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## Review Article

# Real Trouble: The Mental Health Impact of Workplace Bullying and Sexual Harassment Amongst First Responders

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## Abstract

Sexual harassment and workplace bullying are not new conditions among first responders. These workplace conditions have significant, long-term, negative mental health impacts on the targeted employees. Multiple studies have identified a strong association between pervasive psychological disorders and being a target of sexual harassment and bullying. The literature shows that bullying amongst first responders is up to six times higher than the U.S. national average. This research examines 305 articles screened through Hermeneutic research methodology, netting 209 reviews in the results. The core themes that emerge support the theory that the phenomenon of sexual harassment, as a form of bullying, has severe implications for targeted people's psychological health, including severe, pervasive, and deadly consequences for individuals and the general public. This research shows that the key factors around sexual harassment and workplace bullying in first responders' employment include an organizational acceptance and tolerance for both unacceptable behavior and group-think mentality; a normalizing of toxic culture which creates the circumstances for incivility and adverse mental health outcomes for bullied targets within emergency service organizations.

## Keywords

Workplace Bullying, First Responders, Law Enforcement, Mental Health, Depression, Anxiety, Suicide, Sexual Harassment

## Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Introduction

Workplace bullying and sexual harassment have become an emerging and critical areas of research with grave and negative implications for individuals who are the targets of bullying within the organization (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Gilbert, Raffo, & Sutarso, 2013; Nielsen, 2013; Tuckey & Neall, 2014; Walker 2017, 2018; Walker & Stones 2019; Workman-Stark, 2020). Emergency Service Organizations (ESOs) are first responder organizations that include law enforcement, fire and rescue services, emergency medical services, and other emergency management teams (CISA, 2020). ESOs are generally authoritative paramilitary organizations where power is ingrained in the fabric of command structures and organizational culture (Owoyemi, 2011; Einarsen, Skogstad, Rørvik, Lande, & Nielsen, 2016; Houck & Colbert, 2016; McKay, 2013). The literature is fruitful with evidence that shows first responders work in situations with high levels of stress in the normal function of their jobs and are at higher risk of being exposed to bullying in the workplace— six times higher than the U.S. national average (Archer, 1999; McKay, 2013; Walker, 2017; Walker & Stones, 2019). Most other studies focus on this excessive level of bullying, while high degrees of sexual harassment have often been left unaddressed (Collins, 2004; de Haas, Timmerman, & Höing, 2009; Lonsway, Paynich, & Hall, 2013; Rosell, Miller, &

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Barber, 1995; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Walker, 2017, 2018).

There is a significant need to examine more thoroughly how workplace bullying and sexual harassment impact first responders. Given the well documented, detrimental outcomes for the targets of bullying, which include severe mental health disorders, physical health issues, and even death, there remains a lack of specific evaluation of ESOs (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014, 2015; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Sansone & Sansone, 2015; Walker, 2017, 2018; Walker & Stones, 2019). Although some research exists that examines the outcomes for gender-based bullying and harassment amongst first responders who are females, the studies are limited and not well understood (Archer, 1999; Owoyemi & Sheehan, 2011; McKay, 2013; Miller & Rayner, 2012). This research examined the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying and sexual harassment amongst first responder's mental health and therefore, its impact on public safety.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There have been efforts by researchers to explain why workplace bullying and sexual harassment takes place, with emphasis on personality traits such as narcissistic personality types and the dark triad, to issues in the work environment such as poor leadership (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Pilch & Turska, 2014; Walker & Stones, 2019). Emerging research of this complex phenomenon considers both the targeted people and the perpetrators' characteristics, such as power and control issues with the perpetrator and self-esteem issues with the target; while other theories examine the impact of the working environment, such as a sexualized culture or 'cop culture' (Einarsen et al., 2016; Escartín, Zapf, Arrieta, & Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2011; Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2011; Leymann, 1996; Myhill & Bradford, 2013; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002; White, 2013).

Hoel and Cooper (2001) report that individual, group, organizational, and societal factors contribute to bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment. They state that work environments are in the employer's control, which allows for entrenched and enabling environments for bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment within the corporate culture. Another overall perspective is the power imbalance in the workplace and the power dominance related to sexual harassment (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2012; Ng & Othman, 2002; Salin & Hoel, 2013; Volk, Dane, & Marini, 2014). More specifically, there is a consensus that bullying is considered a conflict style where the bully's target is vulnerable, the perpetrator holds power and an influence over them, which creates a significant imbalance (D'Cruz, Noronha, & Beale, 2014; Einarsen et al., 2016; Lunenburg, 2012). Within ESOs and other institutions such as prisons, the culture of the organization is such that power imbalances and the authoritative hierarchy are deeply engrained (Archer, 1999; Brewer & Whiteside, 2012; Coyne & Monks, 2010; Owoyemi & Sheehan, 2011; Tambur & Vadi, 2012; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002). In general, the administrative structure and hierarchy of these types of organizations are often based on seniority and rank where rituals and legend permeate through the corporate culture (McKay, 2013; Miller & Rayner, 2012; Myhill & Bradford, 2013; Ward & Winstanley, 2006; Woodfield, 2016).

### **Methodology**

The use of qualitative methodology allows the researcher to explore participant perceptions and experiences of the phenomena being examining. The qualitative method also enables researchers to more thoroughly analyze the data gathered and present data in a shared way, which is more reflective of the participants' perceptions (Patton, 2015).

For this paper, critical realism has been applied to frame the experience and understanding of workplace bullying and sexual harassment (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Finn, 2020; Giorgi, 2010). Critical realism is a broad meta-theory that has gained acceptance in the social sciences where relationships and behaviors can be better understood, and are considered through the continuum of opposing knowledge paradigms: positivism, and constructivism (Bunn, 2003; Creswell, 2013; Groff, 2004; Roberts, 2014). In work from Easton (2010), critical realism provides a coherent and rigorous approach that provides an accepted framework for the social sciences to examine with thoroughly.

