

ROLE OF POPULARITY IN BEING BULLIED AT THE WORK PLACE

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Abstract

The present study is designed to study “The Role of workplace popularity in being bullied at the work place”. The sample comprised of two hundred participants selected from different tall and flat organization of Karachi city. In this study a workplace bullying questionnaire based on DIAS (Direct Indirect Aggression Scale)by K.Bjorkquist and K.Osterman, Abou Akademi University Finland (1992); was used. The popularity of the individual was rated on a ten point rating scale accompanying the demographic sheet, on which the participant was asked to rate him/herself in order to screen the level of popularity in the organization. It was hypothesized that people who are popular among their colleagues are more likely to be bullied as compared to unpopular people. The second hypothesis stated that women are more likely to be bullied as compare to men. Pearson correlation along with means was applied for statistical analysis. The results showed a significant relationship between bullying and popularity calculated value was + 0.8 which verified the first hypothesis and correlation of bullying scores of men and women was as + 0.2 which revealed no significant gender differences. Further, interesting findings indicated that men are more bullied by men bosses and women are more bullied by women bosses.

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Introduction

The purpose of this research was to identify the relationship between popularity at the work place in being bullied. It is needless to say that workplace bullying presents serious challenges to organizations, yet it remains one of the most neglected problems in the realm of employment relations.

According to Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, and Alberts (2006), researchers associated with the Project for Wellness and Work-Life, workplace bullying is most often “*a combination of tactics in which numerous types of hostile communication and behaviour are used*”.

Gary and Namie, define workplace bullying as “*repeated, health-harming mistreatment, verbal abuse, or conduct which is threatening, humiliating, intimidating, or sabotage that interferes with work or some combination of the three.*”

Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik (2003) expands this definition, stating that workplace bullying is “*persistent verbal and nonverbal aggression at work that includes personal attacks, social ostracism, and a multitude of other painful messages and hostile interactions.*”

Workplace bullying comes in many forms, obvious and concealed, direct and indirect. It is deliberately spiteful, typically repeated, and often malicious in nature. Surrounded by the most commonly reported behaviors are yelling, shouting, and screaming; false accusations of mistakes and errors; hostile glares and other intimidating non-verbal behaviors; covert criticism, sabotage, and undermining of one’s reputation; social exclusion and the “silent treatment”; use of put-downs, insults, and excessively harsh criticism; and irrationally heavy work demands (As cited by David and Yamada, (2008).

Contrary to the impression generated by a growing number of news reports in the past several years, the occurrence of workplace violence extreme acts of aggression involving direct physical assault represent a relatively rare event in work settings. However, workplace aggression—efforts by individuals to harm others with whom they work or have worked—are much more common and may prove extremely damaging to individuals and organizations (Baron & Neuman 1998).

If workplace bullying is to be taken more gravely, it may give details of as part of a deeper overall communal interest in human dignity. On this point, we may turn to Robert Fuller, a physicist and former college president who has attracted national attention for his examinations of dignity in the context of hierarchy and rank. According to Fuller, the primary obstacle to building what he calls a “dignitarian” society is the persistence of “rankism,” which may manifest itself as discrimination on the basis of constructs such as race, sex, or age, but also may generate from unnecessarily hierarchical relationships in our private, public, and civic institutions (As cited by Yamada, 2008).

Bullying can occur at various places depending upon the level of vulnerability of an individual in a group. For example, people are mainly bullied at work by their manager or co-workers or subordinates, or by their clients (bullying, workplace bullying, mobbing, work abuse, harassment, discrimination) at home by their partner or parents or siblings or children (bullying, assault, domestic violence, abuse, verbal abuse), at school (bullying, harassment, assault) in the care of others, such as in hospitals, convalescent homes, care homes, residential homes (bullying, harassment, assault), in the armed forces (bullying, harassment, discrimination, assault) by those in authority (harassment, abuse of power) by neighbors and landlords (bullying, harassment) by strangers (harassment, stalking, assault, sexual assault, rape, grievous bodily harm, murder). Bullying differs from harassment and assault in that the latter can result from a single incident or small number of incidents - which everybody recognizes as

harassment or assault / whereas, bullying tends to be an accumulation of many small incidents over a long period of time. Each incident tends to be trivial, and on its own and out of context does not constitute an offence or grounds for disciplinary or grievance action. (Retrieved from <http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm>).

Bullying is behavior by choice, and, therefore, bullying is a choice. Many bullies are in positions of management or power and, therefore, do not require help - except in their specious attempts to deceive others and to evade accountability and sanction. Bullies rely on naivety, inexperience and people feeling sorry for them and will ruthlessly exploit decent people's urge to "help" and "forgive" them. Such people unwittingly swell the bully's army of supporters, enablers, apologists, appeasers, acolytes, protectors and deniers. This could be one of the reasons for bullying being so common at the work place since the person bullying disguises him/herself very well in public. <http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/myths.htm>.

