

How managers and colleagues can help staff who witness workplace aggression

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Just witnessing aggression or other bad behaviour at work can affect our well-being, but the right support from employers and colleagues can limit the consequences.

That is the conclusion of research being presented today, Thursday 7 May 2015, by Dr Christine Sprigg from the Institute of Work Psychology at the Sheffield University Management School at the Annual Conference of the British Psychological Society in Liverpool.

Dr Sprigg and her colleagues surveyed 127 British [employees](#) who had witnessed aggression at work. Employees were asked to complete a number of psychological measures at two time points six months apart.

The aggression could be anything from physical violence or the threat of [physical violence](#) to shouting and insulting remarks. It also included more indirect forms of bullying, such as withholding information and being given an unmanageable workload.

The researchers looked at the effect of three workplace factors on the employees' levels of work-related depression, anxiety and [emotional exhaustion](#). These included two work-context factors - social support from managers and social support from co-workers - and one individual-level factor - personal optimism.

Dr Sprigg found that employees who had witnessed aggression but reported greater social support (from co-workers and managers) or more

optimism the first time they were surveyed, were less depressed at the second time point six months later. Work-related anxiety was significantly eased by managerial support and personal optimism. The only significant moderator of emotional exhaustion was co-worker support: support from colleagues limited the burnout from witnessing aggression at work.

Dr Sprigg said:: "Taken together our findings show that [social support](#) from managers and co-workers, and optimism are all important moderators of the effect of witnessing workplace aggression on employees' psychological wellbeing.

"Our findings add to the growing body of research linking the witnessing of [aggression](#) at work with psychological ill health. They also provide an indication of those individual trait and workplace contextual factors which act as psychological buffers to ill health.

"This suggests that positive strategies on the part of managers could limit the impact of witnessing unacceptable behaviour."

More information: Presentation: The Impact of Witnessing Co-Worker Unacceptable Behaviour on Employee Psychological Well-Being: A Two-Wave Study, The British Psychological Society Annual Conference takes place from 5 - 7 May 2015 at the Arena and Convention Centre (ACC) Liverpool.

Provided by British Psychological Society

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