Critical realism provides a way for researchers to better understand relationships and behaviors through paradigms of positivism and constructivism that provide a layered examination into the various spheres of reality from the empirical domain to the actual/real domain (Creswell, 2013; Groff, 2004; Roberts 2014). More specifically, critical realism has emerged to understand the world and social interactions through layered spheres of reality; the empirical domain, the existing domain, and the real domain (Bunn, 2003; Groff, 2004; Roberts, 2014). The empirical domain is quantifiable through observed measures. The actual domain allows for generative and casual events to be examined to explore individual experiences and mental models' complexity. Researchers using critical realism understand that to conceptualize the world and how it works the way it does, the researcher must abstract the simple mechanism at play and think conceptually regarding how these mechanisms operate, which is appropriate for this work (Creswell, 2013; Moules, McCaffrey, Field & Laing, 2015). To achieve this degree of understanding in the realm of workplace bullying and sexual harassment, there is a need to examine the relationship between how the individual determined their agency and the circumstances that influenced how people act (structure); as such, hermeneutics was employed (Creswell, 2013; Moules, McCaffrey, Field & Laing, 2015). The hermeneutic method is designed to interpret data (research) rather than offer an explanation,

which allows the researcher to induce knowledge while highlighting the presupposition of how we view the world (Creswell, 2013; Moules, McCaffrey, Field & Laing, 2015).

A comprehensive review of the literature has been conducted to clarify the interpretive conditions in which understanding takes place and how it applies to the phenomenon of workplace bullying and sexual harassment. There is a deficit in the research to examine broader factors associated with bullying and sexual harassment, such as environment and cultural influences (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Focusing on factors related to workplace bullying and its impact on targets is understood within the context of Bronfenbrenner's work related to research on bullying in the education system through the ecological model lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Conlon & Zandvoort, 2011).

### Literature Review

Bullying and sexual harassment within the workplace has become a critical field of study (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Gilbert, et al., 2013; Nielsen, et al., 2012; Nielsen, et al., 2014; Nielsen, et al., 2010; Tuckey & Neall, 2014; Okechukwu et.al, 2014; Walker, 2018). While some research exists regarding firefighters and police officers, there is little to no investigation into the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying amongst first responders within ESOs (Archer, 1999; Owoyemi & Sheehan, 2011; McKay, 2013; Miller & Rayner, 2012; Walker, 2017, 2018). The lack of study into workplace bullying amongst first responders has been cited as a proposed area of further research by multiple authors (Brough, 2005; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Gloor, 2014; Walker, 2017, 2018; Walker & Stones, 2019).

### Workplace Bullying and Sexual Harassment

As reported in Namie (2003), workplace bullying was first defined through investigation of the mistreatment of bank employees. The term workplace bullying has been interpreted in various ways, including harassment, emotional abuse, emotional or psychological terror, sexual abuse, and victimization (Matjasko, Needham, Grunden, & Farb, 2010). The most commonly used definition of bullying in the workplace comes from Einarsen and colleagues' (2003) work; they define bullying as offensive, assaultive, harassing outcomes that result in unfavorable effects for victims. In these instances, they note bullying behavior has taken place throughout 6-months and includes sexual harassment (Workman-Stark, 2020).

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), under Federal Law, defines sexual harassment as harassment that includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature (EEOC, 2017). EEOC reports that this kind of harassment also needs not be sexual in nature, as the harassment can include offensive remarks about a person's sex, such as generalized negative comments about women (EEOC, 2020). The victim of sexual harassment can also be a witness to these kinds of events within the workplace (EEOC, 2020). Further, the EEOC defines two types of sexual harassment by Federal Law as per Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: quid pro quo and hostile work environment. Quid pro quo sexual harassment occurs when a supervisor threatens to terminate an employee who does not submit to sexual advances or where a supervisor promises to promote an employee in exchange for sexual favors (EEOC, 2017). Hostile work environment sexual harassment refers to situations where the employee's work environment is intimidating, aggressive, or offensive due to the unwelcome sexual conduct. The conduct unreasonably interferes with the employee's work performance (EEOC, 2017).

Workplace bullying and sexual harassment are shared across multiple institutions and demographics (Galanaki & Papalexandris, 2013; Jacobson et al., 2014; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). Perpetrators bully and harass their targets openly or covertly to intimidate them and such actions harm the target's well-being (Farmer, 2011; Gaetano, 2010; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). The United States government reports that between 2010 and 2015, there were 162,872 charges of sexual harassment filed by federal, state, and private employees, which equates to approximately 28,000 complaints each year by the Federal government (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016). The U.S. Department of Defense received 6,236 reports of sexual assault by Service members in 2019, and reported an estimated 24.2% of active duty women experienced sexual harassment in 2018 (DOD, 2020). Data further show that between 25% to 85% of women report having experienced sexual harassment in the workplace (Das, 2009; Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016; Gloor, 2014).

### Demographics and Prevalence

The issue of widespread workplace bullying and sexual harassment is not new (Dantzker & Kubin, 1998; Das, 2009; Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016; Popovich, 1988) nor is the fact that the majority of those sexually harassed are women (Das, 2009; Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016; Gruber, 1998). According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), between 2009-2018, 80% of workplace sexual harassment charges with EEOC were by women (GAO, 2020). Sexual harassment has been identified as a significant issue for most organizations for over two decades (Popovich, 1988).

In the United States The Women Census Bureau (2017) found that of the approximately 4,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States, only 7% to 12% of the workforce are women which shows a significant disparity in gender within ESOs (Dantzker & Kubin, 1998; Schafer et al., 2015; Schuck, 2014). Research shows that the targets of bullying, regardless of gender, are exposed to higher rates of mental, physical, economic and social impacts that have far-reaching negative consequences (Barnett & Powell, 2016; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012; MacIntosh, Wuest, Gray, & Aldous, 2010). When examining sexual

harassment in the workplace, MacIntosh et al. (2010) shows that higher degrees of sexual harassment are associated with long-term post-traumatic stress disorder symptomatology as well as an increased likelihood of exiting the workplace where the harassment is occurring. Research by Vartia and Hyyti (2002) explores gender differences in terms of workplace bullying and sexual harassment and finds that 20% of respondents in their large-scale study identify as being a target of bullying with minimal gender differences. However, when it comes to sexual harassment, the majority of respondents identify as being female with the perpetrator being a male co-workers or supervisor(s). The impact of job related bullying and harassment in terms of outcomes is consistent among men and women with similar physical, mental and job performance related issues (Gilbert et al., 2013; Leigh, Robyn, Geldenhuys, & Gobind, 2014; Salin, 2015; Salin & Hoel, 2013; Salin, Tenhiälä, Roberge, & Berdahl, 2014). The GAO also reported sexually harassing behaviour is more likely found in male-dominated industries (GAO, 2020).

