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Dolna 17, Warsaw,
Poland 00-773
+48 226 0 227 03
editorial_office@rsglobal.pl

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THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CAUSES AND MOTIVATIONS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

Fadila Gheraibia

Professor, Lecturer A, University of Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi, Tebessa, Algeria

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of bullying has seen a notable increase in recent times, becoming one of the key challenges individuals face, which hinders their ability to achieve their goals and meet their needs in life. Bullying is a negative behavior perpetrated by an individual or group against another individual or group, and it is most commonly observed in workplace environments. Due to the rising interest of researchers and academics in the phenomenon of workplace bullying, it is important to coordinate efforts to identify the real causes of this phenomenon, understand the factors that drive it, and seek prompt solutions to limit its spread. This is vital to reduce its impact on the achievement of both organizational objectives and human resources goals. The growing prevalence of workplace bullying has significant consequences on individual well-being and organizational efficiency, making it crucial to address this issue to foster a healthier, more productive work environment for all employees.

KEYWORDS

Bullying, Workplace Bullying, Workplace Behavior, Organizational Performance

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Introduction.

In today's era of scientific and technological advancements, various behaviors have emerged in the workplace, influencing the role and overall performance of human resources, as well as the achievement of an organization's goals and, more specifically, the stability of its organizational processes. These behaviors may be either positive or negative. Among the negative behaviors is workplace bullying, a phenomenon that has recently seen increased prevalence in workplace. This behavior is often exhibited by managers toward their subordinates or occurs among employees who engage in behaviors that cause discomfort or disturbance to a specific worker.

Study problem

Workplace bullying is a negative behavior that has become increasingly widespread in recent years. It affects a segment of employees within organizations and is carried out by other individuals who target employees lower in the career ladder or those perceived as deficient in their job performance. This behavior typically involves psychological harm, verbal or physical abuse, or other actions that cause distress and hinder the targeted employees from carrying out their duties effectively in the workplace.

Workplace bullying is a significant barrier to achieving organizational objectives and is regarded as a dangerous behavior that prevents workers from successfully completing their tasks. This, in turn, leads to a decline in performance and negatively affects interpersonal relationships among workers. This study aims to explore this negative behavior in the workplace and uncover the primary drivers and causes of workplace bullying among workers in organizations.

Importance of the Study

Recently, numerous studies across various disciplines have focused on the topic of bullying and its adverse effects on workplace stability. However, sociological studies specifically addressing this phenomenon remain limited. This study seeks to uncover the fundamental causes and motivations behind behaviors that disrupt organizational processes, destabilize workers, and hinder their performance. Prioritizing the psychological and physical health of human resources is essential for the organization's success, as it depends on its workforce to achieve its goals.

Objectives of the Study

- To shed light on the phenomenon of workplace bullying within the workplace.
- To identify the primary factors that contribute to the emergence and spread of this behavior.
- To explore the motivations driving workplace bullying and its prevalence among workers.
- To propose effective solutions to limit or reduce this phenomenon in the workplace, aiming to improve employees' self-confidence and their trust in their work teams.
- To provide a set of recommendations for managers, administrators, and employees to help minimize workplace bullying behaviors within workplace.

Concept Clarifications

"It is a form of deliberate harm aimed at psychological abuse. While it is often verbal, it may also include vulnerability, intimidation, or aggression. It is a behavior directed by an individual or group toward another individual or group, often perceived as weaker or less able to defend themselves. Bullying can take different forms, including verbal abuse, physical harm, gestures, or more subtle coercive strategies like manipulation. It is commonly used to control others through fear and intimidation." (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.).

1. Workplace Bullying:

"Workplace bullying refers to repeated and harmful actions (whether physical, verbal, or psychological) that are unwanted and involve abuse or humiliation. These actions are likely to result in emotional distress, anxiety, or harm to the individual." (Haq, 2018).

2. Job Bullying:

Job bullying is defined as: "A set of negative behaviors directed at workers in the workplace, including harassment, intolerance, poor oversight, and unjust punitive measures." (Mohamed, 2021). This refers to workplace bullying as encompassing all disruptive behaviors that cause workers to feel discomfort while performing their duties, thereby impacting their performance, productivity, and presence in the workplace.

"Bullying involves verbal abuse or harm practiced by an individual or a group of workers toward another individual or group. This can include intimidation, devaluation, punitive measures, humiliation, and harm, resulting in psychological or physical distress." (al-Makarim, 2022).

