



Using Power-Control
Theory to Explain and
Detect Victimization
and Bullying in the
Workplace.

XXXIX Postgraduate Course on Victimology, Victim Assistance, and Criminal Justice, Inter-University Centre, Dubrovnik, Croatia. May 19-31, 2025

Dr. Hannah Scott
Ontario Tech University (University of Ontario Institute of Technology)

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Land Acknowledgement

Ontario Tech University acknowledges the lands and people of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation. We are thankful to be welcomed on these lands in friendship. The lands we are situated on are covered under the Williams Treaties and the traditional territory of the Mississauga, a branch of the great Anishinaabeg Nation, including Algonquin, Ojibway, Odawa and Pottawatomi. These lands remain home to a number of Indigenous nations and people.

We acknowledge this land out of respect for the Indigenous nations who have cared for Turtle Island, also called North America, from before the arrival of settler peoples until this day. Most importantly, we remember the history of these lands has been tainted by poor treatment and a lack of friendship with the First Nations who call them home.

This history is something we are all affected by as we are all treaty people in Canada. We all have a shared history to reflect on, and each of us is affected by this history in different ways. Our past defines our present, but if we move forward as friends and allies, then it does not have to define our future.



Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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By way of introduction (synchronicity and luck)

- Volunteered, then worked at DV shelter as an undergrad.
- Did MA thesis in female serial murderers (90s).
- PhD in Alberta (on victim resilience and resistance), then first job at the University of Memphis, second at Ontario Tech.
- Switched to looking at mass murder and gendered terminology because of victim pools
- Wrote several victim centred papers by started wondering how mass murderers emerge
- Victimology lectures on Westray Mine Disaster, and then the power control wheel for IPV
- Started seeing similarities between what the men described in the mine and what the women were reporting about their abusive techniques their partners were using.
- And here we are 😊



Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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**Is a crime a crime
in every
environment?**

**Does where your
victimization
happens shape
how you will
respond?**

Other responses?



Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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When you last saw an incident of bullying, what do you remember about it?

What did it look like?



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Definition

- ✦ Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work tasks.
- ✦ In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur **repeatedly** and **regularly** (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months).
- ✦ Bullying is an **escalated** process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003, p. 15).

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott,
Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Features

(Einarsen et al., 2011; Monks et al., 2009)

- **Frequency** refers to the number of times per week that the negative behaviours are exhibited.
 - Researchers vary on whether the minimum number of acts must be one or two per week (Einarsen et al., 2011)
- **Persistence** refers to the duration of time for which the negative behaviours are experienced.
 - As with frequency, researchers vary on whether the minimum duration of exposure to negative acts must be six or twelve months (Einarsen et al., 2011).

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott,
Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Distinctions: Overt vs Covert Bullying

- ***Overt Bullying***: Actions taken by a bully that illustrate clear and direct intent to do harm, that are easily understood as bullying by others. These acts are more easily identified as harassment.
- ***Covert Bullying***: Acts that are more indirect or subtle, often disguised acts of aggression with the intent to do harm. These acts are more difficult to identify as harassment.

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott,
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Are these behaviours bullying? Harassment?

- [I] have been blamed for things I did not do
- I was not paid for morning meetings and breaks
- [I was] threatened to have my job replaced by someone else
- Was told that because I had health issues that I was lucky that I still have my job and that someone else would probably not hire me
- my boss was controlling
- [My boss] sent Philosophy questions by text in the mornings on my personal time and one day I didn't respond and he yelled at me saying if I didn't respond next time that I would be considered terminated

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr.
Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and
Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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How about any of these?

- I was under full camera.. he would watch me from home through the computer monitor and he could see and hear every move I made.
- He would not allow me to take time off for my daughters[sic] surgeries.. he said I was not being a team player if I took work off and that my mom was retired and could take my daughter for surgery
- I was not allowed to sit down working the desk in the 8-10 hour shift I was working.. I had to stay busy at all times.
- He would say sexual things to me in front of other employees ,, saying if one of our clients were not happy that I would take care of them on my knees

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr.
Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and
Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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And this?

