

Workplace Bullying And Employee Reaction; Demographics, Work Position And Form Of Mistreatment

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ABSTRACT

It has been reported that workplace violence occurs every other day, and this is quite a misnomer. It ranges from ordinary verbal abuse to getting physical among employees. All forms of workplace bullying should be shunned and completely rebuffed towards creating a more enabling and healthier working environment for employees, as this is the only way to actual growth and productivity of an organization. The reason for this study is to acquaint managers with workplace bullying so that they can take full responsibility for their employees to clamp down on the hazard and provide a better working environment. Organizations should take conscious efforts by looking into some of the practices and cultures that are operational in their workplace and annul some promoting workplace bullying. This qualitative study aimed to copiously probe into workplace bullying, to adequately study the style and pattern via using 1050 questionnaire responses from employees in Cyprus. Results revealed that Bullying is more rampant in the workplace, between the superiors/ managers and their junior workers. Junior workers are subjected to different forms of ill-treatment from their superiors, like hurling abuses at them and making them work overtime, out of which job intimidation takes the lead. Female workers are more vulnerable to workplace bullying than their male counterparts -but it is noteworthy that the bully can be male or female - the question of who bullies is not determined by gender. Employee responses may not reflect reality due to the study's nature and the issue's subtlety. Further studies can focus on which segments of the industry workplace bullying occurs more frequently and in legislative matters.

KEYWORDS: Bullying Effects, Harassment, Mistreatment, Workplace Bullying.

ABBREVIATIONS

GDP: Gross Domestic Product, HR: Human Resources, PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace Bullying can be defined as an array of acts done to another person or group of persons, especially in a very unpleasant way [1-3]. It always has a starting point and a starter who perpetrates such acts by preying on others (targets). Findings have it that workplace bullying contributes largely to the health problems of its victims [4], and the organizations they work in are not left unaffected [5]. Workers repeatedly bullied will lack the enthusiasm, which will propel them to being more productive [6]. Workplace bullying is not sparsely distributed, and studies state that it is commonplace around the globe, wreaking havoc in the organizational system of every society [7]. Workplace bullying is abuse that can take any form, for instance, throwing hurtful words, intimidation, mocking, etc. [6,8-10]. All these have fatal consequences for the victims and also the organization itself. Workplace bullying begins with the bully who plans and decides who and how to prey on his targets [11].

Studies carried out globally have been able to explain the concept of workplace bullying. The results were compared and found to be tilting towards some parallels, that are, the phenomenon has harmful effects on the victims and the organizations [2,12]. Until now, Cyprus has not been maximally studied regarding this problem. Only a few non-academic articles contain a handful of information about Bullying in the workplace. That is why further studies have to be carried out in a very systematic and scientific way. That will help comprehend the situation in this community and also help provide reasonable solutions to it. A goal that this research aims at achieving.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For it to be Bullying and not just harassment, it has to be a behavior that causes offenses and hurts and is always ongoing over a long period [13,14]. The bully puts the victim in a difficult situation that constantly affects him or her psychologically [2,9,12,15,16], which impedes the person's concentration at work [1]. Bullying is not short-term. It continues over a long period, usually 6 months [17,18]. Bullying also involves a power imbalance between the two parties [3,19-21], either the boss pocking on his employees or the employees conspiring against again at their boss. Bullying should not be mistaken for strict managerial styles [22].

The definitions given for workplace bullying opine that it is the continuous state of mistreatment of an employee or a good number of employees by one who is superior to them [5,12,23]. The perpetrator uses different ways to carry this out.

There have been a lot of inadequate or misleading notions raised by different analysts. These unpleasant behavioral acts in the workplace have been a critical phenomenon that workers have to deal with [8]. Managers must face this squarely and develop strategies that will help fight against it.

Examples of Bullying in the workplace exist, including all forms of verbal abuse, social isolation, and spreading unfounded accusations [4,10,14,21,24]. It could be so hazardous that it can degenerate into physical violence, where victims are being assaulted physically by the perpetrators. Whatever style or way it is being practiced in any organization, the result is never palatable because of its psychological effects on the victims [8,12,17,18]. Still, under workplace bullying, the issue of sexual harassment is one we must deal with. This is another level of workplace bullying where the victim is constantly abused sexually against his or her will by superiors, subordinates, or co-workers [25].

