

Workplace Bullying: Prevalence and Risk Groups in a Pakistani Sample

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Abstract

The aim of present study was to explore the prevalence of workplace bullying in a sample of Pakistani employees. In addition, this research also aimed to determine the relationship of various demographics of employees with their experiences of bullying in order to identify risk groups. The study was conducted on a sample of 450 employees of Punjab who showed their willingness to participate. Their age ranged from 22 to 60 years ($M=34.14$, $SD=9.17$). An indigenously developed “workplace bullying scale” with demographic information sheet was administered to collect the data. Results showed that 78% of employees reported experiences of workplace bullying. The findings of present study indicated that female employees, unmarried and young age employees, employees working at lower grades, employees with a low level of education and workers with little work experience are particularly at greater risk for becoming targets of bullying.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, Prevalence, Risk groups

1. Introduction and literature review

Bullying at workplace is a widespread dilemma in working life with high cost to both employee victim and organization itself. According to Nansel et al., (2001) “Bullying is specific type of aggression in which the behavior is intended to harm or disturb, the behavior occurs repeatedly overtime, and there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one”. During the past decade, workplace bullying has been devoted increasing public interest, debate and research (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007). It has become a problem that is too expensive to ignore. As Duffy and Sperry (2007) say bullying results in the humiliation, degradation, discrediting, devaluation, loss of professional reputation and, usually the removal of the target from the organization with all the concomitant, financial, career, health and psychological implications that one might expect from a protracted traumatizing experience. Although, several studies (Niedhammer, 2006; Tehrani, 2004) have demonstrated the mental distress, psychosomatic complaints and career damage suffered by victim of bullying, there are still considerable misunderstandings as well as differences of opinions regarding its nature and the factors that cause to develop workplace bullying.

Numerous factors have been recognized as correlates of workplace bullying. According to Moreno-jimenez, Rodriguez-Munoz, Salin., and Benadero (2008) these factors can be divided into two categories: factors related to work environment (job content, role conflict, weak leadership etc) and individual characteristics of victims (age, gender, marital status, level of education, and work experience etc).

Among socio-demographic variables, gender is one of the important and widely studied variables. But, much of work regarding relationship of bullying and gender of victim is contradicting and confusing. Moreno-jimenez et al., (2008) conducted their study in Spanish Sample and showed higher frequency of bullying for women. However, these results contradict some large scale surveys that have reported approximately equal victimization rates among men & women (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000).

Numerous studies (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Baron & Neumann, 1996) on workplace bullying found that younger people experienced more bullying than older employees. Rayner and Hoel (1997), for example, revealed that victims of bullying were usually less than 25 years of age. As for as victims’ educational level is concerned, the findings show that people with low level of education are the most bullied. Moreno-jimenez et al. (2008) say that it is quite possible that education may provide some protection against bullying by providing people with good conflict management skills, thus decreasing the likelihood of conflict escalation.

Workplace bullying is also strongly correlated with job status. According to Pellegrini (2004) bullying involves the use of aggression from a position of power and is often used to establish dominance and status within the peer group. Numbers of authors (Einarsen, 2000; Leymann, 1996) have reported that bullying is associated with hierarchical status, with workers on lower hierarchical levels reporting more bullying than higher level employees. For example, in a study among business professionals Salin (2001) obtained significant difference: only 2% of managers reported experience of bullying whereas 17.5% of junior & clerks had

experienced bullying over the previous twelve months. But, Einersen (2000) reported equal proportions in the experience of workplace bullying for supervisors and workers. These contradictory results in relation to socio-demographic factors and workplace bullying enhanced the need of empirical study. Thus, the present work contributes to our understanding of bullying in a Pakistani national cultural context. It has two objectives, the first of which is to explore the prevalence of bullying in a Pakistani sample. The second purpose is to identify risk groups, with respect to socio-demographic characteristics, in the Pakistani cultural context.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Sample and research design

