

The Gendered Nature of Workplace Bullying in the Context of Higher Education

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The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to analyze the significance of gender in the occurrence of workplace bullying and exposure to its two forms including work-related bullying and person-related bullying. The purposive sample was composed of 400 employees (men = 200, women = 200) from higher educational institutes of Lahore, Pakistan. The age range of sample was 22 to 60 years ($M = 33.95$, $SD = 8.0$). Workplace Bullying Scale developed by Anjum and Shoukat (2013) and demographic information form were individually administered. Results revealed that women employees experienced workplace bullying more as compared to men employees. Women employees were much more likely to identify bullying behaviors as severe, unlike their men counterparts. Further, person-related form of bullying prevails more frequently among female employees. Overall, results indicate that bullying cannot be separated from gender and that such negative behaviors need to be seen in a gendered context.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, gender differences, higher education

Workplace bullying has become a critical issue with an elevated cost to both the targeted employee and the organization as well (Glendinning, 2001). Workplace bullying is a dilemma that is very costly to avoid. According to Duffy and Sperry (2007) devaluation,

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degradation, disgrace and loss of professional reputation rise because of workplace bullying. Furthermore, elimination of the target from his or her institute with the entire financial and career loss, mental as well as physical health problems that one might think from prolonged traumatizing incidents is also the result of workplace bullying. Bullying is also expected to adversely affect co-workers, family members, and society. In short, Workplace bullying permeates every aspect of an individual's life.

Workplace bullying, as a unique phenomenon, is also referred to as mobbing (Leymann, 1990), harassment (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelk-Back, 1994), workplace aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1996), emotional abuse (Keashly, 1998), and mistreatment (Mears, Oetzel, Derkacs, & Ginossar, 2004). While different terminologies exist, 'workplace bullying' tends to be the most consistently used term, with Einarsen (2000) stating that 'bullying, harassment, and mobbing' can be used synonymously. Furthermore, researchers have consensus that workplace bullying phenomenon should define conceptually (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996).

The concept of workplace bullying refers to a persistent exposure to negative and aggressive behaviors of primarily a psychological nature (Leymann, 1996). According to (Leymann, 1996) the concept of bullying describe insistent experience to hostile and undesirable behaviors of basically a psychological nature. The term describes a situation in which one or more individual suffer unwanted behavior from others in their organizations for a long period of time and in such situations where they for various causes are incapable to protect themselves against such undesirable behaviors (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). According to Einarsen (2000) bullying at work has four specific features that differentiate it from other workplace stressors: first "intensity" second "repetition" third "duration" and the last "power of disparity". Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002) asserted that if we want to measure workplace bullying accurately then at least two of negative acts should occur frequently. Secondly, to establish workplace bullying, these undesirable acts should happen regularly, generally weekly or even repeatedly, as Tracy, Lutgen-sandvik and Alberts (2006) viewed workplace bullying as a repetitive hammering away at the target. Thirdly, these two or more negative behaviors must not only happen weekly or regularly but they certainly also occur over a period of time. Researchers (Leymann, 1990; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002) mostly agree about a period of six months to categorize workplace bullying from other workplace stressors. The fourth feature of workplace bullying is "power disparity". Einarsen (2000) described that victims and perpetrators are crucial in the description of

workplace bullying. He further says that in the bullying process victim remains incapable to protect him or herself.

Over the past two decades, research has demonstrated that bullying is a relevant issue in almost every type of organization (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996), with the highest prevalence being reported on health and social sectors, public administration, and education (Thomas, 2005). Salin (2001) say such institutes have unduly work security, presence of strict standards and higher levels of bureaucracy. Such settings are suitable to the existence of workplace bullying, because these settings make perpetrator imperceptible. According to Westhues (2002) higher education institutes provide perfect environment for workplace bullying because there is a high level of career security, teachers and administrators have contending goals and teaching faculty is appraised with subjective performance rather than objective appraisals. Fox and Stallworth's (2010) study among 779 educators revealed that 46.5% respondents were subjected to bullying.

