

## True Understanding Of Workplace Incivility, Widespread Dilemma In Universities

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### Abstract

*Academia is the “Petri dish” for bullying. This is a widespread dilemma in universities with high cost to both employee victim and institution itself. This paper aimed to describe true understanding of phenomenon and factors that instigate bullying. Furthermore, this paper help to understand the relationship of various victim and perpetrator’s characteristics <sup>1</sup>in the occurrence of bullying at work and severe consequences of workplace bullying. This has become a problem that is too expensive to ignore. If one is not aware of dilemma, one cannot prevent. So, the purpose of present article was to describe the nature of workplace bullying and to clarify the difference of workplace bullying phenomenon with other general workplace stressors. Furthermore, useful coping strategies were also discussed to control workplace bullying problem.*

**Keywords:** Workplace Bullying, General Workplace Stressors, Higher Education Instituti

### Introduction

Workplace bullying is escalating conflict (Leymann, 1996). Workplace bullying is a repeated mistreatment of a employee from his or her co-worker that can be in the form of verbal abuse, conduct such behaviors that are intimidating threatening or humiliating, impair that prevent work performance ; or some combination of the all above mentioned (Namie 2003).

Bullying is specific type of behavior that intended to harm or disturb from a more powerful person to a less powerful one. Vartia (1996) says that bullying is a persistent downgrading of humans through negative acts that gradually undermine self esteem and confidence.

Einarsen and Raknes (1997) describe main sub-dimensions of bullying are “personal derogation”, “work related harassment”, and “social exclusion”. The first dimension is underestimation of thoughts, and verbal abuse and personal criticism. The second dimension of bullying is work related harassment that involves behaviors directed to the performed work task. The last dimension is social exclusion that includes negative behaviors aimed to socially isolate employees.

Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) defined workplace bullying as persistent (at least weekly basis), and constant occurrence of negative behavior (at least six months). Occurrence of bullying behavior at one time is not considered as bullying.

The phenomenon of workplace bullying has been studied under a variety of terms, for example harassment (Björkqvist, Österman, & Hjelt- Bäck, 1994), workplace abuse (Keashly

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& Neuman, 2010), victimization (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), emotional abuse (Keashly, 1998), workplace bullying (Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001), and psychological terror (Leymann, 1996). The term “workplace bullying” is used largely in the scholarly journals (Salin, 2001; Vartia, 1996).

Although various terms are used for workplace bullying but, there is consensus regarding characteristics of the phenomenon of bullying. These are intensity, repetition, duration, and power of disparity. First, the term intensity is reported to specify the number of different negative acts. Victims report and researchers often estimate bullying by counting these acts, which includes: isolation, intimidation, and humiliation. Second, bullying occur frequently usually on weekly basis or more often. Lutgen-sandvik Tracy & Alberts (2007) describe that workplace bullying is a repetitive hammering at victims. The distinction between general workplace conflict and workplace bullying is not basically “what and how it is done” but, noteworthy the frequency and consistency of phenomenon.

Third, bullying behaviors must also occur over a period of time. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002) usually apply a period of 6 months in order to differentiate workplace bullying from general workplace stressors. Fourth, characteristic of bullying is power disparity. Furthermore, researchers describe Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) that imbalance of power between victim and perpetrator is one of the important feature of workplace bullying. They defined that bullied victims feel inferior and unable to defend themselves. Conflict between the parties of equal strength is not considered as bullying (Vartia, 1996).

Workplace bullying is not limited to top-down aggression e.g. from heads to subordinates Ashforth (1994). Many employees on subordinate positions harass their boss, particularly when they have support of other coworkers. Cleveland and Kerst (1993) elaborate that power imbalances can also be the result of other factors for example individual or social. In short, power imbalances grow with the passage of time and bullying practice itself may increase power differences.

**Bully/Perpetrator’s Characteristics:** It is very difficult to recognize the personality of workplace bullies because characterization mostly depends on the opinion of victims. There are number of explanations for why people engage in bullying of others at workplace. Zapf and Einarsen (2001) say that bullying occurs as an outcome of lack of social competencies and as a self regulatory process with regard to protection of one’s self esteem. Such perpetrators feel themselves insecure. They have fear from other co-workers who are more capable and talented. So in order to protect themselves they involve strict and negative attitude and behaviors. Strong relationship between bullying and position is found in several studies. Boss or heads are found as abusers in sixty to eighty percent of bullying cases (Lutgen-sandvik et al., 2007; Namie, 2003 & Rayner & Hoel, 1997).