The present study employs cross sectional research design to collect information about population at a single point in time as well as to describe the features of the population, such as prevalence of phenomenon/conditions and characteristics in terms of person and place (Abramson & Abramson, 2000). Quantitative research method is used in this study because it not only allows to collect data from diverse organizational cultures but also assists to obtain a more extensive sample of 450 employees. The Present study consisted of 450 employees (44.5% males and 55.5 % females) with the age range of 22 to 60 years ($M=34.14$, $SD=9.17$). Concerning marital status, 55.5% indicated that they were single, divorced or widowed. In the present study convenience sampling technique was used because workplace bullying is a very sensitive issue and a random sampling was difficult. They were provided written consent form and participants who showed their willingness to participate were included from four different organizations (universities, banks, hospitals and courts). Participants were taken from five major cities of Punjab including Bahawalpur, Multan, Sahiwal, Lahore, and Rawalpindi. The range of work experience was 1 to 35 years (because employee with less than one year experience may have adjustment problems and not because of bullying) and concerning the job status, majority of the respondents (77.7%) held subordinate positions, where as 22.2% had supervisory responsibilities. 70% of participants had permanent position (full-time) and 30% on contract post (part-time).

2.2 Instruments

To achieve the objectives of this study following instruments were used.

The workplace bullying scale (WBS)

Demographic information sheet (consisted of socio demographics and professional informations)

The detailed description of these instruments is given below.

2.2.1 Demographic information sheet

The demographic sheet was administered on the sample to explore the relationship between workplace bullying and socio demographics and professional variables e.g. age, gender, qualification, marital status, working institute, and duration of job or work experience etc.

2.2.2 Workplace bullying Scale (WBS)

It is firmly supported that measures of behaviors are developed in accordance to the cultural setting where they are to be employed and questionnaire items that work in one setting may not appropriate in another setting. So, an indigenously developed 24 items WBS was used to measure the perceived exposure to bullying by employees at their workplaces. In the development of the questionnaire the process involved reviewing relevant bullying literature, examining existing instruments and carrying out 40 semi structured interviews from the different organizations to detect particular bullying features in this group. A pilot study was also conducted on 40 subjects in order to identifying possible difficulties in answering the questions, and some items were also modified to make them easier to understand. In WBS scale all the items were written in behavioral terms. None of the WBS item specifically refers to "bullying". For each item response categories were: never, sometimes, monthly, weekly and daily. WBS is an operationally defined measure. Based on the previous research only those individuals who experienced at least two negative behaviors, weekly or more often, for six or more months were classified as bullied (Salin, 2001; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). WBS can be completed within 15 to 20 minutes. Alpha Reliability Coefficients of workplace bullying scale is 0.87.

2.3 Procedure

On the whole 500 employees were approached but 50 employees refused to participate. Participants were selected and approached as mentioned in sampling. They were provided written consent form with the detailed description of the purpose of the study. After their willingness to participate in the study, they were provided written instructions about to fill the questionnaires. Demographic information sheet and Workplace bullying scale were administered, respectively. Every subject took the time of 20 to 25 minutes to fill all these questionnaires. All the informations provided by participants were statistically analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) XII.

3. Results

Table 1. Prevalence of Workplace Bullying in a Sample of Pakistani Employees

Bulling Status	Frequency	Percent
Bullied	351	78.0
Non bullied	99	22.0
Total	450	

Description for the above table

Above table shows that prevalence of bullying is very high in a sample of Pakistani employees. Based on the definition of bullying, 78% employees were classified as bullied.

Table 2. Mean Standard Deviation and T-test for the Score of Employees according to their Demographic Variables on Workplace Bullying Scale

Variables	M	SD	T-Test	P. value
Gender				
Male	78.30	26.32	9.72	.000
Female	98.18	16.77		
Marital Status				
With Partner	88.13	25.74	1.21	
Without Partner	90.86	20.78		
Level of Education				
Less Educated (Bachelor or less)	95.19	26.44	5.26	
High Educated (Master or above)	83.76	19.15		
Hierarchical Status				
Officer	72.07	30.94	8.97	
Non officer	94.28	18.44		

Description for the above table

Above table shows female, young age and employees with low level of education and at lower (non officer level) grades are more victim of bullying.

Table 3. One Way Analysis of Variance of all age group employees for the score on workplace bullying scale (N=450)

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	d.f	Mean Square	F	P-V (Sig.)
Between Groups	24409.540	3	8136.513	15.953	.000
Within Groups	227470.380	446	510.023		
Total	251879.920	449			

P.V < 0.05

Description for the above table

The ANOVA table shows the comparison of the means of all age groups. P-value is 0.000 which indicates that the bullying status of all the age groups is significantly different at 5% level of significance. The younger employees are more bullied as compare to old age employees.