Numerous studies have described comparatively high bullying prevalence in higher education institutes, particularly in universities (Lewis, 1999; McKay et al., 2008; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Bjorkqvist et al. (1994), describe that higher education institutions are at risk, but lacks adequate exploration of this work differentiating factors. According to their study, university teachers describe that to compete for promotion in job and status are the main reasons of bullying. They further argue that university management and in charge of departments are unwilling to accept existence of workplace bullying in their settings because it may be perceived as a result of their own poor control and management. According to Simpson and Cohen's (2004) study, 25% of university staff suffered in workplace bullying in the United Kingdom. Workplace bullying is a problem confronted by several workers almost in every type of organization (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011), including teachers as well (Fox & Stallworth, 2010). Beale and Hoel (2011) described that workplace bullying has an extreme potential to negatively impact teaching and learning process.

Basically, numerous factors have been supposed to take part in the occurrence of a bullying and are mainly distributed into two, first 'psychosocial or environmental factors' and second 'personality of the victim and the bully' (Einarsen, 1999). Some have researchers advocate that the environment or psychosocial factors are the main root of workplace bullying and that the personalities of the target are not very much important (Leymann, 1996), while others consider personality of the victim is central (Einarsen, 1999). Researchers

describe that victims of bullying have different personalities from others (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996).

The justification for addressing this matter allows the argument why particular individuals are more or less likely to suffer in this problem. According to Zapf and Einarsen (2001) most of the bullying researches describe that one-third male and two-third female are the victims of workplace bullying. Gender roles and work roles interact to present women and men with very different opportunities. According to Bjorkqvist et al. (1994), women employees record bullying behaviors more frequently. Niedl (1996) describe that severe psychological effects are also reported by female employees. One possible reason is that men are more often in leadership positions than the women at workplaces. Men are in an excellent position to bully women because of both men training especially in male dominating societies and their supervisory power over women employees. On the other hand, women are considered as passive, self-controlled and non-aggressive individuals (Nansel et al., 2001).

Rayner (1997) suggested that there is a higher tendency for female employees to be bullied than their male counterparts. Moreno-Jimenez, Rodriguez-Munoz, Salin, and Benadero (2008) conducted their study on Spanish sample and showed similar results. In most of the ample studies on workplace bullying issue of gender is not considered. According to Hutchinson and Eveline (2010) one possible reason to ignore the gender issue under the subject of workplace bullying-that is 'three times more prevalent than sexual harassment' (Namie, 2003), was a researchers' argument that as "gender territory" was already covered by sexual harassment policies. Nevertheless, some studies have focused on gender differences in prevalence rates and described health problems (Niedl, 1996). In contrast, we have little knowledge about men and women perception regarding workplace bullying. According to Ryner and Cooper (2003) men and women differ in frequency and forms of workplace bullying. Women employees are bullied more frequently than male employees through the use person- related forms of bullying (e.g., Spread rumors & repeated offensive remarks about a person or private life) (Nansel et al., 2001).

In the context of Pakistan, presence of women in higher education institutions is predominantly enhanced in recent years and they have acquired the certain role in the 'knowledge-based economy' as a beneficial human resource. According to Simpson and Cohen (2004) women are more victims of workplace bullying in higher education institutions. But as per our knowledge, not a single study has been conducted on the gendered nature of bullying in the higher

educational institutions of Pakistan. So, this research will not only be useful for employees who are victim of this problem, but also for the clinicians to employ the best decisions for assessments and intervention and for policy makers to stop workplace bullying. Following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Female teachers will be more bullied as compare to male teachers in higher education institutions.
2. Men are more likely to experience work-related forms of bullying (e.g., shifting work tasks without your consultation and withholding necessary information) according to the definitions of workplace bullying.
3. Women are more likely to experience person-related forms of bullying (e.g., spread rumors and repeated offensive remarks about person or private life) according to the definitions of workplace bullying.
4. Women employees will rate the severity of workplace bullying acts as more severe than men employees.

Method

Sample

The sample of the present study comprised of 400 teachers (men = 200, women = 200) from all 12 public sector universities of Lahore city. Data was collected only from co-educational teaching universities. The sample was drawn through purposive sampling. Age range of participants was 22-60 years ($M = 33.95$, $SD = 8.0$). According to marital status, 25% participants were single and 75% married. The base line of academic qualification of the sample was sixteen years of education. 20% participants held master's degree, 65% held MS/M.Phil degrees, whereas 15% participants were Ph.D. The base line for the work experience was 1 year. Participants diagnosed with any clinical problem were excluded from study.

