the evolving discourse and seeks to improve the process of addressing complaints of bullying. The findings shared in this study provide information that may be used by teachers' unions, The Department of Education and school leaders to prevent, address and resolve workplace bullying in schools:

To have any effect on either the practice or the theory of a field, research studies must be rigorously conducted; they need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners, and other researchers. (Sharan B. Merriam 2009, p. 210)

3.7.5 Commitment and rigor

Personal commitment and dedication have been exhibited in the time invested in studying the phenomenon of workplace bullying in schools. This commitment has led to immersion in the relevant literature and in the development of competence and skill in the methods used. In addition, "with IPA there is an expectation that commitment will be shown in the degree of attentiveness to the participant during data collection and care with which the analysis of each case is carried out (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 181). Throughout the interview process participants were treated sensitively, listened to attentively and every effort was made to ensure participants were put at ease and made comfortable. The researcher's insights facilitated greater understanding, empathy and sympathy for the participants which allowed her to "gain entry into their world" (Marshall 1989, p. 174).

"Rigor refers to the thoroughness of the study, for example in terms of the appropriateness of the sample to the question in hand, the quality of the interview and the completeness of the analysis undertaken" (Smith *et al.* 2009, p. 181). In terms of selecting an appropriate sample, participants were carefully selected on the basis of their ability to answer the research question and on their ability to supply the information needed for a comprehensive analysis. Because of the large number of participants, quotes were judiciously selected as appropriate examples for each theme,

and these reflected the general consensus. The interview process was carried out in accordance with the principles outlined in section 3.5 and the resulting data contained not only a description of what was there, but also an interpretation. Ultimately, the data and emerging findings became saturated; the same themes were repeatedly emerging, and the researcher came to the stage where no new information was surfacing as data collection progressed (Merriam 2009).

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought and granted (reference number; 2013-06-17-EHS) for the study from the University of Limerick, Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 7). All interviews were conducted in accordance with the University of Limerick code of ethical standards. The researcher was vigilant and mindful of the principles that guide qualitative research such as treating people with respect, protecting them from undue harm and treating them fairly. Prior to taking part in the study an information document was forwarded to all participants for examination without pressure to participate (Appendix 4). This contained information about the focus of the study, the purpose and the content of the research, the participants' role in the study and the possible benefits and risks of taking part. They were also informed that their interviews would be recorded, transcribed and redacted by the researcher. They were informed that they would be given an opportunity to correct or discard any information that was incorrect or that could be related back to them. Following the transcription of interviews a verification letter, transcript and reflection sheet was forwarded to participants (Appendix 9 and 10).

Participation was strictly voluntary, and participants were given the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured and an outline of how the results would be used and disseminated was explained. Participants were given the option of seeking further information or clarification ahead of the interview. The use of locked, password protected e-mail accounts and a password protected laptop was employed. Transcriptions and recordings were saved on the password protected laptop. In doing all of the above the dignity of the participants and was observed, and their right to give consent, to be provided with sufficient information as a basis for consent, and for the consent to be voluntary were fully complied with.

3.9 Conclusion

“Quality refers to the transparency of the whole research process” (Seale et al. 2006, p.377). This chapter outlined the methodology employed in this study and it detailed the approach to the design and data collection. The stages of the phenomenological methodology were described, and the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach was explained. The data collection process was elucidated and its suitability to the research topic and question was demonstrated. The principles presented for assessing the quality of the research were addressed and illustrated in the light of the present study. Ethical considerations were taken into account and monitored throughout the data collection and analysis. The IPA approach to qualitative research was used in this study; it gave teachers an opportunity to have their voices heard as they relayed their experiences of workplace bullying and of their engagement with the agreed complaints procedures. The next chapter will present the analysis of the data which resulted from those voices and it will answer the research question posed in chapter 2.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in-depth in Chapter 3, the researcher's ontological, epistemological, methodological, critical, social constructionist and interpretivist viewpoints inform the methods and analysis. Having acknowledged and elucidated the significance of the researcher's own experience and how it has shaped her 'world view', a significant effort has been made to understand the subjective world of the participants' experience. Indeed, the researcher is aware that her perception of society and the world, as influenced by her own direct experience, could be subjective and biased. Therefore, the analysis are inevitably influenced by the researcher's 'worldview'.

This chapter presents the themes which emerged from the twenty-one interviews conducted and summarises the findings as they relate to the research questions. The accounts of a sample of teachers and principals (seven male and fifteen female) represent the wide spectrum of issues which pertain to workplace bullying within the teaching profession. This chapter highlights the experiences of teachers who attempted to deal with bullying by engaging with the recommended complaints process. As such, it focuses on participants' perceptions of the organisational response, the aspects of power evident in the response and the effectiveness of the complaints procedures in resolving the bullying issues they encountered. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings. The main research question aimed to illuminate the lived experience of teachers who endured workplace bullying, who attempted to resolve it by making informal or formal complaints and the organisational response to these complaints. The data provides an overview of the experiential realities of these teachers and of the challenges and issues associated with entering the process of seeking redress for workplace bullying and ill-treatment.

4.1.2 Emergent themes

Close analysis of the interview and email data of the twenty-two participants saw a number of themes and subthemes emerge. The following chapter presents these superordinate and subordinate themes, and elucidates the associated findings.

Figure 6 Themes and subthemes

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUBORDINATE THEMES
4.2 Pre-Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived barriers to engagement: Inertia • Lack of Support • Fear • Reluctance to call it bullying
4.3 Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a complaint • Seeking support • Bullying helpline • Employee Assistance Service: Counselling • Trade Union Support • The Teaching Council • Department of Education and Skills and the Inspectorate • Using the ‘Procedure to address staff difficulties’ • Leave
4.4 Response to complaint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived experience of teachers following a complaint • Response of Management: Principal • Principal as alleged bully • Procrastination: <i>‘Wear you down’</i> • Complaints ignored or dismissed • Counter complaints • Retaliation and reprisals • Orchestration: <i>‘A Lamb to the slaughter’</i> • Response to procedures for handling Grievances • Exclusion • Aggression • Bystanders • The mental health assessment
4.5 Consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The struggle to cope with bullying • Impaired performance • Financial Implications: <i>Trapped</i> • School Culture and Working Environment • Career Suicide • Career obstruction • Abuse of Power

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lived experience
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4.2 Pre-Action

The findings established that there was a stage prior to action, entitled pre-action, which explains the reluctance and delay associated with taking action. The first theme of pre-action is delineated as follows:

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUBORDINATE THEMES
Pre-Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived barriers to engagement: Inertia. • Lack of Support • Fear • Reluctance to call it bullying

4.2.1 Perceived barriers to engagement with the complaint procedures: Inertia

A recurrent theme regarding the issue of dealing with bullying was teachers' initial inability to comprehend what was happening to them. This made it almost impossible, or at very least significantly delayed their engagement with the complaint procedures. Research participants reported being so adversely affected by the initial experience that it resulted in an initial delay in apprehending the situation. They spoke of being traumatised and overwhelmed by the experience which left them feeling devalued and helpless. Almost all participants confirmed that initial inertia impeded their ability to deal with the bullying behaviour. As Betty, for example, observed:

“When you’re in the situation, I think you’re so paralysed almost, you know, and so stressed and, you know, it takes up so much headspace for you, and your life is so miserable”.

Sarah also reported that she simply did not know what was happening when it first started and while she did begin keeping notes at some point in the process...:

“...when it started, I was just basically thrown, and I didn’t know what to do”.

A key difficulty encountered by participants during the pre-action stage was the strain of being constantly subjected to bullying behaviour which drained their energy.

“Everything was being sucked out of me” (Patricia).

With energy and motivation depleted, they explained that all they could do was to “*turn up*” for school each day. Confused, disorientated and lethargic they found it difficult to summon the strength to pursue a complaint properly as “*you are so vulnerable you can’t deal with it*”. The state of mind portrayed by Sarah was echoed by all participants during the pre-action stage. She described herself as:

“Paranoid and pathetic. I was totally pathetic. I didn’t believe in myself. I didn’t think I could do anything right”

Betty described going through:

“...an emotional phase where you are so devastated. That’s what I felt I was. It was as if somebody pulled the rug out from underneath me. It was as if I was rudderless really”.

All participants were reluctant or even unwilling to address the problem with the bully. Betty regretted not being able to tackle the issue at the start and even though she was aware of the complaint procedure, she was unable to muster the courage to initiate a formal complaint at first.

“I would say with hindsight now, if I had the youth and the wisdom, I would say if I had the strength I have now, if I had it then, I certainly would address it”.

Like most participants Patricia felt she was powerless to complain. She admitted to being so traumatised that she felt unable to do her job:

“I do love teaching and I’d always loved it, and that now it was like everything was being sucked out of me”.

John also reported feeling “*paralysed*” by bullying:

“At times, it was crazy, but it was more the feeling of not being able to go to look for support”.

4.2.2 Lack of support as a deterrent to progressing a complaint

Lack of support from colleagues was a significant concern for all participants who expressed disappointment with the failure of colleagues to intervene during the initial stage of bullying. In some instances, lack of support acted as a deterrent to progressing a complaint. Bullying may have become the norm so participants believed that if ignoring bullying was the norm, they should too.

John felt that all his colleagues were fully aware of what was happening to him and referred to the isolation which arose from their lack of support and the feelings of being let down by his colleagues. He ultimately confided in the deputy principal who was a close friend. She declined to get involved and offered no support. This remains a source of disappointment for John.

Jane felt saddened that she had received no support from colleagues. Trust was lost and she “*never felt safe*” to report her mistreatment. Like other participants she stressed the need to create a “*safe*” environment so that bullying can be reported. All participants underscored the need to facilitate the reporting of bullying by creating a “*telling environment*”. However, Jane was not optimistic that this would be possible because:

“... *it takes a very brave person to do that because you find a lot want to turn a blind eye and say, ‘Look, it’s nothing to do with me’ and [they] won’t do anything*”.

While participants reported that silent support was offered by some colleagues, they cited fear of becoming the next target as the main reason for their colleagues’ reluctance to intervene. Colleagues expressed a desire to take more action to help but were unsure what or how to do so safely. A number of witnesses to bullying incidents admitted to being afraid to do or say anything that might jeopardize their own position or draw attention to themselves within the school. Tina explained “*there was cultures of ‘keep my head down’ or I will get it*”. While participants appreciated the complexities of the situation and did not want colleagues to suffer on their account, they nonetheless felt disillusioned and abandoned by collegial inaction and lack of support.

Ben knew he couldn't garner support amongst colleagues, the bullies were a powerful group and so felt it was futile to make a complaint. He had been subjected to mobbing by a group of staff members and, while a number of staff witnesses confided that they abhorred the way he was being treated, they admitted that they were afraid to openly assist him or to show overt support. He reported that he had good relationships with most staff members:

"They have actually confided in me and said, 'I don't know how you put up with them'".

Both Frank and Ben recounted how they had actively discouraged colleagues from openly befriending them:

"Now one or two of the new staff were quite good and they would be nice and chatty, but sometimes they would be a bit [distant] ... But then again, I would find myself being distant to people as well because you wouldn't like them to be seen to be talking to you because you know that it's going to affect them down the road" (Ben).

When the INTO union warned Ben that he would require witnesses should he choose to go down the formal complaint route, he realised it would be pointless to instigate any such proceedings:

"You need a witness. I knew I couldn't get any witnesses. I mean, it's just people were either afraid of them or else with them".

Moreover, Ben expressed unease at putting his friends in such an awkward position. In asking them for explicit support, he felt he would be responsible for any subsequent adverse consequences. Ben was pessimistic and had lost all hope of resolving matters in his school:

"I don't know which felt worse; the personal stuff, or the professional stuff. Because I knew I wasn't going to get anywhere, and I never will get anywhere at this stage".

Like Ben, Jane believed the bullying would merely escalate within her school if she persisted with a complaint. She cited a lack of support amongst colleagues as the main deterrent:

"People would close ranks on you. They already had closed ranks when it suited them against the principal".

She maintained that asking colleagues to give evidence in support of her complaint would be tantamount to 'taking sides' as giving evidence for or against colleagues

would inevitably lead to further conflict and division amongst staff. Jane was convinced that if compelled to participate in progressing her complaint, her colleagues would not support her.

Sarah likewise attributed hesitation to pursue her complaint to a perceived lack of collegial support. As she clarified:

“The only way that I would speak up is if there are numbers, you know, strong in numbers. If a lot of people complained ... Do you know, people talk but they don’t [complain]. So not everybody would, because everybody is protecting their own job. It’s an atmosphere of fear”.

While Sarah felt sure her colleagues were all aware of what was happening in her school, she was equally sure they would not publicly support her.

The participants largely concurred that staff wanted to avoid confrontation at all costs, they were afraid of drawing attention to themselves, of standing out and then becoming a target. They referred to the atmosphere of fear that prevailed in schools where bullying prevailed.

Lack of support was particularly apparent in Betty’s interview data. She too attested a lack of collegial support was due to a climate of fear.

“It is that culture of fear and that nobody will back you up”.

4.2.3 Fear

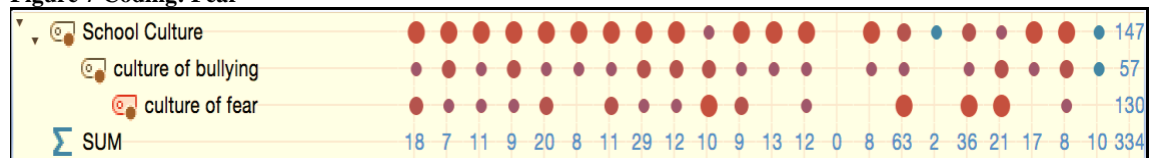
Along with lack of support, participants alluded to fear as a characteristic or distinctive emotion in deterring people from initiating and pursuing complaints of bullying. Participants reported that the main concern involved a fear of making matters worse. Many participants were afraid of being seen as weak or of being branded a troublemaker. Moreover, fear and confusion in relation to the complaint procedure, particularly in relation to engaging with the formal stages, was evident in the interview data, and many participants reported anxieties around the prospect of losing their position, job, and/or livelihood through potential exclusion from alternative employment.

Fear of not being believed or of having their concerns or complaints dismissed were also found to be significant concerns. A predominant issue amongst participants was

the fear of exacerbating matters, with participants unwilling to be held responsible for the further deterioration of an already toxic environment. Figure 8 illustrates the coded segments related to school culture in terms of bullying and fear.

The size of each dot corresponds to the number of coded segments for each participant. Of 334 coded segments in total, 130 coded segments were related to fear alone.

Figure 7 Coding: Fear



Clodagh described how

“... everyone has been afraid to make a formal complaint”.

When Clodagh sought advice from her union representative, the response was both revealing and disheartening:

“Clodagh, you know if you want to make a complaint, I will go and support you. But I’m very reluctant to do it... because I have that SNA in my classroom. I don’t really want to get involved”.

A common thread linking participant accounts was trepidation due to the manifest myths and misconceptions which surround the concept of bullying. Such fears translated into a reluctance to complain or to report bullying. Ben cited these challenges and he pointed out that:

“There always has been that perception that a person who is a target of bullying is a weak person or oversensitive”.

Rita, a school principal, agreed it was difficult to complain because:

“...there is this perception out there that, you know, people who are bullied are weak and they are meek, and they are not able to stand up for themselves”.

Participants were afraid that they, rather than the bully, would be considered the problem. Helen asked:

“Do you ever think that when people are involved in anti-bullying they are seen as trouble maker?”.

The participants concurred that complainants are often derided as oversensitive, troublesome or difficult people, as suffering from some form of mental illness, personality disorder, or particularly predisposed to interpersonal difficulties and conflict. Helen reported that when, in the presence of the principal, she asked her bully if she would agree to mediation:

“She just looked at the principal as if to say: ‘What is she talking about? What could a mediator do?’ I really felt as if this is all in my head. She doesn’t accept that there’s an issue. The Principal doesn’t think there’s an issue. I just felt that it was like as if they were suggesting that I was creating a problem; that they didn’t have one”.

These archetypes are reflected in participants’ difficulty with using the term ‘bullying’. However, participants agreed that this does a disservice to individuals whose jobs, careers, and health, are at risk as a consequence of bullying.

Teachers were afraid they would be considered unsuited to the normal stresses and realities of busy school life and without a supportive voice they were beginning to lose confidence in themselves. When John confronted his principal about the problem of bullying she referred him to MedMark for:

“...counselling or whatever. That she made a referral; this was her [saying], ‘I want to help you’ and it was so completely false of her. So, she was undermining, and she was able to say to the Board, ‘Well, I’m taking this step - I have concerns for John’s health, [his] wellbeing, [his] mental health’, whatever way she put it. So, she made a referral!”.

John maintained that this referral amounted to blaming him for the conflict, and intimated that he was unable to cope with the normal stressors of teaching. The role of Medmark will be discussed in more detail further on in this chapter.

Sarah shared the story of how she and her young family had come from abroad to teach in Ireland. On experiencing bullying, she explained she was initially afraid to complain as she was financially insecure and her emigration status had yet to be confirmed. She

was afraid of being branded a troublemaker and of being unable to secure an alternative post. Despite listing the daily catalogue of abusive behaviours she had been subjected to, she remained apprehensive about making a complaint. She detailed the numerous minor incidents, but reflected:

“If you make something of it, you’re childish...I just couldn’t report them. I was just too afraid. I had too much to lose. We bought a house. We have a mortgage. We have responsibilities...at that stage it was difficult to get a post everywhere. I couldn’t run. I had to stay”.

She attested that other teachers had left the school due to the entrenched bullying but speculated that those staff members:

“...could have afforded it, or, maybe or they just didn’t have as much to lose as I had”.

Sensing her fear, and having witnessed the bullying she was forced to endure over a number of years, her colleagues finally offered to “make an anonymous call to the INTO” but Sarah was just “too afraid”. She believed that if she pursued her complaint, particularly involving an outside agency, she “couldn’t have stayed there”.

She was convinced that this could jeopardize her residency status, which in turn, would have impacted on her children’s future. In weighing up all she had to lose, she decided that if she was to remain in her post and the country, she simply could not risk pursuing a formal complaint. For her the only feasible option was to endure the bullying. Sarah also admitted that the impact of the persistent targeted bullying on her self-esteem had eroded her confidence to protest her treatment:

“Confidence [was] already flat on the ground”.

Jane also spoke of how fearful she was to pursue a complaint:

“...because again you have to go in every day, you have to work with these people. And people do get their revenge on you”.

Clodagh also speculated that nobody had complained about the SNA in her school;

“...well, probably because everyone has been afraid to make a formal complaint”.

One teacher succinctly captured the sentiment expressed by all participants:

“It’s a culture of fear really. And I think that’s what they play on; is that culture of fear and that nobody will back you. And then how difficult it is to actually initiate something and see it through”.

There was much anxiety regarding the area of medical referral and participants were scared of the prospect of medical assessments.

4.2.4 Reluctance to call it 'bullying'

Even though all participants reported being initially uncertain, through discussions with friends and family, they gradually became more aware that they were being bullied. Even then, they experienced inertia and reported an unwillingness to tackle the problem or even name the issue as *'bullying'*. Bullying had started with subtle bullying behaviours, which were misinterpreted by participants, and by the time they realised what was happening some had become so accustomed to the behaviour that they thought it too late to complain. For professional educators, particularly men, to admit to being bullied was particularly problematic and tainted with perceptions of humiliation and the embarrassment. While all participants agreed that it was by no means a trivial matter, they nonetheless felt certain they would be considered "*a troublemaker*", "*childish*" or "*petty*" if they complained:

"I think one of the reasons that you don't make a complaint about bullying is, it's very hard to make it sound un-petty. It's hard to make it sound as important as it is" (Jane).

For this reason, Jane, an experienced teacher, attempted to broach the problem at a staff meeting. She explained how she chose her words carefully:

"I decided not to use the 'bullying' word. I would go for excluded".

Laura also related her experience of trying to address the problem of bullying informally. Her account emphasises a reluctance to use the proper term. When she eventually found the courage to confront her aggressor, she recalled:

"One day I had a word with her because I had had enough. It was a Friday morning. I just went into her and I said, 'Look...' I can't even remember what I said. I didn't say, 'bullying' anyway. I definitely didn't say that!"

Laura became visibly upset when recalling how she had confronted her bully. She found it difficult to explain exactly why it was so hard to use the word *'bullying'*, but described how she had rehearsed what to say whilst deliberately "*not mentioning the 'B' word*". Laura described the reaction she encountered:

'She shouted at me as if I was a child. She said, 'How dare you? Are you accusing me of bullying?' I said, 'No'. Even though I was, I said, No''.

Most participants attributed the reluctance to use the term *'bullying'* to its typical association with children. In other words, bullying is something that adults do not do, or something that does not happen to adults. Even in her own mind Laura was convinced that she was too old to be bullied:

"Okay, I'm over eighteen now. I should be over this. I should not be bullied anymore. I should be old enough to deal with this. You know, that's exactly what I felt. I was like, how could I... [be bullied]? Maybe I felt like a child."

All participants expressed embarrassment and shame at being a target of bullying; feelings they attributed to the numerous taboos and misconceptions that surround the phenomenon. According to Úna;

"There are numerous people I know that have been bullied in the profession, and what they do, is they do what I do: keep your head down and keep going as long as we can".

4.3 Action

The objective of this study was to conduct research so as to understand the experiential realities of teachers who had encountered bullying behaviours in the workplace and had attempted to deal with the problem through the various informal channels or prescribed complaints procedures. The data provided an overview of the issues associated with entering the process of seeking redress for workplace bullying and ill-treatment.

This section presents the data which emerged when the researcher examined the victims' journeys down the different avenues of complaint. This section also focuses on the reaction of the targeted teachers to management responses.

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUBORDINATE THEMES
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a complaint • Seeking support • Bullying helpline • Employee Assistance Service: Counselling • Seeking Trade Union Support • Contacting the Teaching Council • Seeking the involvement of the DES inspector • Using the ‘Procedure to address staff difficulties’ • Leave

4.3.1 Making a complaint

All participants in this study sought action of some kind by engaging with the recommended complaints procedure. They engaged in Stage 1 by deciding to address the issue of workplace bullying in their schools. A number of teachers withdrew from the procedure at Stage 2 citing futility and despair. Those who abandoned the complaint procedure at an early stage did so for a number of reasons: they believed the seniority or positional power of the bully would place him/her at an unfair advantage; their complaints continued to be ignored so they saw no point in engaging further with the procedure; and lastly, they believed the bullying would escalate if they proceeded any further.

As the table below illustrates, more teachers abandoned the procedure at Stage 3 even though their problem remained unresolved. This stage involved addressing the problem with the principal. Only a third of teachers persevered to Stage 4.

In general, participants felt that because the principal is a member of the BOM, it is most likely that he/she has forged alliances with fellow board members. Participants perceived this as creating a further power imbalance and an inequitable setting for Stage 3 and 4 of the process. The principal, as a member of the board, creates the prospect of

prejudicial influence and the likelihood of influencing any board decision. This was a significant factor in most cases, particularly those involving the principal as the alleged bully. Participants described feeling despondent and pessimistic should their complaint be eventually referred to the board as they could not envisage them taking action against a fellow board member. They therefore anticipated an outcome that would inevitably cause a further deterioration in relations. Participants were also conscious of the threat of disciplinary procedures being taken against a complainant. Many participants agreed that if stages 1,2 or 3, which involve addressing the problem with the person or seeking the intervention of the principal/chairperson, yielded no success, there was little point in proceeding to Stage 4. In effect, the inaction of those in authority during the initial stages of the process acted as a direct deterrent. This accounts for the large proportion of participants who dropped out of the process at Stages 2 and 3.

Figure 8 Complaint discontinues stage

Complaint Procedure	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
	Decide to address the matter	Informally address the problem	Address the matter with the principal or chairperson	Board of management
No. Participants	22	3	12	7

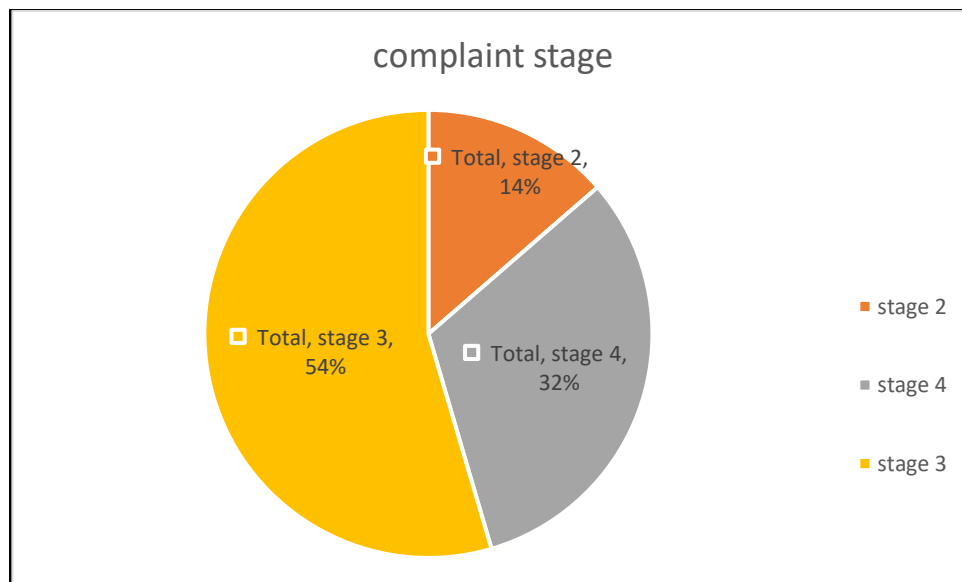


Figure 9 Attrition at stages of complaint

In general, participants found that principals and chairpersons tended to take the passive approach, avoiding the issue rather than making any attempt to deal with it. In fact, Stage 3 responses revealed numerous instances of management not complying with agreed procedures which resulted in further inertia. Eleanor tried several avenues to report bullying, to enlist assistance, and to gain support:

“I informed the chairman at the time, the school principal, the local inspector and [personnel] from the LRC to the type of negative behaviour I was exposed to. I was forced to soak up this unacceptable, inappropriate, passive-aggressive behaviour for a year, as none of the parties I alerted, chose to even acknowledge my email, or that I didn't feel safe”.

Participants perceived that those charged with handling complaints lacked awareness of workplace bullying, were not equipped to handle the problem and were not committed to resolving the problem. There was also the perception that the schools' reputation was to be protected and that principals and chairpersons were reluctant to confront the reality that unacceptable behaviour was taking place in their school. Due to executive-level unwillingness or hesitation to tackle the problem head-on, bullying actually became normalised and deemed acceptable. Sarah explained that she did not know what to do:

“I took these things home because there's nobody else to turn to. And the staff is crippled. The staff didn't know what to do, and everybody was just letting this carry on”.

Participants' accounts reveal that the current procedures for addressing workplace bullying are both unsupportive and inadequate and that implementation of procedures is variable. Úna was particularly scathing of the complaints procedure:

“I read about it, and I said, do you know, it's a joke, a holy joke, a joke! Because you have to go back to the person who was bullying you. So what are they going to do about it, you know? So, it's a joke, a total joke. Yeah, I wouldn't even go there. Anybody in their right mind wouldn't go there because you know what? It makes no common sense to me, you know”.

Having failed to resolve matters through the complaints procedure, participants withdrew, at various stages, concluding that the only way to deal with bullying was either to leave or carry on teaching as best they could. This meant enduring a distressing and unpleasant working environment. Maria took this approach, although she

considered it detrimental to the school, the staff, the students, and destructive to the individual because teachers were simply “*surviving*”. She asserted that schools need to change the practice of:

“...where you don’t talk about it and the problem might go away...I don’t think it ever does unless it’s dealt with. I think the only way to make it go away is to bring it out in the open and talk about it”.

Unfortunately, the subject is never openly discussed amongst the staff. Rita claimed that the teachers in her school had collectively decided to do nothing:

“We’re just going to keep our mouths shut. We’re going to say nothing. But that still didn’t work. It still wasn’t good enough, no matter what approach we adopted”.

Helen referred to this strategy as the ‘*do-nothing approach*’. When she made a complaint, her principal initially offered to arrange mediation but subsequently changed his mind and decided against it. She described how his initial response was to convene both parties to discuss matters, which ultimately ended in further conflict and a deterioration in the situation. However, Helen maintained this was because the principal refused to “*become involved*”. Her persistent requests for mediation or intervention of any kind were met with resistance. Eventually he agreed to facilitate an open discussion where the staff could thrash out issues and attempt to resolve the problem.

Helen recalls being so worried and stressed prior to this staff meeting that she even asked family members to “*say prayers*” for her. Yet she felt even more let down and betrayed when the matter “*wasn’t even mentioned*” at the meeting. Her principal simply refused to deal with the bullying and with her complaint. In fact, it was clear to Helen that the more she complained the more he blamed her for the situation. For Helen, the principal’s failure to act, gave rise to feelings of self-doubt and she began to question her perception of reality of what was happening. A sense of futility accompanied by the loss of confidence in both the procedure and in herself.

Similarly, Betty said she made a complaint to both her principal and the chairperson:

“...but the Principal refused to deal with it really. I should have, I suppose, gone further, but she just refused [to accept and act on the complaint]”.

Although she now regrets not progressing her complaint to the next stage, at the time Betty was so traumatised that she too doubted her own memory and she could see no

point in going further with her complaint when neither the principal nor the chairperson were prepared to act.

Úna went so far as to notify the chairperson of her principal's unprofessional behaviour but her concerns were ignored. She too was pessimistic:

“Why should I bother because do you know what? I'd probably be stirring up a storm in a teacup for myself, because at the end of the day, where would I get? If I didn't get anywhere with that [initial complaint], I certainly won't get anywhere with this, you know”.

4.3.2 Seeking Support

Support or lack thereof was a theme that continued into the Action Stage once the complaint had been made. Participants described the loneliness and desolation associated with being the target of workplace bullying, and all participants emphasised the importance of taking the initiative to find someone to confide in once the individual is ready to take action. Some level of support is clearly essential:

“Support is huge. Of course it is. That you feel you're not isolated and alone in it” (Betty).

In particular, targets sought support from within the school community, from sympathetic colleagues, and from the principal in cases where the alleged bully was not the principal. In fact, the data suggested that support from *“even one staff member”* could make a significant difference to the target:

“I actually thought I would have a breakdown that year and I could find nobody except somebody in a different school who would support me and help me on it” (John).

Many participants stressed the value of social support in the workplace. It was seen as the best way to resist and survive workplace bullying, and many felt it would have helped them to cope. Participants commended the support available to children following the introduction of the new anti-bullying circular, but observed that, even though adults experience similar effects such as anxiety and stress, the same supports are not available:

“The fact that there is so much support now and regulation for the bullying of children, it is unrealistic that there isn’t an equal code [for teachers]” (Maria).

Betty clearly considered in-school support as the most important element in any school approach:

“If you could find somebody who would [provide support]. You need somebody, I think that is first and foremost”.

Sarah believed that even a small degree of support would have been of a major benefit in that *“we just need one person to tell”*, while Tina suggested that although many teachers just suffer in silence, *“you have to tell somebody, and you need to report it”*. However, as in most cases, Tina was dismayed that *“nobody ever tried to help me, no.”* Tina took the view that the *“bystander”* is key to resolving workplace bullying since she regarded collegial inaction as tacitly endorsing the negative behavior:

“If she [the bully] didn’t have the others [staff] to keep flying her flag, she couldn’t have kept going with it”.

Clodagh expounded on the concept of collegial support. She maintained that it was not enough that her school colleagues had tried to help her but that the principal needed to openly support an anti-bullying environment and be willing to act on a complaint:

“They tried to support me, but basically, their attitude is that he’s [principal] not interested”.

Having witnessed bullying behavior Claire tried to help her colleague by speaking up but she became a target herself:

“Well, I spoke to the deputy principal, and because I spoke to her and because we [Claire and the target] are seen and heard laughing, I have been isolated and I think that [reporting] has contributed to my isolation as well”.

Even though all participants considered collegial support most important, Betty deemed the support of qualified professionals to be essential:

“Support is huge. Of course, it is. That you feel you’re not isolated and alone in it. But at the same time, I wouldn’t feel myself that I am qualified to give the best possible support. Like, I know I would give empathy and have great empathy and would support and would do practical things to try and ease the burden for that person. But I do feel that I wouldn’t have the expertise, and that in situations like that, expertise is needed”.

Sadly, participants confirmed that even when they took action school authorities and colleagues provided little or no support. They elaborated that the lack of empathic listening added to their sense of isolation:

“The job is difficult enough and then you’d feel that you’re just not being supported” (Clodagh).

Though targets did not blame anyone in particular and understood those not wanting to get involved, they were disappointed with colleagues’ inaction. Having taken action themselves, the general consensus was that they expected more from colleagues and management. Participants provided accounts of the harmful effects of bullying, particularly in terms of their own physical and emotional wellbeing. Accounts also confirm that bullying is destructive in terms of relationships amongst the whole staff. For many schools this resulted in *“a kind of a division in the staff”*. Participants attested to the deterioration of staff relationships with no effort being made to resolve issues or to restore harmony. Across the participants’ schools the approach taken seemed to be one of ignoring the problem, and hoping that it would just *“go away”*.

Participants attributed the lack of involvement by *“others”* (bystanders) to a general belief that matters would resolve of their own accord or that acceptance of bullying behaviour in the school led teachers to fear becoming the next target should they intervene. In any event, it is clear that bystander behaviour led to a self-perpetuating bullying culture within the schools. John realised that this was why his colleagues and friend, the deputy principal, could not openly support him:

“She lived in fear of her [the principal/bully], and she still does. Like, it’s pathetic. It’s pathetic”.

Some participants felt their colleagues would be punished or isolated if they provided support. Ben was saddened that one of the younger teachers who had been very sociable and friendly to him, *“suffered a bit, I think, because she got on very well with me”*, while Frank disclosed that he actively discouraged other teachers from associating with him because he feared they would become targeted.

Interview data reveals that the overall participant experience was that workplace bullying created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, created division amongst staff, produced a toxic and hostile work environment, and increased teachers' desire to leave. The data also confirms that those who witnessed bullying were reluctant to intervene and unsure of what to do. As Claire warned:

"...either you learn to become resilient, or you end up, you know, very seriously ill - heart attack, stroke, cancer".

4.3.3 Bullying helpline

Having made a complaint, and in an effort to obtain support and advice, several participants contacted an anti-bullying helpline. However, actual support was scarce. Claire was actually advised not to pursue her complaint because *"there is nowhere to go with it"*. Many participants who contacted this helpline expressed dissatisfaction and disappointment at the helpline position that there is no solution to adult bullying in schools, when they had expected direction on how to address and resist bullying and information on how to get support and cope with the effects. To build up the courage to contact a helpline and then be told that there is no help to be had, left teachers feeling disillusioned and let down.