People who bully others are usually incompetent and unskilled and in order to conceal their uselessness they try to belittle others. They usually victimize popular people as a result of intense jealousy against them. Since people who are popular and are being liked by the majority it makes them vulnerable in a sense that these people become prominent and a threat for those who lack potential and likeness among their colleagues. Hence they are targeted by the bully to be as invisible as themselves by threatening and harassing them.

Policy and procedures could be ineffective, and one should not underestimate the ability (conscious or otherwise) of senior managers to undermine the process! One of the most undermining systems we have observed is what is termed 'vacuum management' (Rayner 2002). This is where decisions fail to be made. Senior managers may hope that by not giving an answer,

the situation will go away, and sometimes does. Of course, staff will know about their tactics. Unfortunately, this lack of action can lead to staff having no confidence in senior managers' willingness or ability to combat bullying at work and unfortunately, in some cases this is very well founded (as cited by Dorightatwork).

Objectives

The aim of this study was to observe the relation of popularity with work place bullying.

Observe gender differences in work place bullying.

Research Assumptions

1- It was hypothesized that people who are popular among their colleagues are more likely to be bullied as compared to unpopular people.

2- The second hypothesis stated that women are more likely to be bullied as compared to men.

Methodology

Sample

A sample of 200, 120 men and 80 women participants were selected through random stratified technique after screening them on a popularity scale from various tall and flat organizations. It included both private and government sectors based in Karachi. For all tall organizations, banks, multinational companies, fast chains and for flat organizations schools, NGOs and single unit companies were considered. Their average age was 26 years and the minimum qualification was graduation.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants who had a job experience of at least 3 years and also rated 'seven or above' on popularity scales were included in the sample.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants who had a job experience of less than 3 years or on contract and those who rated themselves less than 'seven' on popularity scales were excluded.

Material

- 1- Consent Form: It communicates the purpose of research, ensures confidentiality and right to withdraw and was signed by each participant.
- 2-Demographic: name (optional), age, gender, marital status, qualification, date of administration, subject's designation and to which category of organization he/she belonged i.e., flat organization or tall organization, work experience, job shifts in the last 3 years.
- 3- A popularity questionnaire based on 10 point rating scale for screening purposes was used.
- 4- Workplace bullying questionnaire was based on DIAS (Direct Indirect Aggression Scale). It is a 4 point rating scale ranging from 0 to 4, never to very often design by K.Bjorkquist and K. Osterman, Abou Akademi University Finland (1992). It has three domains 1-Physical aggression(7 items)2-Verbal Aggression(5 items) & 3-Indirect aggression(12 items).

Procedure

The first step of the methodology was to screen the employees on the popularity scale after getting the consent form signed by the participants. Then participants were asked to fill the demographic sheet in which they had to rate themselves on the bullying scale. Those who rated 7 or above on the popularity scale. On selected participants bullying scale (4 point likert scale) was administered. After they had filled the questionnaire, their scores were calculated. For statistical analysis Mean and Pearson correlation was applied.

Results

There is a 0.8 relation between bullying and popularity which is indicative of strong positive relation. Bullying scores of men and women is 0.2 which shows very weak correlation. Results indicated interesting findings men are more bullied by men bosses and women are more bullied by women bosses. Men are bullied for their work performance while women for personal and moral values.