Instruments

Demographic information sheet. In order to collect the demographic characteristics of the participants the demographic information sheet was prepared by the researcher. Age, marital status (unmarried, married, separated/divorced, widow), education, job rank/status, and work experience was included in the demographic information form.

Workplace Bullying Scale (WBS). WBS was indigenously developed by Anjum and Shoukat (2013). This scale was consisted of 21 items. Items of WBS were written in behavioral form. Not a single item of WBS particularly described the word "bullying". The scale was scored on a 5-point Likert rating scale where *Never* was scored as 1 and *Daily* as 5. WBS was an operationally defined measure. The experience of two or more negative behaviors weekly and more often and continue for at least six months classified as bullied (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Salin, 2001). This scale measures; Person-related bullying which is comprised of 11 items (5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, & 19) and Work-related bullying consists of 10 items of WBS (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 20, & 21). Sample items are 'Withholding necessary information affecting your professional progress'; 'Being ordered to do work below your level of proficiency'; 'Persistent unjustified monitoring of your work' and 'Repeated attempts to undermine your personal dignity'. Alpha coefficients acquired in the present study were .87, and .77 for Person-related bullying, and work-related bullying respectively. Mean score across all items was computed to yield an average response for each participant. Participants who had more than average score were classified as bullied.

Procedure

After acquiring the official permission from the administration of the selected institutions, researcher contacted teachers of the respective institutes individually. In some institutes, researcher also obtained informed consent from faculty deans, heads and in-charge of the faculty. Only those employees were included who agreed formally to take part in the research. All the participants were informed about the purposes of the study and were provided written guidelines to complete the given questionnaire. Follow-up procedure was opted through telephonic communication. Researcher collected questionnaires personally. Participants were granted the confidentiality and were assured that their information would be used only for research purpose.

Results

Percentage, mean, standard deviation, and independent sample *t*-test were applied as statistical tests.

Table 1

Percentage of Higher Education Employees Reporting Bullying Status (N = 400)

Bullying status	Men (n = 200) (%)	Women (n = 200) (%)	Total (N = 400) (%)
Bullied	25	35	60
Non-bullied	25	15	40

Table 1 describes that 60% of the participants suffered in bullying while 40% of the participants never exposed to workplace bullying. Female employees were more bullied (35%) than their male counterparts. The results confirm our first hypothesis that female employees are at greater risk of workplace bullying.

Table 2

Gender Difference on Workplace Bullying Scale and its Subscales (N = 400)

Scales	Men (n = 200)	Women (n = 200)	<i>t</i> (398)	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
WRB	29.29(4.31)	27.60(7.68)	3.83	.000	1.16	3.61	0.27
PRB	17.00(5.52)	32.50(5.60)	-27.83	.000	-16.59	-14.40	2.78
WBS	46.99(7.05)	60.51(10.63)	15.53	.000	-14.88	-11.33	1.45

Note. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit; WRB = Work-related Bullying; PRB = Person-related Bullying; WPB = Workplace Bullying Scale.

Results depicted in Table 2 shows a significant difference for the experience of work-related bullying between male and female teachers of higher education institutions. Results show that male teachers experience Work-related forms of bullying more as compared to female teachers of higher education institutions. For Person-related bullying, the results present statistically significant differences between female and male teachers showing that show female employees have more exposure of Person-related forms of bullying as compared to male employees. Overall, on Workplace Bullying Scale, female teachers experience bullying behavior more severe as compared to male teachers of higher education.

Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to examine gender differences in the experience of bullying and experience to its two forms, i.e., “work-related bullying” and “person-related bullying” within the higher education sector. The results of present study describe that workplace bullying not only take place in the higher education institutions of Pakistan as 60 percent of the sample reported to be bullied but various gender differences emerged from the results of this survey data. Firstly, differences emerged in terms of the scale. This research found that 35% of female and 25% of male teachers experience workplace bullying. So, women were more likely to the victims of bullying as compare to men. Hubert and Veldhoven (2001) describe that education institutions are one of the sectors that are more prone for regular unwanted behaviors. Our findings are in line with the previous findings of Tonini et al. (2011) who also described significant gender differences regarding the experience of workplace bullying. Our findings are also in line with the outcomes of Eriksen and Einarsen (2004) that female teachers experienced bullying more as come to male teachers. Our findings also match with Salin (2003) study on Finnish professionals who showed that women were more victim of bullying. It is argued that there exist a relationship between female socialization and the victim personality because female are believed to be trained to be less self-assertive and less hostile and more kind as compare to men (Björkqvist, 1994). As such, female are more likely to be targeted by workplace bullying and less skillful than men to protect themselves when workplace bullying occurs.

The findings of this study for the prevalence and forms of bullying indicated that work-related bullying was more prevalent among male employees. Salin’s (2011) research supports our findings. According to him male employees experience work-related bullying more as compare to person-related form of bullying.

Findings of present study infer that women are more victim of person-related form of bullying as compared to men in the higher education institutions. Hoel, Cooper, and Faragher (2001) research advocate our findings by clarifying that female employees suffer more person-related bullying than work-related negative behaviors. According to them male employees protect themselves successfully against such forms, e.g. rumors, gossips and verbal attack. Results also match with Adewumi (2008) who claimed that female are more victim of person-related form of bullying than men. He further argues female workers are more likely to feel emotional abuse and that is

why rate relational forms of workplace bullying as more severe than men did. Similarly, according to Crothers, Lipinski, and Minutolo (2009) it has been claimed that since overt confrontation is not necessarily consistent with a feminine gender identity, women often have to practice more covert and manipulative means of establishing dominance. Montgomery, Kane, and Vance (2004) further argued that women express more sensitivity to behavioral nuances, which may explain women's higher sensitivity to these forms of bullying behaviors.

Overall, findings of this study are in high accord with fourth hypotheses of study. Findings of this study reported gender as a convincing predictor of the perceived severity of workplace bullying. Women were more likely to experience bullying behavior as more severe than men did. Similarly, according to Salin (2003) male employees have lower propensity to label their own undesirable encounters as a bullying. So, results of this study suggest that gender is of relevance for how workplace bullying is conceptualized. This is an important insight since workplace bullying is often considered as a gender-neutral phenomenon. As claimed by Berdahl (2007), sex and protecting sex-based social status may be significant mechanisms also in nonsexual forms of harassment.

Implications

The findings have significant suggestions for interventions and human resource practice. Consideration of such aspects will also be helpful for professionals to increase social support. To assess gender differences in conceptualizations of workplace bullying is also helpful for human resource managers of either gender not only to take necessary actions against negative behaviors but also to take appropriate measures for specific behaviors. So, current study highlight requirement for a balanced gender mix teams investigating complaints and grievances about workplace bullying, to ensure that women's experiences are not belittled. For the sake of practical solution we also recommend that the gendered aspect of bullying and perceptions of bullying should explicitly acknowledge and discuss when human resource managers get training on handling alleged cases of workplace bullying.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The main limitation of the present research is that the data were collected through the use of the self report method which might have

resulted in under reporting of workplace bullying because of the its socially tabooed nature. So, it is suggested that in upcoming research other techniques, e.g., interview and focus group method should also use with a self report questionnaire in order to collect inclusive information about the frequency, severity and gender differences of bullying.

Sample for the current research was collected only from public higher education institutes due to two causes; one difference in system and work environment of public and private education institutes and second, according to researchers (Giorgi, Arenas, & Leon-Perez, 2011) workplace bullying is more prevalent in public higher education institutes. However, to deal with the issues of external validity, the sample should not only include from both public and private educational institutes but also from other cities of Pakistan.

Conclusion

It is axiomatic that bullying in academia is prevalent. It is irrefutable that teachers of higher education have and continue to experience undesirable behaviors. The results of this study showed gender differences in the scale and perception of different forms of bullying. Although different academics investigated gender differences, but their conclusions are currently considered just as stereotypes, without any worth, which reflect a reality far from the truth. It is a fact that gender differences exist and these need to be accept and acknowledged. This knowledge will help men and women come together in the workplace and make our workforce stronger.

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