

The impact of being bullied at work on the levels of stress and depression among the employees.

Panguluri Pallavi

* Assistant Professor in Psychology, KL (Deemed to be University).

Abstract: Workplace bullying is an implicit or explicit behaviour embodied with hostility, aggression, intimidation or any harm inflicted on an individual or group of individuals. It is said to be bullying if only these behaviours are persistent and repetitive, exhibited by an individual or a group in the context of an evolving and existing unequal power relationships in the workplace. Exposure to the prolonged bullying acts have deleterious effects on the target's health and may induce psychological, behavioural and physiological problems. Stress and depression are assumed to be the common problems among the targets of workplace bullying. The study was conducted on 300 private sector employees by administering Negative Acts Questionnaire to measure workplace exposure to bullying. Perceived stress scale and Major depression Inventory were administered to measure the employee's levels of stress and depression respectively. The results concluded that workplace exposure to bullying was the predictor of the levels of perceived stress and depression among the employees. The results supported the common notion that workplace exposure to bullying had the tendency to impact the psychological disturbances among the employees.

Key words: Workplace bullying, Perceived stress, depression, and psychological problems.

Introduction

Workplace bullying is a global challenge faced by most of the developed and developing countries. The impact of various pressures (such as global competition, technological change, consumer awareness and expectations, labour expectation and the periods of recession) persistently demand the organisations to change. The outcome of this change leads to organisational restructuring (downsizing and delayering). In a profit-oriented business, along with the continuous change and the practices of restructuring, managerial working styles, various cultures and behaviours, managerial policies and strategies will affect the people that they work in them. The resultant outcome of this affect appears to be workplace bullying (Sheehan, 1999).

The research on workplace bullying in India was still in infancy, few researchers started focusing on this area these days. Some western research on its nature, extent and resultants were evident in the articles. It is possible to have discrepancies in extent of the consequences aroused by workplace exposure to bullying due to cultural differences. It is necessary to understand the effects of workplace bullying across cultures.

Bullying is said to exist where there are deliberate, persistent abusive, offensive, malicious or insulting and intimidating behaviours by utilising one's power, which is unwarranted and meant to undermine the target's self-confidence as well as to make them feel vulnerable, upset, threatened and humiliated. It is an immature behaviour this that the bullies manifest to disorient their weakness, inadequacy, and insecurity (Pallavi, 2018a). Bullying behaviours do not include isolated aggressive acts or behaviour. It is considered as bullying only when negative behaviours or abusive behaviours are prolonged and purposeful, done systematically over a period. Westhues (2008), proposed that bullies have an impulse to socially eliminate the target and humiliate them in order to seek pleasure. Few researchers have also used the word 'mobbing' instead of bullying. (e.g., Leymann, 1990; Zapf, 1999). In the earlier research, higher frequency of workplace exposure to bullying was found and hence the study was focused to find the consequences (Pallavi, 2018b; Pallavi, 2019).

Effects of bullying:

Bullying mostly prevails in a situation where the target finds that they are enmeshed and find it difficult to defend themselves in order to escape from the situation (Einarsen, 1999). Namie (2003) proposed that workplace violence is nearly invisible and roughly sub lethal. The bullied individuals may not express their resentment towards bullies because of shame that may stem from being humiliated and controlled by others.

They also may not get any support from other co-workers due to the fear of retaliation against them. As a result of excessive demands and pressure inflicted by bullying, victims experience emotional problems (Bond, et al., 2001, Einarsen, Hoel & Cooper, 2003), behavioural disturbances (Niedhammer et al, 2009), and deleterious effects on physical and mental health (Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2004). Leymann (1990), proposed that frequent attacks of mobbing occurring over at least six months, may result in psychosomatic, psychic, and social misery for the victims. Individuals exposed to repetitive acts of bullying, in the long run, might lead to deterioration of mental and physical health of the bullied (O'Moore et al., 1998).

Workplace bullying increases physical and mental stress, results in chronic fatigue and reduces job satisfaction (Fisher-Blando, 2008; Hansen et al., 2006). Prolonged exposure to bullying makes the target feel stigmatised or may even cause severe psychological trauma and repercussions (Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006). In Indian workplaces, bullying is assumed to be an annoying problem that imperils the safety of the working individuals. Therefore, studies are needed in this area to assess the gravity of the problem. To understand the phenomenon in Indian perspective, the present study aimed to focus on workplace exposure to bullying in order to predict the levels of perceived stress and depression among the employees. The paucity of the studies on this area laid interest to focus on this phenomenon.