### **Implications for Targets**

Workplace bullying can cause serious harm to an individual's perception of their confidence and self-worth, with a negative impact on their performance at work (Bano & Malik, 2013; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Randle, 2011). Multiple studies have shown that between 10% and 52% of a targeted person's work is unproductive due to: the amount of time that is necessary to protect and defend themselves against 'attacks'; seeking support; having thoughts about the impact on their career; the lack of satisfaction at work; the ease in which they are distracted; and the experience of higher rates of anxiety and depression, including sick time for stress-related illnesses (Bano & Malik, 2013; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Van Rooyen & McCormack, 2013). There are severe outcomes that can result in long-term consequences to the individual and organization, including detrimental health outcomes including death and negative workplace safety issues (Chirilă & Constantin, 2013; Conway et al., 2016; Devonish, 2013, 2014; Lahelma et al., 2012; Eriksen et al., 2016; Reknes et al., 2014b; Reknes et al., 2014a). The GAO also reports that job performance issues affect bystanders and team members who witness sexual harassment in the workplace (Conway, Hogh, Balducci, & Ebbesen, 2018; GAO, 2020).

### **Mental Health Implications**

Confidence, self-worth, and work performance can be impacted by workplace bullying and sexual harassment (Bano & Malik, 2013; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Randle, 2011). The impact of workplace bullying and harassment on the mental health of the targeted person is severe and has long term consequences that can result in such adverse outcomes as death (Chirilă & Constantin, 2013; Conway, Clausen, Hansen, & Hogh, 2016; Devonish, 2013; Lahelma, Lallukka, Laaksonen, Saastamoinen, & Rahkonen, 2012; Eriksen, Hogh, & Hansen, 2016; Reknes, Einarsen, Knardahl, & Lau, 2014).

With such consequences, one must ask the question as to what degree does workplace bullying and sexual harassment have on the morbidity and mortality of employees. When considering the implications of mental health, research shows that bullying targets are at an increased risk of suicidal ideation and relation over time as a direct result of perpetrator behavior (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Leach, Poyser, & Butterworth, 2016). Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, and Salem (2006) were among the first to identify the increased risk of serious risk to bullying targets, including the act of suicide. Data presented outlined persistent absences, cardiovascular disease, mental health disorders, and suicide. Other studies have investigated similar implications for targets of workplace bullying and sexual harassment, and found that outcomes and implications are severe, harmful, impactful and can cause long-term physical and emotional damage, including death (Leff, et al. 2014; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Farmer, Hogh, Hansen, Mikkelsen & Persson, 2012). Further examination of terminal outcomes related to workplace bullying by Leach et al. (2016) was conducted through a systemic literature review which summarized studies related to suicidal ideation. Results show a positive correlation between workplace bullying and suicidal ideation; however, their research identifies the need to examine cause and effect for future studies. As the literature shows, the implications for bullied targets and their co-workers, as it relates to these toxic behaviors are severe, and consequences in extreme cases include death (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Cooper, Hoel, & Faragher, 2004; Farmer, 2011; Hansen et al., 2018; Leff et al., 2014).

There has been a great deal of research conducted over the past several decades which focuses on the mental health-related outcomes for targets of workplace bullying and sexual harassment (Bano & Malik, 2013; Charles, Piazza, Mogle, Sliwinski, & Almeida, 2013; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Reknes et al., 2014b; Richman et al., 1999; Walker, 2017). With increased attention by employers, the media, the #METOO movement, and the recognition of outcomes such as suicide, researchers and clinicians have dedicated significant resources to better understand, identify, and address related mental health-related issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Nielsen et al., 2015; Reknes et al., 2014b). Multiple studies show that bullying and sexual harassment can lead to diagnosable mental health disorders including depression, anxiety, panic, nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disturbances, adjustment disorder and, on the whole, have severe implications for the targeted individual (Bano & Malik, 2013; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Farmer, 2011; Hansen et al., 2018; Maypole & Skaine, 1983).

In a review study, Sansone and Sansone (2015) found that after examining 12 large-scale organizations, over 11% of the employees identify as having experienced bullying. Females are typically bullied or sexually harassed more often than men. However, the emotional implications (such as sleep

disorders, depression, anxiety, suicide, distress, sexual dysfunction) are equally distributed between men and women, suggesting that gender is not a factor that impacts mental health outcomes. Spence Laschinger (2014) and Spence Laschinger & Nosko (2015) shows a relationship between workplace bullying and PTSD in a sample of 1,205 nurses in a healthcare setting. These studies find that the more often a targeted employee is exposed to bullying or sexual harassment, the symptomatology of PTSD is higher and impacts the target's health and work productivity more severely (Read & Laschinger, 2013; Sansone & Sansone, 2015; Verkuil, Atasayi, & Molendijk, 2015). Larger-scale cross-sectional and longitudinal studies also show the positive association that observed symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress-related mental health disorders relate to workplace bullying, and sexual harassment (Verkuil et al. 2015).