4.3.4 Employee Assistance Service (EAS): Counselling

Finding bullying and the process of seeking redress challenging, all participants availed of counselling. Accounts reveal that this was effective in helping teachers deal with the negative effects of bullying. Helen, who availed of a number of counselling sessions, outlined the main benefit:

"It does help to talk. It really helps to talk to someone who has been through it. Being believed is the biggest part, it really is".

Helen said that the counsellor revealed that bullying is *"very common"*, she regularly sees teacher targets.

Mona also found counselling hugely beneficial as she felt she could talk freely and openly in a way that was not possible with family members or friends:

“I had somewhere to off-load and it wasn’t another teacher. And it was a listener and it was more than a chat with a pal or a chat with someone else who was neither your friend nor a teacher”.

Tina agreed she had acquired lifelong skills from attending counselling:

“I would certainly say that the skills that I got; I know that I applied them very much to rebuilding my personal life”.

However, participants considered the limited availability of counselling, under the EAS (formerly CareCall), to be insufficient. Claire complimented the quality of counselling provided, but highlighted the inadequacy of the limited provision, stressing the length of time and the number of counselling sessions required for her to see the benefits:

“I can put all my counselling, the skills I have hopefully learned, into play by standing up and saying, ‘No’. And I’m two years post my final [session], my last counselling, so it has taken that long for this to come, and I think it’s an opportunity to see how far I have come as well. And not that I’m ‘blasé’ about it. I am afraid [of bullying] but it’s not going to paralyze me”.

Participants confirmed they were reluctant to seek additional sessions since this would require approval from the BOM. Having availed of five initial sessions, Ben explained he was required:

“...to go in front of the board and the principal to say why you needed more, and I wasn’t going to do that”.

Ben further revealed that he had no option but to withdraw his request when his board attempted to coerce him into disclosing the purpose of the counselling and threatened *“we won’t sanction it unless you tell us”*. Anthony also criticised the inadequate number of sessions permitted. In addition, he expressed certain misgivings about the counsellors who he claimed are merely contracted by the union, and as such *“not specifically dealing with teachers [who have been bullied]”*. A number of participants were suspicious of the EAS and admitted they were reluctant to avail of the counselling provided by them, as, like Jane, who *“just didn’t trust it, they were anxious about the level of confidentiality.*

Eleanor recounted her experience:

“I applied for counselling because I was stressed at work and the Board informed me that they would support me. And I said I’m asking now for support because I need it,

it's going on too long and I need support. And they said, no, they wouldn't give me the time off [to attend counselling], they wouldn't pay for it, and they then broadcasted it all".

Nonetheless Eleanor found counselling very helpful, and a necessary support for her and for her family. She has therefore continued with private counselling but she admits: *"Nothing can alleviate this [bullying]..."*.

Rita also chose to avail of private counselling:

"I went to CBT, to a psychotherapist as well for six sessions and he diagnosed me with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and he gave me lots of different things [strategies]".

The majority of participants viewed the provision of counselling as a necessary and fundamental support. John justified his particular need for assistance:

"I've had years of counselling; all the years that I was struggling. I've had surgery, which was stress related. It put strain on our family and my marriage...".

In seeking to identify the supports available to teachers who have suffered the negative impacts of bullying, the data indicated that the provision of direct support through counselling, as part of the EAS, provides some degree of support to teachers and helps ameliorate certain effects of bullying. However, counselling under the EAS is limited to six sessions which is wholly insufficient. Moreover, participants acknowledged that counselling merely assists targets in coping with the negative effects of bullying, it does not address the problem.

4.3.5 Seeking Trade Union Support

Almost all participants took action by contacting their trade union, the Irish National Teachers Association (INTO). All except one conveyed disappointment and dissatisfaction with the advice and support offered. Most participants indicated that INTO lacked the authority and determination to force boards to deal with complaints of bullying or to comply with proper procedures. Some participants believed that the INTO, like management, wanted to preserve the reputation of the profession.

Rita, a principal, went further in contending that at times INTO clearly sided with the BOM. Rita attested that on contacting INTO she was advised to keep a record, which

she duly did. At a later stage when she sought INTO assistance to prevent what she considered “*an untoward meeting*” which her chairperson had convened, she was informed that “*technically she [the chairperson] can say that*”, but upon further investigation and scrutiny of the matter Rita believed she was given improper advice, and that, “*technically, she bloody couldn't*”. Rita said her chairperson was “*a law unto herself*” and “*obviously wasn't afraid of INTO intervention - not a bit*”. Many participants echoed this sentiment declaring that those in authority appear to *above the law*. They pointed out that the absence of an external review mechanism allows principals and chairpersons to act with impunity.

When Rita sought to discuss the issue openly with her staff the chairperson evaded it:

“I brought up the topic of bullying with her and the Board. I put it on agendas, but she managed to avoid it and manoeuvre out of it”.

Rita felt she had tried everything but her efforts were futile. She concluded that INTO simply did not know how to deal with bullying within the profession.

Having failed to compel her chairperson to act in accordance with agreed procedures and to resolve issues she recalled the union's advice as:

“Listen, you might have to face up to the fact that your chairperson is a bitch and get on with it. It happens. That happened to a lot of people. You're just going to have to get on with it”.

Rita said she was frustrated and disappointed with the union response:

“Who can do anything about this [bullying] if the INTO can't?”

She was also concerned about the role of the union:

“This was bullying, and it was micro-managing and they [INTO], just couldn't be bothered I think, taking it seriously. They don't want the hassle because it's happening everywhere, and they don't want the hassle of dealing with all these cases. I think the INTO have too much involvement with education and professional development, INTO learning. They should be looking at conditions of employment”.

Participants suggested that the union should move to increase recognition of the problem, survey members to establish prevalence, and provide training and resources on workplace bullying. Participants who had been bullied by their principals expressed the unfeasibility of the union fairly representing both sides in the dispute. Others

pointed out that it was unfair that principals and deputy principals could also enlist the help of the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN). Participants who were principals found the IPPN more supportive and robust in defence of its members than the INTO. There was general consensus that INTO should do more to deliver support, advice, and to raise awareness about workplace bullying:

“They need to take on their proper role and take the whole body out of the area of learning and online initiatives in English, the curriculum of math, and put all that money and time into looking at, not just bullying, but staff relations, interpersonal skills for teachers and staff members and board members” (Rita).

Betty observed that INTO should be more concerned with improving working conditions, resolving teacher issues, and providing support for targets. Moreover, she detected a loss of direction on the part of INTO and felt that they were not fulfilling their proper role as a union. All participants were disillusioned with the INTO’s approach to resolving workplace bullying problems and with the lack of supervision of agreed procedures. One participant commented, *“I think they don’t see themselves as a trade union”*. Other comments reflected this perception of a loss of direction with the INTO:

“So far removed from the ordinary mundane issues of teaching that they don’t really take on the ordinary teachers’ issues. So, I myself, I never had any great faith, I think they are just too much in cahoots maybe with the government and with the Department and they never saw themselves, I think, as the Jim Larkin style old-fashioned trade union”.

When Anthony contacted INTO he was informed, *“they don’t take any calls on a Friday from teachers”*. When he eventually managed to speak to an official, *“all I got from the union was criticism”* about what he had said and done. Anthony expressed extreme disappointment with their attitude and position as he had been a member of the union for over twenty years:

“...paying my subscription, and the one time I look for advice, the answer I get is, sorry, we don’t take calls on a Friday”.

Having subsequently spoken to three different union representatives he was forced to conclude:

“...in the end of the day, what I’m being told is, basically you’re on your own anyway”.

Union advice

According to participants the standard union advice was to keep records:

“They advised me to write everything down and the impact it was having on me... I have a bag full of paperwork this high [gesture]. I kept an account of everything that happened to me in that school and I have forgotten a lot of it. If I look back, I go ‘Oh my God, I can’t believe they did that. I can’t believe she said that. I can’t believe...’ I would say it was on a daily basis” (Ben).

Ben recalled the experience of keeping a log, and reflected on the lack of support, the uselessness of the advice, and the waste of time writing copious notes. He concluded that the notes only serve to remind him of how little things have changed for him. Similarly, when Úna sought the support and assistance of her principal and subsequently, her union, she was very disappointed with the response:

“My principal was prepared to do nothing about it. So I mean I had asked her, and she said that was it, full stop. I decided I would consult the INTO because, I mean, if she’s not going to help me, I’ll go to the INTO. The INTO didn’t help me, and I said, do you know, where do I go? Nobody knows what to do. And I actually think sometimes there’s a lack of information”.

Like Rita, Úna says she was advised:

“...to just put up with it. Basically, to put up with it. Like, it’s part of your job, so to get on with the job”.

Prior to this Úna had expressed confidence in INTO and had fully expected them to deal with her complaints in a diligent and objective manner. She was deeply disappointed, and her frustration is still evident:

“I felt really like saying, ‘Is this the INTO that I’m a member of and I’m paying money every month out of my cheque? I would prefer to keep that myself and get a foreign holiday out of it and I’d be better off”.

John, the only participant who was positive about the INTO, was forced to resign for the sake of his health.

Teachers in this study reported extremely low satisfaction levels with the INTO. Many participants expressed disillusionment with the union’s apparent inability to deal with workplace bullying. Furthermore, they were disappointed with their lacklustre attempts to compel boards to implement and abide by agreed procedures. Many participants

maintained they had abandoned complaints because of the lack of union support as well as their general ineffectiveness. Negative comments ranged from “*Well, I haven’t much faith in them as a union really*” to “*they are useless*”. Frank was particularly forthright in his condemnation:

“Do you really want to know what I think of the INTO? They’re as much use as tits on a bull... You know, they are so fucking useless! You really have to put the gun to their head before they will do anything”.

The complaints procedure agreed by the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association (CPSMA) and INTO to address bullying and harassment in the workplace specifically recognises targets’ fear and need for support to address the problem. Therefore, from participants’ perspective the INTO has an explicit duty of care and a responsibility to support victims of bullying. However, the testimony of most participants in this study supports the perception that the INTO has failed in this duty. Throughout the interview process participants continuously referred to their appeals for INTO involvement in what they consider the “*legitimate role*” of their union; namely, safeguarding its members.

4.3.6 The Teaching Council

Only one participant, Eleanor, attempted to contact the Teaching Council for advice and support. She reported: “*I didn’t receive a reply*” (Eleanor).

4.3.7 Seeking the involvement of the DES Inspector

Participants agreed that inspectors were aware that bullying was taking place in schools but were powerless to intervene. For this reason, they saw little point in involving the inspector:

“She was a very astute lady, but I know she’s only passing through. Do you know, she can’t, she did her best? She came in and she saw everything. She knew exactly” (Rita).

Úna reported that the inspector queried how she, as deputy principal, had no role in the school decision-making.

“After our WSE, the inspector said to me, I want to see you taking a more active part in the school”.

But as Úna explained:

“...there’s no point in an inspector saying that to me unless he says this to the people that are not including you in the school (principal)”.

Nonetheless, she was convinced that the inspector:

“...picked up on that (bullying), that basically the school is being run as a kind of little fiefdom by a certain person”.

Tina believed the authoritarian approach adopted by her principal actually deterred inspectors from even visiting the school:

“The inspector didn’t come inside our door for nearly twenty years because she [principal] didn’t abide by regulations. She made her own rules and she kept the Department out by being ultimately very aggressive”.

When management constantly ignored her complaints, Eleanor, sought the assistance of the DES inspector. She availed of the opportunity to bring her concerns to the attention of the inspector during an incidental visit. She attested that he immediately acknowledged the stress she was under so that when he questioned her about the copious notes she had compiled, she explained:

“I don’t know from one day to the next when I come into the school what am I going to be accused of, so I need to cover my back”.

She outlined to the inspector how anxious and stressed she had become because of the oppressive nature of the school environment, but was afraid to elaborate too much:

“I can’t tell you because it’s not in your remit. And I said if I tell you, my life is going to be made even worse”.

The inspector then contacted the chairperson of the BOM and also reported back to the DES. Eleanor predicted:

“You’ll go now, and I’ll be back to the same old story and it’s going to get worse. That’s my fear now”.

However, the inspector did act, he urged all parties to enter into mediation. Eleanor believed he was sincere in his desire to intervene:

“He said he wasn’t going to let the matter lie. It was brought to his attention now and he would have to record it”.

Matters improved temporarily for Eleanor, but: *“...she [the bully] targeted an SNA (instead). So, she started making her life hell. The SNA couldn’t take it anymore, and got on to her union, invoked another grievance procedure through the board”.*

Participants were critical of inspectors’ unwillingness to *“take the bull by the horns”* in tackling leadership issues in school:

“...if there’s something happening that you see is happening in a school, basically. I think really that you’re relinquishing your responsibility as an inspector” (Clodagh).

Clodagh, felt her principal acted like he was above the law, she noticed that even when her principal was consistently late for school during the WSE, the inspector seemed unwilling to challenge him:

“Look, our inspector was waiting for the school principal to come in and what they saw was all the teachers, even on the days of the inspection, in before the school principal. He was the last to be in, and yet we get comments about the fact that how wonderful he is”.

She went on to assert:

“There is a great tendency in Irish society to actually sweep things, actually in the Department anyhow, to sweep things under the carpet”.

Seamus summed up the sentiment echoed by all participants in stating that if bullying is impacting on educational standards and performance, the DES and the inspectorate must address the issue. As teachers, *“we can’t just ignore this anymore”.*

4.3.8 Using the Procedures to address staff difficulties

Some participants were involved in mediation. In these cases, difficulties had arisen amongst staff and communication had deteriorated. Knowing the alleged bully, many participants felt it pointless engaging in mediation. Rita was unconvinced of the effectiveness of mediation in her school:

“Not with her [chairperson], no, because she was even rude to the INTO. She would basically tell INTO officials to fuck off, she would. She would have no problem standing up to anyone”.

Rita contended that until such time as punitive measures were introduced, management would continue to flout agreed procedures with virtual impunity.

Helen requested mediation but was refused, following discussions between the principal and the chairman of the BOM. In an effort to facilitate open discussion In an attempt at mediation Clodagh offered to present a workshop on staff relations (working together), but her suggestion was rejected.

Participants commended the good practice espoused in policy documents. However, because they were never openly discussed targets were left trying to figure matters out for themselves. Participants maintained that principals were reluctant to initiate mediation since it entailed engaging external professionals, indicating failure on their part. There was also a sense that negative publicity, which may result in reputational damage, was to be avoided at all costs. While participants perceived procedures to address staff relations’ difficulties and the mediation facility, as supportive, they remained sceptical about their effectiveness in resolving workplace bullying.

Participants drew attention to a loophole in the mediation process. It requires the constructive participation of all parties, which may not be forthcoming. Furthermore, because the process is not compulsory, parties can refuse to engage. Unless all parties constructively participate in the mediation process and subsequently accept the recommendations of the mediator, the matter is referred to the BOM. Participants were dubious about this final stage of the process which they held to be entirely biased and unfair, since the bully, often the principal, is also a member of the board. Of the participants interviewed, all reported that their bully was a board member.

In an attempt to alleviate the bullying situation in his school Ben deliberated about mediation. He was sceptical:

“I think it could be good. But a mediator comes in, tries to sort it out, and then when the mediator is gone, you are left with the principal knowing what the situation is. You have exposed all your grievances. They know what hurts you. They know what doesn’t work and does work against you, and then they will screw you into the ground”.

While he thought it might be beneficial to bring in somebody from “*the outside*”, he felt mediation would not work in his particular case as no staff member would disclose the truth about his school:

“Witnesses won’t come forward because the next time a job comes up or a post comes up, the board will know”.

He was also aware that ultimately:

“...a lot of it is one word against another word”, and “there is no legally binding mediation”.

Patricia felt unwelcome and isolated in her school, she reported being given an unmanageable workload and she experienced negative behaviours that rendered her work environment extremely unpleasant. She admitted that her self-confidence was already low but when her health deteriorated, she sought mediation, and was advised:

“It’s up to the board whether you go with the INTO panel or the Labour Court, and the Labour Court is free, whereas if you go the INTO route, it’s the Board have to pay a part of it”.

Patricia preferred INTO arbitration because she believed they understood “*the system of how schools operated*” and would therefore conduct a fairer process. She even offered to pay the board’s portion of the costs and was therefore very disappointed when her principal informed her that:

“...she had been in touch with the chairperson and they had thought about things and they decided they wanted to go with the Labour Court”.

Even so, she engaged with the mediator and an agreement was reached. Patricia recalled that the mediator was really pleased, observing:

“It was so civilised and if I were to mark it out of ten, I’d give ye nine out of ten for the way you conducted it”.

Patricia was assured that all issues had been resolved, and that the board would approve it. As she recalled *“I left thinking, that’s it now, resolved”*. However, the following week Patricia was summoned to the principal’s office where she met the principal and the deputy principal. There she learned that the agreement was no longer in effect and new proposals were being presented to her.

“I just burst into tears and my body was shaking, and I just felt... It was like everything I had been saying in the mediation hadn’t happened”.

When Patricia contacted the mediator, she discovered that:

“...he didn’t write anything down, which he apologised for afterwards. He said in hindsight, he should have”.

Like many cases Patricia’s case demonstrates an indifference on the part of management for the determinations of the process, and how in the absence of a monitoring body, agreements can be broken:

“What people say, and then what they do, can be completely different”.

Patricia confirmed she was very disappointed with the outcome of the mediation process and considered it a waste of time. Subsequently she contacted INTO and was advised to take a grievance case against the board, but by this stage she *“felt wrecked”* and had lost confidence in the efficacy of the procedure. In fact, she felt so exhausted, the entire process had taken so much out of her, she simply did not have the energy to start again. Moreover, the INTO rep warned that the process would also be *“really stressful”*. In Patricia’s case mediation had yielded nothing. On the contrary, it had made matters worse and had cost her greatly in terms of time and stress. Patricia was forced to accept that no resolution would be forthcoming: she would just have to leave or endure the toxic environment.

John described the impact of mediation in his school where staff relations difficulties were a significant issue:

“There was a very fraught relationship between the three ladies: the principal, vice-principal and the third teacher”.

John described the unrelenting bullying behaviour of his principal, he portrayed the culture of his school as toxic, characterised by lack of consultation, collaboration and zero collective decision-making.

“I’ve never met somebody that’s so tyrannical and so absolutely incapable of leadership”.

Having no support within the teaching staff, John’s health deteriorated. The chairperson of the BOM of John’s school suggested mediation as:

“...they knew that things were going very pear-shaped”.

But John was not optimistic about the impact of mediation, he felt the leadership style of the principal was not conducive negotiation or to reconciliation.

John reported that the process was very slow. The attitude amongst staff was positive but a promised report from the mediator never materialised. While John agreed that external intervention is a good thing, generally-speaking, there was no resolution *“it didn’t do much good for the school overall”.*

Eleanor also recounted her experience of mediation under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) and explained that when the LRC representative came to the school to investigate the difficulties:

“They interviewed each staff separately, met with the staff twice, and gave her recommendations. Said there was lack of adherence to rules, poor communication, selective communication, no respect for authority, we were going at an unsustainable rate, and if we continued, we would close the school. There was no respect, no courtesy; a very unhealthy environment”.

Following the process, the LRC representative met with the staff and the Board of Management, outlined the findings and made recommendations. After five months of engaging with the process there was no monitoring or follow-up; just, *“that’s it. Bye, bye”.* Eleanor confirmed it was not in the remit of these agencies to resolve individual grievances and as such:

“...it was recommended that our grievances needed to be dealt with locally”.

The Diocesan Office then appointed a barrister as mediator. Eleanor recalls being asked to write down all her grievances and complaints. A combination of work and family commitments along with health problems convinced Eleanor that she needed to employ a solicitor. As the process advanced, Eleanor was subjected to a number of “*unscheduled visits*” by the chairman, she recalled:

“He came up then to me, to rap me on the wrist; to say how dare I wash my dirty linen in public? He came up to reprimand me. ‘Did you say this?’ and then came the reprimand, you know, the punch. I was in floods of tears”.

Eleanor was dissatisfied with the way complaints were handled. Over a period of eight years Eleanor participated in a wide variety of processes including mediation, a DES facilitated mediation, the LRC representative investigation, and numerous meetings with staff, chairman and board. As such, she was in a position to draw attention to the flaws in the various procedures: there was no specific timeframe; no penalty was incurred by the principal when she failed to comply with deadlines; the investigator did not read the necessary submissions and failed to copy them to the necessary parties; and she received no assistance with the drafting of documents or statements. In fact, she felt that the whole investigative process “*favoured the principal from the outset*” and she gave many examples of how her principal had flouted the rules but was not reprimanded or sanctioned in any form. She found it difficult to trust a system that allowed certain individuals to do as they pleased, for example:

“Despite being furnished with the relevant documentation in September, the principal only furnished the investigator with her response in July”.

Eleanor felt highly compromised with regard to confronting the negative behaviour she had been subjected to believing that those in authority would not be reprimanded or punished. She maintained that the process increased her stress and the only purpose of the exercise was:

“To increase my workload and drown me in paperwork, to wear down my resilience, so I would withdraw my complaint, and the BOM could sweep everything under the carpet”.

Eleanor felt that the process was already compromised because it was organised by a person from INTO:

“...who is rubbing shoulders with the principal’s [INTO] representative”.

Eleanor felt so deflated:

“...we were promised by her [mediator] that she was going to see this through”.

When asked to sum up what the mediation process had achieved Eleanor replied, *“Nothing”.*

4.3.9 Leave

Of the participants interviewed in this study, several left their posts. For them the bullying had become so intolerable they had no option but *“to walk away”*. Notwithstanding that all participants expressed a desire to leave their school and seek alternative employment, only a small number resigned. For some leaving meant taking early retirement resulting in a loss of pension entitlement. Others managed to secure alternative employment. Of those who remained, financial considerations, family commitments, and the lack of job opportunities, meant that resignation was simply not a feasible option. Seamus took a career break because he simply had to get away:

“I took a leave of absence. I was on a career break, so I mean, I suppose, I just couldn’t take it anymore. I just couldn’t. The daily undermining, the daily isolation, the daily no-one talking to me, the daily of going into the staffroom and I’d go in and they’d walk out or I’d go in and there would be silence where no-one would speak. The turning people against me...”.

During the interview he regularly alluded to his sense of regret and the financial difficulties he had experienced due to the loss of his income:

“I have no income. I mean, that’s the bottom line of it. I walked away from my good job, from a school that I worked very hard to build up. I got extensions built. The enrolment when I went there was sixty and now it’s one hundred and twenty-five. You know, I worked hard. I have good staff and good teachers, but I worked hard, and I had to walk away”.

Nonetheless the mere thought of returning to the toxic environment filled him with dread.

Tina, felt her only option was to leave her school but as the sole breadwinner for her family she could not afford to resign:

“So, I started looking around as to how was I going to [leave]. I had to work, I had to. There was no such thing as retiring young or anything like that. So, I had to get out. I knew there was no solving it, so I had to get out”.

Ben admitted he regularly considered leaving his post. He even drafted a “*letter of resignation*”. However, when he considered how he would support his young family and pay the mortgage he decided against it:

“I came close. I actually had my resignation written once, and I never handed it in. I wrote it and I put in a bit of paper, I wrote down everything, the reason why I was resigning. I put it in an envelope, and I had it, and I remember I had it in my pocket for about a day or two, and then I shredded it. And the way I looked at it is, I was thinking that if I had resigned, we mightn’t be able to pay the mortgage, we mightn’t be able to do this, that and the other. I couldn’t.... And that’s what really hardened me, from that on, I went, ‘Right, that’s it. They are not going to get away with that’. It was my way of dealing with it up to a point. But I actually had my resignation written”.

After engaging with the process for some time Jane realised that her complaint would not be resolved, so she decided to leave. It had taken all of her energy just to teach and cope with bullying, without adding the extra effort and stress of trying to contend further with the complaints process:

“You don’t have to put what energy you have left into fighting some kind of a battle in a school”.

Jane highlighted a number of difficulties with the complaint procedure, she was particularly disenchanted with the “*unfairness*” of it. She was convinced she would not get justice if she progressed her complaint due to the power differential. Believing that any effort to stop bullying, particularly using the recommended procedures, would be futile she resigned. Unfortunately she did not qualify for her full pension.

All participants said they knew of other teachers who had left their jobs because of bullying.

Maria confirmed:

“I know two principals. One went to another school”.

Participants observed that these teachers had been excellent, diligent teachers but because they feared being bullied or becoming the next target, they “*threw in the towel*”:

“*There are an awful lot of people in the profession who have actually left the profession because of it [bullying], you know, and good people have left*” (Úna).

4.4 Perceived Organisational Response

This section presents the data that emerged from participant accounts of their experience of the response of management to their complaints of bullying and to their requests for support. The data provides an overview of the effectiveness of the policies and procedures, the issues associated with the complaints procedure, and the outcomes for those who engaged with the different stages of the process of seeking redress for workplace bullying.

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUBORDINATE THEMES
Response to complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived experience of teachers following a complaint • Response of principal • Principal as alleged bully • Procrastination ‘<i>Wear you down</i>’ • Complaints ignored or dismissed • Counter complaints • Retaliation and reprisals • Orchestration; ‘<i>A lamb to the slaughter</i>’ • Response to procedure for handling grievances • Bystanders • The mental health assessment

4.4.1 Lived experience of teachers following a complaint

The data revealed that the negative effects of bullying intensified following the initiation of the complaint procedure. These effects included reduced self-esteem, illness, increased stress and anxiety, reputational damage, recurring feelings of anger, fear, feelings of being trapped, disillusionment, confusion, damage to career and relationships, and financial loss. Indeed, participants agreed that exposure to the increased pressure of dealing with the complaints procedures resulted in further negative effects such as deterioration in psychological and physical health, low job satisfaction and morale, and an increased desire to leave the school. In general, participants found that management tended to blame complainants, took the passive approach of avoiding the issue rather than trying to deal with it, and flouted agreed procedures with impunity. This resulted in what participants believed to be the desired effect of “wearing people down”. Figure 11 shows the distribution of code frequencies for the theme ‘effects of bullying’ across all transcript data. The calculation of symbol size refers to the number of codes recorded.

Figure 10 Effects of bullying



Eleanor explained that she had pursued her complaint through to the final stage of the procedure, had initiated a grievance procedure, had taken part in mediation, and had tried every avenue possible. She had even requested redeployment but was refused. Despite her efforts, at the time of interview, she remained on long-term illness leave and there was very little prospect of her returning to work. Eleanor described the detrimental effects that bullying had on her health, her home life, her career and on her relationships, and she maintained these had been exacerbated following her complaint. She had been optimistic and determined at the start. She really wanted to engage with the proper agreed procedure, it seemed clear to her. She invoked the grievance procedure, but this was ignored. She then sought the involvement of the DES inspector which resulted in being summoned to meet the chairman. She recalled being questioned about what she had divulged:

“What did you tell the inspector? Did you tell him you invoked the grievance procedure? And I said, ‘No boys, I kept your secret, I didn’t tell him anything’. And you could feel the sighs”.

Eleanor was then asked to read out her grievance letter again, following which she was assured that it would be dealt with, but:

“...the very minute I went out, I just knew all he wanted was covering his arse”.

She went on to describe how she had suffered a miscarriage, which she directly attributed to stress and anxiety resulting from bullying. She highlighted her dismay with the lack of support from the school community, her colleagues, the chairman and the BOM. Eleanor welcomed the EAS and availed of the counselling. However, she found the limited number of sessions insufficient, and subsequently engaged a private counsellor. Eleanor maintained it was not enough to treat the negative effects of bullying without addressing the causes and seeking to put preventative strategies in place. When asked what might have helped, she replied:

“No. Nothing can alleviate this”.

Eventually Eleanor reached the stage where she could no longer cope and she knew she had to get out of her school:

“I wanted a transfer. I wanted to get out of here for my health, for my mental health. I was told that that wasn’t an option”.

However, matters eventually became too much for Eleanor:

“I collapsed in my classroom and banged my head. I stopped breathing, my pulse was weak, and I had some sort of convulsion. An ambulance took me to hospital, where I stayed until [date omitted]. I have not returned to teach since”.

Although the physical effects on Eleanor’s health were already serious, she said the process of making a complaint led to further deterioration in mental and physical health.

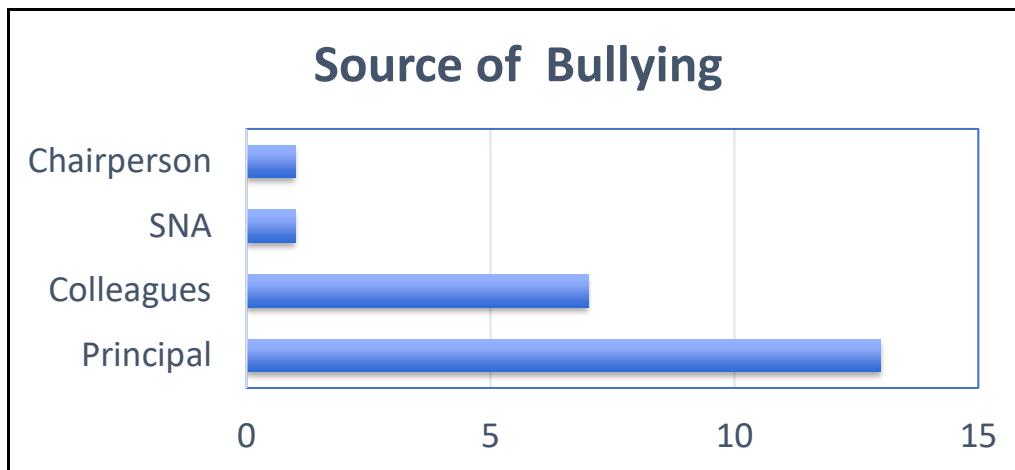
4.4.2 Response of principal

Participants described bullying principals as manipulative, untrustworthy, anarchic, poor decision-makers, unethical and unempathetic. Some went as far as to say that they were downright dishonest. All those who were targeted by their principals referred to the importance of leadership and its effect on the school culture.

The data revealed that participants identified both authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership styles as being associated with bullying. Where these styles were evident, participants reported that the principal failed to intervene when bullying was reported. There was no instance throughout the entire data set of a principal supporting the target or of initiating staff dialogue with a view to resolving matters.

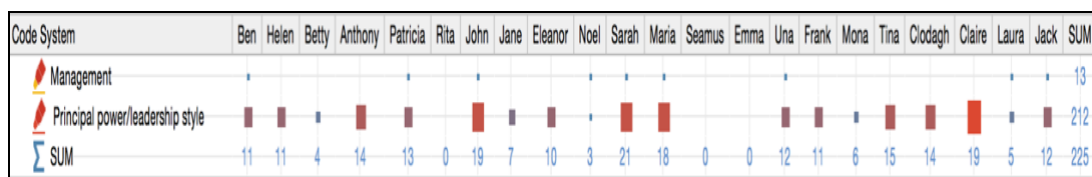
The figure below demonstrates that bullies are represented in all categories of staff within the workplace, from support staff to senior management. However, in this study the majority of those perceived to be bullies were principals.

Figure 11 Source of Bullying



Participants referred to the leadership style of the principal as a key factor in dealing with bullying. A total of two hundred and twelve coded segments (Figure 13) referred to the power and the leadership style of the principal.

Figure 12 Leadership style of the principal



Participants said there was potential for abuse of power, which could be exercised by those charged with the implementation of procedures. Participants were pessimistic about the effectiveness of procedures in cases where the alleged bully was the principal.

The Principal was not the alleged bully

Maria had brought a formal complaint previously, but claimed she was pressurised into withdrawing it by the principal. At a later date, she was denied leave to study and her responsibilities were withdrawn. Due to her previous experience she was certain that making another complaint would be futile: *“I wouldn’t have got anywhere”*. Maria did not proceed with her complaint because she became ill and she held that:

“You’d be opening such a hornet’s nest that, really, you might as well hand in your resignation on the same day probably”.

Maria felt that bullying was being systemically reinforced, authorised and endorsed by management, but particularly through the inaction of the principal of her school. She described her principal’s approach to workplace bullying:

“...she hopes it will go away, ignores it.....she stays in her office and doesn’t get involved”.

When Helen complained informally to her principal about bullying behavior, she was initially reassured that mediation, which she had requested, would be arranged. However, having contacted other principals in the area, her principal then changed his mind. Instead of dealing with the situation he told her he had decided on the advice of other principals, to *“nip it in the bud”* by sweeping it under the carpet. In fact, Helen was instructed:

“You’re not to discuss anything in front of any other staff [members]”.

She was specifically warned about discussing the matter with a particular teacher who had expertise in the area of bullying:

“He said it to me a couple of times, in a kind of a slap on the wrist way”.

She said this action effectively blocked any collegial support and she felt that she, rather than the bully, was being blamed for the turmoil. The principal threatened her:

“If I didn’t cop on and sort it out, he was complaining me to the Board of Management. He was bringing it to the next level. That’s the way I felt that he was acting. That’s the way he spoke to me. Of course, she [the bully] is on the BOM and he is on the BOM, so that’s not very fair”.

When Helen sought the support of the deputy principal, she was disappointed at her unwillingness to become involved. She was shocked that *“fear”* of becoming the next target was explicitly cited as an excuse.

Participants identified crucial difficulties with Stage 3 of the procedure which requires targets to request the principal's intervention, or from the chairperson or other member of the Board of Management (who may have a close association with the principal). Stage 4 provides for the investigation of the complaint by the BOM, but both the principal and the chairperson are influential members of the board. Even though it is open to any of the parties to have the matter investigated by an agreed independent investigating third party, none of the participants, except for Eleanor, reported having experience of a third-party investigation. Notwithstanding that the principal has a duty of care to staff, participants were reluctant to make a complaint to or about the principal. Those who did were disappointed with the response and reported that they achieved little in terms of resolution. In fact, it was more likely that matters would be made even worse for complainants. As Betty put it:

"It was absolutely, unbelievable, incredible, that one human being could lie and be so devious".

Both Anthony and John agreed that although their principals encouraged all staff to speak up at meetings, if anyone did make a point at a staff meeting, they would be reprimanded afterwards for doing so:

"Her management style was definitely that of a bully, and she would get you on a one-to-one and say things that she would never say in front of others on the staff". (Anthony)

John's account is similar:

"She had a very underhand, subtle manipulation. She'd never give you a dressing down in front of another teacher or another colleague".

Patricia admitted that *"I have never felt free to speak"*. Witnessing another teacher being *"demeaned and embarrassed in front of everybody"* deters people from voicing opinions.

Tina asserted that her principal took a cavalier approach to the running of the school, she abused her power, she ignored rules and procedures to such an extent that:

“There were debts, there was a lack of regulation, there was teachers being lost. This was a person that was out of control”.