Methodology:

Objectives: The main objective of the study was to find out whether the levels of exposure to bullying affect the levels of perceived stress and depression among the employees in the workplace.

Instruments used: Negative acts Questionnaire was administered to find the employees levels of exposure to bullying. Perceived Stress Scales and Major Depression Inventory were administered to assess their levels of perceived stress and depression respectively.

Sample: The study was conducted on 300 general employees from private organisation using convenient sampling method. The sample consists of 130 female and 170 male employees.

Procedure: The Organisations were contacted and the purpose of the study was presented to their heads. The proposal was also submitted to them in order to seek permission. The study was conducted in an organisation where they permit to conduct the study. The employees were informed about the purpose of the study. They were also informed about the voluntary basis of participation and the consent forms were distributed along with the self-reporting questionnaires. The examiners gave verbal and written instructions in assuring the confidentiality of the employees with respect to their information. The collected data was coded in order to facilitate analysis. The coded data was transferred to the statistical software like SPSS and SAS to perform computation. The computation tables were further interpreted and the conclusions were drawn as per the analysed results.

Results and discussion:

Table-1

Regression analysis for predicting psychological disturbances for being bullied.

Model		Beta	t-value	Sig.	R ²
1	Perceived Stress				
	Bullying	0.405	15.17	.000	0.164
	WRB	0.444	16.974	.000	0.197
	PRB	0.445	17.021	.000	0.198
	PIB	0.407	15.29	.000	0.166
2	Perceived Distress				
	Bullying	0.459	17.69	.000	0.210
	WRB	0.532	21.52	.000	0.283
	PRB	0.507	20.16	.000	0.257
	PIB	0.453	17.43	.000	0.205

3	Perceived coping				
	Bullying	-0.01	0.352	.725	0.00
	WRB	-0.004	0.140	.889	0.00
	PRB	-0.009	0.305	.760	0.00
	PIB	-0.005	0.161	.872	0.00
4	Depression				
	Bullying	0.318	11.49	.000	0.101
	WRB	0.305	10.97	.000	0.093
	PRB	0.356	13.07	.000	0.126
	PIB	0.327	11.88	.000	0.107

In the above regression analysis, the exposure to bullying and its subscales were taken as independent variables and the levels of perceived stress, its subscales (distress and coping) and depression were taken as dependent variables.

Overall, the similar patterns of results were obtained for the beta values of the employee's levels of being bullied and its subscales, predicting their levels of perceived stress and depression among the employees in the workplace.

The levels of exposure to bullying ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.01$) was significantly positively related to the levels of depression among the employees at 1% level of significance. The beta values of work-related bullying (0.305, $p < 0.01$), person related bullying (0.356, $P < 0.01$), and physically intimidating bullying (0.327, $P < 0.01$) were significantly positively related to the levels of depression at 1% level among the employees at the workplace.

The beta value of the employee's exposure to bullying in predicting the levels of perceived stress among the employees was 0.405 ($p < 0.01$). The levels of being bullied was significantly positively affecting the levels of perceived stress among the employees at 1% level. The beta values of WRB, PRB and PIB in predicting their perceived stress levels were 0.444 ($p < 0.01$), 0.445 ($p < 0.01$) and 0.407 ($p < 0.01$) respectively. It means the levels of WRB, PRB and PIB were positively affecting the levels of perceived stress among the employees at 1% significant level.

With regards to distress, the beta value of the exposure to bullying was 0.459 ($p < 0.01$). Employees levels of exposure to bullying were significantly positively affecting their levels of distress. Similarly, the beta values of WRB, PRB and PIB were significantly positively affecting their levels of distress among the employees in the workplace.

Overall, the levels of exposure to bullying and its subscales significantly positively affected the levels of perceived stress, distress and depression among the employees. This indicates that the employees with high levels of exposure to bullying tend to show high levels of perceived stress, distress and depression and vice-versa.