Einarsen and Nielsen (2014) conducted a five-year longitudinal study to evaluate the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and harassment and mental health disorders, specifically anxiety and depression. They find that even when controlling for baseline mental health status, bullying/harassment in the workplace is a predictor of psychological health issues lasting five-years and longer, further showing the significance of the severe and long-term negative impact this behavior has on its targets (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014). In a cross-sectional examination of 262 employees, results indicate that the interactive effects of job demands and workplace bullying and harassment increased depression, exhaustion, and absenteeism, causing further harm and a drain on workforce resources (Devonish, 2013). Research is clear that workplace bullying and sexual harassment is a predictor for poor health and mental health outcomes and this definitive link between exposure to workplace bullying and sexual harassment highlights the serious outcomes of perpetrator behavior (Dobry, Braquehais, & Sher, 2013; Leach et al., 2016; Sansone & Sansone, 2015). When considering the implications of mental health, research shows that bullying targets are at an increased risk of suicidal ideation and relation over time as a direct result of perpetrator behavior (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Leach, Poyser, & Butterworth, 2016). In research conducted with Australian employees of ESOs, higher rates of bullying correspond to higher rates of suicidal thoughts (Kyron et al., 2020). Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, and Salem (2006) were among the first to identify the increased risk to bullying targets, including the act of suicide; data presented outlined persistent absences, cardiovascular disease, mental health disorders, and suicide. Further examination of terminal outcomes related to workplace bullying by Leach et al. (2017) was conducted through a systemic literature review summarizing studies related to suicidal ideation. Results show a positive correlation between workplace bullying and suicidal ideation; however, their research identifies the need to examine cause and effect for future studies.

### **Workplace Bullying and Sexual Harassment Amongst First Responders**

Given the significant consequences associated with workplace bullying and sexual harassment as documented in the literature, research within the emergency services is limited with some focus on law enforcement and members of the fire service (Archer, 1999; McKay, 2013; Owoyemi & Sheehan, 2011; Walker, 2017, 2018). ESOs culture is insular, protective, and often difficult for outsiders such as researchers to penetrate (Myhill & Bradford, 2013). When considering police or 'cop' culture, studies show that despite anti-bullying policy campaigns, harassment and incivility appear to play a role in the industrial culture that resists change (McKay 2013; Miller & Rayner, 2012). There are existing mechanisms within ESOs that promote retelling stories and hazing where each new generation of first responders is exposed to rituals and complex stereotypes that thrive on cynicism, macho masculinity, and the separation between the first responder and civilians (Miller & Rayner, 2012; Myhill & Bradford, 2013). The notion of inclusivity is problematic whereby a workplace environment establishes an 'us versus them' mentality where acceptance, uniformity, solidarity, and unquestioning devotion are products of conforming to expected behaviors and failure to follow this mentality results in harsh punishment (Archer, 1999; Collins, 2004; Lynch, 2002). In essence, the action noted above is often inappropriate ritualistic behavior as a rite of passage. Failure to comply or report bullying, harassment, and other unacceptable behavior is not tolerated and has severe consequences for the informer. The U.S. Department of Defense reports when sexual harassment occurs, the bullying behavior is not always addressed due to Service members not wanting to threaten the career of a higher-ranking member (DOD, 2020).

Research directed at exploring sexual harassment within emergency service culture is not new and has been documented as both severe and problematic for some time (Archer, 1999; Brown, Campbell, & Fife-Schaw, 1995; Collins, 2004; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). Brown and colleagues (1995) show in a sample of 1,802 female police officers and 164 female civilian staff that females who experience sexual harassment in the workplace are more likely to experience associated career frustration which is found to be worse if they report the behavior. In a follow-up study, survey data shows that the widespread exposure of sexual harassment and other discriminatory treatment towards women creates a general resistance to female advancement within the organization (Brown, 1998). When examining African American, female law enforcement officers' perception of workplace sexual harassment, data shows that racialized sexual harassment is a serious issue that impacts the targeted person's career, their mental and physical health, and that perpetrators suffer little to no consequence if reported (Texeira, 2002). Work by Collins (2004) finds that in the United States, sexual harassment in policing is prevalent and a national issue. The prison system is also well documented to demonstrate high workplace bullying and sexual harassment (Brewer & Whiteside, 2012; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002).

In 2001, the National Centre for Women and Policing reported that females represented 12.7% of all sworn law enforcement officers in large agencies in the United States, which is down from 14.3% in 1999 (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). In a random sample of 2,000 female law enforcement officers, it was found that some motivating factors to start or leave a career in law enforcement, included bullying and sexual harassment perpetrated by their male colleagues (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). This is consistent with Fitzgerald's (1997) work, which identified that the organizational climate for sexual harassment and gender context are 'critical antecedents' of sexual harassment, bullying, and other adverse workplace outcomes. This work also identified how being a target of sexual harassment and bullying impacts job satisfaction, physical, and mental health in negative ways, which is a consistent finding in the literature (Collins, 2004; de Haas et al., 2009; Lahelma et al., 2012; Langhout et al., 2005; Nielsen et al., 2012). Comparisons can also be drawn between first responders and the military. Multiple studies show pervasive sexual harassment and assault in the US military (Buchanan, Settles, Hall, & O'Connor, 2014; Buchanan, Settles, & Woods, 2008; Griffith, 2017; DOD, 2020), which like bullying and sexual harassment amongst first responders has similar adverse outcomes for targets. In a study by Griffith (2017), survey data from 12,567 soldiers in a 180 company-size unit were examined using the Unit Risk Inventory. Data showed that sexual harassment at the individual level was associated with a fivefold increase in the risk of suicide, further strengthening the argument that workplace bullying and sexual harassment have devastating and often terminal outcomes (Griffith, 2017).

In Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)— the National police force —has drawn heavy criticism and public inquiry over entrenched workplace bullying and sexual harassment. McKay's (2013) study on the RCMP examined the organizational structure and occupational context and found that unchecked power within the organization allows for bullying behavior and sexual harassment to go unaddressed while supporting the perpetrator versus the target (McKay, 2013). Further evidence showed that the RCMP's bureaucratic nature enables workplace bullying and sexual harassment despite warnings of discipline; this is likely due to the strict adherence to the hierarchy and the interpersonal relationships within the organization where peers investigate peers (McKay, 2013). In 2013, McKay provided suggestions to the RCMP to address these issues including recognizing that workplace bullying and sexual harassment is typically about power, in turn, empowering RCMP staff to feel like they can influence within the hierarchy so valid complaints may lead to serious consequence as one way to address this phenomenon. Research by Workman-Stark (2020) found RCMP workplace harassment and low mental health is significantly related to "masculinity contest culture," and has suggested organizational justice (employee fair treatment) can diminish this culture and its negative effects (Workman-Stark, 2020). When examining law enforcement officers and the military regarding perceived organizational support from management for targets of bullying and sexual harassment, research shows that psychological well-being increases if bullied targets feel supported (Brunetto, Xerri, Shacklock, Farr-Wharton, & Farr-Wharton, 2016).

Working as a first responder with an ESO means undertaking stressful and physically demanding duties, where the need for strong psychological abilities are essential elements of worker safety and positive public safety outcomes (Bigham et al., 2014; Sinden et al., 2012). When considering the fire services, female firefighters, much like law enforcement officers, are of a minority in a male-dominated field, which has shown as problematic in multiple studies in terms of workplace bullying and sexual harassment (Litchfield & Hinckley, 2016; Rosell, Miller, & Barber, 1995; Ward & Winstanley, 2006). Despite widespread claims that emergency services operate within a safety-driven work culture, the impact of workplace bullying and sexual harassment on female firefighters has been shown to increase job demands, increase stress, and place female firefighters at an increased risk of harm (Sinden et al., 2012). Often, female first responders may ignore injuries to avoid negative attitudes by their male co-workers, which ultimately leads to safety concerns and the potential for serious harm (Sinden et al., 2012). In male-dominated workplaces, such as emergency services, that support cultural norms of sexual bullying, sexual posturing, and misogyny, there is an increase in workplace bullying and sexual harassment and organizational leadership must intervene (de Haas & Timmerman, 2010; de Haas et al., 2009). In response to public inquiries in Australia, research has shown the need for an immediate response to ensure a psychosocial, safety climate within emergency services to protect and prevent injury, as well as other adverse physical and mental health outcomes for workers exposed to workplace bullying and sexual harassment (Law, Dollard, Tuckey, & Dormann, 2011).

When examining the degree of workplace bullying and sexual harassment within the first responder profession, research consistently shows that behaviors move rapidly from indirect, subtle, and discrete action when left unaddressed, to aggressive and hostile acts (Owoyemi & Sheehan, 2011). Owoyemi and Sheehan (2011) investigated demographic characteristics in ESO work related to workplace bullying and sexual harassment. They found that when workers were exposed to interpersonal bullying, those who were new to the organization and ethnically diverse (non-Caucasian) were more likely to experience bullying and harassment. Bullying and sexual harassment within ESOs have detrimental impacts for bullied targets and the witnesses of bullying and harassment, as well as significant damage to the organization as a whole (Archer, 1998; Bigham et al., 2014; Collins, 2004; Johnson & Rea, 2009; Lynch, 2002; McKay, 2013; Miller & Rayner, 2012; Sinden et al., 2012; Walker, 2017; Ward & Winstanley, 2006; Woodfield, 2016; GAO, 2020). There are severe and even fatal outcomes for targets of bullying and

sexual harassment such as: anxiety and depression (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Reknes et al., 2014b); poor physical health including cardiovascular issues (Brewer & Whiteside, 2012; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Van Rooyen & McCormack, 2013); suicide (Conway, 2017; Dobry et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2016); low job satisfaction and performance issues (Devonish, 2013; McDaniel, Ngala, & Leonard, 2015; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012); absenteeism and worker turnover (Devonish, 2014; Lynch, 2002; Salin, 2003); and adverse public safety outcomes (Houck & Colbert, 2016; Longo & Hain, 2014; Owayolu, Owayolu, & Karadag, 2014), all of which indicate the seriousness of these issues (Giorgi et al., 2015; Glambek et al., 2015; Nielsen et al., 2010).

### Methodology

Researchers often struggle with the responsibility of selecting an appropriate research design (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative studies are used to support theory and are use deductive reasoning techniques, while qualitative methods are inductive by nature (Creswell, 2013; Ridder & Yin, 2012). A qualitative research design is used for exploratory research and helps the researcher gain more breadth of understanding of participants' deeper underlying reasons and motivations (Creswell, 2003; Ridder & Yin, 2012; Yin, 2009). This qualitative phenomenological theoretical research focused on an extensive review of the literature to study and evaluate the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying and sexual harassment amongst first responders' mental health. A qualitative research design has been used for exploratory research and helps the researcher understand participants' underlying reasons and motivations (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

Because first responders operate in a closed system where the job tends to be high stress, and traumatic, for many first responders, employment can lead to negative physical and mental health issues (Archer, 1999; Balducci, Cecchin, & Fraccaroli, 2012; Campeau, 2015; Granstra, 2015; McKay, 2013; Schafer, Stutter, & Gibbons, 2015; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002). Workplace bullying and sexual harassment amongst first responders can increase the already high-stress levels to severe mental health and physical health outcomes. Sexual harassment is an extreme form of bullying that is a pervasive and destructive issue facing first responders, which requires more in-depth evaluation.

There is a significant gap between workplace bullying and sexual harassment amongst first responders, where many underlying trends have not yet been identified as they relate to sexual harassment (Charilaos et al., 2015; Einarsen et al., 2009). This research design method has provided an insight into this issue and is used to hypothesize for quantitative analysis by identifying trends (Creswell, 2013).

