

PERSPECTIVES

STOP THE BULLY, SAVE THE CULTURE

Workplace bullying remains a deeply rooted issue across industries worldwide, including in Malaysia. Beyond personal harm, it disrupts organisational culture, weakens morale, and impairs mental health. In recognition of World Mental Health Month, we aim to spotlight the realities of workplace bullying and propose effective roles to be played within the organisation to foster safer, more respectful work environments.



“Workplace bullying isn’t just a behavioural issue — it’s a strategic one. Ignoring it erodes trust, damages morale, and weakens organisational culture.”

At its core, workplace bullying involves repeated, harmful behaviour that creates fear, exclusion, or distress. Unlike isolated disagreements, bullying is persistent and often subtle. Common examples include gossip, unfair criticism, micromanagement, sabotage, and public humiliation. More insidious forms would be withholding information, constant surveillance, or institutional bullying through unrealistic deadlines. These are usually harder to detect but equally damaging. Discrimination and sexual harassment also fall under this umbrella, requiring sensitive and immediate intervention.



Below are examples of workplace bullying recognised by the Industrial Court of Malaysia:

Name of case	Forms of Bullying
Abbott Laboratories v Yeoh Siew Tin [2005] 1 ILR 43	• Verbal abuse and humiliation by a superior • Unreasonable workload and expectations • Lack of support and protection from management • Mental health deterioration due to workplace treatment
Amngran Govindasamy v Lifeline Innovators [2010] ILRU 847	• Physical exclusion from the workplace • Intimidating conduct by superior



These behaviours erode trust and create toxic environments where employees feel unsafe, undervalued, and powerless. In response to the growing concern, the Malaysian Penal Code (Amendment) Act 2025, effective from 11th July 2025, introduced targeted provisions to criminalise harassment and bullying, as follows:

Penal Code Sections	Scope
Section 507B	Conduct that causes harassment, distress, fear, or alarm
Section 507C	Covers similar behaviour where the victim is likely to feel harassed, distressed, fearful, or alarmed.
Section 507D	To act in a manner that causes another person to reasonably believe they will suffer harm.
Sections 507E	Publication or sharing of identity-related information where such disclosure causes harassment, distress, fear, or alarm
Sections 507F	Publication or sharing of identity-related information where the disclosure causes the victim to believe that harm will follow.



Recognising bullying is the first step toward prevention. HR and IR practitioners must be equipped to identify both overt and covert behaviours. To address bullying effectively, employees and Managers, each play a role in fostering a respectful workplace, as such:

- Employees should be encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour, speak up when mistreated, and support colleagues who may be struggling. Documenting incidents and reporting them through proper channels helps build accountability. Creating a culture where people feel safe to voice concerns is essential.
- Managers must respond swiftly to complaints, model respectful conduct, and participate in training that promotes psychological safety. Confidential reporting systems and fair investigations are key to ensuring trust. Managers should also be trained to spot early signs of bullying and intervene before harm escalates.

Ultimately, workplace bullying is not just a behavioural issue, it's a strategic one. Organisations that ignore it risk losing talent, damaging morale, facing legal consequences and public backlash (reputational damage).

By acknowledging the impact of workplace bullying and taking proactive steps to address it, HR and IR professionals can help shape a culture of respect, resilience, and psychological safety. As we mark World Mental Health Month, let this be a timely reminder that safeguarding employee wellbeing is not just a legal obligation, but a strategic imperative.