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## ***Athletic Training Students' Perceptions and Experiences of Work Place Bullying***

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### **BACKGROUND**

Workplace Bullying (WPB) has received quite a bit of attention as a substantial concern in the sports medicine world, but more specifically a concern to athletic training students' (A.T.S) through CAATE accredited education programs. A.T.S exposure to WPB throughout the duration of their educational experiences can be shown from acts of harassment, gossip or aggression by members in athletics.<sup>1,2,4</sup> WPB in the athletic training setting has stress inducing qualities. WPB can create anxiety among the professionals, or students, who experience it.<sup>3,5</sup>

### **OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this study was to investigate athletic training students' perceptions of WPB in the collegiate setting and its effect on their professional development in the field of athletic training. While the existing research in higher education has been conducted primarily within nursing and medical schools, this research looked into providing insight as to the probability of WPB within an undergraduate AT program (ATP) at a division III setting.

### **DESIGN and SETTING**

Survey research design at one DIII college with a CAATE accredited ATP. The independent variables of this study were the athletic training students who participated in the study. The dependent variables were the perceptions of experiencing WPB towards individuals and their professional development.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Smaller sample size given to only undergraduate students from one DIII College, who witnessed or experienced workplace

bullying throughout their undergraduate program.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

A convenience sample of 55 ATS participated with a return rate of 100%. The demographic spanned through freshman 34% (n=19), sophomores 21% (n=12), juniors 29% (n=16) and seniors 14% (n=8). The total participants by gender included males 52.73% (n=29) and females 47.27% (n=26).

### **INTERVENTION**

The research was approved by an institutional review board. Content validity was established through a Table of Specifications. Face validity was determined by the professionals reviewing the research instrument. A Kruskal Wallis test was used with class rankings as the grouping variable. The Chi Square test was used with gender as the grouping variable. The alpha level of this study was in the form of  $p=.05$  *a priori*. Descriptive statistics (% & frequency counts) were used for every applicable item. SPSS 24.0 was used to analyze the data found.

### **MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENT**

Questions 1 through 8 used a 5 point Likert scale to collect data on specific WPB related issues as an ATS (1.Strongly Disagree, 2.Disagree, 3.Neutral, 4.Agree and 5.Strongly Agree). Question 9 asked who they witnessed or experienced WPB by (1.Fellow A.T.S, 2.Coach, 3.Administrator, 4.Clinical Preceptor, 5.Athlete, 6.Professor, 7.Athletics Staff, 8.Other & 9.No WPB exp.). Question 10 asked the class ranking (1.Freshman, 2.Sophomore, 3.Junior and 4.Senior). Question 11 asked for the gender of the participants (1.Male, 2.Female).

## **RESULTS**

21.82 %(n=12) of the participants agree that some ATS' left the ATP because of hostility. The research instrument found supportive information from participants witnessing WPB by athletics staff in the form of abrasiveness 32.7 %(n=18), incivility 14.55 %(n=8), and harassment 23.64 %( n=13). Although, 70.91 %(n=39) disagreed with experiencing WPB as an issue. Although, 5.46 % (n=5) were personally bullied, which provided evidence of WPB. On the contrary, 35 % (n=19) of the participants agreed that they witnessed WPB from coaches, athletes, clinical preceptors/AT staff and even fellow AT students. Witnessed WPB by class ranks included seniors: 62.5% (n=5), juniors: 50% (n=8), sophomores: 41.6% (n=5) & freshmen: 5.2% (n=1). There was a statistically significant difference ( $X^2=7.697$ ,  $df= 3$ ,  $p=.05$ ) towards the female population having a higher WPB percentage 10.9% (n=6) was valid. Males had lesser reports of WPB with a percentage of 7.2% (n=4). Both genders had been targeted by fellow ATS', 18% (n=10), Clinical preceptor/AT staff, 16.3% (n=9), Coaches, 12.7% (n=7). Students in the professional phase of the ATP dealt with WPB more than the pre-professional class of freshman.

## **CONCLUSION**

For the athletic training students in this study, work place bullying has taken place by various constituencies to the point that it has caused some to leave the program. Knowing that females were targeted more than males and upperclassman more than underclassman, Athletic training faculty and staff can and should work proactively to combat this issue. Students should be aware that WPB is not acceptable and know the proper channel to report it.

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**KEY WORDS:** work place bullying, athletic training student, athletic training program, incivility