- he always had a bowl [sic] movement and the bathroom was beside my work station and he said he went and pinched one off for me to smell..

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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1 Respondent

Have been blamed for things I did not do, I was not paid for morning meetings and breaks and was threatened to have my job replaced by someone else. Was told that because I had health issues that I was lucky that I still have my job and that someone else would probably not hire me,, my boss was controlling and sent Philosophy questions by text in the mornings on my personal time and one day I didnt respond and he yelled at me saying if I didnt respond next time that I would be considered terminated. I was also under full camera.. he would watch me from home through the computer monitor and he could see and hear every move I made. He would not allow me to take time off for my daughters surgeries.. he said I was not being a team player if I took work off and that my mom was retired and could take my daughter for surgery. I was not allowed to sit down working the desk in the 8-10 hour shift I was working.. I had to stay busy at all times. He would say sexual things to me in front of other employees ,, saying if one of our clients were not happy that I would take care of them on my knees, he always had a bowl movement and the bathroom was beside my work station and he said he went and pinched one off for me to smell.. I can go on and on about the stuff,, I would cry on my breaks and was sick in the mornings ... finally my doctor convinced me to quit

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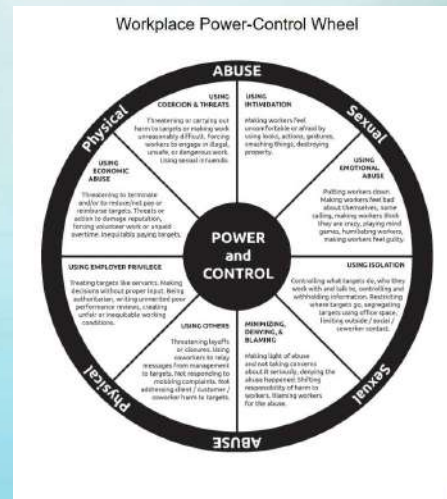
Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Project

- Was initially designed as a pilot project to test this model →
- Scott, H. (2018) Extending the Duluth Model: Modification to the Workplace Power-Control Wheel. *Workplace Health and Safety*, 66(9), 444-452.
- Based on Pence & Paymar's Power-Control Wheel.



Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Started with a tool used to help women experiencing IPV



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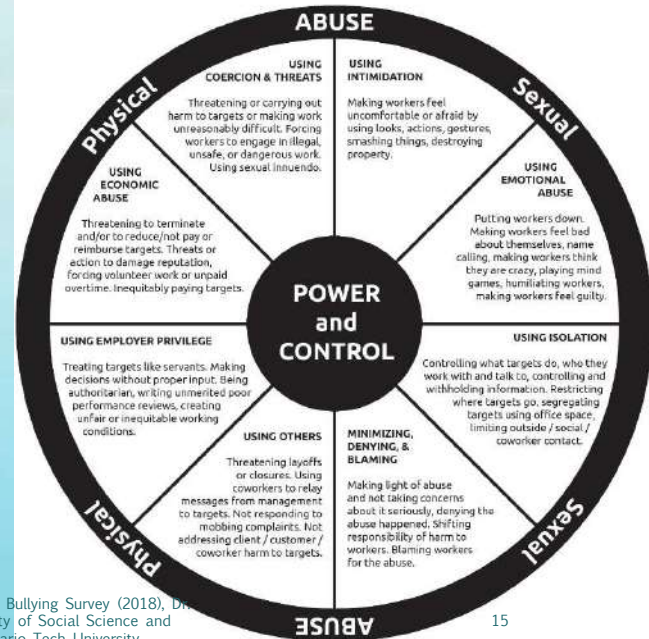
Workplace Power Control Wheel



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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

Workplace Power-Control Wheel



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Using Intimidation



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Using Emotional Abuse

destroying

USING EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Putting workers down.
Making workers feel bad about themselves, name calling, making workers think they are crazy, playing mind games, humiliating workers, making workers feel guilty.