Table 1: Correlation between Bullying and Popularity at Work Place

N	df	r	Level of Significance
200	198	0.8	p>0.5

Table 2: Correlation of Bullying Scores between Men and Women

N	df	r	Level of Significance
200	198	0.21	P>0.5

Table 3 Bullying scores of Males and Female Employees By Male

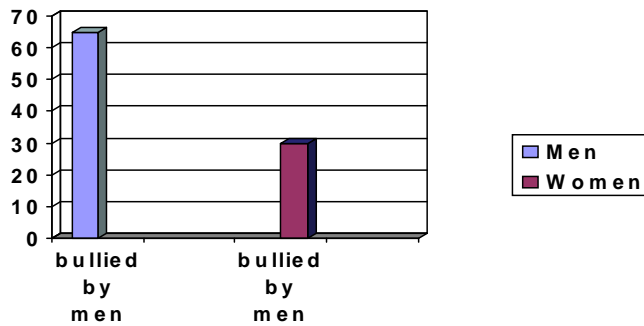


Table 4 Bullying scores of Males and Female Employees By Female Bullies

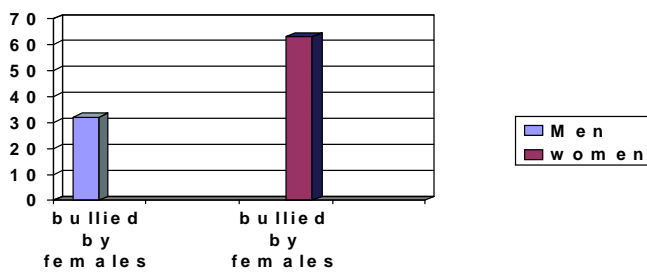
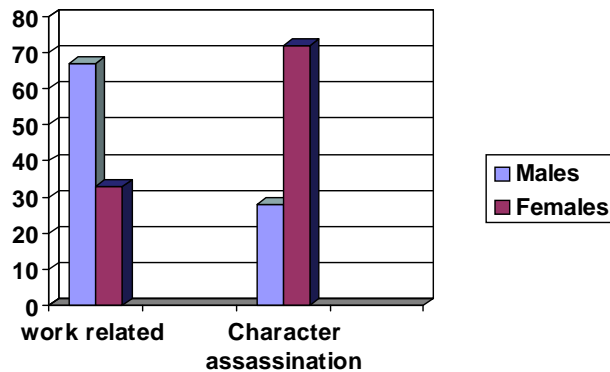


Table 5 Gender Differences in Types of Bullying Attacks

Men are bullied for their work performance, while women for personal and moral values



Discussion

Workplace bullying has been a concern for organizational heads not in the recent era only but ever since the industries were built. Hanley & Gilbraith (2008) suggest that abusive and bullying supervisors have at least some degree of intent to inflict their behavior on subordinates, whereas poor supervisors are often simply “clueless” and lack any sense of specifically trying to inflict stress on others in the workplace. Although the importance of this grave issue is of great concern for the mental health and good performance of the employees unfortunately, not much has been done to handle the issue.

The first hypothesis was ‘*Individuals who are popular would be bullied more than those who are not popular*’. Relating the factor of popularity to bullying, the results depicted that there exist a strong correlation between popularity and bullying i.e., +80. This factor leaves no room for doubt of popularity being a desirable attribute by bullies (Refer to Table 1). Since popular people are liked and appreciated by their bosses and colleagues

they get maximum benefit at the workplace. This creates an air of jealousy for the bully who is less appreciated and mostly criticized by his/her colleagues.

Organizations often find it difficult to identify just where the work place bullying is taking place, because the distinction between bullying and bossiness is hard to draw, and because efficient bosses are usually of economic value to the company by achieving results. Workplace bullying is an alarming future risk exposure for employers. Perhaps the difficulty in defining precisely what constitutes workplace bullying has contributed to the lack of attention given to this issue by many employers. (Query and Hanley 2010).

The second hypothesis states that '*popular females are more likely to be bullied as compared to popular males*'. The correlation applied on these factors gave us the figure of .215 which cannot be deemed as worth interpreting but the results revealed interesting findings that men are more bullied by men bosses and women are more bullied by women bosses. Refer to Tables 3 and 4 .This reveals the gender biases against females that even their counterparts do not spare them and harass them on equal grounds like men. Men on the other hand, are less negative towards their own gender. One reason could be that it is much easier to pick on the weaker sex than their counterparts who are on equal grounds with them. According to Braithwaite, et al 2008 impulsivity, emotional reactivity, sarcasm, a low tolerance for ambiguity and aggressiveness are qualities that predispose some to bullying others. In comparison, targets appear likely to have low self-esteem, poor social competence and exhibit negative affectivity more commonly than other employees; this could be another reason for women victimization at the work place. Men are bullied for their work performance while women for personal and moral values.(refer Table 5) It has been observed at the work place that men are usually targeted on their work

efficiency and skill proficiency, on the other hand, women are judged by their attitudes towards their colleagues and their body language and dress code. Their personal traits and moral conduct determines their vulnerability of being a victim of bullying. The constant harassment in the form of bullying can be very devastating for health. According to Yamada, Workplace bullying is an often unseen, dangerous practice encountered by countless workers today. Such harassment has taken a charge, not just on the physical and mental well-being of the individual directly affected, but on his or her family and social relations, job output, and overall workforce morale. As with more slight forms of sexual harassment, incidences of bullying are often unreported if investigated, brought to a quick and usually unsuccessful conclusion.

“Problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than are any other life stressor – more so than even financial problems or family problems.” (As cited by Yamada, 2008).

According to Ronald Lindah (2006) it is indispensable to distinguish that large-scale organizational enhancement does not occur in a vacuum or sterile environment. It occurs in human systems, organizations, which already have beliefs, assumptions, expectations, norms, and values, both idiosyncratic to individual members of those organizations and communal.

Conclusion

Bulling in an organization can reduce staff turnover and increase de-motivation and absences among employees, hence affecting morale and productivity negatively. Since bullying affects likeable and popular people more it could cause a breakdown of trust, hence refraining an efficient and effective employee from contributing his/her best work, not giving extra ideas for improvement, not providing feedback on failures and may be less honest about performance. Women being among the more vulnerable group will be affected more.

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