Theoretical studies are a type of scientific research that attempts to increase and expand current knowledge. Academic research provides a framework for a more in-depth understanding of a topic and identifies key themes and new perspectives, examined in detail, by identifying divergence in the existing literature (Creswell, 2003; Ridder & Yin, 2012). By observing when concepts are unsuccessful in explaining a popularly studied phenomenon such as workplace bullying and sexual harassment, more in-depth understanding emerges (Creswell, 2013). Theoretical reviews are conducted to establish the development and growth of theories in a topic area where the method can be replicable (APA, 2013; Creswell, 2013). Theoretical reviews were first introduced into the psychological literature by Cooper and Fazio (1984) concerning cognitive dissonance. The theoretical approach is described as an investigation whereby the researcher's core emphasis is conducted with existing literature. The purpose of academic research is to analyze a framework by which to examine existing ideas and data and to provide a more precise interpretation of a specific topic, in this case, sexual harassment and bullying at work amongst first responders (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). Theoretical reviews provide for collecting pre-existing data and allow the research to develop understandings about the conclusions, often uncovering new trends that may not have been identified previously (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Creswell, 2013). A further advantage is that essential themes are explored, which is critical in determining the strengths and inadequacies of using one theory over another (APA, 2013). Theoretical reviews allow for fair means to examine and evaluate data (Creswell, 2013).

For this research, hermeneutics has been used as the methodology to guide and inform the research questions. Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation and is a recognized modern methodological construct that has shaped the researchers' work (Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ware, 2008). This research aims to further the body of literature as it relates to the identification of sexual harassment as a form of workplace bullying amongst the first responder population. As such, the rationale for using hermeneutics is that the methodology best meets the author's need to guide and inform the research through philosophical views that are most relevant to the researchers' goals by exploring the interrelationship between workplace sexual harassment as a form of bullying.

### Participants

This research has followed a structured and comprehensive literature review, which allowed for the identification of participants. The investigation's subject and scope were defined to examine workplace bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace amongst first responders as determined by the research questions. Keywords were developed based on initial examination and review of the topic of workplace bullying and sexual harassment. The keyword searched included: workplace bullying; sexual harassment; workplace bullying and mental health; sexual harassment and mental health; workplace bullying and

suicide; sexual harassment and suicide; workplace bullying and first responders, fire, police, ambulance; sexual harassment and first responders, fire, police, ambulance. Over 305 articles were selected for review; of those, 203 were included for a more in-depth examination. Of those 203 studies, 30 items were identified to answer each of the three research questions. According to multiple qualitative researchers, it is adequate to determine a theme or trend using this type of analysis (Ridder & Yin, 2012; Yin, 2009).

### **Instrumentation**

A literature map was employed, and a spreadsheet was used to classify the literature under the appropriate headings, which were relevant to the research questions. Each article was examined for inclusion or exclusion based on their significance to the research questions. Descriptions of each article were created to allow the researcher to distinguish between relevant data for the literature review and assist in cross-referencing for the data collection and analysis. Each article was then themed by type of workplace bullying and sexual harassment examined and then by the research question.

#### **Data Collection**

Hermeneutic research allows researchers to gain insight and understanding, through the existing literature, to be examined individually as case research and then collectively regarding themes (Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ridder & Yin, 2012; Yin, 2009). The phenomenon of workplace bullying and sexual harassment amongst first responders is complex, severe, and multi-layered. A need exists to examine the phenomenon by eliciting insights and experiences to best capture the first responder population's impact. Precisely, eight steps were followed for this research:

1. Deciding the research question(s);
2. Selecting material (literature/studies);
3. The building of a coding frame;
4. Segmentation;
5. Trial coding; to evaluate and to modify the coding frame;
6. Main analysis;
7. Present and interpret findings (Vieira & De Queiroz, 2017).

Codes were developed that support the construction of specified data. The cultivation of themes and examining the literature through an interpretative lens allowed for the development of a meaningful understanding of information that is critical (Creswell, 2013). The categories created are based on the exact terms and words utilized in the literature (research) being examined, or by the research contributors. Once collected they make themes, which are elements of data that shape shared ideas (Creswell, 2013). The first step of coding links portions of the text relevant to the research question(s) that is accompanied by a descriptive phrase to define what the unit of data is about and adequately capture its meaning (Creswell, 2013). The second step of coding involves a more in-depth analysis to conceptualize the phenomenon through an integrative, analytical, and conceptual interaction between the data (Creswell, 2013). In the second step, the researchers revisited the coding, and a re-examination of data is where new understandings and concepts are identified, which leads to established themes (Creswell, 2013). As outlined in Vieira and de Queiroz (2017), hermeneutic rules were employed for an understanding of the text, which was as follows:

1. a preliminary interpretation that considered the publication of text, to have an opinion about the text, and to write on the general sense of 'first impression' of the text;
2. interpretation of the immanent text to search for the meaning of words and grammatical relations, observe text logic and contradictions;
3. coordinated arrangement to find the context of the text and observe affirmations and negation of the hypothesis.

Incorporating the hermeneutic rules as foundational elements for evaluation, an eight-step process was then conducted for each article included in the research, identified by Vieira and de Queiroz, to increase the rigor for scientific works as follows:

1. Ensure all text is read;
2. Research the text sentence by sentence and impression after impression;
3. Re-read the text as a whole;
4. Consult secondary text where possible from the same author;
5. Note reflections from the general text;
6. Create a sketch for all text;
7. Create a draft (summary) for each part of the text;
8. Re-read the text for a final time.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of this research follows the strict and widely held principles of a hermeneutic methodology based on interpreting the text (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Ware, 2008). As such, the researchers were required to examine existing content and search for essential meaning to provide new understandings of a phenomenon: sexual harassment as a form of workplace bullying amongst first responders. Hermeneutic content analysis is a well-accepted method that joins content analysis principles such as coding, categorization, and interpretation with an examination, reflection, and understanding, which



guided the study of the research (Vieira & De Queiroz, 2017). Scholarly articles were selected based on the methodology of the study to answer the three research questions posed. In this theoretical research, secondary data in the existing literature was examined. The analyses were shaped based on the subjective comparison of comparative analysis and thematic review (Creswell, 2003).