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Isolation

USING ISOLATION

Controlling what targets do, who they work with and talk to, controlling and withholding information. Restricting where targets go, segregating targets using office space, limiting outside / social / coworker contact.

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Minimizing, Denying & Blaming

MINIMIZING, DENYING, & BLAMING

Making light of abuse and not taking concerns about it seriously, denying the abuse happened. Shifting responsibility of harm to workers. Blaming workers for the abuse.

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Using Others

- **Extends the reach of the bully (horizontally, vertically)
- **Plants the seeds of toxicity if bullying is unchecked
- **When management does not respond to bullying complaints, then management becomes the target of grievance. Solves M2M complaint processes.

USING OTHERS

Threatening layoffs or closures. Using coworkers to relay messages from management to targets. Not responding to mobbing complaints. Not addressing client / customer / coworker harm to targets.

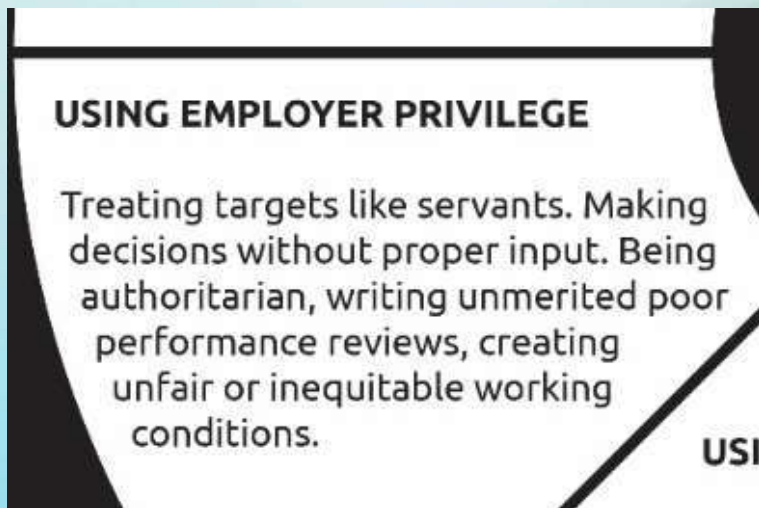
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Using Employer Privilege



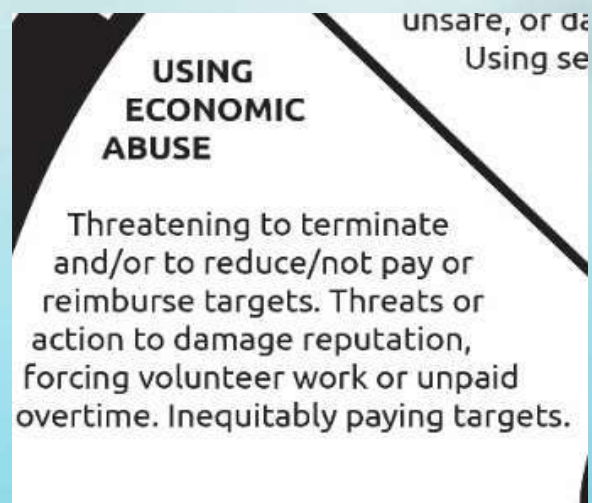
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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Economic Abuse



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Coercion and Threats



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Motive

- Behaviour is not checked by peers
- Entitlement
- Rationalizations



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Chronic vs Acute bullying

If appropriate policies and measures are in place, then bullying can be shorter term (more acute).

Where there is no resources or willpower to make this change, then bullying can become chronic as a mode of leadership.

Workplaces can become....