The results of the previous studies were also found to be consistent with the current results. For example, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, (2002) stated that workplace bullying is a significant psychosocial hazard, having a tendency to show substantial negative effects on individuals and the organisations as a whole. Kivimaki et al. in 2003 found a strong association between workplace bullying and subsequent depression. The studies of Seals & Young (2003); Wieclaw et al. in 2006; McTernan, Dollard, & LaMontagne, in 2013; Matthiesen & Einarsen in 2007; Quine in 1999; Wang, Nansel, & Iannotti (2011); Hansen, et al., (2006) were also supported the above study. Newman, Holden, & Delville (2005) demonstrated that victimization at workplace was associated with negative psychological outcomes. They also found that victims of bullying reported the feelings of isolation and the symptoms of psychological stress. In a study by Finne, Knardahl and Lau in 2011, found that workplace bullying acts as a predictor of mental distress. The studies of Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Bourbonnais et al., 2007; Fisher-Blando, 2008; Akar in 2013; Matthiesen & Einarsen, in 2007; Hansen, et al., 2006 found positive association between workplace exposure to bullying and psychological distress.

Although the research was scattered and scanty to prove the phenomenon that being bullied was significantly associated with perceived stress and depression, we can still conclude that exposure to bullying among the employees in the workplace is associated with their psychological health and wellbeing.

Conclusion: The study was aimed to find out the impact of the employees exposure to bullying on their psychological disturbances. The results construed that the employees' levels of exposure to bullying acts as a significant predictor of their levels of perceived stress, distress and depression. Exposure to bullying was not significantly associated with the levels of perceived coping among the employees at the workplace. In addition, the previous results also supported the present view. Hence, we can conclude that there was a substantial relationship between levels of being bullied and pschological health of the employees in the workplace. Research on conducting intervention programmes to improve the quality of life of the bullied employees is suggested for future investigation.

References:

1. Agervold, M. & Mikkelsen, G.E. (2004). Relationships Between Bullying, Psychosocial Work Environment and Individual Stress Reactions. *Work & Stress: An International Journal of Work, Health & Organizations* *Volume 18, Issue 4*, 2004, pages: 336-351.
2. Akar, N. (2013). The Relationships among Perceived Job Stressors, Workplace Bullying and Job Stress in the Health Care Services in Turkey: A Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Approach. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *Vol. 3 No. 14*, pages: 248-257.
3. Bond, L., Carlin, J. B., Thomas, L., et al., (2001). Does bullying cause emotional problems? A prospective study of young teenagers. *BMJ*, sixth world conference on research integrity. 323(7311), 480-484. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.323.7311.480>.
4. Bourbonnais, et al. (2007). Psychosocial work environment, interpersonal violence at work and mental health among correctional officers. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, *vol. 30*, issue 4-5, pp. 355–368. Retrieved from the website: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160252707000477>.
5. Djurkovic, N., McCormack, D., & Casimir, G. (2004). The physical and psychological effects of workplace bullying and their relationship to intention to leave: A test of the psychosomatic and disability hypotheses. *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior*, 7(4), 469-497.
6. Einarsen, S. (1999). The nature and causes of bullying at work. *International journal of manpower*, 20(1/2), 16-27.
7. Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Cooper, C. (2003). *Bullying and emotional abuse in the workplace: International perspectives in research and practice* (1st ed.) NY: Taylor and Francis Group. ISBN: 0-203-16466-0.
8. Finne, L. B., Knardahl, S., & Lau, B. (2011). Workplace bullying and mental distress—a prospective study of Norwegian employees. *Scandinavian journal of work, environment & health*, 276-287.
9. Fisher-Blando, J. L. (2008). Workplace bullying: Aggressive behavior and its effect on job satisfaction and productivity. University of Phoenix. Retrieved from: <http://www.workplaceviolence911.com/docs/20081215.pdf>
10. Hallberg, L. R., & Strandmark, M. K. (2006). Health consequences of workplace bullying: experiences from the perspective of employees in the public service sector. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 1(2), 109-119.
11. Hansen, Å. M., Høgh, A., Persson, R., Karlson, B., Garde, A. H., & Ørbaek, P. (2006). Bullying at work, health outcomes, and physiological stress response. *Journal of psychosomatic research*, 60(1), 63-72.
12. Hansen, Å. M., Høgh, A., Persson, R., Karlson, B., Garde, A. H., & Ørbaek, P. (2006). Bullying at work, health outcomes, and physiological stress response. *Journal of psychosomatic research*, 60(1), 63-72.
13. Hoel, H., Zapf, D., & Cooper, C. L. (2002). Workplace bullying and stress. In *Historical and current perspectives on stress and health* (pp. 293-333). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

