

How humour can reduce workplace stress

October 3 2018



Credit: Richard Foster/Flickr

Research from ANU has found a bit of humour at work can help employees deal with workplace aggression and stressful situations.

Lead researcher Dr. David Cheng of the ANU College of Business and Economics said workplace aggression and bullying is a widespread problem which impacts the [mental health](#) of victims and the ramifications can be expensive for organisations.

He said the results of his research show [humour](#) can be used to reduce the negative impact of aggression.

"While obviously the best solution to workplace aggression is to stamp out the poor behaviour, our research shows if something stressful does happen to you at work, a bit of laughter can help," Dr. Cheng said.

The experiments worked by having participants exposed to a simulation of a colleague aggressively shouting at them and then shown one of two short videos, one of which was humorous.

"The experiments consistently showed exposure to humorous stimuli is useful for victims of aggression," he said.

"Humour helps reduce some of the damage caused to a victim's psychological well-being by bolstering their sense of power.

"They felt more powerful, and that people would be more likely to listen to them.

"That's important because with workplace [aggression](#), when you get yelled at you feel belittled, you feel weaker. So humour can help counter that by making you feel more empowered."

The study is part of a larger research project into the impact of laughter in the [workplace](#), with another of Dr. Cheng's studies showing humour can also boost productivity.

That 2015 study had participants engaging in boring repetitive work (answering basic maths questions). After a while people were given a ten minute break, with one group again exposed to humours videos.

"After the break we told people they could stop work at any point in

time. Then we measured how long they went for and how they performed," he said.

"The people in the humour group continued to work for double the length of time with the same level of performance in terms of the accuracy of their answers."

The results of the research have been published in a paper titled "Laughter Is (Powerful) Medicine: the Effects of Humor Exposure on the Well-being of Victims of Aggression" in the *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

More information: David Cheng et al. Laughter Is (Powerful) Medicine: the Effects of Humor Exposure on the Well-being of Victims of Aggression, *Journal of Business and Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10869-018-9548-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-018-9548-7)

Provided by Australian National University

Citation: How humour can reduce workplace stress (2018, October 3) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-10-humour-workplace-stress.html>

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