It is further described as: "Various behaviors, such as institutional mistreatment due to pressure of hierarchy of power, physical intimidation, harassment, neglect, and verbal threats, which create significant organizational pressure." (al-Makarim, 2022).

To sum up, This form of bullying is one of the workplace challenges faced by workers while performing their roles. It involves harmful actions by individuals or groups that target workers through verbal or psychological abuse, causing discomfort and anxiety. These behaviors naturally reduce workers' effectiveness and performance within the organization. Thus, workplace bullying is a key barrier to achieving the organizational goals pursued by human resource management.

3. Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying refers to sustained negative conduct by one or more workers toward a colleague, manifesting as verbal abuse targeting personal traits or appearance, physical intimidation, demeaning remarks in workplace, or psychological harm that compromises job stability and productivity. It may also involve disseminating false information or rumors to tarnish the victim's reputation and socially isolate them—actions that disrupt collaborative workflows essential to organizational efficiency (Sitah bint Mandeel Al-Mandeel, 2018).

As noted by (Chadwick, 2017, p. 06), workplace bullying constitutes psychological violence through repetitive abusive behaviors, endangering workers' mental and physical well-being. Those negative behaviors include intimidation and threats (Chadwick, 2017, p. 06).

4. Types of Bullying

Through various scientific studies conducted by most research institutions, several types of bullying have been identified. They are outlined as follows (Sabour, 2022):

4.1 Verbal Bullying:

This is one of the most significant and widespread forms of bullying. It involves the use of offensive words or phrases, name-calling with negative or insulting nicknames, speaking sarcastically or mockingly, or issuing threats and intimidation. This type of bullying affects the psychological state of the individual, often resulting in feelings of sadness or anger as a reaction to discomfort.

4.2 Physical or Bodily Bullying:

This type refers to behaviors where a person is subjected to physical harm, such as severe beating that causes injury, humiliation, or the use of physical force (e.g., pushing) that results in pain or visible effects on the victim's body.

4.3 Social Bullying:

This type manifests in society by inflicting emotional harm on an individual. Examples include spreading false rumors, encouraging friends to abandon someone, isolating the individual, or completely avoiding interaction with them.

4.4 Sexual Bullying:

This form of bullying involves harming an individual through inappropriate sexual language or offensive remarks, which causes emotional distress. It may also involve inappropriate physical contact or actions that violate personal boundaries.

4.5 Cyberbullying:

Cyberbullying involves the use of the internet and social media platforms to deliberately and repeatedly harm an individual.

4.6 Psychological Bullying:

This type occurs when actions such as directed looks, whispers, or gestures are used to cause emotional pain. These behaviors induce feelings of discomfort and annoyance.

4.7 School Bullying:

School bullying occurs among students within educational institutions. It can also be practiced by certain teachers. This type of bullying negatively affects the student's mental health and their relationships with peers in school or university.

4.8 Workplace Bullying:

Workplace bullying is prevalent in organizations and occurs between coworkers, or between superiors and subordinates.

4.9 Political Bullying:

This type of bullying involves the use of power and force to intimidate or oppress another country, often through threats or military forces.

5. Forms of Workplace Bullying

The following are the main forms of workplace bullying (Sitah bint Mandeel Al-Mandeel, 2018):

- Verbal Bullying: This form includes verbal abuse such as insults, cursing, provocation, threats, scolding, spreading false rumors, assigning humiliating nicknames or labels, racial slurs, or offensive name-calling.
- Sexual Bullying: Refers to the use of sexually charged names, addressing individuals with offensive sexual terms, or using vulgar or obscene language.
- Emotional and Psychological Bullying: Involves harassment, threats, intimidation, humiliation, group rejection, or exclusion.
- Social Bullying: Includes preventing individuals from participating in certain activities, excluding them from social interactions, refusing their friendship, or spreading rumors about them.
- Property-Related Bullying: Refers to taking others' belongings, using them without consent, failing to return them, or intentionally damaging them.

6. Dimensions of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying includes negative behaviors that workers face in the workplace, which hinder their professional performance and create obstacles to fulfilling their roles. Researchers have identified the following key behaviors associated with workplace bullying (Al-Baadri, 2021): "Yelling at employees,

whether publicly or privately, refusing to address workers by their names or using inappropriate names, making disrespectful remarks or excessive criticism, overloading employees with unreasonable tasks designed to ensure failure, intentionally withholding important information needed for work, isolating workers from workplace conversations to make them feel unwelcome, giving meaningless tasks that do not match the worker's skills or qualifications, ignoring workers' contributions or suggestions during meetings, making threats, such as unjustified salary deductions, mocking workers in front of others and blaming others unfairly and taking satisfaction in doing so."