14. Kivimaki, M., Virtanen, M., Vartia, M., Elovainio, M., Vahtera, J., & Keltikangas-Järvinen, L. (2003). Workplace bullying and the risk of cardiovascular disease and depression. *Occupational and environmental medicine*, 60(10), 779-783. doi:10.1136/oem.60.10.779.
15. Leymann, H. (1990). *Mobbing and Psychological Terror at Workplaces*. *Violence and Victims* 5(2), pp. 119-126.
16. Leymann, H. (1990). *Mobbing and Psychological Terror at Workplaces*. *Violence and Victims* 5(2), pp. 119-126.
17. Matthiesen, S.B. & Einarsen, S. (2007). Perpetrators and Targets of Bullying at Work: Role Stress and Individual Differences. *Violence and Victims*, Springer publishing company, Volume 22, Number 6, 2007, pp. 735-753.
18. Matthiesen, S.B. & Einarsen, S. (2007). Perpetrators and Targets of Bullying at Work: Role Stress and Individual Differences. *Violence and Victims*, Springer publishing company, Volume 22, Number 6, 2007, pp. 735-753. Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/088667007782793174>.
19. McTernan, W. P., Dollard, M. F., & LaMontagne, A. D. (2013). Depression in the workplace: An economic cost analysis of depression-related productivity loss attributable to job strain and bullying. *Work & Stress*, 27(4), 321-338.
20. Newman, M. L., Holden, G. W., & Delville, Y. (2005). Isolation and the stress of being bullied. *Journal of adolescence*, 28(3), 343-357.
21. Niedhammer, I., David, S., Degioanni, S., Drummond, A., Philip, P., & 143 Occupational Physicians. (2009). Workplace bullying and sleep disturbances: findings from a large scale cross-sectional survey in the French working population. *Sleep*, 32(9), 1211-1219.
22. O'Moore, M., Seigne, E., McGuire, L., & Smith, M. (1998). Victims of workplace bullying in Ireland. *The Irish Journal of Psychology*, 19(2-3), 345-357.
23. Pallavi, P. (2018a). The role of educational background on the employee's exposure to bullying. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 6(2), 1193-1197.
24. Pallavi, P. (2018b). Bullying pervaded at different organizational cultures. *Journal of emerging technologies and innovative research*, 5(5), 939-945.
25. Pallavi, P. (2019, In press). The role of emotional intelligence in abating the workplace exposure to bullying among managers. *Journal of emerging technologies and innovative research*. In press.
26. Quine, L. (1999). Workplace bullying in NHS community trust: staff questionnaire survey. *Bmj*, 318(7178), 228-232.
27. Seals, D., & Young, J. (2003). Bullying and victimization: Prevalence and relationship to gender, grade level, ethnicity, self-esteem, and depression. *Adolescence*, 38(152), 735.
28. Sheehan, M. (1999). Workplace bullying: Responding with some emotional intelligence. *International journal of manpower*, 20(1/2), 57-69.
29. Wang, J., Nansel, T. R., & Iannotti, R. J. (2011). Cyber and traditional bullying: Differential association with depression. *Journal of adolescent health*, 48(4), 415-417.
30. Westhues, K. (2008). Critiques of the anti-bullying movement and responses to them. In *6th International Conference on Workplace Bullying, Montreal* (pp. 4-6).
31. Wieclaw, J., et al. (2006). Work-related violence and threats and the risk of depression and stress disorders. *Journal of epidemiology and community health*, volume 60, issue 9, pages771-775. Retrieved from: <http://jech.bmj.com/content/60/9/771.short>.
32. Zapf, D. (1999). Organisational, work group related and personal causes of mobbing/bullying at work. *International journal of manpower*, 20(1/2), 70-85.