

# Claiming For Fairness Sake. What Makes bully victims claim Workers Compensation?



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## Introduction

Despite the objectives of internal grievance systems to quickly and positively address and resolve workplace conflicts, there are number of studies that report negative outcomes for workers who utilise internal complaint processes in regard to perceived mistreatment in the workplace.

A number of studies have supported the view that employees evaluations of fairness within their organisation influence their organisational citizenship behaviour, level of sick leave taken and general health, including psychological distress and depression

There is also some evidence that employees will retaliate against employers or managers who they perceive as behaving in an unfair manner towards them.

## Hypotheses

1. Those participants who submitted a workers compensation claim for psychological injury will report greater depression and anxiety than those participants who didn't submit a workers compensation claim.
2. Non-compensation group will report a significantly more positive perception of the way that the organisation managed their complaint of workplace bullying / harassment (organisational justice) than the compensation group.
6. Evaluation of organisational justice is hypothesised to contribute to a significant amount of the variance of psychological health, over and above that accounted for by level of bullying.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were self selected and contacted the primary researcher following a media release, and an invitation to participate in the study sent to them by WorkCover. Forty four participants took part in the survey (17 male and 27 female). The age of participants ranged from 22 years of age to 78 years of age, with the median age being 50 years of age. All identified as being bullied at work over the previous 12 months.

Sixty three percent of participants had submitted a workers compensation claim (n=28) for psychological injury as a result of workplace bullying. Twenty nine percent of participants had not submitted a workers compensation claim (n=13)

## Results

### Mental Health and Workers Compensation Claims

Depression was significantly lower in those participants who had not submitted a workers compensation claim as compared to those who had  $t(39)=3.01, p<.05$ .

Anxiety was significantly lower in those participants who had not submitted a workers compensation claim as compared to those who had  $t(39)=1.69, p,.05$ .

### Mental Health and Perceptions of Justice

Mental health was negatively highly correlated with Evaluation of Organisational Justice ( $r = -.49, p<.01$ ), a finding suggesting that a significant number of participants with poor mental health also had a low evaluation of the way their workplace bullying complaint was dealt with by the organisation.

### Perceptions of Organisational Justice and Workers Compensation Claims

The hypothesis that those participants who submitted a workers compensation claim (M=1.50, SD=0.15) would report a lower Evaluation of Organisational Justice than those participants who had not submitted a workers compensation claim (M= 1.73, SD= 0.20) was supported  $t(36)=-3.77, p<.01$ .

## Mental health or organisational injustice?

A logistic regression was used to assess the impact of Mental Health and Perceptions of Organisational Justice in the decision to lodge a workers compensation claim for psychological injury. After deletion of 7 cases with missing variables, data from 36 participants was available for analysis.

Logistic regressions for Organisational Justice were found to be statistically significant  $\chi^2(2, N=37)= 13.22, p<.01$ . The model as a whole explained between 30 % (Cox and Snell R squared) and 43% (Nagelkerke R Squared) of the variance in the Decision to Lodge a Workers Compensation Claim, and correctly classified 70.3 % of the cases.

The strongest predictor of submitting a workers compensation claim was negative perceptions of organisation justice, recording an odds ratio of 1.08. This indicates that participants who perceive poor organisational justice were 1.08 times as likely to submitted a workers compensation claim than those perceived the organisation managed their bullying complaint fairly, irrespective of their level of mental health.

†

Table 1.  
Summary of Logistic Regression of Decision to Lodge A Workers Compensation Claim by Mental Health and Perception of Organisational Justice

	B (SE)	Wald (1)	Sig	Odds ratio (95% CI)
Mental Health	-.005 (.016)	.103	>.05	.96 (.96 6 1.0)
Perceptions of Organisational Justice	.079 (.031)	.644	<.01	1.08 (1.06 6 1.15)

## Discussion and Conclusions

Participants in the study who submitted a workers compensation claim for psychological injury perceived significantly lower levels of organisational justice in the way their complaint of workplace bullying was managed than those who did not submit a claim. This raises the question as to whether perceptions of organisational injustice contributed to increased anxiety and depression, or whether the poor mental health of participants contributed to perceptions of injustice. Further research is recommended.

### Policy Implications

- É Early interventions in workplace conflicts are important
- É Increasing perceptions of justice are important in reducing workers compensation claims
- É Perceptions of injustice may be a more important determinant than mental health when submitting a workers compensation claim

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