It cannot be overstated that for it to be Bullying, it must be a persistent harassment of an individual or group of people in a way that the self-esteem of these people is affected [3,4,21]. According to previous studies, workplace bullying is described as those criticism and abuse hurled at individuals in their place of work [3,8,13,20,23]. The definitions seem faulted because they do not account for how frequent workplace bullying is, whether occasionally or frequently.

2.1. TYPES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

Bullying is a behavior or an action of one person towards another, especially behavior that depicts aggression and domineering [26]. Bullying is a social phenomenon, and as a matter of fact, it is commonplace [6,27,28]. Sixty-five million people suffer from workplace bullying, and about 27% of workers report as victims of this menace, while 72% said they have an idea of what workplace bullying is like [3,23]. Many reasons could account for Bullying, which exemplifies work stress, job insecurity, role ambiguity, and so on [29]. Bullying means different things to different personalities [17] and their interpretation of what another person does or says to them.

Bullying at workplaces could have a serious negative impact on the victims involved, and the organization could also be at the receiving end [17,30]. Unhealthy relationships between employees would hinder the growth and productivity of the organization. Bullying could take any form [2]. The most well-known is verbal violence which could take any style among individuals [2,31]. Another one is intimidating one another by threatening or through social exclusion in the working environment [3]. Thirdly, retaliation is another form of Bullying, where a superior denies a junior colleague promotion because he or she reported him of Bullying [12,17]. The last form is institutional Bullying, where an organization creates and even promotes Bullying, maybe by setting unachievable goals for its staff or denying its staff their wages/salaries [28].

Bullying is not the same as harassment, even though they have things in common. Nevertheless, they are two different problems [32]. Bullying is described as the ongoing treatment of contempt or torment towards someone or a group of persons, while harassment is cruel actions toward an individual or certain persons that are considered illegal and unacceptable [14]. Harassment is not as ongoing as Bullying is [3].

2.2. BULLYING BY COLLEAGUES

Several reasons may be responsible for Bullying among peers in the workplace [12,17]. Some individuals bully their counterparts out of envy, maybe because they feel threatened and insecure about the strengths and potentials the others wield [33]. As a result, these victims get preyed on and bullied by the ones that feel no longer secure about the good feedback the former gets from superiors [23]. Then they start throwing hurtful comments, and unfounded accusations, which sometimes could degenerate into getting physical with others. Further studies into workplace bullying identified other 5 categories of Bullying: threats to professional and personal statuses, segregation, work overload, and destabilization [9,10]. In addition, three types of Bullying were identified through studies: Personal, Administrative, and Social Bullying; an individual suffers from a type of Bullying depending on the nature of work he or she does in the organization [9,10].

2.3. BULLYING BY SUPERIORS

It was also estimated that the kind of Bullying between employers and employees accounts for about 15% of different forms of Bullying [1]. Whether it is a critical boss that singles out a particular junior colleague and constantly finds faults in whatever he or she does, picks on him/her and thereby punishes that individual or a group of workers that ally together to frustrate the life of their boss [23]. This kind of Bullying can become very dangerous in a case where the employee being bullied is forced to resign so that his or her means of livelihood is stopped [3]. Also, the group of employees bullying their manager may force him to take drastic steps like power abuse, threats of dismissal, and the like. This kind of Bullying is a common example of institutional Bullying and should not be encouraged among the workforce [17].

2.4. EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

Serious consequences can arise as a result of Bullying, both on a personal level and on the organization itself. Bullying causes low self-esteem [12], increased negative mood, tension, worry, fatigue, exhaustion, and sadness on a personal level [34]. In terms of employee performance, the impact of workplace bullying should not be overlooked [5,9]. One example of this is the impact is any potential damage or loss of active workforce members due to resignation, or early retirement is one example of these repercussions [5,10,12]. Regarding the public health system's cost of medical procedures, Bullying at work is not only about being aggressive; it may also hurt a person's health, work performance, sentimental comfort, self-confidence and self-worth, and economic condition [2,4,16,20]. Bullies in the workplace have a significant detrimental impact on the organization they work for [35].

There have been complaints of anxiety, fear, and helplessness, which can lead to depression and low self-esteem among victims [6,9,20,23]. Additionally, their mental health and abilities to work effectively suffer as a result [36]. For a business, this can be detrimental. In the workplace, Bullying can reduce operational efficiency, increase absenteeism, and negatively affect staff retention by causing feelings of inadequacy and continual criticism [2,12,23]. As a result of illegal or unfair redundancies, the company is faced with significant legal costs and lost production time [18,28,30].