Table 4. One Way Analysis of Variance of Employees according to their Profession for the Score on Workplace Bullying Scale (N=450)

Source of variation	SS	dF	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	26181.566	3	8727.189	17.246	.000
Within Groups	225698.354	446	506.050		
Total	251879.920	449			

P < 0.05

Description for the above table

The ANOVA table shows the significance of the difference among the respondents of all the organizations. P-value is 0.000 that shows there is significant difference among the people of different organizations.

Table 5. One Way Analysis for the Scores of Employees according to their Work Experience on Workplace Bullying Scale (N=450)

Source of variation	SS	d.f	M S	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8612.442	3	2870.814	5.263	0.001
Within Groups	243267.478	446	545.443		
Total	251879.920	449			

$P < 0.05$

Description for the above table

This ANOVA table shows the comparison among all the groups of employees according to their experience. P-value is 0.001represents that all the groups are significantly different in bullying status. Employees with less working experience are more bullied.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Present study aimed to broaden our understanding of workplace bullying by exploring bullying in the Punjab, Pakistan, which so far has been neglected in bullying research. It examined the prevalence of bullying at the workplaces of Pakistan and its relationship with various demographic variables.

First of all the prevalence of workplace bullying in a sample of Pakistani employees has been measured. Based on the definition provided (e.g. Experience of two or more negative acts on a regular basis (at least weekly) and continue for at least six months were classified as bullied),78% reported that they had been bullied. Comparison with the prevalence rates found in previous researches showed that our employees experienced higher rates of bullying then employees in UK (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996), Norway(Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), and Sweden (Leymann,1992). According to Einarsen (2000) countries in Northern Europe, UK and Australia, which are characterized by negative attitudes, signs of abuse of power, low power distance, and feminine values tends to have lower threshold for experiencing adequate behaviors as bullying and may be more reading to use the right to complain about it.

The second purpose of present study was to identify risk groups. As for the influence of gender on bullying is concerned, a common belief is, that bullying is typically a problem among women. In accordance with this, the findings of present research also indicate that female employees reported more experiences of work place bullying as compare to male employees. Result of bullying experience between males and females of the present research is also consistent with the findings of Bjorkqvist et al. (1994) and number of other researches (Salin, 2001., Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2003).

The present research found that younger employees reported more experiences of bullying as compared to the older age employees. These findings confirm what has been found earlier in a study carried out in UK by Hoel and Cooper (2000). In contrast, in Einarsen and Skogstad's

(1996) study, older age employees reported the highest incidence of bullying. So, there is inconsistency of data indicating relationship between age and workplace bullying. National culture and workplace culture may be one of the major reasons of these inclusive results.

Regarding level of education results of present study shows less educated employees are more victim of workplace bullying. One may conjure that Pakistani educated employees may be less likely to become an easy target of bullying owing to their, relatively speaking, high position and status in the society. In Pakistan, employee with low or less education are employed on low status jobs, and thus may become somewhat vulnerable to workplace bullying by the boss working with them on higher status in any organization.

Findings of present study show that employees working at officer level are less bullied. These findings are in tune with previous study conducted by Rayner (1997). He reported that 83% bullies were in management grades and 74% of victim in a staff position (on officer level) at the time of being bullies. Furthermore, results of this study reveal that experienced employee reported significantly less bullying behavior than the less experienced group. These findings are in favor of the results of the work of Moreno- Jimenez et al. (2008) they reported that senior workers experience less bullying behavior as compare to junior workers.

So, on considering results of present study, it is easy to conclude that individual variables, both socio-demographic factors and work situation factors, are important in understanding the bullying process. However, the findings of present study must be considered in the light of its limitations e.g. small sample size. Overall, however, the present study indicated bullying at workplace is a widespread problem and the results of present study indicated high prevalence rate of work place bullying in a sample of Pakistani employees as compare to studies conducted in European countries. This high prevalence rate found in present study high lights the need for preventive measures and efficient interventions as well as sufficient attention should be paid to the risk groups when monitoring the work climate.

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