However, her principal had such strong manipulative power that:

“She got at people. Like, she went and visited the chairman of the Board, and you know, obviously complained and complained, until he said, ‘look, we’ll do this, and we’ll do this. She still had power over him, even though he thought that he got rid of her (retired). She played him at whatever game she could”.

Like most participants Tina believed that her principal was not amenable to rules and regulations, the absence of a supervisory body allowed her to flout regulations. All participants remarked on how holding the reins of power tends to change people’s personalities. Participants noticed that significant figures seldom saw the darker side of the bully. Many noted that principals *“always wanted a good image in front of the Board”*. Like many participants Tina believed if she had told anybody, especially a board member, what she was really like *“they would be incredulous to think that she was like that”*. Rita described numerous situations where the bully had successfully manipulated people’s opinions:

“It’s easy to be manipulated and brought in; it’s easy to be hooked in by people. It must be easy for some people to get into other people’s heads”.

Management

Figure 14 illustrates the coded segments for school management. The numbers across the bottom show the number of times each participant referred to school management. The values in the end column refer to the number of times aspects of management were mentioned. Of the 149 retrieved segments referring to management, all of them were negative in tone.

Figure 13 Code frequencies: School management

Code System	Ben	Helen	Betty	Anthony	Patricia	Rita	John	Jane	Eleanor	Noel	Sarah	Maria	Seamus	Emma	Una	Frank	Mona	Tina	Clodagh	Claire	Laura	Jack	SUM		
Management																								9	
Principal power/leadership style																									19
cavalir																									12
Lack of control																									13
control																									14
rules																									1
Lack of adherence to ru																									7
over implmentation of r																									4
adherence to rules																									9
Board of Management																									16
Chairperson																									12
chair & principal relationship																									13
Management																									15
Training																									5
Σ SUM	8	6	8	8	7	7	10	2	9	12	7	9	3	0	8	6	7	6	5	10	2	7		149	

4.4.3 Procrastination: ‘Wear you down’

Even after reporting participants found they had to drive the process rather than management being proactive and tackling the problem. No investigation was instigated. In fact, participants were left bewildered by the inaction of those in authority. To most participants, it appeared management were prevaricating in the hope that complainants would become frustrated or worn down and simply drop the complaint. Jane captured the weariness and frustration she experienced when she tried to advance her complaint: *“I ran out of steam. I ran out of goodwill. I ran out of something. I ran out of the energy that it takes to deal with it”*.

Those who persisted found the process dragged on for months and sometimes years. Eleanor observed:

“Instead of acknowledging my written correspondence and investigating my concerns and complaints at the earliest opportunity, the board adopted strategies with my correspondence of ignore, deny, minimise, downplay, deter, delay, deflect, and discredit me, with the specific intention to wear me down and not to resolve relations”.

Participants described feeling further browbeaten by the rejection or mismanagement of their complaints, their experience of the process led to further stress and isolation. Patricia conceded that the process was so convoluted it left her drained, worn out, and unable to advance her complaint any further. She also captured the exhaustion and fatigue that had set in and led to a sense of hopelessness:

“I feel it took such huge energy just managing the last three or four years, and I tried really hard all along, documented everything. Tried really hard and I feel I’m at a stage where I really want out of the place....”

Betty too found:

“...how difficult it is to actually initiate something and see it through. The process is so difficult”.

Ben articulated his despair at the lack of effectiveness of management and of the procedures:

“I don’t know which felt worse, the personal stuff or the professional stuff, because I knew I wasn’t going to get anywhere, and I never will get anywhere at this stage”.

Anthony also expressed his disillusionment with the procedures which stemmed from:

“...a lack of confidence in the principal and in the Board of Management...didn’t think that there was any point in making a complaint about any of this, that there was nowhere to go”.

As Ben pointed out:

“The principal is normally the one in charge, and ultimately the principal knows and runs the Board of Management. That’s absolute poppycock. It has to be somebody from outside the school that is brought in if it’s going to work at all, and they are afraid to do that because the INTO don’t want to rock the boat, or the secondary schools don’t want to rock the boat. It is absolutely [bizarre]. My opinion is that it’s absolutely [ridiculous], it looks fantastic on paper”.

Eleanor tried to persuade her chairperson to tackle the bullying problem in her school but her complaints were ignored. As a last resort, and in her frustration, she involved the DES inspector:

“The board then brought in a facilitator from the Department of Education”.

Eleanor and her colleagues attended numerous meetings with the facilitator and the principal where various matters were deliberated upon, but ultimately, she felt that the exercise was futile:

“Nothing, absolutely nothing, we got nothing. It was eighteen months down the drain, and we gave up loads of our personal time”.

Eleanor described how the facilitator had failed to attend scheduled meetings and eventually left the process completely without having achieved any level of resolution.

Eleanor went back to the chairperson of the board since:

“... [bullying] was continuing in school: the verbal rebukes, publicly, privately, the exclusion, the nit-picking, overloading my duties, keeping me in the same class all the time”.

Eleanor felt that management were continuously trying to cover up the abuse:

“I spoke to our Chairman, by phone and in person, but he failed to investigate any of my issues and did not offer any support or advice to me following this incident, despite my request for his help and advice each time”.

4.4.4 Complaints ignored or dismissed

All participants agreed that the process of making a complaint led to further negative consequences, in particular for their health, their professional reputations and the school environment. However, the findings suggest that even more sinister responses can ensue. After making a complaint of bullying to her principal Emma reported that she was:

“...threatened with something being made up about me if I wrote to the board of management”.

While other teachers were not given any such explicit warning, their experience of counter complaints is perhaps even more stark.

4.4.5 Counter complaints

Findings indicate that teachers feel highly compromised about confronting bullying behaviour, they experience apprehension about pursuing complaints when they feel the environment is not psychologically safe. All participants were aware of the possibility of counter complaints. This made them hypervigilant, trying to give no cause for criticism, particularly in relation to competence or professionalism. Findings suggest that this vigilance was understandable as many of those who did take action and

reported, were subjected to retaliatory tactics. In such insecure environments participants reported that they were not given due consideration and most found it difficult to discharge their professional duties following their making of a complaint. Instead they encountered an escalation in negative behaviours leading to an intensification of fear, isolation, aggression, and stress. Several participants reported that making a complaint of bullying led to reprimands, professional humiliation, and/or criticism. Noel stated he did extra paperwork, was always early for school, and so on:

‘I was not giving him any opportunity to pick me up, but he was still finding things anyway’.

Indeed, being subjected to reprisals for registering a complaint was the most likely occurrence for participants in this study. There was particular apprehension about the potential for withholding support in the event of a parental complaint, but it also emerged that in some cases contrived and unfounded allegations were made against participants by management and by parents. Eleanor referred to the tactic of:

“...encouraging parental complaints against me as another tactic to discredit me”.

In Seamus’s school the bullies caused trouble for him with *“the cross parents”* and:

“...then watch the parent come in, with glee, coming in and giving out to me, and they’d be there sort of delighted with it”.

Tina said she was *“petrified of her [principal]. She made me ill”* and was convinced she had encouraged:

“...the SNA’s making a report about me, and using these very, very plausible complaints”.

Frank believed his principal was behind numerous parental complaints levied against him. He confronted him saying:

“Isn’t it very strange, that every single time that there’s a complaint about me in the school, there’s a common denominator, and that’s you. Isn’t that very strange?”

Jane was afraid that if she progressed her complaint in relation to certain staff members they would retaliate:

“They’ll do it in sneaky ways, do you know, they’ll do it. They’ll exclude you from various things. If you annoy the principal, he would give you a rotten class. Everybody knows that. You know, he would give you a rotten class the next year, or the learning support people would give you the most difficult kids. They’d give you the... I should say, the children with the most difficult parents will end up on your plate. You’re never sure that you’re going to get support then if you have trouble with a parent. You don’t know what people are going to say when they, if they come in to make a complaint about you. You just never feel kind of safe, do you know. I mean, I have to say I never, I never, felt safe”.

Noel’s story highlights the vulnerability of targets who complain. When he made a formal complaint about his principal’s bullying behaviour, he believed that matters had been resolved. Having progressed through the initial stages to Stage 3 of the grievance procedure he recalled how it had resulted in an *“emotional contract”*. This contract set out strict guidelines for contact meetings between himself and the principal, the two parties involved, and these were adhered to. Initially he was relieved:

“He did stick to the agreement. We never once had a [disagreement]...I thought, Oh, brilliant I’ve won!”

But he soon found that the principal managed to bully him in new ways, such as refusing to give consent to do his Masters intervention in the school, not allowing him to return to school after a period of sick-leave until he submitted a *“fitness to teach certificate”*, and so on. But when Noel chastised a child about an incident of misbehaviour which took place in his classroom, he was shocked that the principal refused to discuss the matter with him. Noel feared the principal would withhold support should a parental complaint be lodged. He even appeared to be *“manufacturing a complaint”*. Noel was alarmed that *“he had almost groomed this guy”* and believed that his professional reputation was being threatened. Later that same day, Noel was informed that his principal was invoking the grievance procedure and had lodged a range of complaints against him in *“a big fat envelope with all his complaints”*. Noel was certain that this action was a direct consequence of his previous complaint of bullying against the principal and it would have led to disciplinary procedures had he remained in his school. Noel felt there was no reasonable or accessible avenue of redress open to him. A disciplinary hearing would damage his professional reputation and his future career opportunities.

“Put it this way. I think I only worked another four hours in that school after that point”.

Despite having no other form of income and a young family to support, Noel felt he had no option but to resign.

The use of parental complaints and the fabrication of professional complaints against teachers were reported as a common occurrence. Participants reported constant stress at having to maintain a constant state of hypervigilance. John was a teacher who worked so hard that his health and wellbeing was shattered. Despite his conscientiousness the principal informed him that a parent had made a written complaint about him. John recalled feeling shocked because he had been on friendly terms with the particular parent. After investigating and discussing the matter with the parent in question he discovered:

“It wasn’t a written complaint. But it was her [the principal] all the time. He [the parent] was a real puppet. She [the principal] was the puppeteer”.

Like Noel, John too felt he had no option but to resign rather than risk damage to his professional reputation and his future career.

Rita was subjected to similar campaign:

“The amount of complaints I had against me from parents you wouldn’t believe ... Now sorry ... all instigated by the chairperson”.

Noel, John and Rita resigned due to the initiation of contrived complaints against them. However, resigning was impossible for the majority of participants. Participants described suffering damage to their professional reputations due to their attempts to resist bullying. Teachers who remained and endured bullying felt they had no choice but to discontinue their complaint process rather than risk further damage. But Frank and Eleanor, who perceived that the parental complaints against them were contrived, refused to drop their complaint or to leave. To date, years of meetings, medical assessments, hearings, and legal consultations, have not succeeded in restoring them to their positions. Eleanor stated that over a period of nine years she has:

“...participated in a number of processes to resolve my perceived work related issues. A DES facilitator who worked on whole school communication with a view

to improving staff relations in 2008 & 2009. The LRC provided future focused whole school mediation from February to June 2014”.

Meanwhile, Frank is still being prevented from returning to his school and the protracted adversarial process has compromised his physical, mental, and emotional health.

4.4.6 Retaliation and reprisals

Evidence from this study confirms that a common response to complaints of bullying is to regard the complainant as the cause of the problem. When Laura confronted her bully and asked her to refrain from her intimidating, humiliating behaviour, she was summoned to a meeting with the principal. She described how infantilised and embarrassed she felt:

“So now you can imagine why I didn’t say anything [all along], because the one day I said something, she was bringing me to the principal.”

In any event, when Laura duly attended the meeting with the bully, the principal, and the deputy principal, her initial complaint was barely mentioned. Instead she was faced with a list of counter-complaints about her work and accusations of breaching school rules.

John reported that he was *“threatened with a disciplinary procedure”* after he complained of bullying. Rather than face *“the hassle”* he decided to resign.

Emma also asserted that her principal *“threatened”* her when she first complained, warning her that she would be referred for medical assessment. Emma was shocked that her complaint was not upheld considering the amount of evidence she had built up and alarmed at the mention of a medical assessment. Following this experience:

“I didn't bother complaining afterwards because I knew that I'd be punished for complaining”.

Another point raised by participants was that inspectors should be alert to the possibility of manipulation by principals. Many participants considered and feared the possibility

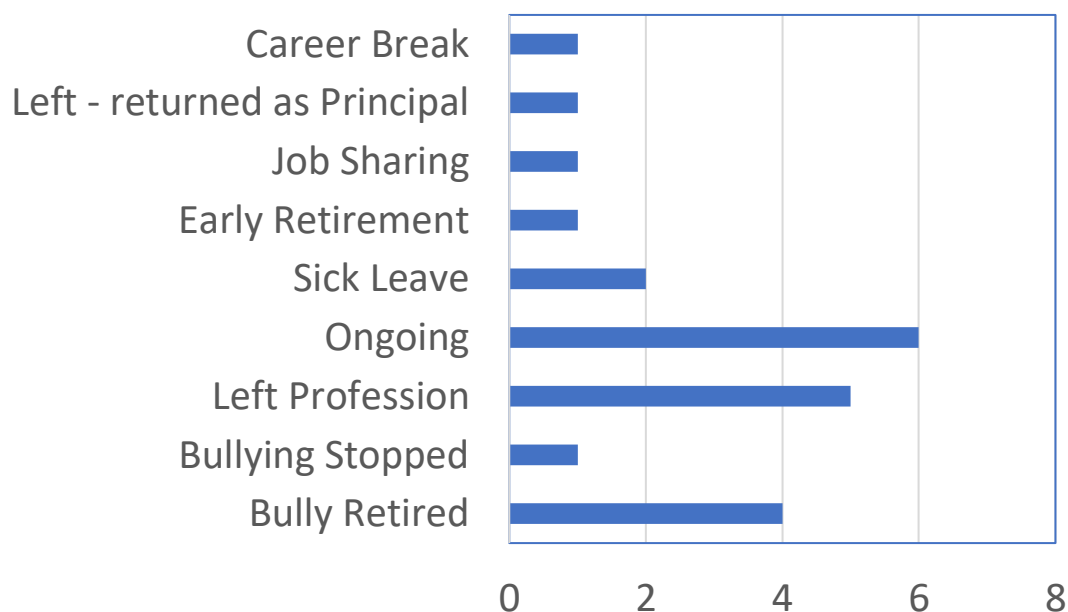
of the inspector being used as a bullying tool to cause further professional damage. Ben's experience underscores the potential for principals to deploy the inspectorate in this way. His account also highlights the lack of accountability and the necessity for follow-up enquiries into principals' actions. In this case, Ben, who had never received a negative inspection report, suddenly found himself the subject of numerous incidental visits from the local inspector. In the end the inspector clarified the context:

"He said to me, 'No offence, but I am not coming out to you again'. He said, 'I was called out.' And I said, 'I can sort of guess that'. He said, 'It's fine. There is nothing wrong with you. Your classes are fine. Your preparation is fine'. He said, 'I am going to say it to the principal that I will not be calling out again.' So, he did".

Ben believed the inspector must have been aware of the principal's bullying behaviour towards him, yet he did nothing to support him or to alleviate the situation. The principal was not held to account for his continuous requests for evaluation of Ben's teaching ability. Following the failure of this bullying strategy, Ben continued to be bullied by his principal by other means.

Frank speculated that such retaliation to be "*of a piece with the prevailing authoritarian ethos*" within schools. He spoke of an air of "*presumed infallibility*" in relation to principals and authority figures, such as chairpersons. According to Frank "*any action by a subordinate teacher that calls into question that infallibility*" is considered inappropriate, improper, and punishable. Figure 15 below illustrates the status of participants at the time of interviewing, and also delineates the various methods targets found to escape bullying. Those who were unable to risk financial hardship, felt that the only feasible option was to remain endure bullying. Those that could no longer withstand the toxic culture went on sick leave , career break or left.

Figure 14 Status of participants



4.4.7 Orchestration: “A lamb to the slaughter”

This study found that when a complaint was registered, ‘orchestration’ was a likely consequence. The following accounts illustrate principals’ ability to control, suppress, and ensure complaints were not progressed.

Ben made a formal complaint about a group of teachers who were bullying him. In line with the procedure he reported to the principal and readily accepted an invitation to meet to discuss the problem. He assumed the principal would attempt to resolve matters. However, Ben described how, when he attended the meeting, he was confronted by the bullies:

“I went in and the three of them were there. And I looked, and I was literally, like, a lamb to the slaughter”.

Moreover, Ben was shocked to discover that they had come fully prepared:

“They all had their diaries and everything with them, and I was there looking, going, what do you mean?”

Ben described being accused of various offences and each of his bullies said he witnessed what the other was saying:

“Well, I saw you do this, and this, and the other guy was there, Well, I was a witness to that. And I was there, and I was literally just bushwhacked. So, in the end, I went, Right, that’s fine. I’ll leave it alone”.

Laura recounted a similar experience. She disclosed how she had been continuously chastised, verbally assaulted, and harassed by a senior member of staff. She described being addressed so aggressively that an SNA had thought she (the bully) was *admonishing a child*. A witness reported the bullying to the principal, but no action was taken. Laura finally confronted the bully, asked her to refrain from her oppressive behaviour and requested that rather than reprimanding her in the presence of her colleagues and pupils, she would address concerns with her in private. As a result of this action she was summoned to a meeting with the principal. Laura was relieved that finally the bullying behaviour would be exposed. However, Laura was not prepared for the barrage of accusations that subsequently confronted her. In the presence of the principal and the vice-principal, the bully chastised her about a range of issues, which had never been brought to her attention. They ranged from the mismanagement of her class, negligence of pupils, unprofessional conduct, and various other transgressions:

“So, she had two A4 pages, well, an A4 page on both sides written of all the things that I’d done wrong. Like, this is mad. I can’t even remember the things, but, so she sat and went through, so, ‘OK, this day you ... Like, there was a boy with autism. You left the boy with autism outside the class for 15 minutes and I don’t know what he was doing out there.’ I didn’t leave him out there. I actually didn’t. He was probably coming back from lunch or something. I said, ‘Oh my God, like, I’m sorry that I did that’, but that, like, I was trying to explain myself and I was like, ‘God, I’m sorry, I can’t ...’”

Laura described being shocked that the principal and the vice principal stood passively by while she was subjected to this onslaught. A catalogue of complaints emanated from the bully, who, in fact, had no supervisory role. She recalled being unable to defend herself and feeling powerless to challenge her accuser. In her view, the lack of managerial intervention, despite her complaint, actually enabled bullying. Laura was so traumatised she did not realise that the meeting was supposed to be about her complaint of bullying. This was not discussed at all:

“Look, you’re not getting what I’m saying here. But the principal took no notice and she just said, ‘Right, off you go’, And so the bully walked out of the meeting, after saying her piece”.

Laura became visibly distressed whilst recalling these humiliating and unjust events which led to no resolution, no acknowledgement, and certainly no restoration of the relationship. The only action the principal took was to remove Laura from her class and transfer her to a learning support role, a move which Laura interpreted as a reprimand for making a complaint. Laura had been on a temporary contract and was not retained the following year. Despite the fact that she was rendered unemployed, Laura was relieved *“thankfully, I don’t have to go into that environment ever again”*. Laura summed up her experience:

“I took a step to confront my bully, it took me five months to do that, and it didn’t help at all because it made things worse, I think. Obviously, the bullying stopped [because she was moved away from the bully] ... but I had to leave”.

Similar events were evident in Jack’s account. He complained to the BOM chairperson about his principal’s bullying behaviour. Then Jack, the chairperson and the principal had a number of meetings whereby they *“tried to establish some kind of a working relationship”*. During the third meeting Jack recalled having to defend himself against a litany of criticisms about incidents that had happened in the distant past:

“I was shaking because he drew up so much rubbish and shit, so much stuff, which I couldn’t neither prove nor disprove about previous stuff”.

Feeling completely shocked Jack felt he had no choice but to drop the complaint. He decided to leave and apply for another job.

The above accounts of Ben, Jack and Laura, who had brought their difficulties to the attention of the principal/chairperson in accordance with Stage 3, demonstrate how, rather than being listened to and supported, they were trapped and made to feel that they were the problem. In effect they were *“set up”* by orchestrated managerial strategies which effectively shielded the bully.

4.4.8 Response to the procedure for handling grievances

Eleanor, the only participant who invoked the ‘Grievance Procedure’ had serious concerns with the provision of learning support for pupils in her class since the:

“...two SNA’s helping the secretary photocopy, cleaning the staffroom, cleaning the toilets and collecting money, all the time, and chaos in my class...”

Under great stress she discussed the problem with the principal, but having made no progress, she informed the chairperson and put her complaint in writing:

“The Chairman of BOM sought advice and he informed me in writing that he had no role to play in Stage One and returned my grievance letter together with a copy of the ‘Working Together Document’”, adding, “‘if I wasn’t fit, couldn’t I go off sick?’”

Eleanor then sought legal advice, and again wrote to the chairman. Her letter was not acknowledged. Eventually Eleanor said:

“I spoke to her formally about it and there was an awful lot going on in the school, not only with me, but with two other staff members to the point that the board then brought in a facilitator from the Department of Education”.

Eleanor found the formal investigation process adversarial, and at times, even more stressful than the bullying. She particularly referred to:

“...the inept handling of my grievances by the independent investigator. The investigative process was seriously flawed and favoured the principal from the outset”.

Eleanor listed a number of shortcomings with the formal procedure, such as:

“My requests for guidance and advice on the format of my complaint was ignored”.

She was requested to submit a written account. A month later she was again required to forward yet:

“...another comprehensive summary of complaint to be no more than two pages and place my correspondence record in chronological order... There was no sign of specific timeframes which are recommended in dealing with complaints and no penalty was incurred by the principal when she failed to comply with deadlines for her response”.

It was almost one year later the hearing was held. All of which did nothing to restore workplace relations, but rather led to further conflict and stress by reinforcing divisions amongst staff. Eleanor felt management's strategy was to wear her down, the chairperson continuously avoided the issue and chose to "*ignore, deny, minimise, downplay, deter, delay, deflect*". To date, Eleanor's attempts to redress the bullying situation have been on-going for more than six years. Her complaints are still unresolved, and she remains on long-term sick leave; an eventuality she strenuously tried to avoid.

4.4.9 Bystanders

Participants referred to isolation as the ultimate aim of the bully. In fact, all the participants concurred that making a complaint had led to increased isolation and exclusion. However, such a situation can only prevail when others stand by and take no action:

"But it's when you have others are joining in; it's like a witch-hunt" (Ben).

Participants speculated on the reasons for bystander behaviour. Lack of knowledge around factors such as not being able to recognise bullying, how to address it and how to resolve it were common considerations. Fear of becoming the next target was cited by all participants as witnesses to bullying feared for their own position. In some participants' schools it was clear that the staff were so accustomed to bullying behaviour that it had become normalised. This perpetuated the toxic school culture:

"But again, nobody would say anything against anybody else" (Ben).

From the participants' perspective the absence of bystander intervention was tantamount to tacit acceptance, leaving targets doubting their own perception of issues and feeling betrayed by their co-workers. Patricia reported that a colleague confided:

"Oh, I just keep my head down. And that's what people do. It's like they just keep their heads down, do what they have to do to survive".

Participants described how the sense of isolation they experienced following their complaint resulted in their becoming more withdrawn and reluctant to communicate,

which in turn, effectively cut them off from any possible support within the working environment.

4.4.10 The medical referral

For those who pursued complaints beyond stage 3, the data confirms evidence of a ‘mental health trap’ type process in response to complaints of bullying. Of particular significance was the perception that even the mention of a medical referral represented a threat for some teachers:

“They said that if I was out past a certain period of time, one day past it, I would have to go to a medical, to their doctor, their person, their counsellors, and they would be sending the reports to the Board” (Ben).

Several participants were referred for medical assessment while continuing to teach. These teachers had not anticipated that complaints of bullying could trigger such a response and were understandably dismayed at the implications of such a referral. As John protested:

“There was nothing wrong with me. There was... No, I never missed a day, thank God”.

John doubted the sincerity of his Principal’s referral:

“It was so completely false of her, but she was able to convince the Board that she was concerned for my wellbeing”.

Ben was coerced into returning to school while still on official sick-leave by the prospect of a medical referral:

“I went back, but I didn’t feel like going back. I had to go back because I wouldn’t [undergo a medical assessment]. I couldn’t give them that information”.

When considering the implications of her referral to Medmark (occupational healthcare for teachers) Rita maintained:

“If I had told Medmark any of that [stress due to bullying], they would never let me back to teach again. They would think you’re mad”.

Rita explained that she felt unable to divulge her true story because she was terrified of being referred for psychiatric assessment. The perception of the stigma of mental illness

filled her with fear. Similarly, when Jane complained of her colleagues' bullying behaviour to her principal and mentioned that she had been prescribed medication to cope with the situation, he immediately alluded to Medmark. She became so worried she "*didn't mention it [medication] again*". She admitted there was a real dread of "*people knowing that you have a medical condition*".

A number of teachers in this study were highly sceptical of the impartiality and fairness of Medmark, the agency to which teachers are referred. A number of participants were referred as a mandatory requirement due to protracted sick-leave, but for those not on leave, it was perceived as a direct result of their complaint of bullying. For teachers already overwhelmed and stressed, this was their first encounter with the prospect of a psychiatric assessment and of the possibility of being diagnosed with a 'mental illness'.

No participant reported any investigation of the work environment. Frank argued that by failing to investigate the workplace targets are being prejudged as being the problem. Frank believed that Boards of Management:

"...are abusing the Medmark referral process with a view to getting rid of teachers by getting them declared medically unfit to teach...Medmark (or its psychiatrists) transmute the stress into 'mental illness' which is used as a pretext for terminating the target's career".

He went on to declare that:

"In the primary sector these type of referrals are becoming more and more prevalent and Medmark's default position in many instances in cases where teachers complain about being bullied is to trigger a full scale psychiatric referral. This process is a mechanism for circumventing the usual rules re 'due process' and medicalising a HR problem, ostensibly on the grounds of 'concern for the teacher's health and well-being'".

Some teachers in this study are currently prevented from returning to their posts as a direct consequence of attending Medmark assessments which deemed them unfit to teach. Their cases have dragged on for years with little hope or expectation of matters being resolved or of ever returning to work. Moreover, they have exhausted their sick-leave entitlements and are now reduced to half-pay leading to financial hardship. Both

have suffered adverse health and mental illness consequences due to what are considered accepted and legitimate actions by their BOMs. As Eleanor reflected:

“The maintenance of the status quo left me exposed and increased my anxiety and stress levels which led to me being put on certified sick-leave several times during the delay caused by the respondent in proceeding with the hearing. I also had to access additional medical treatment in the form of weekly counselling session to help me deal with the hostile and toxic work environment at my own expense financially and at the expense of sick leave”.

Frank, a deputy principal, initiated a grievance procedure against his principal, who then:

“...went to the board when I took a grievance procedure, and he said a teacher had come to him and told him he was under considerable stress and that the stress was as a result of interpersonal difficulties with him. That triggered, [a medical referral] ‘Oh, we have a duty of care to this teacher’”.

Frank reported being directed to take sick-leave and he was subsequently referred to Medmark. He had made complaints of physical and mental abuse against his principal. Frank did not receive a copy of the initial referral document:

“So I go down to Medmark and I ask for my referral form, which makes for interesting reading because it says I’m aggressive, I’m dangerous ...”

Over the course of a year Frank attended numerous medical assessments at the behest of his BOM. The most recent Medmark assessment resulted in him being placed on long-term leave from school. He expected to be back in school within a short period of time but instead he was directed by the board to remain out of the school until his complaints of bullying were dealt with. In the meantime, he was further referred for a psychiatric assessment, he attended this with his wife. Prior to the assessment he discovered that his chairperson had submitted grossly prejudicial information which contained “*exaggerated*” and “*twisted*” accounts of school incidents. One such incident involved the intimation of inappropriateness to Frank’s rendition of a song. Frank reported that this had the effect of making him doubt his own memory, perception and sanity. The resulting report stated that he:

“...is medically unfit, long term for his role as a primary school teacher due to an unmodifiable medical condition”.

Frank has vigorously contested this finding and has assembled numerous reports which all state that he *“is currently fit to carry out his normal occupation”*. Nonetheless:

“I am out of school for eight months now. My big problem is Medmark. Despite four Consultant Psychiatrists, one Consultant Physician, one Consultant Neurologist, and another psychological assessment [which cleared me], Medmark would appear to be ‘not for turning’”.

Frank was convinced that his enforced sick-leave, which his chairperson claimed was due to alleged inappropriate behaviours, is *“a medicalisation process”* whereby the teacher is seen as the problem and that any perception the teacher has to the contrary is thus symptomatic of the *“teacher’s mental illness”* or *“paranoia”*. He believes that the situation is further compounded by the false claim that *“this psychological abuse is based on concern for the victim’s well-being”*. Moreover, the situation directly impacts his family since his claim for salary protection has also been denied. He summed up the process:

“They wear people down by bullying them. When people seek redress for the bullying, the redress procedures are so flawed they are only a further means of wearing the victim down and the problem remains unresolved. The process ends with the ‘mental health trap’- the victim has no option but to take stress-related sick-leave. The victim is then referred to a medical hired gun who finds the victim medically unfit for work and this is used to eliminate the victim from the workplace. As Joseph Stalin said, ‘No man, no problem’. It is just a form of scapegoating and a means of bypassing people’s constitutional right to fair procedures and natural justice”.

Eleanor recounted how she was also referred to Medmark, *“they (the board) had concerns about my fitness to teach”*. She recalled how she had been teaching satisfactorily in her school but had sought time off to attend counselling to help her cope with bullying. She outlined how she had pursued complaints of bullying against her principal, and when she was referred for assessment, felt her willing attendance proved she had *“nothing to hide”*. Eleanor was relieved to find that Medmark concluded that:

“I’m fit to teach. I’m fit to participate [in mediation], and he [doctor] stated very clearly that medical intervention alone will not confirm my symptoms, and medical intervention alone will not resolve my health, and that the Board needs seriously to engage with me”.

Eleanor continued to pursue her complaint through the grievance procedure but believed that the board’s tactic was to swamp her in copious bureaucracy. Eleanor attended numerous Medmark assessments, each one concluding that she was “*deemed unfit again for another three months*”, but to date, has still not received “*any outcome or report regarding my complaint*”. Feeling she has been held “*in limbo*” for almost three years, she summarised the Board’s conduct as follows:

“My confidence in the process is seriously compromised. In my opinion the investigation process is a farce and a shambles. Speaking metaphorically, it was a fox designing a chicken hut”.

4.5 Consequences

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUBORDINATE THEMES
Consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The struggle to cope with bullying • Impaired performance • Financial Implications: “<i>Trapped</i>” • School culture and the Working Environment • Career Suicide • Career obstruction • Abuse of Power • The lived experience: factors that permeate throughout all stages

4.5.1 The struggle to cope with bullying

Sadly, this research reflects the diverse damaging consequences of bullying behaviour for targets. All participants in this study expressed a desire to leave their school due to the impact of bullying on their physical and mental health, professional reputation, and

job satisfaction. However, considering the restrictions on recruitment during the current economic climate, the decision to voluntarily leave a secure position risks unemployment or the prospect of surviving on substitution opportunities. For a number of reasons, resigning was not a feasible option for the majority of participants. However, for some the work environment had become so intolerable, there was no alternative. They had to escape the toxic environment. Rita explained that having “*tried all the options*”, she had concluded:

“I had no way out. But I actually did have a way out. It’s very easy. You think at the time, I have no way out.... Just leave...it’s easier to step away ...you’re stronger if you step away..... just step away”.

The teachers were fortunate in securing alternative teaching positions. Now at a remove and working happily in their new schools, they have come to realise just how dysfunctional their previous employment situation had been.

Those who remained reported being unsuccessful in securing posts in other schools which they directly attributed to their complaint of bullying. With the distinct possibility of never securing another post they had lost hope of progressing further in their own careers. A sentiment echoed by all targets was that they had lost their ambition and passion for teaching; they were simply “*existing*”, running down the clock until retirement. Sarah described the destructive effect of bullying on her enthusiasm and passion for the job:

“...in this school, I’ve lost my ambitiousness. I am a teacher. I go in and I do my job and I try to stay out of trouble”.

Maria who had worked tirelessly to promote IT in her school admitted:

“I’ve actually just given up. I can honestly say I’ve given up. I don’t bother with it [promoting and teaching IT]”.

The hopelessness and demotivation of staff was palpable across the various participant accounts:

“That’s what we have, you know. People are just dragging themselves in because they cannot leave” (Maria).

Ben, who successfully attained a secondment opportunity but was denied permission to fulfill it by his principal, described how he had lost all interest in his teaching career. He explained that he had developed a “*split personality*: enthusiastic, sociable and passionate about everything he does outside of school, with lots of friends, hobbies, and regularly going to the gym; but once in school:

“It’s as if you had a veil on going in, concrete, stone-faced, do what you have to do, get it over and done with, on automatic”.

With no hope of ever resolving the bullying, Ben said he has had to adopt this approach “*just to survive*” and to remind himself that “*this is going to pay the mortgage*”.

A considerable degree of desolation, isolation, sadness and despair was consistently evident in participants’ accounts of coping with bullying.

Claire confessed:

“Once the door is closed in the morning until ... it opens again at half-past one, I don’t really give the others [the bullies] an awful lot of thought, but you know they are there”.

Similarly, Anthony’s career dream had always been to apply for a principal’s post, but the motivation was now gone:

“I am suffering from depression. It has been confirmed by a doctor. I am taking medication; I don’t need the stress of the job at all. Now I would just go with the regular teaching that I have been doing, forget about the principalship, and all that”.

Participants grieved the loss of fulfillment and job satisfaction which they had enjoyed prior to the bullying. All participants maintained that their schools had become toxic workplaces which were detrimental to their health. Each had found their own individual way of coping. For all participants the loss of commitment and passion for teaching was obvious:

“I’ll get in, and I’ll do my job and get out of here” (Betty).

4.5.2 Impaired performance

“Anything that affects a teacher’s happiness is going to affect their teaching” (Anthony). Regrettably, the data from this study provides evidence that bullying behavior has a negative impact on the professional ability of teachers. Analysis suggests that teachers who experienced and complained of bullying, perceive themselves as being no longer able to do their job to the best of their ability. Targets said they experienced reduced commitment to the school and the students which translated into poor teaching performance. Dealing with bullying had absorbed so much of their time and drained their energy and “head space” that they were unable to concentrate on the demands of teaching. Participants were particularly mindful that poor performance had a negative impact on the learning potential of students. Participants who had worked in other schools and ‘second career’ teachers underscored the devastation of encountering toxic working conditions. Figure 16 highlights the effect that bullying had on the whole school community, in terms staff morale, relationships, and students’ education.