The literature is clear that workplace bullying is a significant phenomenon in today's work settings (Galanaki & Papalexandris, 2013), resulting in many severe outcomes for targets and witnesses physical and mental health (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Hansen, Hogh, & Persson, 2011; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012) with rates of workplace bullying up to six times the national average amongst first responders (Archer, 1999; Griffith et al., 2016; Miller & Rayner, 2012; Walker, 2017). A supposition for this research was to consider the impact of sexual harassment as a form of workplace bullying. The literature is relatively silent within the population of first responders on the phenomenon of sexual harassment, yet outcomes related to sexual harassment are equally severe as traditional workplace bullying (de Haas et al., 2009; McKay, 2013; Rosellini et al., 2017; Ward & Winstanley, 2006). A further supposition is that given the well documented insular culture of first responders (Myhill & Bradford, 2013), and that sexual harassment is often kept quiet in highly structured emergency service organizations, the examination of the sexual harassment phenomenon in the current literature is limited and likely embedded in broader workplace bullying literature. Lastly, to accurately analyze the data from this research, it is assumed that qualified researchers or other professionals have conducted the research in articles identified where guidelines for using human research participants, as defined in the APA code of ethics or institutional review board, were followed (APA, 2010).

### Limitations

This research has limitations. One of the limitations of this research was that workplace bullying in the literature has been derived from self-reported data from the participants who have voluntarily selected to engage in a review. There is no identifying information obtained in secondary data research, and there is no way to verify if the self-reported information is accurate. Due to the use of theoretical design, there are limitations in assessing causality and generalizability. This research examined secondary data. Because data was anonymous with no identifying features of the organization in which the participant is part, there are unknown factors at the participant's workplace that could bias the participants' responses, impacting the findings in this research. Another limitation of this research is that theoretical methods do not allow for the generalization of findings to the whole population. It is important to note that these research results are only generalizable to first responders due to the unique nature of the people that are being studied.

### Findings

The question, "To what degree does workplace bullying and sexual harassment impact first responders' long-term mental health?" is based on 209 articles searched and 70 items reviewed. Of those discussed using the hermeneutic method, 32 are included in the analysis. Table 1 demonstrates examples of the breadth and depth of the search and articles examined, and addresses the reliability and validity of the themes being presented from researcher imposed and data emergent categories (Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ridder & Yin, 2012; Yin, 2009).

Author	Themes	Subjects
Brown & Daus (2015)	Anger control	120 police officers
Carter et al. (2013)	Psychological Harm	2,950 workers
Conway (2017)	Suicidality	78,972 workers
Einarsen & Nielsen (2014)	Long terms mental disorder	1,613 workers
Goodman et al. (2016)	Psychological injury	220 police officers
Hogh et al. (2017)	Increased depression	133 First Responders
Hogh et al. (2012)	Stress Reactions	1,010 workers
Laschinger & Nosko (2015)	Depleted psychological resources	1,205 nurses
McTernan et al. (2013)	Job strain epidemic	2,074 workers
Nielsen et al. (2015)	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	29 workers
Schyns & Schilling (2013)	Cognitive impairment	200 workers

**Table 1** *Salient Impact Chart*

Themes were then listed on a spreadsheet to determine relevant conclusions about the degree to which workplace bullying and sexual harassment impacts first responders. Thirty-two articles were used for thematic analysis using the hermeneutic research method. According to multiple studies, implications of workplace bullying and sexual harassment have severe, detrimental, and long-term impacts on the mental health of targets (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Hurley et al., 2016; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Walker, 2017, 2018; Walker & Stones 2019). More specifically, workplace sexual harassment and bullying have been shown to increase anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicide amongst the target group (Conway, 2017; Loerbroks et al., 2015).

### **Theme One – Psychological Harm**

Mental health problems found amongst bullies' targets are located along a continuum of depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Nielsen et al., 2014). The data shows as the degree of workplace bullying increases, so do the adverse health effects, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptomatology (Nielsen et al., 2014). Bullying and harassing behaviors often lead to diagnosable mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, panic, nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide, found by multiple authors (Bano & Malik, 2013; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Farmer, 2011.)

The long-term psychological impacts on employees who are targets of these actions are predominantly negative and harmful. Studies show that workplace bullying and sexual harassment are predictors of poor physical health, higher mental health rates, suicide, and PTSD (Spence Laschinger & Nosko, 2015). Workplace bullying and sexual harassment are predictors of mental health disorders and further psychological harm, further signifying the severe and long-term impact of bullying on targeted workers.

### **Theme Two – Depleted Psychological Resources**

The interactive effects of job demands when workplace bullying and sexual harassment are present show increased physical exhaustion, depression, and absenteeism, causing a significant drain on the workforce and an employee's psychological resources (Devonish, 2013). Psychological harm and its associated consequences should be considered a workplace hazard. These behaviors have been identified as a strong predictor of emotional (mental) exhaustion and the depletion of psychological resources (Tuckey & Neall, 2014). There is increased emotional exhaustion due to workplace bullying and sexual harassment. The internal and external resources that are lost associated with exposure damages psychological and cognitive capacity by drawing energy from the individual resulting in physical and mental deficits (Walker & Stones, 2019).

Research shows that as bullying and sexual harassment increase in the work environment, so do the rates of adverse mental health, poor physical health, and suicide (Lovell & Lee, 2011; Sansone & Sansone, 2015; Spence Laschinger & Nosko, 2015). A first responder's work environment is inherently one of high stress with exposure to trauma, violence, and increased risk of safety to one's well-being. Being able to function in high-stress, physical, and emotionally demanding situations is critical. As such, there is a need to ensure the psychological well-being and strength of internal resources to do the job (Sinden et al., 2012). Workers are routinely placed in high-risk situations that increase the odds of sustaining an injury from mental health and physical health perspective.

The implications for those involved in workplace bullying include: serious mental health issues (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Spence Laschinger & Nosko, 2015; Verkuil et al., 2015); low physical health issues (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015; Karatza, Zyga, Tziaferi, & Prezerakos, 2016); suicide (Dobry et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2016; Sansone & Sansone, 2015); severe and long-term adverse outcomes leading to psychological harm and the depletion of internal resources (Giorgi et al., 2016; Glambek et al., 2014, 2015).