The dimensions of workplace bullying can be grouped into the following behaviours: "Threats to professional status (e.g., undermining opinions, public professional humiliation, or accusations of poor effort). Threats to personal status (e.g., name-calling, insults, or intimidation). Isolation (e.g., exclusion from opportunities, social isolation, or withholding information). Work overload (e.g., excessive demands, unrealistic deadlines, or unnecessary disruptions), and destabilization (e.g., withholding credit, assigning meaningless tasks, or removing responsibilities).

From the above, three primary dimensions of workplace bullying can be identified: devaluation, work undermining, and verbal abuse (Al-Baadri, 2021).

6.1 Devaluation:

Devaluation involves belittling workers, often by authoritarian managers who humiliate their subordinates in front of colleagues. This includes accusing them of incompetence or diminishing their value. Such actions can lead to psychological harm, anxiety, and resentment toward both the workplace and the manager. Ultimately, this affects workers' performance and willingness to comply with directives.

6.2 Work Undermining:

Work undermining includes negative behaviors by a manager or colleagues aimed at undermining a specific individual's reputation or hindering their ability to perform tasks. This may involve withholding critical information required to complete tasks, failing to ensure distributive justice (e.g., unequal access to rewards, financial incentives, or recognition), or excluding certain workers from participating in decision-making processes.

6.3 Verbal Abuse:

Verbal abuse occurs in the form of offensive or harmful language directed toward the victim by a colleague or supervisor. Such language diminishes the victim's status and self-esteem, which can hinder their performance and prevent them from building healthy relationships with colleagues. This often leads to social isolation, reduced self-confidence, and a lack of belief in their ability to successfully complete tasks.

7. Causes of Workplace Bullying Behavior

The causes of workplace bullying are varied and depend on the individual's circumstances. These causes can be grouped into four main categories (Al-Baadri, 2021):

- Changes in the nature of work.
- Work organization processes.
- Organizational culture.
- Leadership.

Workplace bullying tends to occur as a result of the environment and conditions that victims endure within the organization they work for. In addition to these causes, researchers have noted that workplace bullies often share common traits, such as having been victims of bullying in the past. By initiating bullying behavior, they seek to protect themselves by targeting others first. Additional traits that contribute to workplace bullying include low adaptability, resentment, dishonesty, deceit, a lack of moral integrity, and a fixation on controlling others. These traits play a considerable role in the emergence of bullying in the workplace.

Organizational culture is also a major factor in the spread of workplace bullying. Factors such as high-pressure work environments, favoritism in task allocation, an atmosphere of anxiety and insecurity, a lack of supportive work conditions, and internal conflicts (often stemming from unresolved grievances) all create fertile ground for bullying behaviors. These issues significantly impact workers performance and effectiveness, which ultimately harms organizational productivity and prevents the achievement of its goals.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

After conducting this study, the researcher has developed a series of suggestions and recommendations, outlined as follows:

- Increasing societal focus on the issue of bullying in all its forms and manifestations, with particular attention to workplace bullying.
- Working to involve civil society organizations in combating the causes of this phenomenon, which threatens the stability and security of individuals on one hand and undermines the efficiency and effectiveness of human resources on the other.
- Establishing an organizational environment that prioritizes providing the psychological and social conditions necessary for human resources to carry out their professional duties effectively.
- Promoting open communication and fostering dialogue between leaders and subordinates in the workplace as a strategy to counter the adverse effects of workplace bullying.
- Organizing seminars and awareness campaigns aimed at educating human resources about the risks of workplace bullying and ways to combat it. This is vital because such behaviors obstruct the achievement of institutional objectives as well as those of the workers.

Conclusions

Based on the discussion of workplace bullying, with particular attention to defining the concept and identifying its primary causes and drivers among workers, it has become apparent that this topic is one of the most significant organizational issues requiring attention and resolution. Serious efforts should be made to find permanent solutions to this phenomenon. These negative behaviors are typically initiated by an worker who holds authority or power, targeting another individual or group of workers to undermine their professional abilities, weaken their sense of belonging to the organization, and disrupt their social relations within the workplace. Therefore, sociological and psychological experts must give this issue significant focus. It should be studied both theoretically and practically to identify its underlying causes and motivations. Additionally, there should be a concerted effort to develop solutions that aim to eradicate this negative behavior, which has become increasingly common within institutions and organizations.

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