Figure 15: Effect on school

Code System	Ben	Helen	Betty	Anth...	Patricia	Rita	John	Jane	Eleanor	Noel	Sarah	Maria	Seam...	Emma	Una	Frank	Mona	Tina	Clod...	Claire	Laura	Jack	SUM
Effect of Bullying	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	■	■	■		50
staff morale	■	■				■	■	■	■		■					■	■	■	■	■			30
effect on the school	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■		■	■	■	■	■	■	129
school relationships	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■					■	■					53
effect on children	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■			■	■	■	■	■	101
Σ SUM	25	25	7	7	11	12	23	9	31	12	23	14	28	0	34	7	5	22	21	28	6	13	363

The harmful effects of bullying encompassed loss of job satisfaction, teaching confidence and spontaneity in teaching. Participants also emphasised that staff morale is affected. Patricia said she was no longer enthusiastic about her teaching and this impacted her job satisfaction. As she recalled:

“I used to love teaching and education, and that’s why I really want out [of the school] because I know what it can be like. I have had the experience of a really good [working environment.] And now it just feels like hell. I absolutely hate it”.

John, who had left a previous profession, reflected:

“Over the five or six years [of bullying] there was a gradual sap of your force, you know, your creativity... You put so much energy into just surviving that. You’re not giving the kids..... You’re not doing your job to the best of your ability”.

Having secured a post in another school where he felt supported to use all his talents as a teacher, he had noticed a huge improvement in his enthusiasm, his performance, and his sense of job fulfilment:

“I’m still, like……, In my new [school], I’m still, kind of, I want to do everything I can in this job now. It’s just keep it right, keep my classroom going very well, keep it in line, and the one thing I’ve learned is; if I’m stressed, my kids are stressed”.

Claire also went back to college as a mature student to train as teacher, something she always wanted to do. She has come to regret this decision since she believed the bullying issues in her school cannot be resolved:

“I get very sad about it because my teaching career is effectively in its twilight years and I get very, very saddened that something I wanted to do so badly and went to so much trouble to get the qualification, has turned out to be such a bitter disappointment”.

In her school, where bullying was pervasive, Rita, was convinced *“those kids were unhappy because the staff were unhappy”*, while Jane maintains the bottom line is that bullying is a huge drain on the productivity of teachers:

“I would have been a better resource to the staff had I been treated better. There would have been more work out of me. I ended up just looking after myself at the end, and I can only assume that there are other people like that then”.

4.5.3 Financial Implications: ‘Trapped’

When Rita finally decided to leave her job, she recalled thinking:

“I’m never going back there! So, I took the sick-leave and I knew I was going to resign, but I didn’t know what to do. I had no idea what was going to happen. But I knew I wasn’t going back there!”

Prior to this, Rita had explored every possible means of redress, both informal and formal, without success, and finally came to understand that her BOM was not amenable to any of the agreed policies or procedures. Even faced with the prospect of never teaching again Rita was willing to take the chance. She was also fortunate to be in a position to resign as she had few commitments and the financial support of her

husband. She admitted that she was finally able to secure another position due to the professional alliances she had forged and maintained in her earlier career.

Seamus eventually accepted that he could no longer tolerate the school environment, he opted to take a career break. His account highlights the financial damage inflicted on targets of bullying:

“I have no income. The only income I have is the income I’m pulling together from a few hours [part time work] ...but I mean, I have a car out there that I need to change, and I can’t change it., And that’s the reality of the situation”.

Laura, a newly qualified teacher (NQT) on a temporary contract, was similarly relieved to escape from her school. While initially afraid to complain in case it would affect her future job opportunities, having finally confronted the bully and complained, she recalled being happy to be free of bullying even though it had direct financial consequences for her. Laura was fortunate to secure a temporary position in a different school the following year and she reasoned:

“She [the principal] has seen that I was weak. Even though what was happening to me, was bullying, I did speak up and say, I’m being bullied. Please acknowledge this. Please don’t hold this against me. But I was kind of happy to be gone as well. I would have to get a new job, but I was, after a while, I was like...thankfully I don’t have to go into that environment ever again”.

For all other participants who were permanent teachers, leaving their schools would mean resigning their posts, applying for substitute or temporary work, and restarting to build service so as to gain panel rights after at least three years. Due to family and financial commitments, the majority of participants were simply not in a position to do this.

4.5.4 School Culture and the Working Environment

Participants commented on the negative effects of bullying behaviour on the school environment. From their perspective a toxic culture had been created in their schools. They mentioned the significant effect management had on school culture in either encouraging or discouraging the resolution of complaints. This study found that teachers’ perceptions of their school culture directly influenced their decision-making

process in relation to making or progressing a complaint. Having had their complaints dismissed or ignored, most of the participants decided that there was no point in continuing to the next stage in the procedure. They conceded that bullying was ingrained within school culture and resistance was futile. Rita was stunned that teachers could remain in such environments:

“Anyone who stays in that school, there’s something wrong with them in the head, I think. They’re all psychologically feeding into it. Anyone that kind of stays in a situation where that’s happening, and bullying is happening, and people are being bullied; there’s something up with their mind” (Rita).

Despite her role as principal Rita too found it impossible to change the existing school culture and observed the *“confusion and chaos in the staff every day”* and how management were *“constantly breaking every law and rule possible”*. She went on to delineate the power struggles between the chairperson, the board, the principal and the union, as *“just constant conflict”*. With no hope of resolving her complaint due to the board’s disregard for agreed procedures she resigned.

Patricia, who had taught in a number of other schools, could not relate to the culture of her new school. She felt separate from the school community and mourned the loss of job fulfillment which she had experienced previously. At the time of interview she intended to resign since she had made a complaint which was wholly disregarded. When she enlisted the help of her union to make a formal complaint and participated in subsequent mediation, the ensuing agreement was ignored and reneged on. She was astonished that those in management went along with this approach:

“There’s a part of me that feels people are standing by in that school and doing nothing and ... I can’t go along with things like that.”

She described the lack of professional, respectful, civil behaviours, which she believes emanate from the top down:

“There’s a real lack of respect amongst the adults in the school...Does she [principal] not think about her own behaviour? And yeah, for me, it just feels all wrong. But it’s just so well-hidden and nobody is saying anything”.

Participant expectations of being listened to, of complaints being dealt with, and of resolution were all based on their perceptions of the school culture. School culture

encompasses the attitudes, beliefs and values that are shared by the people that make up the school community and unless all staff, particularly those in authority, believe that bullying should be prohibited, participants felt there was no point in pursuing a complaint. Rita claimed that in her school, bullying was so prevalent and pervasive that *“people don’t even care that they are being bullied”*. Participants commented that in some schools young teachers are influenced and perhaps indoctrinated by existing school culture. Therefore, their behaviours and values can be moulded or changed by the environment they initially find themselves in. Participants were concerned that young teachers were being inculcated with the idea that that unacceptable behaviour and a toxic environment are normative for primary schools. Participants emphasised the environmental characteristics of their schools which accommodated bullying. They therefore considered it important to examine the context or culture created within the school that overlooked bullying, discouraged intervention, and that dismissed or ignored their complaints of bullying.

The data revealed that bullying was flourishing within participants’ schools. The distinguishing traits emerging from the data, which are consistent with a toxic culture, include autocratic or laissez-faire leadership style, acceptance of bullying behaviours by colleagues, non-intervention, lack of support, a culture of fear accompanied by a desire to leave, non-implementation of rules and regulations by management, lack of open communication, the misuse of power, hierarchical patterns of decision-making and the fact that while bullying may begin with the principal, those in subordinate positions may adopt that behaviour because they see it as ‘acceptable’. Participants noted that when school principals legitimised bullying behaviours it led to the creation of a bullying environment, while others referred to the low staff morale and injustices that permeated their whole school. A combination of these characteristics constituted a culture of bullying for participants in this study. The general view of participants was that in environments that tolerate bullying, complaining is futile.

Those who resigned noted the difference in school culture. As a newly qualified teacher (NQT), John commented that what he had initially accepted as ‘normal’, he now understood as *“culture in that school I think it was barmy, it was nuts”*. John soon

realised when he made a complaint and participated in staff mediation that it would be unsuccessful. However, though it was some distance from his home he was fortunate to secure a post in another school which he described as “*a different planet*”. For him, the most striking aspect was the way the teachers interacted with one another with “*positive rapport*”. John was very complimentary of his new principal whom he characterised as an ‘*affirmative*’ example for the whole school.

Jane worked in four schools and under eight principals over the course of her career and was amazed at the diversity of “*culture and the ethos*”. “*I am still surprised at the kind of stuff that went on and that was allowed to go on*”. Jane saw no point in advancing her complaint beyond Stage Two and she left her position due to “*the norm*” of bullying behaviour. She described the school as unwelcoming, and her place in it as “*persona non-grata*”:

“I had been teaching for thirty-something years, I have two Masters, I have had some writing published. I have a very good home life. I have all of this lovely stuff going on. And yet why do I feel when I go into this school every morning that I am somebody who has never done anything in their whole lives? It’s like I am coming in here on teaching practice, and I think all of that is to do with the atmosphere and how things are done and how people perceive themselves”.

Like Jane, Helen’s complaint had been dismissed and her request for some kind of intervention ignored. However, she was unsurprised at this outcome, since her school’s working environment was a place where teachers consistently behaved unprofessionally and without consideration for others:

“It was a culture of promoting oneself by putting others down. There was no respect for other people’s point of view. It was just who’s the loudest. I felt that I wanted to work in a climate of dignity and respect, and I felt that wasn’t happening. It was the opposite of harmonious staff relations, which is what we should all be working with. It was the opposite of honest, open cooperative, transparent and collaborative. I felt that I was undermined in work situations and publicly humiliated. I felt at times that it was verbal abuse, with Miss X, definitely, I was continuously undermined. The complete opposite of a supportive environment in school”.

Helen had tried to address the problem informally but found that every attempt at resolution was summarily rejected and dismissed. Even her request for mediation was refused. It was evident from the data that where the school culture does not promote

open, constructive dialogue where differences can be aired and difficulties addressed, there is little chance of resolving bullying issues. Participants found that where a culture of bullying exists, it is almost impossible to have a complaint addressed:

“It was just when we came to this place, it just... I think I was in shock for the first few years, and then you sort of...I think it’s like going through the grieving process. I don’t know. And then you come to accept it, and then you suddenly come out the other side. You are lucky if you come out the other side” (Ben).

4.5.5 Career Suicide

As well as experiencing ill-treatment, lack of support, and increased isolation, participants felt that making a complaint of bullying had a negative influence on their professional lives. In fact, “*career suicide*” is a term used by some participants to describe the consequence of complaining. Teachers believed that members are not willing to report breaches in agreed procedures “*because they are going to be blacklisted and they won’t get a job anywhere*” (Anthony).

Eleanor agreed that by making a complaint of bullying she had effectively:

“...committed career suicide. I tried to apply for principalships. I have been unsuccessful”.

Eleanor blamed the Church’s power alliances across Boards of Management for her inability to secure a post in another school. “*The church has a lot to do with it. The Church needs to get out of education.*” This view was shared by many participants who reported having suffered professionally in this way. Participants were convinced that the lack of success in securing positions in other schools was due to the fact that they had made complaints of bullying. They were now labeled “*troublemakers*” and believed that these malicious characterisations were communicated by their former BOM members, chairpersons, and principals’ networks to other Boards of Management.

When Úna brought a complaint of bullying and her chairman ignored it, she recollected how dejected she felt, how her reputation had been damaged, and how she had now lost hope of getting out of her school:

“Again, it’s not easy to find a job after losing a job. You won’t even get a job because they’ll say, ‘What was in your career that you couldn’t get, that you lost your job?’ like, you know. So, at the end of the day, like, it’s just like [keep going] ... In the absence of another plan or a scheme to utilise to stop it [bullying], you just keep, you put the head down, and keep going because at the end of the day, we all need a job to go to ...”.

Several participants felt despondent and trapped in toxic environments where bullying dynamics were maintained. In the absence of any effective measures to deal with bullying, there was little they could do except “*survive from day to day*” without being actively engaged in the school’s operation. Claire remained pessimistic about the prospect of resolving the bullying in her school:

“Well, I think if you do nothing, it continues. If you do something, it gets worse”.

Several teachers echoed this sentiment and reported feelings of disillusionment, isolation, and abandonment. For Rita there was only one choice:

“I don’t know if there’s any solution. That’s why I kind of...If you have to give a solution...For me, it was just to get out!”

4.5.6 Career obstruction

Academic jealousy appeared as a recurring factor in participants’ transcript data. Surprisingly, all participants, except for the NQT, held at least Level 7-8 postgraduate qualification. Teachers said that following their initiation of a complaint, there was a marked drive to obstruct or halt their access to further professional development. Targets reported that those in authority, usually the principal, refused consent for study leave, conducting research, and/or participation in further postgraduate courses. Participants interpreted this as a reprimand for making a complaint, and indeed the study found that teachers who had complained of bullying experienced a negative impact on their further professional development, which in turn, had a knock-on effect on overall career opportunities.

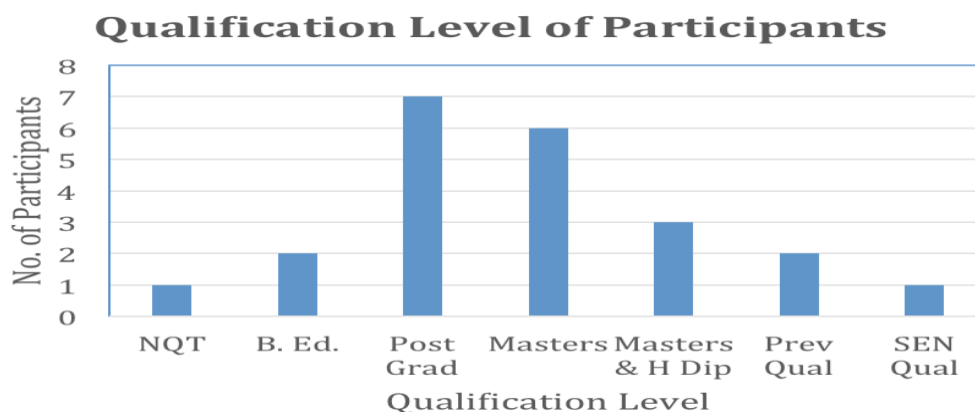
From meeting with participants it was evident that they had been highly motivated teachers until the time that they encountered bullying. Figure 17 outlines the qualification levels of the participants in the study and underlines the fact that these teachers were diligent, dedicated professionals who were often more qualified than those in management positions. Given that many had completed or were currently pursuing postgraduate studies, they feared that progressing a complaint of bullying would jeopardise their future studies and career opportunities. Some, like Ben, found that it led to a complete immobilization of their studies: *“I have suffered professionally and personally because of it. Very much, professionally”*.

Seamus thought he may never return to teaching, as he *“ended up walking away from [his] job”*, while Sarah was very disappointed that she was obstructed from continuing with a post-graduate course that had already entailed substantial financial outlay:

“I was against the wall and I had nothing to lose, because I was sure that I would need to give up my studies”.

Noel was also unable to complete a ‘Master of Special Education’ as his principal refused to sanction his research project. He observed: *“it’s incredibly damaging to yourself and then to your career”*.

Figure 16: Qualification level of participants



This study found that where the bully was the principal there was a definite and intentional attempt to hamper or obstruct participant progress in gaining access to further training and qualifications. For Anthony it was impossible to progress his complaint of bullying because he really wanted to enrol on a post-graduate course:

“The fact that I was trying to get on this course, it required the agreement of the principal, and it required the principal to make a commitment to me being left in this line of work for so many years afterwards”.

For five years Anthony had been trying to enrol on, a Higher Diploma in Special Education postgraduate course; an area he was passionate about. He realised that had he progressed his complaint, his principal would not have consented to his participation in a course. Moreover, he was worried that without that postgraduate qualification his chances of getting out of the school would be greatly curtailed. When his principal continuously refused to sign the required permission form, he was unable to understand her reasoning:

“I always wanted to study ... I had a battle on my hands, because of the person I was dealing with, just to do the study, and then it was being used..., the fact that I wanted to do it... was being used as a bargaining chip, like, to get me to teach a class that no-one else wanted to teach”.

Some participants found that obstacles emerged when trying to conduct or complete research projects. Sarah felt unable pursue her complaint because her principal was already delaying her studies' progression by consistently refusing consent to her research being carried out in the school. At one point she was losing all hope of completing her Masters and on the brink of leaving the course:

“I've lost my ambition. I am a teacher. For the children, I will do everything.... I don't know what the reason was. Why she didn't want me to. Why, why, why? I mean, it's good for a school if the teachers are well qualified”.

Noel also found that once he had made a complaint, obstacles were put in his way:

“I was trying to get consent to do my Masters intervention in the school, and he wouldn't give me consent. He couldn't give me a reason why, but he wouldn't respond to my letters”.

Noel persisted in requesting permission, but his principal kept delaying a decision and ignoring his pleas. Noel eventually decided that he would have to leave the school in

order to be able to complete his studies. To date he has been unable to complete his Masters.

When applying for study leave or seeking permission to complete the research element of their postgraduate courses, Ben, Noel, Sarah, Maria and Jane all asserted that “*the principal turned it down*”. All five participants were aggrieved at the huge cost in terms of time and money which they had invested in these courses, but they particularly regretted the loss to the school in terms of expertise and commitment.

Following his complaint of bullying Ben thought it would be of benefit, for all concerned, if he became involved in the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). He had a number of postgraduate qualifications and he assumed his principal would relish the prospect of having him out of the school, at least for some periods throughout the year. Ben really wanted a break from the toxic environment in his school. On the basis of his qualifications he had been invited to join the service, but he recalled what happened when he mentioned it to the principal:

“So, I went in and I said it to him. And he looked at me and said, ‘I can’t spare you’. Ben pleaded: ‘But I’ll be out of your hair. You know honestly that you don’t want me here. I’ll be out of your hair for a year if not two, and I will be going around to different schools and that’. ‘We can’t spare you’ And then he sat back and just had the pen and just turned it over, and just looked. ‘Anything else?’”.

Ben interpreted his principal’s refusal to release as a reprisal for making a complaint of bullying.

4.5.7 Abuse of Power

Participants cited power imbalance and abuse of power as the cause of lack of confidence in the procedures to resolve bullying in schools. Policies reflect clear commitment to preventing bullying by outlining procedures but participants all agreed that they are weak due to issues with implementation and investigation. All participants discussed the role of power and how the exercise of power, or indeed the abuse of

power, by those in school management was a key determinant of workplace bullying.

As Jane asked:

“Why is it that some people in a place can actually do whatever they like and other people don't? Other people toe the line and some people do. I don't know. It's kind of an interesting power, a thing about power structure, and who has it”.

Participants affirmed the view that the hierarchical management structure of primary schools in relation to the roles of the principal teacher, the chairperson and the Board of Management was susceptible to abuse because they were largely unaccountable and unsupervised. All participants commented that principals were not accountable to a higher authority, and that complaints could be ignored or buried because inspectors were not proficient in the identification of weak leadership or indeed those who exhibited toxic leadership traits. In some cases, the power of a group of staff members outweighed the principal's power but many participants believed that power struggles within the teaching staff was a trigger or a motivation for bullying behaviour as the bully or bullies tried to gain control over the target. Like Ben, Noel explained how he had to be hypervigilant when he met with his bullying principal:

“He used to sit behind his desk and the power ... There was the power there and then, and you had to be on your guard and full thinking mode. My fight-or-flight sense was really in gear”.

Noel, Sarah and Anthony had all sought approval from their principals to undertake a Masters program. Sarah could think of no plausible reason why consent was not forthcoming. She reasoned: *“I think it is definitely a power thing, you know. It's like, it's a total power thing”.*

All participants shared the view expressed by Anthony when he spoke of the *“power alliances of principals”* and he clearly feared the risk to his career of making a complaint and exposing the bully:

“You are vulnerable, and you see, you are only trained for one type of work, and the interviews are similar across the board, no matter which schools you are going to, and all the principals know one another”.

Other participants echoed this sentiment. They felt that the chances of securing a position in another school within a reasonable distance of their homes were negligible.

Participants in this study felt there was too much power vested in the roles of principal and the chairperson. It seemed as if they were not amenable to rules or regulations, particularly those relating to the handling of complaints of bullying:

“There is too much power I think attached to a principal’s role. Like, the person you would complain to in a school is the principal. The Child Protection Officer (CPO) is normally the principal. The person who says, “Yay” or “Nay” is the principal. Even in a business, you would have a Board. But who is in charge of the Board? The principal!” (Ben).

Interestingly, Rita maintained that certain types of people are attracted to these roles precisely because of the power they represent:

“It’s the type of people you are getting into the principalship, it’s the type of people you are getting into the chairperson’s role; it’s the type of people that go on a board”.

Jack concurred:

“I have a bugbear, but the one thing that’s wrong with the system is that they [principals] have too much control. Way too much control”.

Significantly, the lived experiences of most participants uncovered a sense of hopelessness and helplessness in the bullying situations in their schools. Their narratives clearly established that the individuals who were targeted felt unable to defend themselves due to their weaker positional power. In addition, misuse of power by the perpetrator was evident from the analysed cases, reaffirming the notion that those who were targeted lacked power (Branch *et al.*, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012).

4.5.8 The lived experience: factors that permeate throughout all stages

Participants initially trusted that issues would resolve of their own accord and the bullying would stop eventually. They also explained they had no idea how to deal with workplace bullying but once action had been taken, participants found that they were obliged to drive the process as management ‘sat on their hands’ and waited. Like all other participants, Eleanor stated that the complaint process had exacerbated her stress and had made matters worse. All those interviewed commented that it was almost impossible to engage with the complaint procedure whilst trying to teach full-time. However, the participants cited certain factors that either worsened or helped to

alleviate the consequences of standing up to bullying. The behaviours that constitute bullying in primary schools, the devastation that ensues, and the need for peer or home support were recurring themes throughout. Overwhelming evidence from this study indicates that targets of bullying experience a delayed cognition of being bullied, feel unable to fully defend themselves, are reluctant to complain, and have no real knowledge of how to deal with bullying behaviour.

As such, when bullying arises within schools most colleagues, management, and even the targets themselves, try to ignore the problem in the hope that it will fizzle out. Throughout the initial stage of the process inertia was evident in participants' accounts.

However, once initial inertia had been overcome, and clarity established, participants commented that the full awareness impact of bullying left them stressed, lacking confidence, and with a diminished locus of control. Initially participants felt certain that by following the correct procedure the issue would be resolved. However, participants found the tortuous, bureaucratic, and largely futile process, merely resulted in increased stress. The central or overarching conclusion however was that once a complaint had been made the effect on targets' family and social life intensified and the negative consequences increased for both victim and family members.

Home Support

Participants commented on how difficult it is for those who work in a positive environment to understand how and why bullying is tolerated in workplaces. Being believed was central to participants' sense of support. Unfortunately, there was no evidence to suggest that this was the case with management at any time throughout the process. Having made a complaint and finding no encouragement amongst colleagues, participants often confided in someone outside of the workplace. Feeling ignored, disbelieved, unsupported, and sensing that redress was not forthcoming targets looked to family and friends for support. Most participants highlighted the critical role of family and friends in providing the only real support in alleviating the consequences of making a complaint. While participants appreciated home support as crucial, they were

also concerned about the negative impact exerted on family members and home life: *“I’m sure that it affected my relationships with everybody around me”*. Indeed, the finding that while participants progressed through the various stages of the complaint procedure, the negative effects of bullying tended to spill over and affect the people around them is stark and worrying. These *“critical others”* were mentioned by all participants as playing a vital role throughout the pre-action, action and post-action stages. Family members and friends provided a listening ear for targets’ feelings of anger, pain, shame, fear, anguish and unhappiness. As Ben recounted: *“You’re there and you go, well, who do you turn to, and stuff like that?”*

Úna stressed the important role her husband played in providing support and her increased social withdrawal:

“You have to talk to somebody... My husband would say to me, ‘Be conscious now that you’re kind of off-loading there’ and I would say, ‘Maybe I am. I’m offloading. But jeepers, bar I tell the tree like Labhtraí O Lóingsigh, I mean, I have to tell somebody. I have to, I mean, just for sanity. For my own sanity, I have to tell somebody, and I can’t tell anybody in the local environment above because it will go back. You know, you have to be very careful who you talk to and who you off-load to”.

The data revealed that relationships became strained as a result of bullying and participants ultimately regretted subjecting their partners and friends to their incessant moaning and irritability. Úna observed how it affected her family:

“You’re taking it out on them. You’re venting it all out on your family when you go home”.

Participants disclosed that partners:

“go through an awful time as well, because they see their partner suffering”.

Sarah summed up the toll it was taking on her whole family:

“I took it home. My children were wrecks. My husband broke down one evening. It was just he couldn’t handle it anymore. He didn’t know what to do. I mean, it became a kind of a life thing for me because it carried on for so long. I took these things home because there’s nobody else to turn to. You feel a bit better because my family and I ...the long-term thing, I got physically ill, and my whole family suffered because of it”.

Noel also regretted how much bullying had affected his relationship:

“It had come at a cost. I was highly anxious, I would come in with a lot [anger], and it was very difficult. And me and my wife’s relationship wasn’t great at the time, because I would come home and off-load it all on to her”.

Ben similarly recalled how the protracted school bullying took a toll on his marriage and that something needed to be done:

“It did [take a toll on the marriage], up to a point. But we came to a decision where we wouldn’t discuss my work after six o’clock. Luckily enough, we used to keep fairly fit. We would go to the gym and everything, which helped an awful lot”.

Meanwhile Eleanor reported that her husband:

“...had to take two months unpaid leave from his work to carry me to my medical/hospital appointments and my children to school”.

Una admitted turning to the services of ‘CareCall’ to alleviate the pressure on her family:

“I found that good because it’s just, you have to off-load. I mean, at the end of the day, my family were hearing enough about it and you don’t want to be off-loading, off-loading, all the time to your family”.

John said his wife pleaded with him to leave the school despite the fact that they would have no income. She was increasingly concerned about the toll bullying was taking on his health and on his quality of life:

“I don’t care [about the income], this is it. We’ll manage, we’ll survive. Get out, we’re getting you out”.

In the same way, Helen realised her husband found it difficult to stand by while she continued to suffer. He even tried to directly intervene:

“My husband had come up [to the school]. He went into the principal. I asked him not to go in, but he went in. He said (to principal) that it had gone so bad that I wouldn’t be able to come back in September and that it was affecting our family life, which it was”.

Helen said he pleaded with the principal to investigate her complaint, to intervene and to try to resolve the conflict so that their family life could return to normal. However, she said his appeal for intervention was ignored, her request for mediation rejected, and the bullying continued unabated.

Rita appreciated how lucky she was to be able to discuss the situation with family and friends, but she nevertheless regretted how it affected her husband:

“Some people didn’t understand. My friends understood. My husband understood. My husband... the biggest effect, and that’s the regret I have, is that he was affected very badly. He was so stressed, he had his own job to deal with, and now he’s free, we look back and go, ‘Wow, remember this time last year?’ He says, ‘I can spend the day without worrying what’s happening to my wife, without wondering is my wife going to ring me? And she will ring me’”.

The author acknowledges the devastation that was inflicted on all participants and their families by workplace bullying, but one cannot but be moved by the sense of despair and desolation experienced by those who did not have the support of spouses or partners. For them, the lack of such support networks can only exacerbate the suffering.

Behaviours

The findings in this study concurred with the literature reviewed on the detrimental effects of bullying. Following analysis of the data it was observed that participants continuously elaborated on the workplace bullying behavioural descriptors. Even after making a complaint, participants detected a continuation, and possibly an escalation, of reported behaviours. This study found that the initiation of a complaint of bullying did not deter bullying behaviour; on the contrary, it was more likely to develop into a directly aggressive phase, involving actions that resulted in further humiliation and isolation. As a result, teachers described finding it difficult to defend themselves and becoming withdrawn and reluctant to communicate. This, in turn, cut them off from support within their working environment. The reported behaviours all fall within the scope of the definitions of bullying behaviour gleaned from the literature.

Figure 18 below, created using MaxQDA (code matrix browser), gives a general overview of the distribution of coded segments for the code and sub-codes relating to bullying behaviours. It illustrates the occurrence and frequency of reported behaviours for all interview documents. The negative behaviours identified by participants are listed on the left side and participant pseudonyms are listed at the top. When a code is

assigned to a document a square appears at the intersection. Each square represents a coded segment of the data and the size of the square depends on the number of coded segments that were found in each document. The more often a code has been assigned to a document the larger the square. By default, the size of a single square is determined its relation to all the other squares in the matrix. The sum total of coded segments for each negative behaviour is listed down the right side. The total number of coded segments of negative behaviours for each participant is listed at the bottom.

Figure 17: Bullying behaviours

Code System	Ben	Helen	Betty	Anthony	Patricia	Rita	John	Jane	Eleanor	Noel	Sarah	Maria	Seamus	Emma	Una	Frank	Mona	Tina	Clodagh	Claire	Laura	Jack	SUM		
Bullying																								0	
Behaviours																									47
Menial tasks assigned																									3
Confidentiality breached																									9
Overburdened																									27
Subjected to rude behaviour																									30
Threatened or physically attac																									15
Deprived of affirmation																									34
Isolated																									100
Information/resources withheld																									31
Undervalued																									23
Not supported																									44
CPD denied or obstructed																									11
Subjected to malicious roumou																									45
Subjected to sarcasm																									11
Subjected to false allegations																									78
Unjustly criticized																									28
Treated differently or unfairly																									62
Subjected to intimidation																									26
Hinted at to leave																									9
Insulted																									22
Undermined																									57
Subjected to manipulative beh																									21
Gossiped about																									43
Ridiculed																									26
Set up																									10
Mobbed																									80
Ignored																									55
Over-supervised																									28
Deceived																									53
Subjected to aggressive behavi																									46
SUM	89	81	21	28	36	56	83	72	55	58	39	21	64	0	76	49	25	33	32	69	42	45		1074	

Leadership style of principal

Several participants deemed their bully principals to have dual personalities; one side for the staff, and one side for the public, inspectors and board members:

“You know, she would have put on the PR job for everyone else. We were wonderful to everybody else, but behind the scenes, we were being whipped” (Tina).

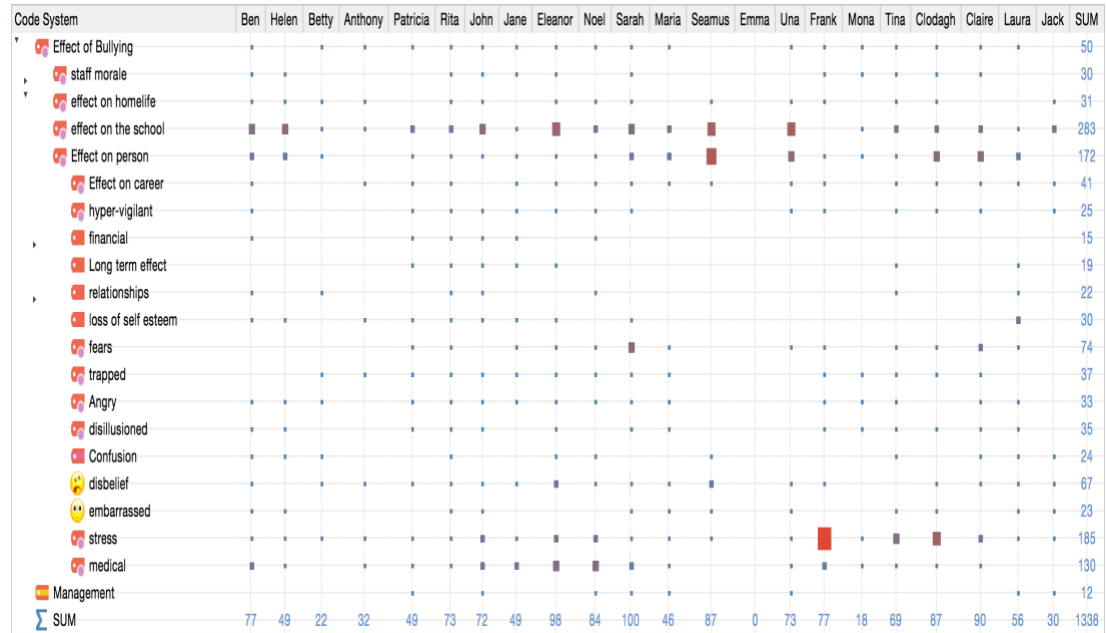
Participants also noticed that those in powerful positions tend to adopt a cavalier attitude to regulations, procedures, and the normal rules of behaviour. A number of teachers reported that principals used their authority in areas such as class allocation or consent to attend CPD, as a bargaining chip or as a reprimand for making a complaint. However, renegeing on agreements was also a regular occurrence. Teachers were frustrated when, having completed the required task, promises were renegeed on and agreements were systematically broken. This was particularly upsetting for some teachers who felt they had been duped. A view shared by all participants was that confidence and trust in the authority of the principal had been damaged due to unpredictability, manipulation, dishonesty, and an unwillingness to tackle complaints of bullying:

“You can’t be sure with her [the principal], because you know, she’s one of these people that’s nice to you one day and you don’t know ... You know, it’s like Brutus and Caesar, ‘et tu? You don’t know what’s coming’”. (Úna)

Exclusion

Participants alluded to the behaviours documented in the literature on workplace bullying. Even though the principal was not always involved, participants reported that management did little in terms of support or intervention once they were made aware of bullying. The Figure 19 code matrix represents the coded segments for the effects of bullying behaviour. Each square represents a coded segment of the data and the size of the square depends on the number of coded segments that were found in each document. The sum total of coded segments for each effect is listed down the right side. The total number of coded segments of negative effects for each participant is listed at the bottom.

Figure 18: Effects of bullying



The most prevalent behaviour experienced by teachers following a complaint of bullying was exclusion leading to further isolation and increased sense of being treated differently. This resulted in further damage to self-esteem and to mental health. Exclusion sometimes involved a group dynamic particularly in the case of bigger schools. Participants felt that colleagues distanced themselves because they did not want to be drawn into disputes. Claire reported that her principal actively discouraged other staff from engaging with her:

“She actually told her [member of staff] that she was speaking to the wrong people”.
Claire perceived this as an attempt to perpetuate her exclusion and isolation.

Úna described how:

“...when I went into the staffroom, it was all chat, chat, chat together, hush, hush, hush, and then the conversation would stop when I came in”.

Claire also believed she was becoming “*somebody not to speak to*”, while Ben revealed that he was consistently excluded from taking part in school planning:

“There would be a committee set up for something in school and you would put your hand up to go on it, and you weren’t chosen”.