Vartia (1996) study found that the behavior of bullies has also been characterized in terms of various personality disorders, and personality disorders have been identified to start from bullies’ early age. Namie (2006) defined bullies as “attractive and seductive, clever and manipulative”. He says that it would be true to recognize all bullies as psychopath. According to above and other researchers including Tracy, Lutgen-sandvik, and Alberts (2006) say that bullies act in a way that identified as pathological, controlling, and power addicted. Nevertheless, to date, there is lack of research that directly specific the personality type of perpetrator of workplace bullying.

**Victim’s Characteristics:** According to the studies there are also personal victims ‘characteristics that might triggers workplace bullying. In fact, employees who experienced bullying at work also experienced almost similar circumstances in other situation, for example with their family and friends.

Nonetheless, studies describe that some individual factors for example gender of victim, age, and financial status may raise the risk of bullying exposure. Bullying ratios depends on these individual factors. Certain groups are found more vulnerable than others including women employees as well as junior employees. Researchers reported a higher frequency of workplace bullying among women employees as compared to men employees Rayner (1997) says that bullied employees are usually less than 25 years. Similarly, Hoel, Cooper and Faragher (2001) also found that young people are more likely to suffer workplace bullying behaviors. There are some organizational or work-related factors that also enhance risk of being bullied. Such factors are: employees who are on junior status, employees with low level of education, and employees working as a part time.

Few studies have examine type of employment contribute in the exposure of bullying. In the higher education institutes employees work on as part time, on contract and as full time workers. Baron and Neumann (1996) say that there is a strong positive relationship between the type of employment and bullying. Employees with low level of education had more exposure of bullying. Moreno-Jimenez et al., (2008) stated that education provides protection against negative bullying behaviors and good conflict management expertise. Thus education decreases the likelihood of bullying escalation. Furthermore, employees in universities with high level of education are usually on high positions. Studies found that higher education employees on higher rank have less exposure of bullying behaviors as compared to employees who are on lower rank positions.

### **Bullying in higher education**

Several researchers have found that prevalence of bullying in higher education institutes particularly in universities is high as compared to other organizations (Simpson & Cohen 2004). According to Bjorkqvist et al. (1994) universities are at greater risk. But, lack of attention is paid to this issue. Their study reported that according to university teachers compete for promotion and struggle to achieve higher ranks are the major reasons of workplace bullying. Furthermore, heads and university management are not willing to accept existence of bullying in university because it may be supposed that bullying prevalence is a result of poor control and failure of their management skills. Simpson and Cohen (2004) describe that 25 percent of university employees suffered in bullying. Bullying destroy all aspects of life. Workplace bullying harms learning and teaching process (Beale & Hoel, 2011).

Mckay, Arnold, Fratzi, and Thomas (2008) reported that 32 % of university employees mentioned that they were experiencing bullying. Fox and Stallworth's (2010) study reveals that 46.5% of educators were subjected to bullying. Although, bullying is a big problem in academic institutes but teachers are not truly aware of the features of workplace bullying. This is one of the reasons of under reporting of bullying. Furthermore, need is to understand that all actions are not considered as tactics of bullying. E.g., not give leave, not invite co-worker for lunch. These behaviors would most likely been taken as regular routine of working life. But, such actions will be taken as bullying when employees face these acts number of time.

**What differentiate bullying from general workplace stressors:** The term harassment and bullying are often used interchangeably (Cornell & Limber, 2015). Gilmour and Hamlin (2003) say one example of harassment behaviors is "sexual harassment". The issue of sexual harassment at workplace has acquired an increase attention in the scholarly literature from the last 25 years. Richman et al. (1999) defined sexual harassment as a desire for sexual favors, any undesirable sexual advances, and other verbal and/or physical conduct of a sexual nature. So the focus is the behavior of sexual nature.

Although workplace harassment and workplace bullying may seem similar but particular forms of harassment are related to the characteristics of a targeted employees. For

example, racial harassment would focus on the employees' race. In sexual harassment sexuality will be the focus of the bullying behavior (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994). So, general harassment, and not the sexual or racial harassment, may be incorporated under the concept of workplace bullying (Hadikin & O'Driscoll, 2000).

Tehrani (2004) says mobbing is subtype of workplace bullying. Leymann (1996) defined mobbing as "psychological terror", that may be verbal and/or physical. Such behavior is ethically unavoidable and pushes the employee in a helpless position. Zapf (1999) says mobbing is a type of aggression that contains a group of mobbers. In other words, "group of mobbers" or more than one perpetrator is a particular characteristic of mobbing. Whereas bullying usually occurs between one victim and one perpetrator. Westhues (2004) conducted a study on university employees. He stated that mobbing of professors by their administrators and colleagues is very different from the experience (however upsetting) of being bullied by a single perpetrator. Earlier victims suffer more in psychological, physical and emotional strains. In short, employees of higher education should recognize in which type of workplace harassment they had suffer and how they should report.