It has become increasingly important to examine the degree to which bullying and sexual harassment negatively impact employees. Of concern, given the severe physical and mental health outcomes, there is an increased need for research that has a focus on determining the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying on first responders (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014, 2015; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Sansone & Sansone, 2015). Emergency service personnel provide vital services to our communities and make life and death decisions daily. Based on the review of the current literature, there are real and immediate needs that require further identification, examination, and intervention to better support and protect first responders from the effects of bullying and sexual harassment (McKay, 2013; Miller & Rayner, 2012; Owoyemi & Sheehan, 2011; Sinden et al., 2012).

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

A core issue facing first responders is the high degree of bullying and sexual harassment that occurs within the work environment and the associated negative implications. Bullying and sexual harassment amongst the first responder population have proven to create detrimental outcomes for the physical and psychological health of employees, exacerbating an already stressful work situation, and can have severe impacts on the worker, their co-workers, and the public (Archer, 1999; Balducci et al., 2012; Campeau, 2015; Granstra, 2015; McKay, 2013; Schafer et al., 2015; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002). The pervasive behavior of incivility is psychologically harmful, depletes personal resources, and is grounded in an insular culture that promotes the acceptance of harsh ritualistic behavior.

Evidence shows long-term negative impacts including: increasing forms of aggression, incivility, and social exclusion (Bano & Malik, 2013; Hogh et al., 2012; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2010); diagnosable mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Nielsen et al., 2014); and in extreme cases suicide (Dobry et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2016; Sansone & Sansone, 2015). The impact of these behaviors effects the organization by decreasing job satisfaction, lowering work engagement and productivity (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011), increasing sick time and absenteeism (Devonish, 2014; McTernan, Dollard, & LaMontagne, 2013), and increasing employee turnover (Glambek et al., 2014; Trépanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2015).

The consequences of these behaviors lead to psychological harm and poor mental health outcomes for the targets of bullying and sexual harassment. Understanding the effects of bullying and sexual harassment amongst the first responder population is an important starting point towards adequately addressing this serious issue. As rates of bullying and sexual harassment are consistently high amongst the first responder population, it goes to reason that in the clinical setting, many of those individuals presenting from this population are likely struggling with how best to deal with the outcomes of the persistent phenomenon.

An essential element of this study has been to explore bullying and sexual harassment amongst first responders and the associated outcome on mental health and public safety. A chief supposition supporting this study is that first responders are not immune to bullying and sexual harassment and experience higher rates of the phenomenon than the general public (Nielsen et al., 2010; Walker, 2017). As such, given the poor physical and mental health outcomes for bullied targets (Nielsen et al., 2015; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Sheehan et al., 2018) and associated adverse public safety outcomes (Spence Laschinger, 2014; Kwan, Tuckey, & Dollard, 2016; Longo & Hain, 2014), it is presumed that first responders are at higher risk of harm.

Findings show that psychological harm and depletion of mental resources are core factors that impact bullied targets. Research consistently shows that psychological damage endured by targets of workplace bullying is prevalent and predominantly harmful (Einarsen et al., 2009; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Verkuil et al., 2015). Studies show that workplace bullying is a predictor of poor health, higher mental health rates, suicide, and PTSD (Spence Laschinger & Nosko, 2015). As noted earlier, bullying and sexual harassment are considered a workplace hazard and is a predictor of emotional (psychological) exhaustion (Tuckey & Neall, 2014). When workers have depleted levels of psychological resources, emotional exhaustion occurs where there is a loss of hope and/or optimism; the bullied employee's self-efficacy impacts their ability to be resilient. The resource loss associated with exposure to bullying at work damages job and personal resources by drawing energy from the individual resulting in physical and mental disorders (Walker 2017, 2018; Walker & Phillips, 2019; Walker & Stones, 2019). Resource loss associated with exposure to sexual harassment at work also impacts the workplace culture itself, with lower levels of performance, absenteeism, and commitment (GAO, 2020).

When considering practice implications related to bullying and sexual harassment amongst first responders, there is a need for ESOs to create robust methods to identify and address the act of harassment and the mental health implications of targeted employees. Clinicians need to be aware that, given the severity of adverse outcomes, which include anxiety (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014; Reknes et al., 2014a), depression (Devonish, 2013), PTSD (Farmer, 2011) and in extreme cases, suicide (Sansone & Sansone, 2015), there is a need for clinicians to screen for indicators of distress and open a conversation around bullying and sexual harassment with the client.

As noted in the findings, toxic organizational culture and a "rite of passage" normalcy tend to be factors that influence the covering up or acceptance of workplace bullying and sexual harassment; clinicians need to be aware that the underlying issue of presenting behavior may in fact be a result of workplace incivility. When considering psychological harm and depletion of psychological resources, there are severe implications for clinical practice to identify and intervene in cases of workplace bullying and sexual harassment to ensure the safety of targets and to work towards decreasing long-term harm.

Lastly, when considering employee mental health as related to public safety outcomes, the clinicians in regards to prevention should examine worker burnout, intervention, and postvention (after traumatic event) measures established to better protect the worker and the public. The risk of a toxic culture can lead any worker to ignore safety concerns to minimize bullying behavior in executing their duties, leading to serious harm to the worker, co-workers, and the public (Sinden et al., 2012).

## **Conclusion**

During the exploration of this work, core themes emerged that support the proposition that this phenomenon has severe implications for the bullied and sexually harassed employees' psychological health and the implications for their organizational culture. The research's themes also support evidence of negative consequences that are severe and pervasive for both individuals and the public. Studies have shown that workplace bullying and sexual harassment amongst the first responder population is up to six times higher than the U.S. national average, indicating that the phenomenon is pervasive and impacts a large number of first responder workers (Archer, 1999; Miller & Rayner, 2012; Owoyemi & Sheehan, 2011, Walker, 2017). The impact on bullied targets includes severe psychological harm, and the depletion

of psychological resources support negative mental health implications. Data in this study shows that factors that influence workplace bullying and sexual harassment include accepted, organizational culture and a "rite of passage," which creates a groupthink mentality that normalizes and makes a toxic culture ripe for incivility and bad behaviour.

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