Ben described his treatment on a staff night out:

“I often used to avoid them [staff social outings], because you could go and you could be left on your own then, or sometimes you would go there and you would make sure that you were sitting beside a certain person [who would talk to him] or if I knew that somebody [to talk to] wasn’t going to be there, I might be ill, or I might not go. It’s just a case of, why put yourself through it? Because you have been through it enough at work and you will pay for the meal and all the drink...., and then a couple of times, Christmas a couple of times, the round... the drinks went around, and I didn’t get one”.

Jane was adamant as she summed up the isolation following her complaint:

“I wasn’t with the older members of staff. I wasn’t with the younger ones. I found that I didn’t really have any friend in the school... and it was a very deliberate thing”.

Similarly, Sarah explained:

“You feel outside the bubble. You know, you don’t feel included as part of the staff. I mean, this year, I did not go to the staff function. I just thought, Why?”.

The most heartrending of all accounts was that of Seamus, who had been ‘frozen out’ by the entire staff and left solitary, friendless and lonely:

“I just couldn’t take it anymore. I just couldn’t. The daily undermining. The daily isolation. The daily no-one talking to me. The daily of going into the staffroom and I’d go in and they’d walk out, or I’d go in and there would be silence where no-one would speak”.

Seamus recounted many upsetting accounts of the dreadful, toxic environment his school had become. One could not but be moved by the image of a lonely, solitary individual pacing up and down the school yard, day in day out, without as much as a ‘hello’ from another adult. What made his story more compelling was that, as a single man, he was without the support of a spouse or partner to confide in when he went home in the evenings.

“I was so isolated that I didn’t have the courage maybe to do it. I knew that I was struggling to survive each day and I really didn’t have it within me to open up that conversation, to tell you the truth, because I was going there every day and I was just praying for the courage to get to three o’clock, and for the strength to get there, and I really didn’t have it in me to challenge anyone”.

Aggression

Complaints of bullying sometimes gave rise to aggressive reactions. Participants reported that aggressive, rude behaviour had become the norm in their schools, and their accounts reveal a number of blatantly aggressive episodes with one incident bordering on physical abuse. Eleanor was thirty weeks pregnant when she submitted a written complaint of bullying. She described her principal and deputy principal as being “aggressive and intimidating” following her complaint. She recounted how one day they brought her into a room and Eleanor felt she had no option but to change her statement:

“She [the principal] closed the door and she put her back to the door, and she said, ‘Delete it. You’re not leaving this room until it’s deleted’. And I cried. I cried”.

When Frank made a complaint to his deputy principal he was shocked by his violent reaction:

“I go, and I do the procedure. Make a complaint. I’m abused, roared, and shouted at. He gets right into my face. His nose is touching mine”.

Clodagh and Claire also recalled confronting an intimidating bully:

“She got really angry and she ... I felt that I was at a risk of a physical assault. She got very aggressive”.

“She [principal] came into me at half-eight one morning in a most aggressive manner”.

Sarah noted her superiors were:

“...just plain rude to me. The principal and the assistant principal, like. As in slapping doors in my face”.

Rita denounced her bully's:

“...psychopathic tendencies....no people skills, zero empathy, manipulative....just a law unto herself....She was the biggest bitch I've met in my life, in -my- life! I have never met such an evil person....”.

Participants were doubly dismayed that aggressive, openly confrontational episodes such as those described above were often carried out in full view or earshot of impressionable young children and were concerned about the adverse impact of such experiences on the children.

4.6 Conclusion

It is evident that participants presumed that, having developed and adopted anti-bullying policies, their respective BOM would adhere to the procedures of investigation and intervene. This was not the case. In fact, participants reported that despite robust policies being in place, these were utterly disregarded.

Participant accounts suggest that the school, as an organisation which operates without external independent review mechanisms, is vulnerable to internal autocracy. The data illuminates the deficiencies in the current anti-bullying policies and procedures within primary schools. The data evidences dissatisfaction with the present complaints procedures and confirms that in-house investigations, if conducted at all, are inadequate and unacceptable.

Opinions somewhat differed on the issue of responsibility and accountability but participants generally concurred that there was a lack of appropriate intervention by

Boards of Management, the DES, INTO and the inspectorate into reports of workplace bullying. Participant experiences demonstrated that inspectors, principals, INTO representatives, school staff members, and boards of management were ill-equipped to deal with the problem of workplace bullying in schools due to a widespread lack of awareness of bullying along with a dearth of expertise and training in engaging with the problem.

As such, all participants agreed on the need for a multi-disciplinary team of professionals to investigate complaints, train staff, mediate, and develop effective policies in the area of workplace bullying. One participant proposed:

“A complete overhaul of the system from the Department, right down to the teacher training colleges, and proper management training for principals and deputies to deal with this”. (Clodagh)

In general, participants appreciated that responding to complaints of bullying is a complex challenge for management but felt that understanding the specific kinds of support required and providing such support would go some way towards alleviating the detrimental effects of bullying on teachers, students, and the entire school community.

All participants offered their intuitive views on how workplace bullying in schools could possibly be prevented or tackled and how schools could better support the targets of bullying. The following chapter outlines participants’ suggestions of potential support structures and provides considerable insight into the factors which impinge on bullying, and which in turn, may contribute to a possible resolution.

5.1 Introduction

This study seeks to widen the view of workplace bullying by exploring the experiences of targets as they seek redress for workplace bullying. Understanding the practices of power in the primary school setting has important implications for practice and in extending the limited available literature in the area of power, effectiveness of redress procedures and organisational response to complaints of workplace bullying. Moreover, understanding the nature of power within workplace bullying processes can inform “organisational strategies to disrupt the cycle of inappropriate behaviours” (Patterson *et al.* 2018, p.32). Therefore, a critical conception of power, and how it operates through and is facilitated by organisational practices, is explored. The findings of this study confirm the teacher participants endured the adverse realities of workplace bullying and it supports international research confirming that workplace bullying damages physical and mental health and the careers of targets (O’Moore *et al.*, 1998; Hudecova, 2007; Grey and Gardiner, 2013). The participants accounts provides evidence to show that the cases in this study followed a typical bullying process such as the conflict escalation model of Glasl (1994), Leymann’s (1993, 1996), Björkvist (1992), Einarsen (2011), Lutgen-Sandvik (2008), Skogstad (1996) and Field (1996). Participants in this study initially employed various passive or covert strategies which were perceived to be unsuccessful. In these cases teachers either left or they tried to survive somehow in the school, mostly using some kind of withdrawal behaviour. Targets, sensing a lack of power and control, were then compelled to engage in more active approaches which proved equally ineffective. Consequently, “the victim has to apply other, mostly passive, strategies to survive” (Zapf and Gross 2001, p.504). In line with previous empirical studies this study found that targets first use a series of covert conflict management strategies followed by more overt strategies such as voice. The apparent unequal power dynamic however leaves little opportunity for the target when active and constructive strategies such as voice do not prove successful. In line with previous research, the data show that, most of the participants experienced escalating

bullying and that “bullying in an advanced stage is a non-control situation for the victim” (Zapf and Gross 2001, p.515). However, leaving, the ultimate reaction of many targets, was not considered a feasible option for most participants. The results of the present study support the view that preventative measures are warranted so that intervention strategies can be implemented prior to the escalation of bullying.

The study also indicates that bullying not only has a profound impact on the individual target, teachers perceived that it also affects students, school climate and culture (Hirschstein *et al.* 2007). Stress, anxiety and associated mental and physical health problems, from participants’ perspective, ultimately impacted their quality of teaching, and culminated in professional disengagement and absenteeism. While there are many factors that help understand why targets react the way they do to bullying, this study adopted a power perspective. The literature proposes that “resistance to abuse at work is a complex, dynamic process in which workers fight to have a voice and are often punished for their efforts” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.429). Despite the fact that they all sought to resist it, their efforts led to frustration and disillusionment with management procrastination and inaction. This raises questions about how certain workplace factors facilitate or enable this through antecedents and “enabling structures and processes” which are conducive to such behaviours (Salin 2003, p.1217). Taking a critical interpretation of the power dynamics within the primary school this study illuminates the role of institutional power dynamics associated with workplace bullying.

While targets sought redress in their bid to resist bullying, hesitancy and fear marked their efforts, with organisational inaction, retaliation and further abuse being commonly reported. Policies and procedures are intended to serve as means of agency for targets in their quest to resolve workplace bullying, but the data indicates that they can also act as technologies of power for bullies or management who either denied, ignored, procrastinated or retaliated with counter complaints and attacks against the target. If we accept that workplace bullying in primary schools must be addressed using the recommended complaints procedures then it is vital that the role of power in negotiating and enforcing these procedures is considered. In this study all participants considered the role of power, specifically the imbalance and abuse of power, in the organisational response to their complaints of bullying. What is perceived as the legitimate exercise of organisational power, in the operation of the complaints procedure, is fundamental to the ways in which teachers describe the process as inherently flawed and

impracticable. In particular participants regarded positional power as an important factor in allowing bullies to exercise control over targets as well as other staff. Indeed, shock that negative and unrestrained bullying was perceived to continue to persist in their schools compounded their deep sense of futility and powerlessness.

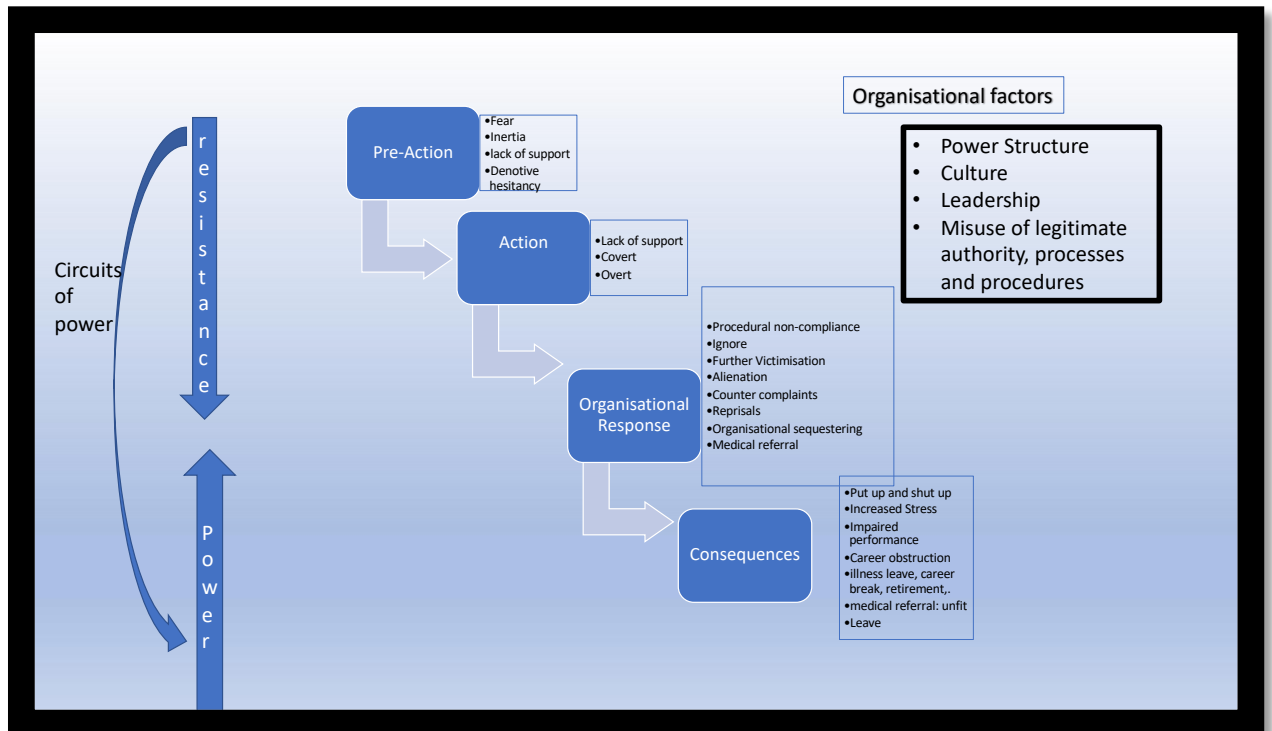
It is evident from the findings that certain practices associated with organisational structure, hierarchy and lack of oversight, hamper resolution and may actually prolong or perpetuate bullying behaviour. The literature has also demonstrated how poorly the problem is managed by both trade unions and HR (D’Cruz and Noronha, 2009). Despite the stipulations of Health and Safety legislation which vouchsafe prompt management responses to allegations of workplace bullying, no evidence of appropriate or timely interventions within Irish primary-school settings was identified in this study. On the contrary, the findings demonstrate that in participants’ schools such issues are perceived to be often mishandled, denied or ignored by management and/or those in leadership positions, with participants reporting that their complaints were habitually discounted and agreed procedures systematically flouted despite the escalation of bullying behaviour. The participants’ accounts attest that when bullying becomes an issue within a school, the best alternative may be to ‘get out’. Significant enabling factors at play in the context of the Irish primary-school were identified, including by-standing, cultures of bullying, leadership difficulties, and the inherent power structure of schools. In addition, the culture of managerial or staff denial or avoidance of workplace bullying, was perceived to at least partly enable “the continuation of such behaviours” (Hoel *et al.* 1999).

This chapter discusses the findings in the context of previous research and demonstrates how they relate to the research questions posed in Chapter One. The wide spectrum of issues which pertain to workplace bullying within the teaching profession, and the factors which impact on the decision to act and to engage with the complaints procedure, are also discussed. The chapter continues by analysing the experiences of teachers, in the context of power theory, who struggled to have their experience of bullying resolved by engaging with the recommended complaints process and as such it highlights the interplay between power and resistance with regard to anti-bullying procedures. It uncovers whether these policies provide real opportunity for resistance

and it delineates participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the complaints procedure in addressing or resolving such issues. The chapter concludes by considering important organisational factors that impact on workplace bullying.

5.2. Model of teachers' experience following a complaint of workplace bullying

Figure 19 Model of teachers' experience following a complaint of workplace bullying



5.3 Individual Response to Bullying - a power perspective

5.3.1 Pre-Action

Barriers to engagement with the complaints procedures

The data reveals a number of barriers which hinder teacher engagement with the recommended complaints procedure and confirm that teachers may attempt a range of alternative reconciliatory or covert strategies prior to formalising a complaint. Questions concerning definition, a disbelief that teachers engage in bullying behaviour, denotive hesitancy, fear, powerlessness and the erosion of professional status can

impede targets' ability to recognise and resist bullying. This study concurs with Lewis' (2006) contention that barriers exist which delay targets' recognition of bullying "beyond earlier stages when prevention may be easier" (Lewis 2006, p.129). Shifting the focus from the individual voice to the organisational response, through its processes and structures, uncovers the nature and complexity of the power dynamics involved in resistance to workplace bullying in primary schools.

Definitional issues

As observed across in the literature, one of the main challenges to combatting workplace bullying rest on issues of definition (Namie and Namie, 2000; Riley, 2012; Adams, 1992; Leymann, 1996; Smith, 1997; Samnani, 2013). Despite three decades of research, an explicit and coherent universal definition of adult bullying continues to be problematised by perceptual and contextual considerations. Although the concept of school bullying is relatively homogeneous, "workplace bullying is more ambiguous" (Einarsen *et al.* 2003, p.228). Denotative hesitancy, an "initial difficulty of naming experiences before there exists a consensual language from which to draw" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.20), was clearly at play, causing delays in recognising bullying behaviours and stalling the initial responses of both targets and witnesses. The literature proposes that as a highly subjective and ambiguous concept, bullying covers a wide range of negative behaviours, which are difficult for targets and organisations to identify and they represent a significant barrier for targets (Hall 2005; Lewis 2006).

While the matter falls under Irish Health and Safety legislation, the fact that there is no statute currently in force which explicitly defines and/or protects targets from workplace bullying may reflect perceptions that such behaviours are inconsequential, tolerable, or even acceptable. This study found no evidence that the taxonomy of the most prevalent bullying behaviours encountered by the primary teachers in this study, is properly identified or discussed. There was some overlap with the literature in relation to associations with childhood behaviour, which reinforce the reluctance of adult targets to disclose experiences of being bullied. For professional educators, particularly, such an admission is deemed particularly problematic and tainted with perceptions of shame, humiliation, and the embarrassment of "*feeling like a child*". Indeed, this "stigmatizing association with childishness or weakness" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.20) merely underscores the dissonance between the values underlying teachers'

professional practice towards pupils and managements' professional practice towards staff. Given the role of the teacher as specialist and as role model, it is arguably more difficult for a teacher to admit to themselves and to others, that they are being bullied. Research highlights a number of cultural and contextual factors, which will be dealt with later in the chapter, suggesting that many targets suspend their expertise in relation to anti-bullying, thereby diminishing their ability to distinguish between normal supervisory or social interactions and bullying behaviour (Hall, 2005). The findings suggest that teachers may be the "least capable of identifying bullying in the workforce" (Hall 2005, p.47), and indeed, the participants here clearly vacillated about the seriousness of ostensibly minor incidents, even when they accrued into sustained bullying campaigns. Despite experiencing such behaviours as distressing and personally threatening, they wavered about the precise commencement or intensity of the phenomenon and held back from reporting '*trivial*' occurrences for fear of appearing '*childish*'. This study identified typical behaviours found within the school workplace that fall within the scope of the accepted definition but despite openly referring to incidences of collegial inequality, coercion, intimidation, exclusion, and verbal abuse, targets struggled to equate such experiences with bullying. In enduring almost all of the negative behaviours compiled by the researcher, the participant narratives may inform the formulation of a less ambiguous definition of bullying which could inform the teaching profession.

Fear

This study identified 'fear' as a core emotion in remaining silent, reluctance to seek help or redress and in discontinuing or withdrawing a complaint of bullying. Because hierarchically organised bureaucratic control threatens human autonomy (Weber, 1948), the participants who were almost all bullied within hierarchical relationships, were initially too afraid to report it. The notion that power is embedded in bureaucratic workplace arrangements, through hierarchical authority, is taken for granted by targets and bullies alike (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). Targets in this study withheld or abandoned complaints of bullying and used alternative strategies to negotiate bullying behaviours due to fears of their complaint being ignored or dismissed by those in authority. There was evidence that intimidation, loss of employment, financial hardship, and/or being regarded as a whistle-blower or troublemaker were also grounds for concern (Fahie, 2010). Accounts reveal that teachers struggled with a choice between enduring bullying

or making a complaint, but they perceived that in making a complaint they were criticising or challenging the status quo which can “entail significant risk for employees given management power of sanction against those who in their eyes are deviant” (MacMahon *et al.* 2018). The data provide clear evidence that targets perceive speaking up about workplace bullying in primary schools is futile and may even be dangerous. Contrasting perspectives on resistance among those in positions of power, such as the principal, chairperson, and members of the BOM, can lead to fears of not being believed and/or of reprisal among those in subordinate positions.

Anti-bullying policies should encourage targets to report bullying but for this approach to be effective, targets must have confidence in those charged with handling complaints. In the context of this study, participants’ lack of confidence in either the complaint process or management’s ability to deal with the problem, manifested in a genuine ‘fear’ of making a complaint. As observed across the literature, this study links resistance to teachers’ overall sense of protection in the workplace. Occupying positions of authority in primary schools, as seen in section 1.1.4, bullying principals can influence the BOM in relation to disciplinary or dismissal procedures, leaving targets “muted” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.59) and deprived of either recourse or agency by fears of further victimisation in terms of termination and loss of income. For the targets in this study, who depend on their teaching job for their income, and in some cases citizenship, this meant the perception of having no alternative but to continue in their school and endure bullying. The constraint imposed by fear of unemployment reduced some individuals to the belief of having one possible or feasible action, to cease resistance, *by putting up, keeping the head down or getting out*. Giddens’ theory of *feasible option* is particularly relevant to the superordinate theme of *‘pre-action’* as actors that have no feasible option are no longer ‘agents’ (Giddens 1995). Compounded by the perceived threat to ontological security (Giddens 1991) some targets chose not to resist overtly or to discontinue acts of resistance. Moreover, managements’ reaction in response to complaints, discussed later in the chapter, acts as a signal to other employees that speaking up is not a feasible option for them either. A climate of fear and silence can then be created shifting the balance of power in favour of management (Cullinane and Donaghey, 2014).

Participants' acts of resistance to bullying suggests links to both Foucault and Weber who viewed disciplinary power as a means of achieving an efficient model of social control or regulation. According to Foucault (1977) any act of defiance or challenge to such control becomes a crime against the whole of society with complainants becoming outsiders, enemies of society or the problem. A common narrative amongst participants was that resistance to workplace bullying was interpreted as 'insubordination' and considered grounds for disciplinary action or dismissal. Targets commonly feared that any act of resistance to bullying would provoke such responses. The findings highlight that willingness to speak or act, also defies the embedded culture which discourages 'telling tales' or seeking help. Toxic environments, such as those described in participants' narratives, were perceived to be exacerbated by cultural myths, misconceptions, and norms which denote bullying complaints within the teaching profession as inappropriate, unacceptable, and unprofessional.

Weber's (1978) conceptualization of 'power' as the capacity to force one's will on the behaviour of others was evident in that 'fear' of the negative repercussions and potential reputational damage was thought to impede targets' acts of resistance and was considered to cause many to abandon their complaint. In the case of the teachers in this study, resistance appeared to be transposed into insubordination and considered grounds for termination. This in turn deterred further acts of resistance, thereby silencing targets. The escalatory nature of bullying behaviour in tandem with acts of resistance, validates Foucault's (1982) contention of a push-pull interaction of power and resistance. The point of reversal or permanent limit of resistance reached when fear overcomes the target and complaints are no longer pursued. Weber's core concept of power being focused on the ability to achieve objectives despite resistance became apparent as targets withdrew complaints.

Power and Authority

There are important implications to be drawn from Weber's sociology of authority and domination in the present study. Weber proposed that authority comes from a source that is perceived by the group as legitimate and he interrogated the basis of gaining compliance, motives and means. Submission is achieved when people choose to avoid deprivation or harm. Therefore, a person in authority such as the principal, may demand compliance, on the basis of legitimacy, while maintaining a threat of penalty or promise

of reward. This is reflected in the data as teachers highlighted the view that certain legitimate functions of those in authority, particularly the principal, could be wielded against complainants. Class allocation, support in respect of potential parental complaints, professional development opportunities, classroom resources and in particular competence issues were considered by participants as possible sanctions or rewards for compliance. For Weber, organisations that employ “ample force or by control over economic resources and social status or over information” have a greater chance of achieving compliance or obedience (Uphoff 1989, p.303). Clegg’s framework also suggests that power is resource dependent and that these resources are unavailable to subordinates. Power disparity in the context of resource control or availability means that in bullying scenarios targets feel powerless.

In bureaucratic workplaces, such as the school environment, the presence of certain roles of authority, and the exercise of authority, can create compliance demands on others by invoking rewards and sanctions. They can also rouse beliefs and attitudes in people’s minds. Rational-legal authority, for Weber is the most important base of power. Within hierarchical organisations, like schools (see section 1.1.4), power is vested in hierarchical positions, the board members. The role of the various actors, principal, chairperson, deputy etc., and the power vested in them by the Education Act (1998), serves to perpetuate the embedded power dynamic. A common narrative amongst participants was the impact on colleagues who observe managements’ inaction, retaliation or target ill-treatment. They too may remain silent because of the threat of authority vested in those positions with some referring to their schools as *fiefdoms*.

Teaching is characterised by a culture of obedience, dedication and a strong adherence to hierarchy. The literature proposes that “subjecting bodies to continuous observation, discipline functions to transform individuals into passive machinery suited to the work of modern organisations” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.14). Just as obedience becomes an accepted element of workplace culture so too can bullying. It is worth noting that the organisational context in participants’ schools appeared to influence and model the rules of social relationships so that bullying became normalised and accepted.

Lack of support

The literature emphasises that those who observe bullying play a vital role within the overall bullying scenario (MacMahon *et al.* 2018). In this study, participants recounted

how managements' inaction indicates to other staff that bullying is tolerated and that challenging authority is unsafe. As expected, targets in this study stressed how difficult it was to garner the formal support of colleagues. The findings indicated that when colleagues stand silently by "targets became uncertain of whom they could trust" which intensifies withdrawal, isolation and distress (van Heugten 2006, p.18). The inaction of colleagues was perceived by targets to be due to fear of reprisals for challenging authority, not knowing how to intervene safely, or simply by accepting that bullying is the norm. However, the degree of 'silent support' evident in the data points to the role of compliance with authority and fear of the wrath of that authority rather than a belief in the legitimacy of that authority as being right and proper. Research confirms that the wellbeing and health of both target and witness is affected by bullying since "a hostile environment is one that a person cannot survive in either professionally or personally" (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.106). Hence, colleagues can feel highly vulnerable with regard to supporting targets or confronting negative behaviour. In addition organisational indifference to bullying can signify that the only option is to "shut up and put up" (Hodgins, 2004). Therefore, "the high costs of involvement, arising from organisational factors, cause them [witnesses] to retreat and withhold their support at the workplace while continuing to experience severe emotional turmoil because of their inaction" (D'Cruz and Noronha 2011, p.286).

The literature discloses that social influence plays a key role in facilitating bullying cultures to thrive therefore teachers can act as inadvertent passive enablers of such behaviours. Witnesses who wish to avoid attracting similar treatment tend to follow the abuse of hierarchy and structural power which, for them, is a rational response following their assessment of the challenging situation. While the reasons why teacher witnesses do not intervene was beyond the scope of the present study, target accounts infer that those who witnessed bullying were afraid of drawing similar attention and behaviours upon themselves and were unsure of how to intervene safely. The apprehension and distress suffered by those who witness bullying is well documented, but the outward silence of the bystander plays a critical role in validating bullying behaviour. Informal power structures normalise bullying and adherence to the rules maintains the accepted order "with a silent tolerance of abuse and hostility viewed as part of that accepted order" (Hutchinson *et al.* 2010a, p.35). It is significant that present

anti-bullying policies neither request nor instruct staff of their responsibility to intervene once bullying becomes obvious. In exploring bystander responses to bullying behaviour the data in this study suggests that the present policies and procedures do not create a '*safe telling environment*'. Targets were hesitant to seek the support of colleagues due to the possibility of their attracting the same negative treatment while simultaneously being saddened by their failure to act. "In environments that lend themselves to a tolerance of bullying, bystanders often feel isolated, unsupported, and up against a culture they are left to challenge on their own" (Ryan 2013, p.10).

Professional status

A recurring narrative amongst participants was the ensuing isolation and perceived erosion of professional status and integrity which compounds targets' inability to fight back (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). Since participants' sense of both self- and professional identity were intrinsically linked to their role as teachers, they reported that attempts to cope by withdrawing commitment jarred with their established standards of professionalism (van Heugten *et al.* 2018, p.17). Such adverse effects on self-identity can ultimately become "deeply inscribed within the targets' being to such an extent that they become part of how the target sees himself/herself" (Fahie and Devine 2014, p.240). This is supported by Giddens (1991) assertion that ontological security becomes threatened as targets are left with nothing to support their own view of the truth (Ryan 2013). The data reveals that targets were aware of the change in their vulnerability, they were *set adrift, rudderless*. By admitting to '*problems at work*' targets feared their competence, professional reputation, and/or social identity would be compromised. The perceived failure of management to protect targets, negatively affects self-esteem and confidence and increases perceived unfairness, resentment and disloyalty. The apparent absence of any verification that workplace bullies are disciplined or penalized reinforces apprehension. As echoed in the findings a "fear of being judged incompetent" can explain why many targets chose to cease engagement with the complaints procedure (van Heugten 2006, p.18). Participants in this study were also conscious that teachers who disclosed workplace problems, particularly inter-personal difficulties, risked being labelled as 'difficult' or having mental health issues. This risk was aggravated by the professional ignominy associated with inter-personal conflicts or being prey to bullying.

Weber's philosophy is particularly relevant to how culture is reproduced in religious and educational institutions such as primary schools. He considered power, authority and the nature of control as key elements. He stressed that the 'norms' which govern them only arise because a few impose their will on the many, who submit to them (Lachmann 1971). Weber (1913) proposed that institutions such as schools are created by a first group, who impose their will on others. It is run by a second group and used by a third group. The fourth group, the masses, "learn by tradition certain modes of conduct in respect of the institution" (Lachmann 1971, p.62). Resisting any exercise of authority within the institution, equivalent to withholding legitimacy, is difficult and this is particularly germane to the primary school. This is because the state, the DES, usually has superior organised capacity for producing and deploying its own force against acts of "civil disobedience" (Uphoff 1989). Weber considered the state as the highest source of power and authority in any territorial area and force is the core resource for the protection of authority.

As mentioned in the introduction 96% of Irish primary-schools are directly linked by religious affiliation, management and staffing structures that extend beyond parish and diocesan boundaries, the threat to the professional status of participants in this study was considerably wide-ranging. Participants attested that avoidance or delays in challenges to bullying behaviour largely rested on fears of being disparaged by the teachers, principals, and/or BOMs of other schools: that their careers would be "kicked to the curb" (Ryan 2013, p.14). Narratives reveal that those who ultimately chose, or were forced, to leave, felt so dubious about securing new employment which relied on the written and verbal references of their principal or chairperson, that they named alternative referees. As noted by participants, complaints of bullying could lead to concerns regarding competence or mental health issues and possible termination, especially as perpetrators of workplace bullying "are frequently higher in an organizational hierarchy and have the power to significantly impact jobs, including to fire" (van Heugten *et al.* 2018, p.4).

As in prior studies (D'Cruz, 2012; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2010) this study found that targets felt embarrassed to admit they had been bullied for fear of further reputational

damage and possible loss of status or position. Consequently, they felt unable to act and were therefore “no longer an agent” (Giddens, 1995, p.63). Participants remarked that the overall process serves the general political function of impugning the victim (Ryan 2013) and sidestepping the issue of organisational duty of care (Crawford, 2001). The interview data indicated that perceived risk to professional status and future employment hindered challenges to bullying and delayed initial engagement with the complaints process. Echoing the findings of previous research, once complaints were initiated, participants experienced further professional destabilisation through tactics of denigration, criticism, exaggeration of minor infractions, and the manufacture of complaints (Hutchinson *et al.* 2010a; Duncan *et al.* 2011; Thirlwall 2015). The perceived possibility of not being able to teach due to damage to professional status, reputation, or fitness, effectively lacerated the targets’ sense of self and led them to see themselves as inadequate, incompetent failures (Fahie 2010).

“Organisations may be not only hierarchically authoritative structures of class domination but also structures of patriarchal domination” (Clegg 1989, p.196). Weber’s concept of ‘patriarchalism’ is also germane as participants commented on how their principals exercised power without restraint and seemed to be *a law unto themselves*. The authority of the master/principal, the most important type of domination in Weber’s view, allows those in positions of power to do as they like. Such power derives from accepted customs and tradition, particularly pertinent in the Irish context. Such individuals, granted traditional authority, can be good or bad but receives the authority just the same and on this basis resistance can be seen as futile. This was particularly evident in participants narratives as they perceived that principals, whether tyrannical or incompetent, in the absence of accountability, can do as they like. The emergence of quiescent and acquiescent silence was apparent in participants’ interview data as they became increasingly afraid of attracting further negative consequences. In addition, a perceived sense of futility dissuaded them from proceeding with a complaint. This supports Weber’s conceptualisation of traditional authority as being unchallenged and Adams’ (1997) contention that the power of the bully lay in causing targets to remain silent through fear. The data reveals that the culture of ‘high power distance’ which prevails in schools, deters targets from challenging powerful superiors because it is viewed as challenging the status of the individual (Porter *et al.* 2003).

5.3.2 Action

There is a general acceptance amongst theorists that power implies resistance, that within the power relation there exists a possible interdependence between power and resistance. In line with Foucault's theory of "resistance and control" teachers found that the more they resisted bullying the more they were deemed insubordinate or troublesome. His assertion that power and resistance are simultaneously present and mutually constitutive was reflected in the way the bullying process intensified or escalated as targets used more overt actions such as confronting the bully or engaging with the complaints procedure. Formally or informally reporting bullying presupposes that the target acknowledges that bullying is taking place and that clear procedures exist. In keeping with the literature, individuals were slow to identify themselves as targets (Rayner *et al.*, 2002). However, having tried to resist bullying using various indirect or covert strategies, such as ignoring, taking sick leave, attending counselling or confiding in family and friends, the data shows that participants became increasingly exasperated with their perceived continuing and escalating exposure to bullying. Targets then appeared to use more overt actions such as confronting the bully, making informal or formal complaints or leaving the workplace (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005).

Clearly submitting a complaint or a grievance is a significant act because "it puts the employee on record as challenging a management decision" (Lewin 2014, p.286). This marked the defining or *'fateful moment'* referred to by Giddens, where covert acts of resistance moved into the public sphere, and a complaint was initiated. The interview data indicated that such moves generated increased stress for targets as speaking up was perceived to cause relationships to deteriorate and targets to become more isolated. Participants perceived that perpetrators' superior organisational position allowed their version of rationality to have the greatest influence, particularly in relation to BOM, as hierarchical power was seen to mute targets' voice. Strategies of "reframing, rejigging, and rebuffering" (Thirlwall 2015, p.147), perceived to be employed by those in authority, presented evidence of the covert exercise of power. Indeed, Clegg's (1989) 'mobilization of bias' provides a framework of how this operates within organisations. Structure of dominancy in primary schools provides an understanding of how actors should act and it constructs a form of social action that is viewed as legitimate. The social system operates according to how the dominant individuals and groups influence and exert control on the system, effectively shaping attitudes, opinions values and

beliefs of those with less power. Therefore, a ‘mobilization of bias’ dictates what is considered to be legitimate and “prevents crucial issues that may question this legitimacy from emerging for public debate” (Gordon *et al.* 2009, p.17). This was evidenced under the superordinate theme of ‘actions’ as participants sought support and assistance from various bodies as their apparent helplessness and inability to resolve interpersonal issues was regarded as discrediting and immature, and led to “a sense of being trapped with nowhere else to go” (van Heugten 2006, p.18).

Participant narratives highlighted how retaliation by colleagues and/or the organisation “increases the already high cost that targets pay for filing a formal complaint or grievance” (Meglich-Sespico *et al.* 2007, p.36). Teachers who complained perceived that they were portrayed as ‘the problem’ as aspersions were cast on their competence, ability, and even their mental health. A common narrative amongst participants, and reflected in previous research, was the perception that the power of the bully was grounded in “the ability to informally delegitimize actors in the ‘eyes’ of others” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.19). Participants assessed that the power dynamic, or mobilization of bias, resulted in the manipulation of their reputations which in turn influenced relationships within the workplace, has the effect of normalising the isolation of individuals. The literature reveals that bullies often pit workers against one another and deter peer communication in an effort to close down opportunities or support for resistance (Tim Field 1996; Crawford 1999; Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). The presence of the social order, a bullying culture, manifesting in patterns of non-communication and non-intervention was perceived to impact on targets’ decision whether to withdraw or to take further action. Resignation also acts as a “third-order control that retarded action by characterizing action as fruitless” (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011, p.357).