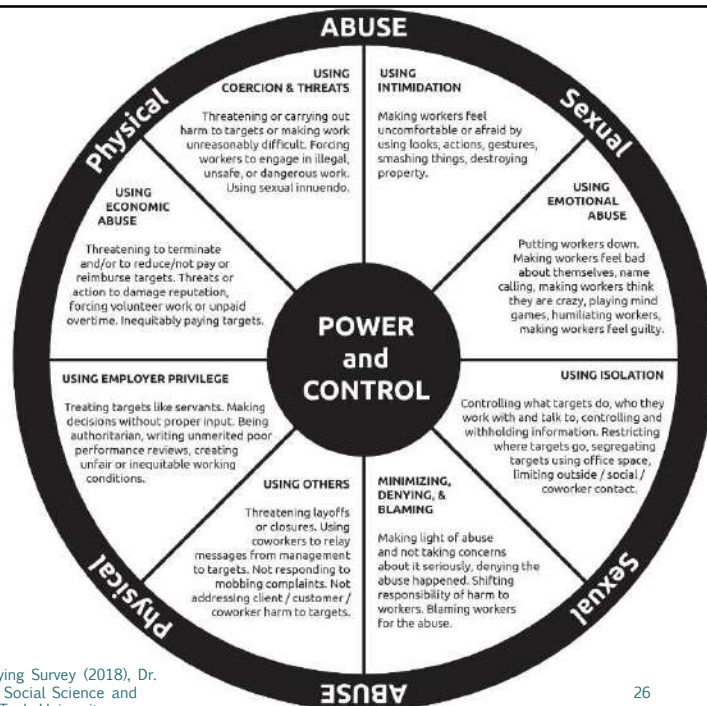
Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Physical & Sexual Abuse

- Rare
- Risky
- Overt



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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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What are the implications?

- Telling the story
- Making a complaint
- Employers use the word harassment.
 - this important?

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graph LR
    Bullying --> Harassment
    Bullying --> Violence
    Bullying --> Toxicity
  
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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Projects

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Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Dr. Trace Trice-Fleming

- Doctor of Social work
- The University of Alabama
- Looked at how victim advocates experience bullying in the workplace and testing the theory of power control.



Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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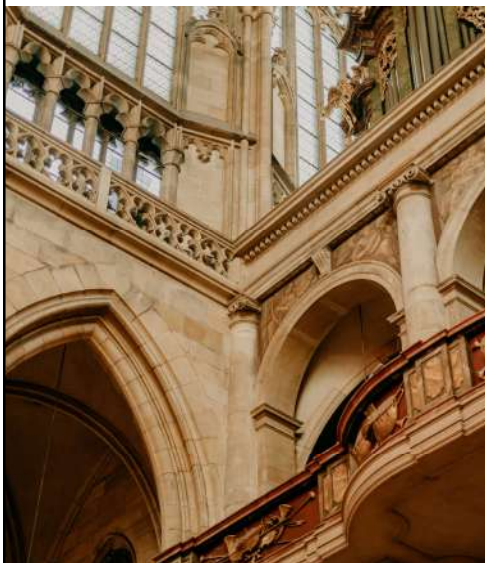


Photo by [Loriane Pierre](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Amy Webster

- Doctoral student, Ontario Tech
- Using WPCW and social ecological theory of bullying to contextualize WPCW using 100+ cases of self reports at Canadian Universities.



Eric Peipelman

- Georgia Southern University
- Looking at bullying in military health systems in the US
- Has just secured union agreement to share survey with 45,000 members.



Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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M2M (Scott & Webster, 2025)

- Does the model explain mobbing
 - The targeting of one employee by other workers.
 - Yes.
 - Others become weaponized

USING OTHERS


Threatening layoffs or closures. Using coworkers to relay messages from management to targets. Not responding to mobbing complaints. Not addressing client / customer / coworker harm to targets.



Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University



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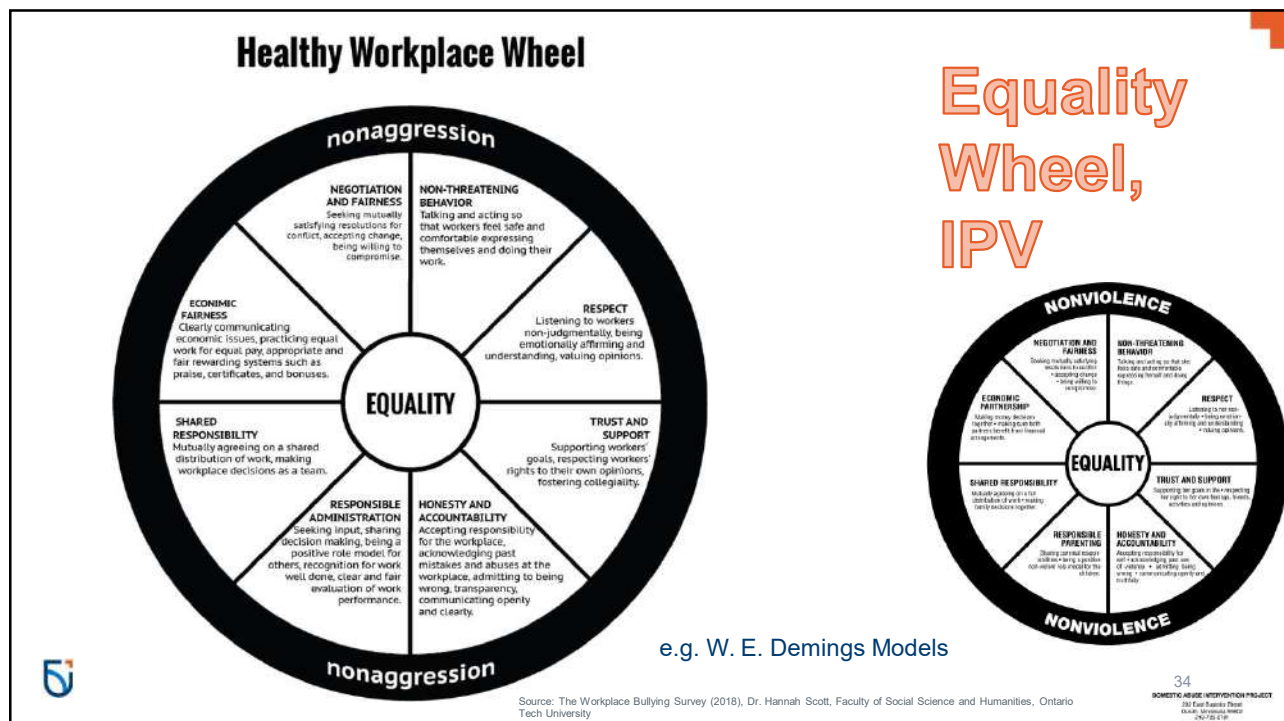
What works?

- In the school yard
- In the home?
- In the workplace?

Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Resource: For a video to sum and share the wheel



Source: The Workplace Bullying Survey (2018), Dr. Hannah Scott, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Ontario Tech University

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Thank you...

Have a great day.

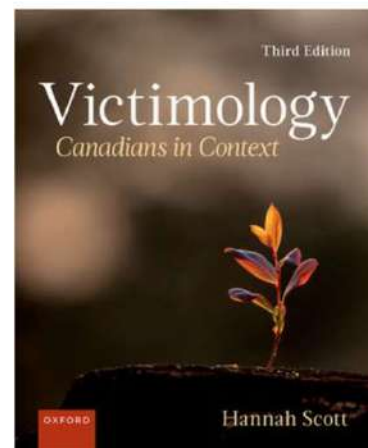
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The Ontario Technical University is proud to acknowledge the lands and people of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, which is covered under the Williams Treaties. We are situated on the Traditional Territory of the Mississaugas, a branch of the greater Anishinaabeg Nation, which includes Algonquin, Ojibway, Odawa and Pottawatomi.



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NEW in 2025!

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