The cost of workplace stress and Bullying is estimated to represent between 1% and 3.5% of a country's GDP, which is unaffordable for underdeveloped countries [37]. People who are bullied can perceive their work in terms of danger, threat, and insecurity, resulting in inefficient work [4,30]. HR departments normally provide little social support to bullying victims [23], and victims are regularly pushed from person to person, making them feel shame and possibly relocating human resources or even providing support for the Bullying rather than the victim [38]. According to a study conducted in the United States, HR's support was inadequate in helping the victim in 62% of cases, while in 32% of cases, HR seemed to defend Bullying and reacted negatively [4,30].

The victims feel the most harmful effects of Bullying in their most basic form. An organization's greatest asset is its employees since they are unhappy. It will negatively affect the work environment and, as a consequence, its performance [1,23]. As a result, employers must consider their employees' well-being, listen to concerns, and investigate accusations of Bullying, as firms that condone a bullying atmosphere will face the consequences [1,23].

Several studies on workplace bullying and organizational outcomes have been conducted. Those who appear to be workplace bullying victims expressed widespread discontent with their jobs [39]. Those that their bosses harass also have a high level of work discontent [12]. Bullying, according to research, lowers morale [1,12,21,23]. It causes a high turnover rate in the affected units; disrupts the recruitment process; increases workers' compensation claims and disability claims; and lowers productivity through worker sabotage [2,3,6]. Bullying at work also wastes time when it comes to resolving issues, as well as union grievances, litigation, and workplace violence. It was determined in previous studies that workers who experienced low levels of workplace bullying had the best work performance, indicating that these workers had greater work performance than those employees who experienced high levels of workplace fear [2,3,6]. This is consistent with research findings, which showed that Bullying negatively influenced job performance as a kind of interpersonal conflict. However, it might not be easy to accurately determine this impact due to additional influences such as absenteeism, melancholy, turnover, and sickness [40]. As a result, an employee who is cheerful, peaceful, and free of Bullying appears to perform better at work [2,3,6].

The vast majority of research on Bullying and bullying behavior has concentrated on both physical and psychological consequences. Dating back to the late 1980s, a novel and enthralling kind of research has been used to examine the effects of Bullying on persons who witness terrible events [41]. Most studies on Bullying and bullying conduct have focused on the physical and psychological effects [5,8]. Since the late 1980s, a new and extremely intriguing method to research has been carried out, taking into account the impacts of Bullying on those who witness unpleasant acts. According to recent research, witnessing Bullying can cause a person to suffer negative psychological and physiological effects as severe as those experienced by the victim [42]. Study results indicate that 78% of employees have been bullied at work, with the number of bullying incidents recorded in the workplace being significantly lower than 53% [4].

65% of those who attended a rehabilitation program for victims of Bullying had PTSD, a symptom of anxiety, according to previous studies [43]. According to another study, 75% of 102 long-term bullying victims recruited by two Norway-based national bullying associations suffered from anxiety symptoms indicative of post-traumatic stress disorder [1,4,5,8,30]. Even after the Bullying had stopped for five years, 65% of those bullied reported having PTSD symptoms. Overall, 76.5% of people scored above a level indicating psychiatric disease on the Hopkins symptom checklist, compared to 21.4% for women and 12.4% for males in a control group [1,4,5,8,30]. The severity of reported aggressive behaviors was strongly linked to the severity of post-traumatic symptoms, which was especially obvious if the aggressive action was viewed as personally demeaning.

People are understandably fearful of reporting occurrences to management because they assume, or perhaps know, that management is aware of what is going on and will not take the required steps to address it [2,4]. Witnesses can become so engrossed in the fight that they develop a dread of it, making it hard for them to report cases that profited from the bullying casualty. Insufficient guidance about Bullying to the victim often coerces them to fight intensification.

Thus, based on the findings of the preceding research, it is concluded that victims typically describe being normal and healthy before becoming victims of Bullying and that because of their experience with Bullying, they developed health, behavioral, and productivity issues at work. Many victims allege that Bullying has harmed their health. Down depicts a victim's description of the severity of her health problems. This narrative illustrates how a victim believes that a survey developed to assess psychological and psychosomatic disorders following exposure to traumatic events may underestimate the extent to which Bullying has harmed their mental and physical health.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND QUESTIONS

As it is today, Bullying as a social menace is spreading like wildfire, proving too difficult to curb. That is why it is important to say that when we want to examine Bullying in any organization, one should be critical of it. The reason is that Bullying could stay unnoticed by viewers. So the onus lies on whoever is doing this more carefully so as not to think there is safety where there is danger. The effects of Bullying could be awful, and this is not just for the victims alone. Onlookers could also have their fair share.