The interview data indicated that targets employ overt strategies in their attempts to resist bullying but ultimately end with a more covert approach, leaving either temporarily or permanently being the ultimate avoidance strategy (Zapf and Gross 2001). By confronting the bully directly, going to the bully’s superior or to the union representative, the most common perceived outcome was that nothing would happen (Rayner 1999). When these fail, targets resorted back to avoidance behaviours or covert actions (Jóhannsdóttir and Ólafsson 2004). “When the organizational culture is such

that problematic situations are left unattended, organizational members see the situation as hopeless” (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott 2011, p.357). Throughout the process targets reported experiencing feelings of hopelessness and helplessness “a progressive deterioration of the bullying situation, greater distress and more extreme (albeit ineffective) remedies to attempt to tackle it” (Jóhannsdóttir and Ólafsson 2004, p.329). It was evident that participants first employed “constructive coping strategies (voice and/or loyalty), but after perceiving that problem solving was not possible, they resorted to destructive strategies (neglect and/or exit)” (D’Cruz and Noronha 2010, p.103). A common thread amongst participants accounts was that they tried one strategy after another but that in hindsight the best strategy in their opinion was to exit the school. The findings suggest that targets lacked confidence that the complaints procedure would improve their situation and so they sought support from external sources. Indeed, participants alleged that once they lodged a complaint they were generally regarded as difficult, troublesome, incompetent, or over-sensitive. Considering the psychological damage already inflicted by bullying it is unsurprising that overwrought participants reported feeling unable to further pursue complaints. Moreover, the data suggests that their apprehensions were justified and that those who engaged redress-seeking activity were subjected to retaliation, reprisals, or counter-complaints which gave rise to withdrawing complaints or “the inevitability of needing to leave the workplace” (Van Heugten 2009, p.18). Fear, as a core emotion, was justified in this study in light of the fact that exercising voice resulted in negative repercussion for targets with many declaring that once they lodged a complaint they had to leave. The data provide sufficient evidence to justify targets’ fear in respect of seeking redress as many suffered psychologically, physically and emotionally as well as financially. Many participants regarded the irreparable damage caused to their professional lives by seeking redress as “*career suicide*”.

Supports

Experience of the EAS were perceived to be positive overall as participants reported being helped to deal with the associated emotional and health-related matters. However, it is worth noting that participants perceived that bullying is not well understood within the medical profession and that although their symptoms were alleviated somewhat “the underlying root cause of their health problems remains unabated” (Meglich-Sespico *et al.* 2007, p.36). All the teachers in this study accessed counselling, mainly provided by

the EAS, to help mediate the toxic environments in which they worked. While counselling may arguably provide support, it can also be inadvertently construe the target as a ‘problem; that needs to be fixed’, thereby absolving the organisation from tackling systemic bullying. Without action to improve the behaviour of the perpetrator the work environment can remain toxic while targets continue to be “exposed to inappropriate behavior” (Thirlwall 2015, p.151). In this context, complaints of bullying may ultimately be distorted into health issues. Vickers’ (2010) similar contention that procedural supports espoused by employers are a ‘horrible deception’ chimed with the participants in this study.

As the professional standards body for teaching, the Teaching Council’s function is to regulate the professional standard. Its aim is to guide teachers in upholding the reputation of the profession. The *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* does not explicitly reference bullying. In view of the seriously damaging effects of bullying behaviour(s) on individuals, on schools and on the profession as a whole, the author contends that the Code should incorporate a clear prohibition in this regard. The core values and professional standards that teachers subscribe to should reflect the fact that being “safe and supported at school is essential for staff wellbeing and effective performance” (Riley 2012, p. 148). Teachers in this study who contacted the Teaching Council received no response. The ‘hear no evil’ omission (Ferris 2004) inferred by the lack of response and exclusion in the Code is significant given that several studies have demonstrated the prevalence of workplace bullying in education. Ignoring the issue arguably indicates “a deliberate effort to deny the existence of bullying” (Thirlwall 2015, p.150). Moreover, it can perpetuate the notion that the mistreatment of teachers is condoned, while simultaneously espousing respectful conduct.

The data exhibited extreme dissatisfaction with the trade union, the INTO. All participants were members of the union and as such considered it the main mechanism through which they could exercise formal voice in the employment relationship (Lewin 2014). It is of note that INTO objectives include safeguarding and improving the conditions of employment of its members. The capacity for employee exercise of voice is embodied in the various procedures which form part of an agreement negotiated between the INTO and the CPSMA. It was evident in the data that that INTO staff representatives and union officials were perceived to have failed to respond effectively and to do little to intervene in workplace bullying scenarios. Participants viewed union

representatives as reluctant to become involved and powerless to force board compliance with agreed procedures. The findings highlighted the possible lack of necessary expertise, skills or resources to resolve bullying; rather they advised targets to try to resolve matters internally and to keep extensive 'notes' or records of events which were never sought or utilised by the union. Ferris (2004) urges caution when union officials direct targets back to their organisation; "a negative response may place the employee at risk of incurring greater harm" (Ferris 2004). The findings draw attention to an aspect corroborated by many participants, that union appeals, attempting to temper management's authority, were regularly disregarded by schools' management. The perception amongst targets was that this, like workplace bullying in schools, was accepted by the union as they took no further action. The inaction response may also be a product of "powerlessness or organisational culture" (Paull *et al.* 2019, p.18). The inaction or turning a "blind eye" to these practices left targets with the opinion that nothing was to be gained in their protesting further. In the context of power theory the failure of these outside agencies to deal with bullying represents a more subtle abuse of power. This hidden or covert form of power, by withholding support or protection, has been shown in previous studies to facilitate bullying to flourish (Sadan, 2004). The realisation that support would not be forthcoming and the prospect of dismissal, unemployment and subsequent financial difficulties reduced targets' action to one perceived feasible option, acceptance of the status quo. For Giddens an unintended consequence can become discouragement for future action. In this way the tacit acceptance of bullying and the recognition that it cannot be challenged, may not be overtly stated or codified in policies or procedural documents, is significant in the formation of the social order through its habitual application. "Non-intervention can become the norm over time" (MacCurtain *et al.* 2018).

In focusing on domination and conflict Foucault gave a clear insight into power and state and the art of government or 'governmentality'. According to his philosophy people might be led to conduct themselves as free subjects as a way of progressing society and this practice consists of various instruments "assembled to link the power of the state, the regulation of populations, and a 'pastoral' power that addressed itself to the conduct of those who recognized themselves as subjects" (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.256). Foucault's writing endorsed the rights of the individual to mediate state power and he highlighted potential sites or opportunities for resistance.

5.4 Organisational Response to complaints - a power perspective

“The notion that workplace bullying is an individual, psychological issue or a set of interactions solely between the bully and target are myths” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.361). Studies indicate that bullying is a complex phenomenon that involves bullies, bullies’ accomplices, passive enablers, bystanders and organizations and this may explain why individual efforts rarely end workplace bullying (Lutgen–Sandvik, Namie, & Namie 2009; Richman et al. 2001). In the school environment attributing blame to the target is a common feature of workplace bullying since the focus of target or bully dyads tends to centre on individual traits and weaknesses rather than the broader collective context (Ryan, 2013). A common narrative amongst participants in this study was that this enables bullying “to be framed as personality conflict or the product of problem-employees” (van Heugten *et al.* 2018). In discounting bullying behaviour as trivial, personality clashes, interpersonal difficulties, or incompetence on the part of the target, “organisations and management structures have been able to remain immune” and their role in perpetuating bullying obscured (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.120). A frequent perceived organisational response, particularly evident in this study, is to transpose resistance to bullying into insubordination which in turn acts to deter further resistance (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005).

Policy and procedure

As previously stated, the most common advice for preventing workplace bullying is for workplaces to have an anti-bullying policy in place which provides commitment to prevention and outlines clear guidelines as to how it should be managed should a complaint arise (Hoel and Cooper 200). Health and Safety laws requires that employees and employers draw up agreed policy statements reflecting the need to eliminate bullying behaviours from the work environment. They are also required to put in place an agreed procedure for dealing with complaints. Therefore, the use of procedures is considered an obvious and appropriate response to complaints as they provide a clear means for organisations to address bullying while “concomitantly providing an avenue of justice for both the victim and alleged perpetrator” (MacMahon *et al.* 2018, p.475). However, despite DES recommendations (see introduction) that policies be developed in collaboration with management and staff, the teachers in this study reported that their contributions were not sought and in some cases rejected. This echoed the findings of

previous research which discloses that management routinely retain control over employee voice mechanisms within the workplace (Donaghey *et al.* 2011). As a consequence, participants' accounts point to lack of information about policy, procedures, their implementation and targets were unsure who to turn to when management refused to engage. Participant narratives referred to procedures as convoluted, unworkable, and biased since management control the process while they themselves are common perpetrators of bullying. It is clear that policies are not sufficient to ensure that workplace bullying is dealt with and teachers were discouraged by the perception that lodging a complaint, in the absence of accountability, transparency, and capacity or expertise to deal effectively with the problem, was inherently futile (Hodson *et al.* 2006, p.390). In fact, rather than offer a justice mechanism, complaints procedure or rather management's response, served to quell resistance by forcing participants to withdraw complaints. Targets perceived that this was achieved by "generating a sense of fear and futility" (MacMahon *et al.* 2018, p.476). Antibullying policies as they stand are perceived to offer no guarantee that complaints will be addressed, in fact, lodging a complaint or reporting bullying through the present process, transposed into challenging the status quo, can result in further victimization as increased disciplinary power, embedded in institutional power structures and networks, is wielded.

Even the most complex, well-thought-out procedures can look promising on paper. This notwithstanding, all such measures and processes are inevitably subject to the interpretation and enactment of individuals, and therefore the implementation or non-implementation of the agreed procedures remains the crux of the matter. Complaints procedures are focused on responding to targets' requests for support and assistance following incidents of bullying. Yet despite this, the present study could find no evidence of perceived support from within the school community. Indeed, participants' limited faith in the fairness or efficacy of 'sham' procedures which management frequently arrogate to their "discretion (real or imagined) in their implementation" (Vickers 2012, p.544) proposes a reconfiguration of bullying which incorporates structural and organisational factors. These are most significant when targets who seek redress are met with organisational abuses of power including the non-implementation or disregard of agreed policies. This study aligns with literature that regards the concept of workplace power as a dynamic which is vested in hierarchical authoritarianism and

the impunity of those in authority. The deceptive nature of the policies and procedures designed to counter bullying within the primary school is undermined by a perceived pervasive mentality of power and entitlement. Subordinates are more likely to yield to the structures and circuits of organisational power and control than challenge supervisory prerogatives and in the dyad of self-subordination (Foucault, 1977, Deetz, 1992, Mumby, 1997) where the superior represents all that is proper and correct, resistance arguably smacks of insubordination.

This study found pervasive mistrust of anti-bullying procedures with general agreement that current policies and procedures aimed at the elimination of bullying, albeit comprehensive and logical, are perceived to be taken as mere guidelines by those in authority. For Weber the concept of patriarchy, represented the most important type of domination as its power, which has few limits, derives from customs and tradition. This was particularly evident in the perception of management's poor response to complaints as those in authority exercised power without restraint in relation to the procedures. In the absence of effective mandatory or supervised application, they constitute little more than an "insurance policy for organizations, offering a legal minimum against potential lawsuits and related problems" (Vickers, 2012, p. 545). It also removes the "imperative for action from the organisation" (Thirlwall, 2015, p. 149). The data suggests that the policy and procedural support outlined in official documents initially gave targets a false sense of security. However, the perceived reality suggests that management failed to respond effectively. In sum, engaging with the process deterred future action and thus had the effect of silencing targets. Therefore, structure also places limits "upon the feasible range of options open to an actor in a given circumstance" (Giddens 1979, p.176).

Moreover, bullies in hierarchical positions were frequently protected by those with greater access to resources of power (Giddens, 1982) which they use to subjugate their targets even further. This aligns with Clegg's circuits of power framework (Clegg 1989) as forces were deployed to overcome resistance. Techniques of discipline operating within the system integration circuit (Clegg 1989) cause the target to become the focus of attention whilst deflecting attention away from the bully. When applied in this way, the redress policy itself becomes the agent of power and exploitation as targets are portrayed as inadequate or emotionally unstable. Those in authority were perceived as being able to use their legitimate authority to disparage and bombard targets with false

information in which confrontations were distorted, complaints trivialised or re-cast. Given that “individuals are socially produced by the surrounding systems of power” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2010b, p.33) targets are perceived to be left doubting their own perception of reality while the bully was protected within the organisation through alliances with those responsible for resolving reports of bullying. The participants in this study underscored the fact that the school principal is implicated in all stages of the complaint investigation which gave rise to questions of impartiality and objectivity. The perception of the entire process as flawed, especially in cases where the principal is the alleged perpetrator, was widespread. As the process is generally deemed “far from straightforward” and reliant on “investigators’ knowledge about bullying” (Einarsen *et al.*, 2003 p. 353), it is telling that many board members responsible for adjudicating such complaints are perceived to lack the proper training, skills, or expertise to do so. In addition, there is a perception that by addressing the issue, boards fear that workplace bullying problems will be exposed and the school’s reputation tarnished. There is evidence in the data to suggest the view that management move to protect the interests of the school at the expense of teachers’ well-being (Harrington *et al.*, 2015). None of the participants in this study reported vindication or redress as an outcome of engaging with the complaints procedure; on the contrary, several perceived the redress procedures as technologies of power which were used to counter-attack them or to seek revenge. In effect, speaking out was viewed as making matters worse for targets as their complaints were transmuted as challenging the accepted order. The researcher deduced that BOMs, as the managerial structure charged with the handling of bullying complaints for primary schools, not only facilitated, but arguably empowered bullying to thrive unchallenged in participants’ schools. Lewis and Rayner (2003) compared the systemic injustice of having “managers being judge and jury combined” in a policy that requires victims of bullying to seek redress from the bully. The response of management was perceived to be that of disbelief, blame, and the negative inference that “the participant was unable to cope and adjust” (D’Cruz and Noronha 2010, p.275). The belief that problems would right themselves without intervention was also identified as a common response (Burrige and Mulder, 1999). Thus, rather than being supported in their efforts to deal with the problem and having their complaints properly investigated, teachers were perceived to encounter further isolation, conflict avoidance, and self-protection. The findings determined that the managerial paradigm can operate

as a source of bullying through lack of support, inaction, and non-implementation of agreed procedures. Hence, the failure on the part of management to properly address workplace bullying in schools is an exercise of power in itself

It was particularly evident in the data that the redress process was perceived as so convoluted and protracted that participants lost resolve and became exhausted by the system. It may be the case that this is the intention or perhaps they were drawn up without proper insight into the micropolitics of school life. In any case the end result is that the system makes it impossible to engage in certain counter organisational behaviours and so “management responses send strong signals to the larger workforce that contestation of managerial prerogative is perilous” (MacMahon *et al.* 2018, p.486).

5.4.1 Perceived effectiveness of organisational response

The results suggest that policy alone is insufficient: policy must actually be implemented by management (Riley *et al.* 2012; Thirlwall 2015). The literature suggests that when targets “take action to resolve their difficulties, their complaints were routinely set aside or sequestered in some way by their employers and union representatives” through strategies such as reframing, rejigging, and rebuffing (Thirlwall 2015, p.147). The data confirms that the policies as they stand are perceived to be unfit for purpose. Since all policies are subject to implementation by those in positions of authority, commitment from management is necessary for success. Despite recommendations that bullying be addressed in a timely and supportive manner, the data here show that participants perceive that management did little to address allegations of workplace bullying and frequently prolonged the abuse by retaliating via organisational sequestering strategies, a manifestation of power in itself. The perceived deficiency of organisational support and response was particularly evident in the data and it resulted in increased isolation and sense of betrayal. Responses were deemed unconvincing, ineffective and only exacerbated matters which points to the failure of anti-bullying policies and complaints procedure in schools. In the absence of accountability, the perceived cost to the perpetrator is low and as such acts as an enabler while targets often feel bullied a second time by the organisational response. Participants perceived the current system of addressing bullying, the complaints procedure, as self-regulatory, the probability of perpetrator sanctions as low, and management as largely unaccountable. In fact, for most participants it seemed unfeasible to challenge superiors, seen as a *above the law*, and futile to report the

bullying of a superior. Procedures which require teachers who suffer bullying to seek redress from a principal who may be the perpetrator, are systemically flawed, aggravate the situation, and may cause deterioration of the problem and further damage to the target's self-confidence. The perceived power differential, in circumstances where there is lack of accountability, results in a sense of fear and powerlessness that renders targets incapable of confronting the bully.

As previously stated, occupying privileged points in the circuit of power allows actors such as the principal to (mis)use legitimate organisational power to invoke hierarchical oversight. "By challenging such employees' personal competences and aptitudes, management use bullying behaviours as a tool of subjugation" (MacMahon *et al.* 2018, p.485). As outlined in Sections 22 and 23 of the Education Act 1998, the principal has responsibility in that regard to the competence of teachers. The unique and complex nature of the operation of Irish primary schools creates a situation where the primary school, as an organisation, is scarcely constrained by outside agencies. This study provides clear evidence that, as Weber suggested, it is futile to resist rational-legal bases of power, evident within hierarchical organisations such as schools, where power is embedded in bureaucratic workplace organizing through authority in hierarchical positions. The current complaints procedure, agreed by all the relevant parties and deemed acceptable by all legitimate agencies, claims to provide a fair mechanism for resolving complaints of workplace bullying. Yet when targets challenge the bureaucratic structure and report abuse to management or external bodies they perceive that they are labelled as troublemakers, mentally ill, and problem-employees. Using their power of legitimate authority, management were perceived to create additional problems for targets: one such problem being medical fitness to teach. The trauma of workplace bullying then takes on the additional dimension of having to prove rationality, stability, and fitness to teach. Regrettably, the present study follow-up discerned exactly this pattern in the case of participants who had persevered with their complaints. These targets perceived that they were further bullied using a strategy of managerial legitimation or the misuse of organisational power by mandatory medical assessments or fitness to teach health assessments. Such mental health or psychiatric assessments can conclude that targets are not fit to teach to the required standard. By bombarding the target, and others with misinformation and distorted views about

unremarkable school incidents, bullies and/or management can be perceived to convince teachers of their own incompetence. Bullies and their associates can also convince other members of the “status group” (Weber 1999). When management approve of the exercise of power in this way, legitimate authority vested in the bully, the willingness of its members, to accept and obey, create levels of legitimacy. In so doing authority maintains power and people accept domination as a structured phenomenon. For Weber, obedience is associated with domination, and relationships characterised by domination, become successively structured thus ensuring continued unquestioned obedience, compliance and the acceptance of subordination. Consequently, speaking out about such practices becomes unacceptable and therefore silence is normalised. This study found a palpable view among participants that organisational power dynamics, under the guise of rationality, can maintain such ominous responses to complaints of bullying.

In line with the literature examining the effects of bullying on health, this study found that targets of bullying report suffering physical and/or mental ill-effects. A genuine fear for targets in initiating complaints of bullying against a superior is that they can be “baited into the trap of being found unable or unfit to do their job and effectively bullied out” (Ryan 2013, p.63). No employer is precluded from investigating the work environment or enlisting the help of an independent body; yet there was no evidence of this in the present study. When management neglect to carry out such an investigation and demands the psychiatric assessment of a teacher, it implies that the teacher rather than the work environment is at fault. In fact, medical referrals can have the effect of “draw[ing] attention away from work environments that condone and perpetuate abusive practices” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.123) and directly shift the blame for ill-health onto the teacher. The ‘*medicalisation*’ process can clearly have the effect of reframing the problem and in this way a complaint of bullying may be sequestered. This practice suggests that the operation of power within school organisations can serve to justify and legitimate spurious practices which are often unquestionably accepted and that those who complain are either ‘sad, bad or mad’. Indeed, “it is in the interest of organisations to distort processes to ‘investigate’ bullying in favour of the powerful” (Hodgins and McNamara 2017, p.202).

Teachers compelled to take stress-related leave due to bullying are automatically referred to Medmark, referred to in section 1.1.4. Teachers in this study, who did not avail of sick leave, were also referred. Since these referrals are typically made in the absence of an investigation into the causes of the stress, they are arguably prejudicial scapegoating rituals compounded by the enduring stigma of 'mental illness'. In reality, the referral may be only the beginning of a strategy which triggers a *medicalisation* process wherein the teacher must prove that s/he is not mentally ill. This raises both interesting and troubling question as *The Psychopath Test* (2011) by Jon Ronson contends that it is easier to prove mental illness than sanity. The data suggests that DES inspectors may also be unwittingly drawn into verifying substandard work and providing the bully with necessary corroboration. Narratives identify that even the most trivial or minor infractions were exaggerated and embellished to strengthen the bully's case. As "medical assessments are increasingly conducted by forensic psychiatrists" (Ryan 2013, p.67), this study found that the perceived threat of such referrals acted as a managerial tactic to offset possible legal challenges which obstructed complaint protocols and further intimidated and oppressed targets. While health professionals can undoubtedly validate symptoms of anxiety and stress, they are unable to evaluate the realities of exposure to bullying in the workplace. By focusing on the teacher's psychological state as the problem, Medmark personnel, perhaps unintentionally and unwittingly, validates the process by ignoring the environmental factors of bullying cultures or toxic environments. Though medical assessment appears innocuous and perhaps rational, the organisation itself may be instrumental in that it has processes, such as this, that whether through intent or not, may operate to protect the organisation. Some targets in this study perceived Medmark as strategic partners for management dealing with complaints of workplace bullying and therefore they too become engaged in the circuits of workplace power relations (Clegg 1989).

It is the researcher's contention that the use of the referral for medical assessment or for counselling, to ascertain the level of the 'psychiatric illnesses' obfuscates the role of the workplace in causing the problems being responded to, and the organisation's responsibility to provide and maintain a safe environment. This study found examples of similar forces at play in Irish primary schools with complaints being reframed as medical issues. A number of participants are still prohibited from returning to their

schools having been deemed unfit to teach due to underlying medical conditions. In their cases, complaints of bullying were perceived to be reframed by linking it to their previous medical history and private lives, denying the existence of bullying, which ultimately had the effect of removing the necessity for action. For them, the supposed complaints process, involving organisational sequestering, has prolonged the impact of bullying for a considerable time. Having undergone the 'medicalisation' process a participant contended that the forensic psychiatrists most commonly used for this purpose, are engaged in conducting inquisitions of employees on behalf of employers seeking to avoid bullying complaints and litigation. "Reframing in this way sequesters the issues as personal matters rather than organisational problems" (Thirlwall 2015). In this study 'mental illness' was imputed in the case of some teachers. They were determined and steadfast in their quest to have their complaint of bullying resolved but after many years of dispute they perceive that they remain effectively blocked from returning to their jobs.

Throughout participant narratives the prospect of taking legal action for workplace bullying was considered. Unlike other countries, Ireland does not have a broad array of legislation that specifically deals with workplace bullying but existing health and safety regulations do provide an avenue of legal redress. In order to take a legal case, targets must prove that management breached its duty of care by not providing a safe place of work. Management are placed as the scapegoat in that they shoulder responsibility for the bully's behaviour, which may be predominantly out of their control. The researcher contends that a core feature of the legal approach, and the problem as a whole, is that if the target seeks redress they are pitted against the organisation as opposed to the bully. However, going to court is extremely expensive, time consuming and was beyond the means of all of the targets in this study. While bullies are protected and financially supported by board guarantors, in contrast targets have no such access to resources. Clegg, Weber and Giddens linked agency to structure through discussions of resources or resource control, which they proposed represented various facets of power and domination. Without access to similar resources, and no expectation of union financial support, the perception was that legal action was unfeasible. In any event, workplace bullying cases in Ireland are fraught with difficulties and very difficult to prove so the perception is that a case of bullying will not succeed. While the macro elements such

as legislation are extremely important, this study suggests that it doesn't even get to that level because the processes that must first be undergone within the organisation, have drained them psychologically and emotionally to such a degree that they are perceived to be completely disempowered.

5.5 Power

Research confirms that the phenomenon of power, or indeed powerlessness, is “of particular interest” to the context of workplace bullying (O'Moore and Stevens 2013, p.180). To this end, the main findings centre on how power impacts bullying and teacher engagement with policies and procedures. Foucault (1989) claimed that power is not a thing but rather “power designates relationships between partners” (Foucault 1982, p.786). It is “a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations” (Foucault, 1980, p. 410). The conceptualisation of power as engaged through an active web of association is particularly germane in this instance, since every participant in this study attested to their relative powerlessness, and the perceived use or abuse of power by authority figures within schools. Not only did the participants criticise the support systems ostensibly designed to help and protect the teaching profession as wholly inadequate; they also condemned the operation of the complaints procedures as unfeasible, and principals' power to influence management and block complaints, as unjust. Power has long been accepted as an intrinsic dynamic of organisational bullying scenarios. It follows then, that staff who are relationally less powerful in schools are more vulnerable and likely to endure bullying. Perceptions of power also impact on attempts to seek redress as the subjectivity of relationships within schools is an influencing factor which “erases the ways in which targets and witnesses *do* access rules and resources of power or diminishes them to such a degree that agency is virtually obliterated” (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005, p.56). As established in the literature review, the balance of power and authority in education lies in the various systems of control: namely, between the Department of Education and Skills; the religious education establishment; managers and administrators; teachers, students and the parents; and the broader community. While the literature refers to various conceptualisations of power, the *manner* in which power is exercised is of greater significance in this instance. The potential for management to exploit structural power, in particular through policies and procedures, pose problems for any teacher wishing to

lodge a complaint, particularly in allegations concerning a higher-ranked staff member or principal. As it stands, the current system is arguably open to toxic influences, and in reality, the policies and procedures originally designed to support targets, often have the effect of stripping individuals of agency. The literature predominantly links positional power with workplaces which inscribe “formalised power differentials that invite people to exercise the trappings of power and dominance over others” (Ryan 2013, p.55). Thus, those in subordinate positions are more vulnerable to oppressive behaviours; those in senior positions are more likely to instigate them. The present findings underscore the function of power as an enabler of bullying and support the contention that individuals in positions of power are more likely to behave in a negative or uncivil manner towards subordinates. More specifically, power differentials obtain to such factors as organisational status, social status, professional skills or qualifications, levels of knowledge and experience, and/or gender. The school environment creates many degrees of control which formalise power differentials that authorise power over students and certain staff members. The superior status attached to the positions of principal, head teacher, master, vice/deputy principal, manager, chairperson, promoted posts, or posts of responsibility, and the distinctions made between permanent, temporary, substitute, mainstream class teacher, and support teacher, clearly underscore school hierarchies of seniority, expertise, superiority, importance, entitlement, and power. Subordinate roles such as newly qualified teacher (NQT), assistant teacher, support teacher, classroom assistants, temporary or substitute teacher, and special needs assistants are characterised by compliance and to superiors. It is significant that all but one of the targets in this study occupied subordinate roles. Under section 24 of the Education Act, 1998 (as amended by the Education Amendment Act, 2012) the board’s responsibilities as the employer include the recruitment and dismissal of teachers and other staff within the school, subject to relevant DES circulars, employment legislation, and sectoral agreements. The principal and the chairperson are the two most powerful figures on the board. As the final decision in relation to any complaint rests with them, the fact that only those in positions of power may resolve bullying issues is inconvertible. Targets themselves may perceive the power structure as too formidable a force to contend with and the perpetrator “untouchable” (Field, 1996, p.6). In cases where the alleged bully was the school principal, participants in this study perceived that making a complaint was futile. Given the disproportionate

number of participants who cited the principal as the bully, the culture and managerial paradigm of certain schools arguably function “as a source of bullying” (D’Cruz and Noronha 2010, p.117) and constrain targets ability to cope. A ‘powerful-versus-powerless duality’ prevails in bullying literature (D’Cruz, 2013) yet in this study several targets continued to resist bullying by ignoring the behaviour, complying, over-compensating, withdrawing, confronting the bully, or lodging complaints. Studies of target resistance also demonstrated that while targets seemed unable to stop bullying, they nonetheless tried to fight back (Lutgen-Sandvik’s 2006). However, long-term victimisation within the hierarchical environment of a primary school was perceived to erode the power to resist due to a growing sense of powerlessness, fear of reprisals, or further escalation. In keeping with the literature examining anti-bullying strategies, the current study found that such behaviours could persist unabated, in some cases, for years, “irrespective of how the targets attempted to deal with it” (Kitt, 1999, p. 177).

5.5.1 The Board of Management

Victims of bullying often feel ashamed and embarrassed and teachers are particularly averse to disclosing such issues to board members, who are drawn from the local community. Humiliation, indignity, and shame typified participants’ feelings around the possibility that locals or neighbours, perhaps the parents of children in their classes, would deliberate on the merits of their complaint. As such, it was clearly difficult for a teacher or a principal to submit their case to board members for adjudication. Moreover, the data in this study demonstrated extensive perceived misgivings about BOM expertise and confidentiality, which exacerbated anxieties about bringing Stage 4 complaints to board level. The established procedure did nothing to assuage these feelings. Moreover, this study is consistent with Hutchinson and colleagues’ (2005) assertion that when targets assert resistance “subsequent circuits become involved, bringing into play techniques of discipline” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.122) including disciplinary meetings, reprisals, mediation, counter-complaints, orchestration, procrastination, and enforced medical assessments. Participant narratives questioned the independence of the board maintaining that bullying networks were in a position to “mis(use) accepted organisational processes for the purpose of co-ordinated, systematic and targeted bullying” (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.122).

5.6 Leadership

A key factor that prevailed throughout participants' narratives was leadership. "Principals provide leadership for their schools on issues of organisational culture" (Gray and Gardiner 2013, p.824). Given the significance of culture in the bullying dynamic research proposes that "it is possible to achieve a situation of zero tolerance of bullying through leadership" (Riley *et al.* 2012, p.159). The principal's management style plays a key role in defining school culture and the behaviour modelled by school leaders and observed by individuals within the school environment signals acceptable benchmarks of behaviour within the work environment (Gray and Gardiner 2013; Porter *et al.* 2018). Since school leadership and management are axiomatic to school culture, change, and improvement, several studies have identified poor quality leadership as a significant antecedent of workplace bullying (De Wet, Blasé and Blasé, 2004; Grey and Gardiner, 2013; Salin, 2003; Shields, 2004). Leaders who lack conflict management skills often fail to intervene in bullying situations as they do not recognise the antecedents, behaviours, and consequences of such behaviours (Bartholomew, 2006; Einarsen, 1999; Fox and Stallwoth, 2004; O'Moore and Lynch, 2007). Conversely, effective leadership can "eliminate or at least reduce the phenomenon of workplace bullying" (Duncan and Riley 2005, p.24).

The hierarchical authority of management in primary schools inscribes the principal as an all-knowing, all-powerful figure, reinforcing boundaries which can isolate teachers and foster a hostile environment. The data here show that teachers' roles can be undermined by an over-vesting of authority in the principal and the principal's own reluctance to devolve leadership (INTO, 2010). This research particularly addressed the phenomenon of top-down bullying. Indeed, the majority of participants in this study reported being bullied by principals whose abusive behaviour was subsumed beneath the "veneer of legitimacy" (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.122). By ignoring, denying and trivialising complaints, targets perceived that they become the primary focus of "the circuit of power" and increasingly regarded as the 'problem' (Hutchinson *et al.* 2006a, p.122): a situation which was compounded by the dismissal of complaints and the instigations of reprisals. The data also suggests that principals, exhibiting laissez-faire leadership styles, often shirk their duty-of-care responsibilities by ignoring or dismissing reports of bullying behaviour. In fact, without the principals' positional power and support, targets sensed that pursuing complaints was an exercise in futility. Given the principals' authority to condone, deny, or ignore bullying, any failure to act

suggests either an unwillingness or inability to effectively intervene and/or resolve workplace bullying. Without recourse to alternative supportive structures, participants felt they were left completely disenfranchised by “the operation of the techniques of discipline within the circuit” (Hutchinson *et al.*, 2006, p. 122). The inherent imbalances of the system may explain why targets often decide to “*put up and shut up*”, while those who witness bullying remain silent. The perception of the current system of bringing complaints of bullying to the principal or the Board indicates that the procedure, particularly Stages 3 and 4, is inherently skewed. In fact, the power structure makes sure that it is difficult to address a complaint with somebody in authority who isn’t either connected to or knows or is the perpetrator. Far from engaging with the issue in an equitable and constructive way, speaking out is perceived to only makes matters worse.

Evidence from this study confirms that, through informal collaborative networks, principals can recommend the discounting of bullying complaints. This points to efforts to suppress or obscure workplace bullying in schools and it demonstrates a degree of indifference towards anti-bullying policies and procedures. While inadequate training and expertise may explain why bullying problems are not dealt with properly, avoidance also speaks to lack of awareness and weak leadership skills. Leaders who “lack knowledge or experience of bullying are unlikely to understand its impact” (Thirlwall 2015, p.150), or see how individuals are experiencing them (Gilbert and Malone, 1995). Findings suggest that while such ‘*invisibility*’ may have been a factor in managements’ responses to complaints, they may also represent “a deliberate effort to deny the existence of bullying” (Thirlwall 2015, p.150).

It is self-evident that the solution to any problem rests on initial recognition that a problem exists. However, in evaluating the utility of Stage 3 of the complaints procedure (i.e. seeking the principal’s assistance), all participants perceived their principals to be ineffectual in pursuing or resolving the matter. The micro-technologies of power, or disciplinary practices, often viewed as normal, may have the effect of increasing control over organisation members’ behaviour and dispositions. While inaction may be traced to a lack of awareness or training about bullying, it is clear that when those in power ignore complaints of bullying, for whatever reason, the problem often intensifies. Previous research in public service settings have drawn attention to

the link between authoritarian and ineffectual leadership and weak responses to workplace conflict (Jackson *et al.* 2013).

5.7 Culture

Even though culture is not a theory it is a very important organisational factor because school cultures comprise complex webs of traditions and rituals which have built up over time (Carpenter 2015). Schools are characterised by strong cultures and they each have their own customs, traditions and ethos. As such, they are determined by the values, shared beliefs, and behaviour of the various stakeholders within the school community and reflect the unique school ethos and social norms (Groseschl and Doherty 2000). They are also informed by local, regional and national culture (Brodsky 1976). The importance of culture in the toleration of bullying has been identified in the literature and reveals that in some schools bullying behaviour can become normalised (Field 2009; Grey 2013; Cowan 2013; Lipinski 2014). This study supports this contention in identifying consistent levels of inappropriate behaviour among certain staff members which was gradually accepted and emulated by others in the school community. Clegg's circuits of power model put forward a social integration circuit as the domain that defines relations of meaning, rules of practice and membership. Like Clegg, Foucault and Weber also pointed to the micro-technologies of power that produce increasing control over organisation members' behaviour. Made possible by networks of alliances, disciplinary practices influence relations of meaning (Clegg 1989). Unresponsiveness or indifference to complaints tacitly endorses such behaviour and transmits the message that bullying is tolerated. Previous research informs that bullying cannot occur unless the culture rewards, or at least enables, such negative behaviours (Brodsky 1976). The findings of this study suggest embedded cultures of bullying which were perceived to 'allow' and therefore 'validate' the inaction of those in influential positions (Aquino and Lamertz 2004; De Wet 2010).