**Coping Strategies:** According to literature victims of bullying employ two types of coping strategies. Emotion-focused coping strategies and problem focused coping strategies. Emotion-focused decrease the negative emotions associated with the bullying. Example of emotion-focused coping involves seeking social support for emotional reasons, behavioral disengagement, and mental disengagement. In short term use of emotion-focused coping strategies gives some relief. But, if we see long term effects use of these strategies prevent employee to find out ultimate solution and that is why harmful for employee wellbeing. This point of view is supported by literature. So, emotion-focused coping is an ineffective way of coping workplace bullying issue.

Problem-focused coping strategies are also called active strategies. Active strategies are used to find out the ultimate solution of the bullying. Strategies in problem focused coping involves seeking practical assistance, planning, and taking direct actions to tackle bullying. According to researchers (Zapf, 1999; Keashly & Neuman 2008) problem focused strategies not only help to find out the solution but, also prevent this problem at workplace.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To assess the factors that differentiate workplace bullying from another phenomenon.
- To assess the factors that help to instigate bullying at workplace.

### **Methods**

**Sample:** A sample of 100 teachers working in public sector higher education institutes were collected using purposive sampling. Their age range was 29 to 60 years. Sample was collected from teachers working in different positions.

**Measurements:** Workplace bullying scale developed by Anjum was used to assess factors that help to instigate workplace bullying. This was 21 item tools. Its reliability is .89.

**Procedure:** Sample was included with their willingness. Data was taken at their respective workplace. It took 20 minutes. Participants were assured that their provided data would be kept confidential.

### **Results**

**Table 1** Factors that differentiate workplace bullying from another phenomenon N=100

Factors	Action	Percentage
Nature	Verbal or Physical	65
Number of incidences	2 or more	60
Continuity	Weekly or more often	82
Frequency	Continue at least 6 months	68

Most of the people think that such bullying behaviors occur weekly (n=82) and continue at least 6 months (n=68).

**Table 2** Factors that help to instigate workplace bullying N=100

Factors	Percentage
Gender	90
Rank	70
Financial background	82
Poor organizational structure	65
Lack of support	78
Poor leadership	70

Findings of table 2 show that gender is the most important factor to instigate workplace bullying. People who are financially weak also face such type of behaviors.

**Discussion**

Workplace bullying in higher education institutes occurs more as compared to all other institutes. Several researches have documented high bullying prevalence in universities (Björkqvist et al. 1994; Keashly and Neuman 2008; McKay et al. 2008). Bullying literature describe that university environment is a vulnerable place of its occurrence. Our national culture, autocratic culture style of heads of departments, and increased demands for efficiency as well as changing global landscape of education are causal factors in the occurrence of bullying.

Workplace bullying has severe consequences. Bullying not only damage employees ‘personality but also harm his or her working life. Employees who have exposure of bullying suffer in anxiety, stress, PTSD. According to the findings of various studies bullied workers also have low level of self-esteem than non-bullied workers (Naime, 2003 & Agervold, 2007). Studied also found that bullying is correlated with psychological strains among employees of universities. Bullied employees also suffer in interpersonal strains. Such behaviors include irritability, isolation, and withdrawal. Employees with physical complaint show symptoms of cardiovascular problem, sleep and eating disruptions.

Employee’s turnover and absenteeism are also the major consequences of bullying vocational strains. This would lead to low level of job satisfaction and employees’ turnover.

Quine (2001) found that employees who had been bullied reported lower levels of job satisfaction.

Employees' turnover is a great loss for organizations. Any organization spends a lot on their employees. Institutions not only bear financial loss but also experienced employees when they leave their institution. So, there is need to give awareness of this problem to all employees particularly employees of higher education institutes. In short, Advance in awareness of bullying phenomenon help to use more effective prevention and intervention strategies.

### **Implications**

- The present paper is helpful for employees to understand bullying phenomenon and to adopt the better coping strategies.
- This discussion is also rich for clinicians to treat victims of bullying.
- This paper is also useful for management in order to make better policies to deal this alarming phenomenon.

### **Conclusion**

Bullying in academia is a longstanding issue with a very brief history of research. Workplace bullying is a distinguished phenomenon from other general workplace stressors because of consistency of its occurrence and power disparity exists between the victim and perpetrator. This is true that researchers should give attention to their own backyards. This is also irrefutable that university teachers experience such negative behaviors continuously So, there is strong need for the employees of higher education to be aware of, address and stop workplace bullying.

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