To elucidate more on workplace bullying and its implications in Cyprus society in the 21st century, some questions should be considered, which made to probe more into the phenomenon: (i) What is the most famous type of Bullying, (ii) Does

any link exist between work level and Bullying?, (iii) How does demography affect workplace bullying?, and (iv) How does workplace Bullying impact victims, and what are The reactions of these to it?

4. DATA AND METHODS

This descriptive study entailed analysis, interpretation, and discussion of outputs and was employed to attain primary data, eventually leading to answering the research questions. The research was carried out in Cyprus by distributing questionnaires to its people in a qualitatively analytical way to fully grasp words, ideas, and people's experiences and consequently arrive at results that can be easily standardized and made available to researchers.

For this research, the working class in Cyprus was labeled as the target population. Sample data was drawn from the population, one of which is representative of the population. The study design used here is "simple random sampling," which is highly scientific and offers a non-zero probability. A sample size of 1050 was selected to obtain data and information for using a questionnaire. The employees diligently attended to the questionnaires and submitted them back to the researchers, having stamped them in the envelope provided with the questionnaires. The researchers guaranteed the answers the participants provided in the preamble they introduced.

5. RESULTS

To better comprehend the results, it is recommended that one should take a deeper look at the structure of the questionnaire before presenting them. Gender, age, education, marital status, present employment, field of work, organization size, and years of experience in the particular role are all covered in the first section. The study's second phase looked at workplace bullying, and participants had to respond if they had experienced workplace bullying. They had to determine which answers were valid and answer questions regarding the frequency of Bullying and the type of Bullying they had experienced in the following questions (verbal, physical, psychological violence) and who bullied them. The third part dealt with the ramifications. The questions focused on the implications on their mental and physical health, work-related performance, and the negative impact of relationships at work and social and family relationships. Part four looked at how to cope with bullying victims. This part includes a question about the steps they took to deal with the Bullying they experienced by choosing from a variety of predetermined options. Finally, the questionnaire's fifth part dealt with prevention suggestions. The respondents were then asked to rank the most important factors in preventing workplace bullying.

To begin with the presentation of the findings, it is important to note that employees in Cyprus completed 1050 questionnaires. Of 1050 people surveyed, 53% said they had been bullied at work, with 59% of women and 41% of males answering yes. To create a significant impact and combat bullying as much as possible, the majority of respondents believe that greater criminal consequences and regulations should be implemented. As a result, 25% of participants believe that legislation is required for change, and 25% believe that heavier punishments are required. Psychological assistance is also crucial to 23% of respondents. Finally, 17% agree that knowing about Bullying is vital. Finally, only 6% agree that encouraging victims to disclose such incidents is necessary. Furthermore, the majority of women believe that heavier sanctions are important, whereas the majority of women say that a change in the law is more necessary. Further, there is a high level of verbal Bullying reported by participants (32%), with most reporting at least one incident of Bullying per participant, whereas psychological Bullying occurs in fewer individuals but also combines some forms of other Bullying.

The following piece is equally intriguing. The private sector employed 30% of people bullied at work. Of the 53% who had been bullied, 45% stated they were accepted by their co-workers, 40% by a superior, 10% by clients, and 5% by all three categories. There were five categories in the third section of the questionnaire about the effects on the individual. The first category was emotional consequences, the second was physical consequences, the third was behavioral consequences, the fourth was no consequences, and the fifth and final category was another. The emotional implications were cited by the majority of people, with 29% mentioning it specifically.

In comparison, 10% is allocated to the first and second repercussions, i.e., emotional and physical consequences. Physical implications were indicated by another 5% of respondents, behavioral consequences by only 1%, and no consequences by only 1%. In addition, the first three repercussions (emotional, bodily, and behavioral) were reported in combination. In addition, 1% reported a combination of the first three repercussions (emotional, physical, and behavioral), and 8% reported a blend of one and three (emotional and behavioral consequences).

Most of those who had encountered workplace bullying were between the ages of 26 and 35, and the majority were married. 45% of those who were bullied were between the ages of 26 and 35, 25% were between the ages of 18 and 25, 15% were between the ages of 36 and 45, and 15% were between the ages of 56 and 65. When asked about the effects of Bullying on those who have been bullied, 30% said their performance had not changed, 16% said it had dropped, and only 7% said their performance had increased.