Descriptive terms for toxic school cultures such as culture of fear, secrecy, isolation, persecution, disrespect, unsupportiveness, manipulation were associated with school environments which tolerated bullying, while the normalised culture of "*keeping your head down*" confirmed the perception that if those in authority turn a blind eye to workplace aggression, "it is most likely that teachers will do the same" (Gray and Gardiner 2013, p.839). Similarly, principals and management who turn a blind eye to

teacher conflict and bullying were considered ineffectual “they were seen as allowing conflict to continue until it became a pervasive part of the school culture” (Gray and Gardiner 2013, p.841). The findings suggest that while bullying may be formally prohibited in schools, through anti-bullying codes of behaviour, it can be openly portrayed. Staff can be socialised into school norms which tolerate bullying and this can delay the individual perception and identification of such adverse behaviour (Giorgi *et al.*, 2015).

Jacobson *et al* (2014) proposed that national culture affects bullying behaviours observed within organisations. As school culture is influenced by national culture which “diffuses downward in terms of expectations of behaviour”, so bullying behaviours in Irish schools may be shaped by Irish norms and mores (Jacobson *et al.* 2013, p.54). Accordingly, to understand bullying behaviour it may then be necessary to examine how the wider cultural context influences the individual’s behaviour (Jacobson 2013).

Literature examining teacher experiences of workplace bullying remains relatively limited; perhaps because the issue is so keenly avoided by school personnel. Indeed, the results of this study underscore a reluctance, even an unwillingness, to talk openly about adult bullying in schools. Confronting such sensitive and potentially volatile matters may be problematic, however, the prevailing culture of silence which surrounds workplace bullying can only intensify the sense of isolation and vulnerability borne by targets (Fahie, 2010), perpetuate secrecy, and suppress potential resolution of the issue. Ironically, while teachers are increasingly pro-active in whole-school anti-bullying policies and programmes as they relate to students, and are now obligated to report, monitor, and tackle student bullying in situ, (Skills 2013), no such initiatives or directives are applied to adult bullying. Only with the benefit of hindsight did participants perceive that they fully recognised the patterns of systematic bullying behaviour which they believe had diminished their teaching performance and stymied their confidence to speak out and seek help.

All participants agreed that teachers who work in a positive school culture with no experience of bullying, find it difficult to comprehend the gravity of toxic conditions. Participants who subsequently managed to secure alternative employment were struck by the marked contrast in the positive culture of effective open communication and collaboration in their new working environments. Themes centring on lack of open

communication or active collaboration and pervasive distrust which recurred across the transcript data in this study clearly characterised the participants' school experiences. The study offers clear insight into the need to create a secure environment where teachers are confident to challenge and report bullying and where targets are given the necessary support from management. The literature proposes that wellbeing is pertinent with respect to effective teaching performance (Riley 2012, Hall 2005). This study found a palpable belief among respondents that students' experience were affected by workplace bullying in schools.

5.8 Conclusions

Previous research points to an important organisational antecedent for a bullying culture, the presence of a power imbalance which in turn can mediate engagement with complaints procedures. Those who exercise power often occupy formal positions of leadership but it may also "involve those who exercise power as informal leaders" (Riley et. al, 2012, p. 151). "Foucauldian studies similarly ascribe large amounts of agency to managerial forms of control and relatively little to the employees who struggle with them every day" (Mumby 2005, p.27). This view of power implies that targets are disempowered yet considerable research asserts that workers can be effective, involved participants with "discursive consciousness" (Giddens, 1979) which afford them a degree of organizational control. Nevertheless, it is difficult to identify any action that could resist such wide-ranging organizational control mechanisms which results in a situation whereby the social actors are "subsumed within, and ultimately ineffectual against, a larger system of power relations" (Mumby 2005, p.37). Miller (1998) identifies three 'justice' issues respecting the policies and procedures of the contemporary employment relationship; namely, "system justice, procedural justice and outcome justice" (Einarsen *et al.* 2003, p.376). He found procedural injustice to be potentially immoral since the absence of employee representation allows management to act as decisional judge and jury. His position aligns with the predicates of this study, in that, if those invested with decisional power are bullies, the process is inherently unjust. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of injustice is that the subordinate bullying target is more often referred for mandatory medical assessment rather than the more senior perpetrator. Not only must targets withstand the anxieties of a procedure which requires them to lodge their complaint with the bully; they are arguably punished

for complaining through subsequent directives to attend disciplinary hearings and submit to medical assessment.

This study supports Hutchinson's (2004) claim that speaking out makes matters worse for the target. As discussed in the literature review, power increases in response to resistance, and indeed, study participants perceived that they clearly faced trenchant bully and/or management opposition following the initiation of their complaint. Indeed, they believed that their resistance merely triggered further deterioration in workplace relationships and an escalation of bullying behaviours. The literature supports participant perceptions that their bid for justice was regarded as "deviant behaviour by those for whom the resistance is threatening" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p.429). Participants also attested that their complaints were undermined by branding them as over-sensitive, trouble-makers, or mentally unstable through mandatory medical referrals.

The findings of this study confirm that the organisational structure of current procedures, as devised and endorsed by management, may significantly restrict or constrain the agency of targets. When the teachers in this study resisted, acted autonomously and demonstrated agency they were apparently castigated and penalised to such an extent that the majority either capitulated or resigned. Others were seemingly edged out through early retirement, career break, long term sick-leave or disability strategies, and in this way, the circuits of power remained unchanged.

It may be the case that the structure of primary schools limits the feasible options for teachers in the context of bullying (Giddens, 1979). The hierarchical position of the bully and scarce employment opportunities arguably boosts hierarchical power to oppress and intimidate targets. During times of economic down-turn, employees are particularly constrained by "economic dependency" (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.214) in which "putting up with being bullied in exchange for a job can amount to a lifetime of clock watching and a type of aching incarceration that has started to define many careers" (Ryan 2013, p.64). Due to economic austerity, embargo on recruitment and scarcity of alternative employment opportunities the majority of teachers in this study were economically dependent on their current jobs. In effect, they were obliged to prioritise financial security, which merely consolidated the climate of submission. The need to *'put up and shut up'* evidently reinforced target fear of aggravating the situation

by complaining and fostered insecurity which is “strongly associated with increased bullying” (Hodson *et al.* 2006, p.387).

However, Giddens (1982) refused to accept that people are ever completely powerless. Rather he maintains that even when influenced by conditions outside of ones’ control, some measure of personal choice is present in compliance. “Compliance may, in many cases, be a rational and self-preserving assessment of a difficult situation” (Mannix McNamara *et al.* 2018, p.81). The act of leaving, particularly given that work not only provides livelihood, but is intrinsic to self-identity, “should be fore-fronted as resistance” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.207). This research qualitatively examined the lived experience of targets of bullying who exercised their agency by seeking redress through the informal and formal complaints procedures at their disposal or by leaving the school through early retirement, resignation, sick-leave or career breaks as an act of resistance. For some, resistance took the form of withdrawing commitment to the school and/or students until the bully either retired or left. Participants agreed the best advice they could offer to teachers in a similar situation was to ‘get out’ as soon as possible.

Given the dyadic nature of power and resistance (Foucault, 1980), it appears that resistance was met with escalatory and retaliatory action. There was justifiable apprehension for one’s sense of ontological security (Giddens, 1991) and genuine fear regarding the potential for professional reputational damage which in turn threatened future employment prospects. There was evident of the perception that the bullies, often in superior positions, had greater access to resources of power (Giddens, 1982) and applied them to subjugate their targets even further. As the unsuspecting targets considered that they did not have counter-evidence to refute derogatory claims, hierarchical power became a formidable tool of oppression.

This study rehearsed the role of power and the interaction of structure and agency on forms of resistance when targets of bullying seek redress within their organisations and are met with further exercises of power. As such, it advocates for a more expansive formulation of the phenomenon which extends beyond the boundaries of interpersonal interaction to include structural and organisational dimensions. The findings highlight the consequences of target resistance, and reveal that complaints are perceived to be routinely ignored or dismissed, and strategies of procrastination, counter-complaints,

retaliation, reprisals and the perhaps most ruthless, medical referral, are deployed. The interplay between target agency and the hierarchical structure of the primary school exposes a clear vacuum in the circuits of power. The fact that the structures of the school system are perceived to fail to deal with the problem of workplace bullying objectively has a direct bearing on perceived agency. This study indicates that as organisations, primary schools may significantly curtail teacher agency, leaving targets struggling to cope, impairing teaching performance, damaging health and professional careers, and creating serious financial hardship. Eliminating the inherent conflict of principals and management investigating allegations of workplace bullying in their own schools would therefore be an important first step in diffusing the current abuses of structural and resource powers in redress procedures.

These findings underline a vacuum within the circuits of power of primary schools which allow staff intimidation to flourish and forestall confronting the issue of bullying in an objective and just manner. This directly impinges on teacher agency by sustaining circumstances wherein teachers' commitment to and passion for teaching is lost.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

Bullying is a multifaceted and devastating workplace phenomenon, and as such, combatting it requires complex, multiple strategies at the individual, workgroup, and organizational level (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005). The main objective in carrying out this research therefore was to assess the effectiveness of the policies and procedures for addressing bullying and the role of organisational power in facilitating bullying. Clearly, if current procedures are ineffectual in preventing or resolving bullying issues, it is necessary to devise and implement an alternative strategy. Consensus on what actually constitutes bullying and a collective commitment to eliminating bullying behaviour would represent important steps towards realising the shared vision of a bully-free workplace. A further difficulty is addressing the power dynamic that facilitates bullying and silences targets and witnesses. Instead a culture of open discussion, disclosure, resolution and reconciliation should be fostered which would replace the historical authoritarian and controlling dynamic with a more ethical and just workplace environment.

The data from this study provides evidence that there is an urgent need to institute effective anti-bullying mechanisms within Irish primary-schools. The task of creating and implementing prevention strategies, anti-bullying policies, and comprehensive non-adversarial procedures which would enable management and staff to respond effectively to bullying is daunting. Nonetheless, change is critical for the following reasons: workplace bullying in education is consistently cited as prevalent; it is a silent, pervasive scourge that devastates lives and careers; it can be ignored by management; there is an absence of supervisory bodies or legislation to control it; it affects the quality and delivery of education; and it drives out the best and most talented teachers. In short, “bullying is a workplace health hazard” and as such, it deserves to be a priority on every Board of Management’s safety agenda (Hall, 2005). Effective responses from organisations are vital (Lewis, 2001; Woodrow & Guest, 2014) and the need for protection for workers in the form of anti-bullying legislation is vital if every

employee's right to dignity at work is to be realised. The restorative justice framework, now widely used with students in schools, provides an alternative approach. It's focus is on the restoration of the relationship through mutual respect, dialogue, engagement, empathy, tolerance, apology and restitution. In this model harmful, negative behaviour is addressed through empathy and change and a climate of care and justice is established. "When operationalised within the circuits of power that enable workplace bullying, frameworks such as restorative justice offer opportunities to formalise forms of resistance that serve to create fissures and counter currents within the established flows of power, thereby opening up opportunities for discourses that counter established power dynamics" (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.23).

6.2 Conclusions

The previous chapter drew together the main findings of the study in terms of the research questions posed. This chapter concludes the study with a summary of the main findings as they relate to the knowledge of redress procedures for workplace bullying in primary-schools. The data in this study contributes to the knowledge of bullying in the Irish primary-schools context as it raises interesting questions about the reporting of workplace bullying in Irish schools. It demonstrates that the possible under-reporting of bullying in the teaching profession may be attributed to the following barriers: lack of trust in the procedure; the disregarding or mishandling of complaints; the non-implementation of procedures and policies; and the perception that complaining might make matters worse. "Organisational commitment to eliminating the problem of workplace bullying is a critical factor" (D'Cruz *et al.* 2019, p.17). This study identified that the most frequently cited impediment to engaging with the complaints process was the expectation that nothing would come of it. The results of this study add to the evidence that primary school management bodies are failing to address workplace bullying, an exercise of power in itself. The re-casting of complaints as interpersonal difficulties or mental health issues points to the misuse of legitimate power through its policies and procedures that fail to support targets. Given the magnitude of the negative effects of workplace bullying in schools and the evidence that organisational power can operate to facilitate and perpetuate bullying the researcher argues for major improvement of anti-bullying policies and procedures. A number of conclusions emerged from this study and possible preventative measures and solutions were suggested.

6.2.1 Awareness of bullying

It is essential to persuade teachers, teacher unions, boards of management and the DES of the seriousness of workplace bullying; that it does take place in schools; and that awareness needs to be raised in the profession as a first step in tackling the problem. If teachers were more aware of their behaviours and those of others, they would develop a clearer understanding of what constitutes bullying behaviour and therefore be in a better position to identify, intervene, and name bullying for what it is.

6.2.2 Definition of workplace bullying in education

If you name the issue, then you can do something about it.

Naming bullying is a complex endeavour, but it needs to be clarified and labelled if it is to be eliminated from the workplace. Merely agreeing a definition of bullying does not go far enough, specific language about teacher behaviour must be included in the policy. Therefore, the specific behaviours which occur in the school environment must be elucidated. The negative behaviours list, used as part of this study, was found to be effective in illuminating the distinctive bullying behaviours. Many may apply to a wide range of workplaces but some are specific to the school workplace. This gives strong validation to the value of listing behaviours in assessing bullying and it also points to the way to resolving it. Attention should be drawn to negative behaviours which may lead to the development of an unpleasant working environment, in order that they be ruled out of bounds and so that bullying behaviour is discouraged. The level of tolerance also needs to be agreed upon and understood by all staff.

6.2.3 Open discussion

“Formal policies alone are unlikely to reinforce codes of professional conduct. Intentional dialog about professional norms is essential in creating a prosocial school climate” (McEvoy and Smith 2018, p.14). Findings reveal that workplace bullying is rarely discussed in school staffrooms. A culture of openness should be promoted so that the topic can be discussed freely and regularly at staff meetings. Proper input and involvement in policy development by teacher should be facilitated. While it is clear from the data that this rarely happens, talking about bullying in a reasoned and measured fashion would arguably enhance everyone’s understanding and leave

perpetrators in no doubt of staff awareness of and willingness to intervene in bullying scenarios. The teaching community therefore must be facilitated towards an open discussion on teacher behaviour in the school environment. Unless a safe forum is provided to discuss bullying bystanders are unlikely to speak up.

6.2.4 Bystander

When bullying occurs a hostile environment is created not just for the target but for all staff members. Effective intervention by colleagues can be difficult as they risk becoming the next target. Yet by doing nothing they become passive enablers. Failure to confront bullying results in underperformance, lost teaching time, and leaves targets feeling unsupported and abandoned. As agreed by D’Cruz, Noronha & Mulder *et al.* (2008), Paull *et al.* (2010), Rayner & Bowes-Sperry (2008) and van Heugten (2010) bystander intervention holds the promise of being the most effective remedy for workplace bullying. The intervention of “upstanders” negates the isolation which Ryan described as “one of the hallmarks of bullying” (Ryan 2013, p.27). Along with de-escalating conflict situations, bystander intervention fosters supportive work environments which firmly demonstrate zero-tolerance of interpersonal abuse (Davey-Attlee & Rayner, 2007).

Bullying must be confronted safely and effectively and the responsibility to report and support targets must rest with every member of staff. For this practice to be successfully introduced and maintained, each member of the school community must accept their responsibility to act immediately and decisively in all such cases.

6.2.5 Complaint procedures: revision

The current procedures leave teachers feeling angry, distrustful and discounted by management. Those in positions of power, such as managers, board members, principals, union representatives, and DES inspectors, appear to minimise or ignore abuses of power and complaints of bullying. In fact the present policies and procedures allow management to be judge and jury in its own case (Sullivan 2010). This process is exacerbated by managements’ apparent disregard for procedures, which further distresses targets, since managements’ failure to act effectively condones bullying. The current procedures take no account of the dynamics of human behaviour particularly

given the hierarchical power structure of primary schools. In fact, the failure of management to address bullying in primary schools is an exercise of power in itself. There is a strong argument to be made for abandoning the present procedures and replacing them with a more 'fit for purpose' system which is based on the latest research and international best practice.

It is essential to restore confidence in procedures so that victims of bullying are supported, and bullying is controlled and perhaps prevented. Since teachers are reluctant to take the legal route it is important to develop a proper, non-adversarial means of addressing workplace-bullying complaints in primary-schools in order to establish criteria for best practice. In his book *'The Bully-Free Workplace'* Namie recommends developing a 'pre-complaint process', through which people can properly establish whether what is happening to them is actually bullying and proceed from there (Namie and Namie 2011).

6.2.6 Leadership: Training

Inaction by those in authority provides immunity for bullies. Toxic cultures in schools enable bullying and decrease staff morale, teacher and school effectiveness, and job satisfaction. In order to remedy this, training for all staff is crucial so that witnesses and principals are best equipped to prevent, intervene, and eliminate bullying from their schools. In addition, policies should outline the employees' obligation to respond when they witness bullying and the principal's obligation to act when a complaint is made. Training is essential for principals, board members and DES inspectors in order to be able to recognise bullying behaviour promptly and to intervene when a problem arises. Reflection and self-assessment are essential exercises for principals to determine the source of the problem and to ascertain whether their own leadership skills are part of the problem.

Ethical leadership is positively related to trust, honesty, fairness, care, compassion and credibility in the leader, and negatively related to abusive supervision. Employee voice in combination with ethical leadership could play a central role as principles and practices to negate bullying behaviour (Holland 2019). While voice mechanisms exist, they may be weak and unable to change the prevailing culture. "Simply putting in place a set of procedures will not necessarily change the culture" (Holland 2019, p.17). What is required is a combination of structural and attitudinal change associated with genuine

organisational responses to voice and the development of trust in the context of ethical leadership. Foucault described 'ethics' as the relationship with oneself, "in excess of that drawn from us by power" (Stones *et al.* 2017, p.250). It entails one's judgement and one's knowledge converging to determine moral choices and actions. Ethical leadership therefore is characterised by a "system of actions directed towards raising awareness of conduct in the workplace and towards a search for a common understanding of professional practices" (Langlois 2011, p.44).

6.2.7 Prevention strategies

"More and more schools are beginning to see that bullying can be reduced by systematic, planned action on the part of schools specifically directed towards preventing and reducing bullying" (Rigby 2002, p. 71). There was compelling support for the establishment of some form of intervention to prevent bullying. "Workplace environments deteriorate following bullying, and this negative climate is likely to provide a suitable setting for yet more inappropriate behavior" (Zapf, 1999). Research studies underscore the importance of preventive measures: "to prevent bullying at all and to enable intervention in early stages of conflict escalation" (Zapf and Gross 2001, p.519). The aim of prevention strategies is to establish an environment in which bullying is not tolerated, but rather recognised, named, and acted upon. Therefore it is essential to attend to the wider working environment by establishing a positive culture through concern for well-being, psychological safety and health.

6.2.8 Staff involvement

Clearly a policy written in isolation cannot expect to garner the involvement or commitment of the whole school community. It was clear from this study that school staff had no input in devising such policies. There is clearly an urgent need for a more participative approach and the inclusion of the whole school community in the development of realistic prevention strategies, policies, and achievable workplace bullying prevention initiatives.

6.2.9 Department of Education & Skills

In 2013 The Department of Education and Skills set out guidelines on the mandatory investigating and reporting of bullying complaints in the case of students. A similar procedure would act as a deterrent in cases of adult bullying. Schools should be required to inform the DES of their reporting and investigative procedures. According to Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik (2003) the reform of the workplace needed in order to tackle workplace bullying must involve a new social contract between all parties which involves justice and cooperation.

6.2.10 Policy development

The traditional approach of duplicating online policies or copying policies from other schools should be replaced by a more active, participatory process resulting in a more tailored, personalised policy, which is more readily accepted and acceded to. There is a greater prospect of everyone implementing a policy if everyone is involved in its formation. Policies and procedures should also be regularly reviewed, assessed, updated, and agreed by all staff members. The involvement of the whole staff in drawing up the policy is paramount, as this would ensure that everyone is aware of negative behaviours, the proper means of addressing bullying, how complaints should be handled, how witnesses can intervene, and how to report bullying. Policies should transmit the message to the whole school community that bullying will not be tolerated in any shape or form, and that all individuals are aware of the behaviours which constitute bullying, are continuously observing, and are willing to make a complaint. In short, policies must encourage bystander intervention. This could be achieved by formalising witnesses' responsibility to intervene and report. Such a policy would arguably create a secure school environment wherein it is *'safe to tell'* and to report bullying.

6.2.11 Disabling factors

Certain factors, antecedents or “enabling, motivating and triggering factors” allow bullying to occur and make the environment conducive to bullying (Salin and Hoel 2003, p.214). By the same token there can also be disabling factors which create a culture that discourages bullying by making it impossible for bullies to succeed. At present there are no negative consequences for perpetrators of bullying. Those in

positions of power who bully, managers or principals, are rarely brought to account (Riley *et al.*, 2012). Since there is no commitment to providing a fair or credible investigation bullies are free to continue their toxic behaviour with impunity. Procedures therefore need to offer genuine support for staff rather than making them feel that they are the problem. In Finland, for instance, there is now a legal requirement to resolve bullying, and the process, which involves discussions with both parties, can result in dismissals and sanctions for the bully if allegations are confirmed (Salin 2009). For Foucault power is a key element in the very “formation of individuals” (Allen 2002, p.135). Therefore power is an element of the everyday work dynamic but “appropriate protections need to be in place to prevent its abuse” (Hodgins and McNamara 2017, p.203).

6.2.12 Independent body

The most disturbing finding of this study was that even when witnesses report bullying it is ignored. For both target and witness this is a particularly devastating indictment of the complaint procedure. Thus, there is a strong argument to be made for an external and impartial agency to provide staff training, to assist complainants, to manage complaints, and to provide a facilitation mechanism for open discussion among staff and management. Candour within a potentially litigious environment is inherently challenging but a new approach is required. This research supports the recommendation that a specific body be established to monitor workplace bullying within the teaching profession. School management is ill-equipped to deal with workplace bullying and an obvious solution would be to transfer responsibility for handling complaints away from the BOM. An independent, competent body such as an ombudsman service should therefore be established and assigned the task of investigating and implementing solutions. Such a service could provide a neutral investigator whose agenda does not involve protecting the powerful.

6.2.13 Support to leave: Redeployment

Despite best efforts it may be impossible to completely eliminate bullying behaviour and restore relationships. The results of the present study support the view that bullying in an advanced stage is a “non-control situation for the victim” (Zapf and Gross 2001).

A number of writers on the topic have identified a ‘strong desire to leave the job’ as a consequence of bullying behaviour. Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) affirms the view that the bully’s goal is often to drive the target from the workplace and the target’s goal is to leave. In view of financial constraints, family commitments, and lack of job opportunities for Irish teachers, stepping away may not be possible. Consequently, the present situation can trap targets in their toxic environments. Transfer to another school, though potentially unfair to targets, would provide at least some support for the target. All targets in this study agreed they would have availed of this option were it available to them so therefore it is one option that could be explored.

In light of the damage caused to targets, students, and the working environment, this study advocates that targets have the option to transfer to another school even though it seems grossly unfair that targets would be transferred and those who bullied them not. Notwithstanding, this research supports a new voluntary redeployment scheme, similar to that in operation for post-primary teachers, which would be suitable and fair to all teachers and enable mobility within the primary sector.

6.2.14 Legislation

At present, under Irish legislation, if a board has concerns or reason to believe that a teacher’s health is affecting their work performance, they can direct employees to attend a medical assessment, which can include mental health assessment. A teacher must undergo any mandatory medical assessment they are ordered to attend, and risk suspension if they refuse. Teachers who have been made to undergo mental health assessments following complaints about bullying expressed a range of surprise, disbelief, and fear of being accused of having a mental incapacity.

Ireland has “not yet introduced any specific legislation targeted at bullying, but rests on a series of recommendations and guidelines as set in indirect legal obligations” (O’Byrne, 2013 Thesis, legal). Thus, despite the various statutes that have some bearing on the issue, it appears that there are no specific regulations covering the areas of policy implementation. “Where there is no specific legal requirement to manage bullying, a less positive range of outcomes has emerged” (Thirlwall 2015, p.146). However, “state involvement, organisational commitment and collective action are all important contributors in reducing workplace bullying” (D’Cruz *et al.* 2019, p.77).

Simply requiring schools under Health and Safety legislation, to put policies and procedures in place to deter and deal with bullying behaviour has proved wholly inadequate. For this reason, many comparable countries, such as England, France, Australia, Germany and the Scandinavian countries, have introduced explicit anti-bullying legislation. “The presence of legislation signals national intolerance of the issue, indicating that the state recognises workplace emotional abuse as a problem” (D’Cruz *et al.* 2019, p.16). No such legislation exists here in Ireland, though Riley *et al.* (2012) maintain that bullying behaviour can indeed be resolved by legislation. Even though reliance on the legal route is best avoided, no one should be expected to endure systemic bullying. However, “legal protection would offer incentives to organisations to prevent bullying” (Thirlwall 2015).

6.3 Limitations of the study

The following limitations are relevant to the interpretation of the results and can serve as recommendations for future studies:

- This is a small scale study with self-selecting teachers. Future studies might consider a multi-informant approach and compare teachers’ age, status, and school size.
- The data is based on teachers’ self-reporting where recall bias may result in over- or under-reporting. In addition individuals who have been targets may be more likely to come forward and take part in the research. Also self-selecting respondents means that the sample is not representative of the population.
- Unsupported targets may use studies such as this one as an opportunity to air their grievances in the absence of other outlets (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006), which may explain “the rich vein of experience that the findings reveal” (Thirlwall 2015, p.155).
- This study did not provide an in-depth exploration of the interactions between the teachers and the learner or the parents that could result in bullying behaviour.
- This research could not indicate whether teachers may have been experiencing stress or anxiety due to other circumstances prior to the

bullying experience, or reduce whether feelings of depression or anxiety affected teachers' interactions with staff or perceptions of staff behaviour.

- Participants were recruited from the primary sector of education in Ireland which limits the generalisability of the results.
- Even though teachers who were happy with the outcome of their complaint were invited to participate, none came forward. This may be because they felt it unnecessary to participate, which may have caused a bias in the responses.
- “Interpretive researchers are sensitive to and aware of themselves as mediating the research” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005, p.211).
- Future studies could seek to replicate the study in a variety of settings.

6.4 Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations arising from this research. This study recommends that a new approach is needed to prevent and effectively manage bullying behaviour in the school workplace. Such an approach would involve:

1. **Accepting that workplace bullying occurs in some schools:** There is a need to expose workplace bullying in schools and build structures that increase transparency and openness. Sometimes only the target is aware that such behavior is occurring.
2. **Raise Awareness:** The data points to the necessity for planned action on the part of school management specifically directed towards raising awareness of workplace bullying among school staff.
3. **Promote a positive working environment:** Management should endeavor to create a positive working environment in which there is an explicit commitment to promoting dignity at work and where a culture of mutual respect is fostered. Zero-tolerance of bullying should be encouraged.
4. **Increase bystander intervention:** Specific bystander intervention training should be made available to all staff through which by-standers share the responsibility for tackling bullying among all staff and makes everybody accountable.

5. **Employ best practice in prevention:** ‘Prevention is better than cure’ and the key to ensuring a bully free work environment is education. A whole-school approach to professional development and training should be provided so that employees have the necessary knowledge and skills to identify and to deal with the challenge of bullying behaviour amongst staff.
6. **Improve policy development and procedures for dealing with workplace bullying in schools:** In order to achieve this, a collaborative process involving representatives from all strands of the school community should be initiated and ensure that all staff are aware of policies, procedures, how to report, where to get advice and support is essential.
7. **Agree a definition:** Steps should be taken to define workplace bullying as it pertains to the teaching profession. A good place to start is to have an open discussion that encompasses all negative behaviours that could constitute workplace bullying in schools. This research supports naming the behaviours that characterise bullying and ruling them out of bounds.
8. **Employ specialised support:** Staff with expertise in the area of bullying should be appointed to handle complaints. Those experts need to offer genuine support to teachers who encounter bullying in schools and be given the authority to act. Access to supports such as counselling and psychological support should be made available to targets.
9. **Revise management’s role:** The current in-school management structure, involving voluntary members drawn from the local community, is clearly ineffective and should be reviewed and revised.
10. **Increase DES involvement:** All school staff should be invited to discuss any experiences of staff bullying with the DES inspector as part of the WSE. Furthermore, an ombudsman-type position at Department level or a designated representative of the DES should be appointed and be available to all teachers to discuss and report workplace bullying.
11. **Prohibit the medical referral of targets:** The referral of complainants of workplace bullying to psychiatrists or other medical practitioners for work-related stress, without first investigating the workplace as the origin of the stress, should be expressly prohibited. The role of Medmark should be investigated.

12. **Implement sanctions:** Those found to be engaging in harmful, unacceptable behaviours that infringe the rights of others, should be held to account and penalised. It is vital that complaints are acknowledged, investigated, and effective sanctions imposed on all perpetrators. Management and principals who fail to act should also be held to account and penalised. Ensuring the consequences for perpetrators are made known would serve to reinforce the message. The obligation for everyone to be vigilant and active in the maintenance of a bully-free environment should be stressed.
13. **Improve leadership:** Leaders exert a powerful influence on school culture, as their attitudes and actions determine whether bullying is tolerated or eradicated from the school. Those in leadership roles should be facilitated in reflecting on their current leadership style. CPD in areas such as workplace bullying, teachers' well-being, interpersonal relations, and conflict resolution should be provided. Leaders and inspectors should be able to recognise and ameliorate workplace bullying. Awareness-based training should be provided, along with skills-based conflict management /resolution training.
14. **Enact legislation:** There should be improved legislative efforts to tackle bullying and the need for specific legislation should be revised.
15. **Increase trade union involvement:** There should be more effective engagement of trade unions to survey, define, and tackle the problem of workplace bullying. The role of the INTO in resolving bullying disputes should be examined. Bullying is less likely to occur and is more likely to be tackled when it does, when there is a strong and well-organised trade union presence at the workplace (Ironsides and Seifert 2003).
16. **Establish an independent procedure:** Riley *et al* (2012) propose the establishment of an ombudsman type of position at the system level. This should be given consideration here in Ireland to enable teachers to discuss and resolve their experiences of staff bullying. Ensuring that complainants are heard by those charged with their support is vital.
17. **Initiate a voluntary redeployment scheme:** A new voluntary redeployment scheme, similar to that in operation for post-primary teachers, which would be suitable and fair to all teachers and would enable mobility within the primary sector.

18. **Establish Monitoring:** Workplaces should be constantly scrutinised to assess whether toxic bullying cultures have developed and support networks provided for potential targets. All schools should devise and update their own individual set of guidelines to monitor workplace bullying behaviours.

6.5 *Future research*

Opportunities for future research might include:

- An up-to-date survey to assess the present level of workplace bullying in primary schools. Though all teachers confirmed that they had been exposed to bullying behaviour the frequency and intensity was not measured.
- A similar study at secondary and third level should be carried out.
- Future studies should consider factors which hinder the resolution of complaints, such as school culture, leadership styles, interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution skills, and staff size.
- Further research should be carried out in order to identify the most effective procedures to resolve bullying issues in schools since this may reduce reliance on legal recourse.
- Research aimed at identifying the most effective strategies to prevent workplace bullying should be conducted.
- Familiarity with the specific kinds of support required by targets of workplace bullying would help alleviate the negative effects.
- It is uncertain how many teachers' careers have been terminated due to bullying since the whole process is shrouded in secrecy. Further research should identify teachers who left the profession due to bullying or due to psychiatric reports that have forced teachers to resign on the grounds of imputed or actual ill-health.
- Research should be carried out to compare the processing of bullying complaints in various jurisdictions in order to evaluate and assess the impact of legislation on the level of bullying and the process of investigation.
- All participants reported that bullying had impacted job satisfaction and teaching performance, but adverse effects were not measured.

6.5.1 Questions which may prompt further research include:

- What is it about primary-schools or the school context that nurtures bullying?
- How does workplace bullying affect teachers' teaching competence?
- How is student learning affected?
- How are witnesses affected, and how do they cope in toxic environments?
- What is the experience of staff and students who witness bullying?
- What is the role of leadership as an antecedent of bullying culture?
- What are the educational and financial costs of school workplace bullying?

6.6 Conclusion

Chapter Four presented the data analysis of the study designed to explore the experience of teachers who made complaints of bullying and how those teachers engaged with the recommended complaints procedures. The participants in this study generously shared their experiences of bullying and of their interactions with the present complaint procedures. Much of the data was presented and elaborated using direct quotes from the transcripts of recorded interviews. The chapter ends by weaving the themes together to formulate a concept of responding to complaints of bullying. The data presented provide the results of the data analysis and findings which facilitated answering the research question posed in Chapter One. The analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of themes and sub themes and concludes with a summary of the key findings. Throughout the research there was frequent reference to how best to tackle the problem of workplace bullying in schools and this was incorporated in the discussion. Several conclusions and recommendations are drawn from this research.

This study reported a high prevalence of acquiescence, endurance, and in some cases submission to bullying cultures which leave teachers with a sense of isolation and shame. The data revealed that none of the participants consider the current procedures effective in resolving complaints of bullying; they are not fit for purpose. All those involved in education should review and evaluate the current system for dealing with complaints of bullying. The study advocates the importance of addressing workplace bullying in schools. The implications of the study are that any approach to tackling workplace bullying must encompass fundamental interventions. The innovative reforms proposed in the study would lead to a change in the cultural climate in primary schools, thereby resulting in a workplace culture that does not tolerate bullying, but

rather encourages the reporting of and responding to complaints of bullying.

This study contributes to the knowledge about school workplace bullying and should go some way towards the establishment of a more effective and comprehensive way of dealing with the phenomenon within schools. If the level of bullying in education is to be tackled, then the stakeholders must 'lift the veil of secrecy' which surrounds workplace bullying in schools. This study sheds light on some of the key issues involved in confronting and seeking redress for workplace bullying. The insights it provides are useful from both an organisational and an individual perspective. The primary school work environment must protect its workers from bullying. This study contributes to discourses of redress in workplace bullying in challenging researchers and policy-makers to fully examine the issues surrounding the seeking of redress for workplace bullying.