Finally, in terms of education, there is something that needs to be looked into. The majority of people who have experienced workplace bullying had secondary education (47%) and higher education (42%), respectively, with only 6% having primary education and 5% having a doctorate. How they deal with this problem is a major factor. There were nine alternatives in section D. In the first case, the victim did not discuss the bully with anybody. In the second case, it was discussed with a co-worker; in the third, with a superior; in the fourth, with a competent authority; in the fifth, with a family member; in the sixth, with a lawyer; in the seventh case, it was discussed with the individual who bullied them, and finally, in the eighth case, it was a complaint to a competent authority and the ninth was "other". So, with a proportion of 12%, the majority of people chose the fifth alternative, which was to discuss it with a friend outside of work. Also, 7% of people chose

the second and fifth options: to discuss it with a friend outside of work and with a colleague. 5% chose the second, third, and fifth options, i.e., they addressed it with a co-worker, a boss, and a familiar individual outside of work.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research shows that women are more intimidated than men [2,6,10]. It has been suggested that one of the reasons why women believe that is because they have less social authority. In an uneven situation, the powerful individual can try to maintain the status quo by openly discriminating against the weaker party and taking other unpleasant actions [2,6]. According to studies, women in higher executive roles have also been more likely to be bullied. Further, a link exists between women and official positions [5], with women in administrative positions being more likely to be frightened by men. One theory is that because women are underrepresented in management positions, they become more conspicuous and vulnerable.

Past studies found that 16% of female senior executives were bullied, compared to only 6% of men. Several studies have suggested that male employees in dominating occupations, such as healthcare, civil service, and childcare, are more exposed to women working in minority positions. Women are more likely to be targeted for abuse, as 57% of those who reported being abused were females. The majority of aggressive Bullying occurs among men (60%), but when a woman is a bully, the target is still more likely to be a woman (71%).

The majority of participants said they had been verbally abused. This is consistent with the literature. One of the most common types of Bullying is verbal Bullying. That refers to any form of Bullying that occurs solely via the voice and does not implicate physical contact. Insulting, sarcastic or derogatory names and nicknames, spreading rumors, lying, or threatening someone are some forms of verbal Bullying noted in prior studies. Also, yelling or speaking to someone in an unpleasant or obnoxious tone, especially without cause. In verbal Bullying, the bully uses the voice to insult or make fun of the victim. Both genders are liable for verbal Bullying in many circumstances, although women are more prone to do so. In general, women are subtler in their insults than men. Perhaps this is why it was previously discovered that the majority of those who were bullied were women, particularly by co-workers.

Research reveals that most bullies seem to be in supervising positions; hence, analyzing who received the Bullying is also worth noting. Peers are the next most popular group, followed by subordinates and consumers. The three main relationships among the participants in workplace bullying are the supervisor-subordinate, coworker-employee-customer, and supervisor-employee-customer relationships. The three main relationships among the participants in workplace bullying are the supervisor-subordinate, coworker-employee-customer, and supervisor-employee-customer relationships. When co-workers are bullied at work, bystanders usually take sides, siding with either the target or the perpetrator. Witnesses do not want to be the next target, so perpetrators frequently "win." This result encourages bullies to continue their harassing behavior.

Bullying in the workplace has a vast range of implications. When you leave work, the repercussions of workplace bullying continue. Bullying can hurt one's physical and mental health. Anxiety and tension were frequently observed in our research. In their literature reviews, many researchers include high blood pressure, panic attacks, and sleeping problems. When it comes to the impact on job performance, it is self-evident that intimidated personnel are unable to function at their best. Reduced productivity because workers are incapable of working or concentrating. Another reason they waste time is that they are preoccupied with other things, like avoiding Bullying, seeking help, or coping with the situation. Non-target co-workers are also affected. Victims and witnesses of Bullying are more likely to be prescribed psychotropic drugs such as antidepressants, tranquilizers, and sleeping pills.

Finally, what needed to be done in the penultimate part of bullying prevention suggestions was clear. Most people believed the law needed to be modified and those harsher penalties needed to be established. There is also the belief that while employees must speak out against Bullying, report incidents to senior management, and document events meticulously, the work needed to prevent a work environment with a negative tone has to come from the top. Creating a strong, consistent corporate culture that prevents Bullying before it happens is the best way to avoid a bad and disrespectful work environment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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