Schools are microcosms of society and at times, they can reflect the unacceptable in addition to the acceptable values of that society. There is a need for schools to examine their own value systems and to ensure that every member of the school community is treated with dignity and respect (I.N.T.O 2000, p.16).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Summary of research findings in the context of previous research

Workplace Bullying in the Teaching Profession

Research Gap	Research Question	Research Findings
<p>Bullying has been extensively studied in childhood; less attention has been paid to adult bullying in the research literature.(Sylvester 2011; Lipinski and Crothers 2013).</p> <p>Research on adult bullying in the workplace is a critical issue for all organisations, including schools (Liefoghe and Olafsson 1999).</p> <p>Academic studies on workplace bullying have been comparatively silent on the issue of resistance and have subsequently fallen short of conceptualizing a theory of resistance in these situations. Bullying literature provides scant evidence that people resist, fight back, or formally complain, and even less evidence of a</p>	<p><u>Main Research Question</u></p> <p>What is the lived experience of teachers who have initiated informal or formal complaints of bullying?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions concerning definition, a disbelief that teachers engage in bullying behaviour, denotive hesitancy, fear, powerlessness and the erosion of professional status can impede targets’ ability to recognise and resist bullying. • Prior to their experience of bullying teachers in this study had little or no awareness or knowledge about bullying. The negative behaviours, list used as part of this study, was reflective of their experience. • For the teachers in this study the process of making a complaint or registering a concern led to further negative consequences, in particular, for targets’ health and wellbeing, professional reputation, and for their capacity to teach. • Participants reported that the negative effects of bullying intensified following the initiation of a complaint. Participants found that making a complaint led to retaliation such as reprimands, professional humiliation, criticism, and having contrived and unfounded allegations made against them.

<p>link between resistance and subsequent change (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005).</p> <p>Workplace bullying is a complex issue about which there is little research in Ireland...” (Rockett 2015).</p> <p>Bullying of staff in schools is rarely discussed or researched (Duncan <i>et al.</i> 2011).</p> <p>The issue of teacher-peer bullying has not gained the attention that it deserves. Researchers need to find a new urgency for the study of this topic (Gray and Gardiner 2013).</p> <p>In keeping with the extent of diversity present, we call for more studies of workplace bullying in varying cultural contexts (D’Cruz <i>et al.</i> 2016).</p> <p>It is necessary that further research be undertaken to examine the validity of this hypothesis (Field, 1996) with regard to</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complainants encountered procrastination, reprisals and orchestration, which led to considerable harmful effects in terms of physical and emotional wellbeing. • Ignoring or dismissing of complaints was a common occurrence in participants’ schools and this exacerbated the negative effects of bullying. • Teachers in this study found that a common response to complaints of bullying was to regard the complainant as the cause of the problem. • The study found that parental complaints and the fabrication of professional complaints was a common occurrence following a complaint. • In participants’ schools the whole staff were not involved in the development of the anti-bullying policy and it was not discussed at staff meetings. • Teachers perceived that student engagement suffered due to impaired teaching performance. • This study found significant enabling factors at play in the context of the Irish primary-school, including by-standing, cultures of bullying, leadership difficulties, and the inherent power structure of schools. • Teachers who complained were portrayed as ‘the problem’ and aspersions were cast on their competence, ability, and even their mental health.
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<p>the prevalence of bullying in education and nursing (INTO, Staff relations).</p> <p>Bullying in the workplace may be more prevalent than the numbers who complained in the past would indicate. (ICTU, 1995).</p>		
<p>“No bullying research to date has sought to explain the role of power in bullying” (Liefoghe and Mac Davey 2001, p.377)</p> <p>Power has received little critical attention in the literature on bullying (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.14)</p> <p>There has been little critical examination of the institutional power dynamics that enable bullying (ibid).</p>	<p>What aspects of organisational power are evident in the response of management to complaints of bullying?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants reported a general reluctance to tell or to make a complaint about bullying in the teaching profession due to perceived power imbalance. • Participants also noticed that those in powerful positions tend to adopt a cavalier attitude to regulations, procedures, and the normal rules of behaviour. • This study found that in participants’ schools the procedures for addressing workplace bullying were inadequately implemented. Misuse of legitimate power or abuse of authority were cited as the explanation. • It is evident from the findings that certain practices associated with organisational structure, hierarchy and lack of oversight hamper resolution and may actually prolong or perpetuate bullying behaviour. • Participants affirmed the view that the hierarchical management structure of primary schools, particularly in relation to the roles of the principal teacher and the chairperson was susceptible to abuse because they were largely unaccountable and unsupervised. • Participants cited power imbalance and abuse of power as the cause of lack of confidence in the procedures to resolve bullying in schools.

<p>“By and large, power has become a neglected subject analytically” (Uphoff 1989, p.297).</p> <p>Less commonly, workplace bullying has been viewed as a micropolitical exercise of power (Hutchinson 2010).</p> <p>“Few bullying researchers have engaged in any serious way with the more detailed or critical conceptions of power” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015, p.14).</p> <p>“There is limited empirical research on the thought processes and perceptions of targets who do experience bullying and incivility, and in particular how they have experienced the response from management within the organization” (Hodgins and McNamara 2017, p.192).</p> <p>“Little is known about sources of bullying perpetrators and their interactions with targets of bullying” (De Cieri <i>et al.</i> 2019, p.325).</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant accounts suggest that the school, as an organisation which operates without external independent review mechanisms, is vulnerable to internal autocracy. • The power differentials that operate within primary schools, render redress procedures inappropriate. • The managerial paradigm can operate as a source of bullying through lack of support, inaction, and non-implementation of agreed procedures. The failure on the part of management to properly address workplace bullying in schools is an exercise of power in itself. • Those in authority were able to use their legitimate authority to disparage and bombard targets with false information in which confrontations were distorted, complaints trivialised or re-cast. • The organisational context in participants’ schools appeared to influence and model the rules of social relationships so that bullying became normalised and accepted. • A frequent organisational response, particularly evident in this study, is to transpose resistance to bullying into insubordination. • The ‘<i>medicalisation</i>’ process clearly has the effect of reframing the problem and in this way a complaint of bullying is sequestered. This practice suggests that the operation of power within school organisations serve to justify and legitimate spurious practices which are often unquestionably accepted. • The researcher contends that a core feature of the legal approach, and the problem as a whole, is that if the target seeks redress they are pitted against the organisation as opposed to the bully.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets themselves may perceive the power structure as too formidable a force to contend with and the perpetrator “untouchable”
<p>What strategies do employees use to respond to or cope with incivility and do the strategies moderate relationships to outcomes? These and other issues must await future research (Cortina <i>et al.</i> 2001).</p> <p>Whilst it is fair to say that the research data that are available in respect of workplace bullying behaviour amongst teachers are not as complete as those regarding bullying behaviour amongst pupils (O'Moore and Minton 2004).</p> <p>“An examination of such factors is important, as employees might frequently be reluctant to report negative workplace behaviours due to different reasons, and the personal and professional resources available to them may be their only recourse and source of help on in coping with workplace bullying” (P. Harvey <i>et al.</i> 2007)</p>	<p>What support is provided to staff to prevent or deal with workplace bullying?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants stressed the importance of social support in the workplace, but this study found that a model of genuine workplace support is lacking. • participants reported that management did little in terms of support or intervention once they were made aware of bullying. • Participants described a lack of appropriate involvement by boards of management, the DES, the INTO and the inspectorate in addressing workplace bullying problems. • Specific support would go some way towards alleviating the detrimental effects of bullying on teachers, students, and the entire school community. • Participants stated that no action was taken by their school to prevent workplace bullying or to facilitate difficult dialogues about bullying. • Participants testified that genuine departmental support could ameliorate the harmful effects of bullying. • In this study counselling was considered effective and beneficial in dealing with the negative effects of bullying but the number of sessions provided under EAS was found to be inadequate. Some participants felt it can lead to the assumption that they are the cause of the problem. • Participants in this study expressed a lack of satisfaction with the advice and support offered by the INTO. • No participant reported support from school management or colleagues. • Those who contacted the Teaching Council received no reply.

<p>“Further research on rehabilitation of targets is also needed, especially studies that focus on people who are still working” (Annie Hogh 2011, p.122).</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants conveyed a lack of expertise and training in how to deal with the problem. • While participants appreciated home support as crucial, they were also concerned about the negative impact exerted on family members and home life. • Targets found it extremely difficult to garner the formal support of colleagues
<p>Organisational responses to allegations of workplace bullying have received more limited attention from academics (Thirlwall 2015).</p> <p>“The issue of teacher-peer bullying has not gained the attention that it deserves (Grey and Gardiner, 2013).</p> <p>“Targets of workplace bullying deserve our continued commitment as they seek equitable relief and redress” (Meglich-Sespico <i>et al.</i> 2007, p.41).</p> <p>“The more employees do not oppose bullying by management, the more</p>	<p><i>What are teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and organisational response to dealing with bullying.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The data reveals a number of barriers which hinder teacher engagement with the recommended complaints procedures and confirm that teachers may attempt a range of alternative reconciliatory or covert strategies prior to formalising a complaint. • Participants reported that despite robust policies being in place, these were mostly disregarded. • The data evidences dissatisfaction with the present complaints procedures and confirms that in-house investigations, if conducted at all, are inadequate and unacceptable. • This study found that anti-bullying policies and guidelines appear ostensibly excellent but in reality, participants found them to be ineffective mainly because management seem to have discretion in their successful implementation. • The data confirms that speaking up about workplace bullying in primary schools is futile and may even be dangerous.

<p>bullying can be used by management to achieve organizational changes that may otherwise be resisted” (Hutchinson and Jackson 2015).</p> <p>“Unfortunately, there is so far only limited knowledge on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee silence” (Lutgen-Sandvik 2003; Rai and Agarwal 2018).</p> <p>“A major oversight in the extant literature on bullying is its limited focus on the underlying and intervening mechanisms involved in the bullying-outcomes relationship” (Park and Ono 2017).</p> <p>“It is also important to take into consideration how organisational actions may impact on these processes and whether preventative measures in organizations actually reduce bullying at work” (Annie Hogh 2011, p.122).</p> <p>“Different measures at all levels of prevention are used in organizations to</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather than offer a justice mechanism, complaint procedures or rather management’s response, served to quell resistance by forcing participants to withdraw complaints. • Antibullying policies as they stand offer no guarantee that complaints will be addressed. • Management’s poor response to complaints indicates how those in authority exercised power without restraint in relation to the procedures. • Not only did the participants criticise the support systems ostensibly designed to help and protect the teaching profession as wholly inadequate; they also condemned the operation of the complaints procedures as unfeasible, and principals’ power to influence management and block complaints, as unjust. • None of the participants in this study reported vindication or redress as an outcome of engaging with the complaints procedure; on the contrary, several discussed the redress procedures as technologies of power which were used to counter-attack them or to seek revenge.
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<p>prevent and reduce bullying at work, but assessment and evaluation of different strategies in relation to their effectiveness have so far been scarce” (Vartia and Leka 2011, p.364)</p>		
<p>“.....so far we still know little of the processes and factors involved when cases of bullying and potential bullying take alternative routes. Research efforts must therefore still be directed at such issues”. (Einarsen <i>et al.</i> 2012, p. 32). “Future academic research on workplace bullying should begin to systematically examine how targets might successfully remedy bullying situations” (Lipinski and Crothers 2013).</p> <p>“The more the public knows about the causes and consequences of bullying, the greater the likelihood the level of tolerance for workplace bullying will decline” (Meglich-Sespico <i>et al.</i> 2007, p.41).</p>	<p>What are the effects of organisational responses on those seeking redress?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For participants in this study the inaction of those in authority during the initial Stages of the process acted as a deterrent. This may account for the large proportion of participants who dropped out of the process at Stage 2 or 3 and therefore did not pursue their complaint further. • This study found that making a complaint did not resolve bullying issues. It either had no effect or it made the situation worse. • Participants found that those in authority can disregard the procedures with impunity. • Those who persisted with complaints found the process dragged on for months and sometimes years. • The study found that the formal investigation process was adversarial and at times even more stressful for participants than the bullying. • Teachers perceive that a culture of silence and complicity operates within school workplaces. • Teachers in this study who pursued a complaint of bullying experienced retaliation in the form of reprisals, counter complaints and further escalation of bullying behaviours and stress.

<p>The policies and practices that may exist in schools with established anti-bullying policies hinder the reporting of bullying. (O’Dowd, 2009).</p> <p>Workplace bullying has been ignored for too long and commitment to eliminating it rests with the teaching profession (Riley <i>et al.</i>, 2012, p. 157).</p> <p>The high incidence of workplace bullying reported in this study indicates that the primary school is a work arena in which unacceptably high levels of bullying thrive. (Stevens, 2013).</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For teachers who pursued their complaint beyond Stage 3, there is evidence of a ‘mental health trap’ type process. • Teachers in this study perceived that they were referred for medical assessment because they complained of bullying. They commented on the ensuing stress and anxiety. • This study found that referrals were made without investigating the work environment for the cause(s) of the stress; hence participants believed that they were being prejudged as being the problem. From an objective standpoint, they were being scapegoated. • There was no evidence in this study to suggest that the alleged bully was referred for medical assessment. • Teachers in this study who experienced bullying contemplated an exit strategy. Due to financial constraints, family commitments and lack of job opportunities some targets remain trapped in toxic environments in schools. • There was evidence that intimidation, loss of employment, financial hardship, and/or being regarded as a whistle-blower or troublemaker impacted on those seeking redress. • The data provide sufficient evidence to justify targets’ fear in respect of seeking redress as many suffered psychologically, physically and emotionally as well as financially.
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Notification for INTOUCH Magazine

*Research Study
Bullying in the Teaching Profession*

A qualitative study on workplace bullying is being undertaken by this author, entitled 'Bullying in the teaching profession; Teachers' experience following a complaint'. The study will look at the experience of teachers who have encountered this phenomenon and sought to resolve issues through the complaints procedure or otherwise. The researcher is seeking to interview teachers who are, or who have been, subjected to or witnessed bullying behaviour. Participants are guaranteed anonymity and no names or identifying details will be used as part of this project. The study hopes to contribute to the evolving discourse and seeks to improve the process of addressing complaints. While the study seeks to examine the testimonies of teachers who have made complaints or sought to address issues, contact from teachers who, for one reason or another have decided not to formally complain, would also be particularly welcomed. If you have experienced bullying behaviour at school and are willing to participate in this research project, please make direct contact with the author at 10141375@studentmail.ul.ie.

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me about your experience of workplace bullying?
2. Checklist of possible bullying behaviours.
3. Were other staff members aware that you were being bullied?
4. Did anyone intervene or try to support you?
5. What do you think was the trigger/motivation for the bullying behaviour?
6. How did you react and what has been the immediate and long term impact?
7. Where did you look for support/assistance?
8. What do you think is the role of the union or support services?
9. What, if anything helped alleviate the situation?
10. Does workplace bullying have an impact on the quality of education in schools.
11. What is your experience of the complaints procedure?
12. What measures do you think could be employed to prevent, alleviate or resolve workplace bullying?
13. Is the definition of workplace bullying adequate? If not why?
14. Have you any questions/queries?



Consent form

I have read and understood the research information sheet.

I understand what the research study is about and what the results of the research will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with this study.

I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw consent from the study at any time without prejudice and without having to supply a reason.

I know that I may omit questions that I do not want to answer.

I know that my data will be treated with full confidentiality and, if published, it will not be identified as mine.

I am aware that the data collected for this study will form the basis of a research report that will be submitted to the University of Limerick in fulfilment of the researcher's thesis and that no identifying features will be in that report thus guaranteeing anonymity to all participant teachers.

By signing below you are agreeing that you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and that you agree to take part in this research study.

Participant's Signature _____

Participant's Signature _____ (Please print)

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Researcher's Name _____ (Please print)

Teachers' experience following a complaint of bullying in the workplace



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
D E I S C O L L U M N E R I C H

Teacher Information sheet

What is the study about?

My name is Kathleen Fitzpatrick and I am undertaking a Ph.D. research study on 'Teachers' experience following a complaint of Bullying' in the Primary Sector of the Irish education system. This research is guided by Dr. Patricia Mannix-McNamara . The education sector has the highest incidence of workplace bullying in Ireland (ESRI, 2007) yet the issue of staff bullying has been, to a great extent, ignored by schools and teacher unions. Indeed there is evidence to suggest that individual complaints have been dismissed and some contend that making a complaint even makes the situation worse. The aim of this study is to establish whether the present complaints procedure/grievance procedure is sympathetic of teachers' complaints, is successful in dealing with efforts to report staff bullying and is fit for purpose. At present we do not have sufficient information about the incidence of staff bullying in Irish schools, indeed bullying of staff is rarely discussed or researched. A good understanding of the actions of teachers who have made complaints of bullying and their satisfaction or lack of satisfaction with the outcomes of their complaints should help to direct our attention to a possible range of instruments which schools could use to assess, build and maintain a bully-free workplace culture. This in turn should go some way in overcoming the problem.

What will I have to do ?

To gain a greater insight into the experiences of teachers who have been subjected to bullying behaviour in the education sector I need school teachers to tell me about their

own experiences and invite them to contribute to this research should they see themselves in any or some of the following categories:

2. Teachers/Principals who have been subjected to bullying and who have made a complaint.
3. Teachers/Principals who have been subjected to persistent bullying and who have sought advice/intervention from another body. (Union, IPPN, BOM)
4. Teachers/Principals for whom the bullying has continued despite making a complaint.
5. Teachers/Principals for whom the bullying has stopped due to intervention.
6. Teachers/Principals who have experience bullying but, for whatever reasons, have not made a complaint.

What are the benefits of the study?

My goal and motivation is to raise awareness of the issue of bullying amongst teachers, to encourage further debate on the issue, to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge and to carry out research in the area of the aftermath of bullying complaints. A considerable proportion of research which has been generated in Scandinavian countries resulted in considerable advances in public awareness of the existence of bullying. In addition it is reflected in the establishment of specific laws such as their national work environmental legislation which ‘support the rights of workers to remain both physically and mentally healthy at work’ (Leymann 1996). There has been increasing pressure on Irish governmental departments to improve legislation in this area but to date the issue of adult bullying has been neglected in Ireland. It is hoped that the present study will increase awareness about bullying of staff in schools and that this in turn will increase pressure on the government to improve legislation in the area. It is hoped that by participating in the study interviewees will come to realise that they are not alone in their suffering, that efforts are being made to change current practices and that some measure of confidence can be restored through some sense of a shared empathy.

I hope to meet with participants individually to discuss the problem of bullying in greater depth. The information that will be obtained from this research project should

assist the teaching profession in the implementation of more effective policies and procedures in combating and preventing workplace bullying.

What are the risks?

It is not envisaged that there will be risks to participants. However, given that this is sensitive topic teachers will not be asked for any personal information. I will endeavour not to misrepresent nor assume that my interpretations of participants' accounts are what is intended or true. To this end I will invite those being studied to reflect and comment on my interpretations and drafts.

What if I do not wish to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part or to withdraw at any time there is no pressure to take part. Participants will reserve the right not to answer individual questions and to terminate the interview before its completion.

What happens if I change my mind about participating during the study?

Participants will reserve the right not to answer individual questions and to terminate the interview before its completion. However, as interviews will be transcribed and published as part of the study as such it will be impossible to remove it once completed.

What happens to the information collected?

Data will be collected from all interviews and these will be recorded and transcribed. The study will be further supported by field notes. The interview data will then be analysed and formulated, meanings will be clustered into themes allowing for the emergence of themes common to all of the participants' transcripts. Depending on the quality and depth of the data collected verbatim transcripts may be imported directly

into a qualitative software package, yet to be decided. The results will be integrated into an in-depth description of the phenomenon.

How will the results be disseminated?

The research report will be made available to the University of Limerick and to the INTO. It is envisaged that the findings of the study will be reported in the 'Intouch' magazine and possibly presented at Educational Conferences.

What if I have more questions or do not understand something?

If you wish to ask any additional questions about the research process or if you have any queries you can contact the principal investigator at the following:

Patricia Mannix-McNamara,
Course Director Health Education and Promotion
Faculty of Education and Health Sciences
University of Limerick
Tel: (061) 202722
Email: patricia.m.mcnamara@ul.ie

also

10141375@studentmail.ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (2013-06-17-EHS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

EHS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel (061) 234101
Email : ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix 5: Negative acts list

List of negative acts

1. Had information withheld that affected your performance
2. Been exposed to an unmanageable workload
3. Ordered to do work below your level of competence
4. Given tasks with unreasonable/impossible targets/deadlines
5. Had your opinions and views ignored
7. Had your work excessively monitored
8. Reminded repeatedly of your errors or mistakes
9. Humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work
10. Had gossip and rumours spread about you
11. Had insulting/offensive remarks made about you
12. Been ignored, excluded or isolated from others
13. Received hints or signals from others that you should quit job.
14. Been intimidated with threatening behaviour
15. Experienced persistent criticism of your work and effort
16. Been ignored or faced hostile reactions when you approached
17. Had key tasks removed, replaced with trivial, unpleasant tasks
18. Had false allegations made against you
19. Subjected to excessive teasing and sarcasm
20. Been shouted at or targeted with spontaneous anger (or rage)
21. Pressured into not claiming something to which entitled
22. Been subjected to practical jokes
23. Experienced threats of violence or abused/attacked.

Appendix 6: Completed negative acts list

List of negative acts

1. Had information withheld that affected your performance: yes
2. Been exposed to an unmanageable workload: yes
3. Ordered to do work below your level of competence: yes
4. Given tasks with unreasonable/impossible targets/deadlines: yes
5. Had your opinions and views ignored: yes
6. Had your work excessively monitored: yes
7. Reminded repeatedly of your errors or mistakes: yes
8. Humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work: yes
9. Had gossip and rumours spread about you: yes
10. Had insulting/offensive remarks made about you: yes
11. Been ignored, excluded or isolated from others: yes
12. Received hints or signals from others that you should quit job: yes
13. Been intimidated with threatening behaviour: yes
14. Experienced persistent criticism of your work and effort: yes
15. Been ignored or faced hostile reactions when you approached: yes
16. Had key tasks removed, replaced with trivial, unpleasant tasks: yes
17. Had false allegations made against you: yes
18. Subjected to excessive teasing and sarcasm: yes
19. Been shouted at or targeted with spontaneous anger (or rage): yes
20. Pressured into not claiming something to which entitled: yes
21. Been subjected to practical jokes: no
22. Experienced threats of violence or abused/attacked: no

From: Anne.O'Brien
Sent: 18 November 2013 15:38
To: Patricia.McNamara
Subject: 2013_06_17_ EHS

Dear Patricia

Thank you for your amended Research Ethics application which was recently reviewed by the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The recommendation of the Committee is outlined below:

Project Title : 2013_06_17_ EHS Teachers' experience following a complaint of bullying in the workplace

Principal Investigator : Patricia Mannix-McNamara

Other Investigators: Kathleen Fitzpatrick

Recommendation: Approved until June 2015

NB Please check that the student email address on the info sheet is correct.

Please note that as Principal Investigator of this project you are required to submit a Research Completion Report Form (attached) on completion of this research study.

Yours Sincerely

Anne O'Brien

Anne O'Brien
Administrator, Education & Health Sciences
Research Ethics Committee
Ollscoil Luimnigh / University of Limerick
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Gréasán / Web: <http://www.ehs.ul.ie>

Appendix 8 Coding in MaxQDA

the motivation for this kind of behaviour?

PARTICIPANT: For this kind of thing? I think it's power and the two women, the two main kind of drivers of this would tell you that they feel that they were important within the parish because they worked in the school because the Vice Principal had told me at one point that she was well-liked within the parish.

If you annoy the principal, he would give you a rotten class. Everybody knows that. You know, he would give you a rotten class the next year, the learning support people would give you the most difficult kids. They'd give you the, I should say, the children with the most difficult parent will end up on your plate. You're never sure that you're going to get support then if you have trouble with a parent. You don't know what people are going to say when they, if they come in to make a complaint about you. You just never feel kind of safe, do you know, I mean, I have to say never, I never felt

but when it came down to it, that was how he dealt with it. He told me to stop. And I did discover that he was very susceptible to particularly the younger girls on the staff. If they went and cried enough about anything, he was an older man, he would have done anything for them, do you know, and they were very fond of him. but fond of him because again it was a thing of. you know. "You scratch my back.

84 INTERVIEWER: The Board of Management?

85 PARTICIPANT: Yes. That was the bottom line. They didn't want anything to leak out that this happened, but like, I haven't really, well, this year I did confront, I'll be honest, I spoke to the teachers who were involved in making the decision that suddenly pulled me out of resource and said I had to teach a Maths class. Now as I said, per se, I could teach my Sixth Class Maths blindfolded, I didn't mind it at all. But what I minded was the way it was done.

86 INTERVIEWER: And not being consulted, yeah.

87 PARTICIPANT: And totally unprofessional and everything. One of them did apologise and said that at the meeting, she said to the principal, "Do not make any decision until you consult those teachers." Another lady said to me, "I did it for the good of the children. It was up to the principal to deal with it after that." She said, "I just recommended that maybe those classes should be put together. It wasn't my doing. At the end of the day, he didn't have to take my advice" and the other two just ducked for cover and pretended, look, you know, we weren't at the meeting and when I asked was there notes for it, there was, it's now, whether there were or not, I don't think there were.

88 INTERVIEWER: But what was the meeting, was it a staff meeting then?

89 PARTICIPANT: No, it was a meeting of just three or four that were of A posts, just and I mean, I have a B post myself. Three or four like the Principal, the Vice, the Acting Principal, the Acting Vice-Principal, two Assistant Principals and an A-post holder, and they called themselves the SMT, the Senior Management Team which don't exist of course in theory.

90 INTERVIEWER: Oh, right.

91 PARTICIPANT: But in fairness, one of them did say that she was very sorry and she did think it was bullying and with hindsight and she was saying that she didn't know whether there were notes taken at the meeting or not. Now she said, "I don't think there were. Maybe the principal did" but he didn't, he told me, he didn't. They all were telling me there were, there were notes and some of them act as if the meeting never took place. They would have no recollection of what happened as in, "Yeah, he did mention something" and so, but what I found as the bottom line is, they don't want the Board to know it and they just want bullying to continue. Now I will say they certainly won't confront me in anything now. I think that they have seen that, look, you know. But I think it has left a very sour note in the staff.

Parent code	Code	Coded segme...	Coded segme...	Author	Creation date	Code alias	% Coded seg...	% Coded seg...	Documents
● rules	adherence to ...	42	42	Kathleen	22/03/2016 11...		0.62	0.62	9
● decision making	role definition	27	27	Kathleen	21/03/2016 23...		0.40	0.40	12
● Subjected to f...	by SNA	8	8	Kathleen	21/03/2016 20...		0.12	0.12	4
● Bullying	general comm...	224	224	Kathleen	21/03/2016 20...		3.32	3.32	16
● Effect of Bullying	staff morale	30	30	Kathleen	21/03/2016 14...		0.44	0.44	12
● medical	referral	9	9	Kathleen	20/03/2016 19...		0.13	0.13	3
● Behaviours	Threatened o...	15	15	Kathleen	20/03/2016 17...		0.22	0.22	8
● Academic jeal...	denied time to ...	18	18	Kathleen	19/03/2016 17...		0.27	0.27	7
● Academic jeal...	jealousy	15	15	Kathleen	19/03/2016 17...		0.22	0.22	8
● new approach	independent m...	11	11	Kathleen	19/03/2016 17...		0.16	0.16	7
● new approach	raise awareness	33	33	Kathleen	19/03/2016 16...		0.49	0.49	12
● Effect on person	trapped	37	37	Kathleen	19/03/2016 16...		0.55	0.55	15
● Seek help	Principal	13	13	Kathleen	19/03/2016 15...		0.19	0.19	7
● Behaviours	Deprived of a...	18	18	Kathleen	19/03/2016 15...		0.27	0.27	9
● Principal pow...	Lack of control	46	46	Kathleen	19/03/2016 15...		0.68	0.68	13
● School staff	cliques	45	45	Kathleen	19/03/2016 15...		0.67	0.67	10
● Trigger	job application	8	8	Kathleen	19/03/2016 15...		0.12	0.12	7
● culture of bully...	toxic environm...	61	61	Kathleen	19/03/2016 15...		0.90	0.90	16
● Suggestions/R...	Leave	34	34	Kathleen	19/03/2016 15...		0.50	0.50	13
● Effect on person	Angry	33	33	Kathleen	19/03/2016 15...		0.49	0.49	16
● Effect on person	disillusioned	35	35	Kathleen	19/03/2016 15...		0.52	0.52	14
● Effect on person	fears	74	74	Kathleen	18/03/2016 17...		1.10	1.10	13
● Bullying	definition	17	17	Kathleen	18/03/2016 17...		0.25	0.25	11
● Dealing with b...	other teachers...	59	59	Kathleen	18/03/2016 15...		0.87	0.87	15
● Effect on person	medical	95	95	Kathleen	18/03/2016 15...		1.41	1.41	16
● The Bully	manipulation	130	130	Kathleen	18/03/2016 15...		1.92	1.92	17
● The Bully	Trust	38	38	Kathleen	18/03/2016 14...		0.56	0.56	14
● The Bully	personality	48	48	Kathleen	18/03/2016 14...		0.71	0.71	14
● Trust	dishonesty	53	53	Kathleen	18/03/2016 14...		0.78	0.78	15
● School staff	secretary	8	8	Kathleen	14/03/2016 23...		0.12	0.12	3
● School Culture	School staff	43	43	Kathleen	14/03/2016 23...		0.64	0.64	13
●	Dealing with b...	151	151	Kathleen	14/03/2016 21...		2.24	2.24	20

Dear -----

I would like to thank you most sincerely for your participation in my research project, which seeks to highlight the specific features of and difficulties with, the phenomenon that is workplace bullying. Your interview data provided me with a detailed understanding of your lived experience and my aim is to write, in detail, about the perceptions and understandings of you the participant. In the coming months I hope to provide a rich, transparent and contextualized analysis of your account which I hope will shed light on the complexity of this human phenomenon and in particular on the problems encountered when trying to deal with it.

As you know informed consent was sought prior to data collection and the likely outcome of my data analysis may involve the inclusion of verbatim extracts. All transcripts have been edited for anonymity but, as promised, you now have the option of reviewing the accuracy of the data from your own interview. If you identify any name, term or information, which you feel could identify either you or your school, please feel free to draw my attention to it and I will ensure that it is further redacted. I hope you have received some benefit from the opportunity to speak freely and reflectively and to develop your ideas and express your concerns at some length but should you wish to add to your account please do. I have provided a reflective template and I would be most grateful if you could provide a brief account of your thoughts and reflections as you read through your own transcript. Be assured again that your account will be handled with sensitivity and care and I hope that to have your experiences represented and your voice heard will go some way towards alleviating the damage and hurt caused by your past experience of bullying.

The aim of my interviews was to facilitate an interaction, which permitted you the participant to tell your own story, in your own words and from the first perusal the data points towards the urgent need to address workplace bullying in schools.

You may be aware that it is difficult to recruit participants to take part in research dealing with bullying and it is even more difficult to reach teachers who have retired or resigned their posts because of it. Should you know of anyone who would like to contribute to my research please forward my email and urge them to make contact with me? You have contributed much to the knowledge and understanding of workplace bullying but how this knowledge is translated into effective school practice is paramount. I hope that I can do justice to your contribution and elicit change.

Finally I want to thank you most sincerely again for sharing a detailed account of your individual experience.

I look forward to your comments,

Kind Regards,

Kathleen Fitzpatrick

Appendix 10 Participant Post Interview reflection

<p>Gender:</p> <p>Made a complaint: <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Left school because of bullying <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Age Range</p> <p>20-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-50 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>30-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 50-60 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p> over 60 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Changes/supplementary material to my interview data:</p>	
<p><u>Reflections</u></p> <p>What it was like to read through my transcript:</p>	

Appendix 11 Completed reflection sheet

Gender: Female Left school because of bullying <input type="checkbox"/> √	Age Range 20-30 <input type="checkbox"/> √ 40-50 <input type="checkbox"/> 30-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 50-60 <input type="checkbox"/> >60 <input type="checkbox"/>
Changes/supplementary material to my interview data: None that appear to stick out to me.	
<u>Reflections</u> What it was like to read through my transcript: I found it difficult to read through my transcript at times, because it started to show me what I had experienced and this made me upset. I found it very emotional, however I did think it was useful to remember what I had experienced because I trust that the information I have shared is going to very good use. It makes me feel happier knowing that I can sue this experience to help others in the future. Also it is quite surreal to see what you have spoken aloud written back to you, but I feel appreciative to have read through it as it is a unique experience.	

Appendix 12 Complaint Protocol for Primary School Teachers and Participant Stages of Redress at time of Interview

Table 3: Complaints Protocol for Primary School Teachers and Participant Stages of Redress at time of Interview

More detail on stage and procedure are available at <http://www.into.ie/ROI/InfoforTeachers/StaffRelations/BullyingHarassmentProcedure/>

Stage	Procedure	Participant level of engagement	Attrition
Stage 1: Decide to address the matter	The target decides to address the matter. Trade Union (INTO) assistance can be sought. Access to counselling available via employee assistance scheme. The complainant to keep a record of the pattern of behaviour.	All participants in the study had engaged in stage one. All had engaged in the uptake of the recommended counselling.	All continued to stage 2
Stage 2: Informally address the problem	The complainant to seek a meeting with the other party (may be facilitated by a third party). The aim is to bring the behaviour to the attention of the other party and to request it to stop. If there is no satisfactory resolution between parties then the complaint should be referred to stage 3.	All participants had engaged in stage two.	Three ceased engagement with the procedures at this stage.
Stage 3: Principal teacher or chairperson of the board of management	Formal meeting with the school principal/chairperson of the board of management of the school. Principal can intervene and resolve matters. If the principal teacher is one of the parties in the complaint the chairperson of the board should be involved. If the chairperson is also involved then a member of the board may be designated to intervene. The complaint should be written and investigated confidentially. If resolution is not possible then the matter should be referred to the board of management as per stage 4.	Eighteen participants had engaged in stage three.	Twelve ceased engagement with the procedures at this stage.
Stage 4: Board of management	The matter is referred in writing to the board for investigation. The board should request background details of the difficulties, may meet the parties individually or collectively and may request written submissions. They may offer the parties an opportunity to present their case orally at a board meeting in each other's presence and they may designate the chairperson to meet with the parties again, separately or jointly if further clarification is required. Having considered all matters, the board of management should reach a view on the matter not later than 20 school days after receipt of the written request/referral	Six participants had proceeded to stage 4	Three left employment at stage 4 (two resigned their positions, one took unpaid leave). In two cases the bully had retired and one bullying situation was ongoing.