

WORKPLACE BULLYING: THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS IN KUWADZANA CLUSTER, HARARE, ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

Bullying among teachers merited interest for many reasons. These included its possible detrimental effects on the students, its ability to cause low morale among teachers, a high turnover of trained staff and, poor quality of pupils' results. This study examined the experience of workplace bullying among teachers in Kuwadzana Cluster, Harare, Zimbabwe. The experiences included verbal workplace bullying, nonverbal workplace bullying, practical workplace bullying and performance related workplace bullying. The survey research design was used for the study. The population for the study was five hundred and twenty six (526) teachers from Kuwadzana Cluster. The sample for the study comprised of one hundred and eighty (180) teachers from both primary and secondary schools. The research instrument for the study was a questionnaire of the five point Likert scale. The questionnaire was face and content validated and reliability was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability method. A reliability coefficient of 0.951 was obtained for the instrument. The data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive statistics and regression analysis was used for the analysis of data. The study revealed that teachers were sometimes subjected to belittling remarks about their work or personal life with a mean of 2.5698. On the overall, teachers in Kuwadzana cluster rarely experienced verbal workplace bullying, nonverbal workplace bullying, practical workplace bullying and performance related workplace bullying. Teachers rarely experienced stress and stress related health problems and mental health problems. They, however, experienced low morale as a result of workplace bullying with a mean value of 2.8111. The more qualified the teachers; the more they experienced workplace bullying as indicated by the positive Beta value of 0.623. The experience of workplace bullying

accounted for 49.7% variance and had a high effect on the effects of workplace bullying. Based on these findings, recommendations were made.

Keywords: Workplace Bullying, Experience, Teachers, Stress, Zimbabwe

Introduction

There is no universally agreed upon definition of workplace bullying. Lan (2010) argued that due to lack of an integrated conceptualisation of workplace bullying, there was a lack of a functional definition. However, it was observed that definitions of workplace bullying contained at least one common element: repeated mistreatment of another. Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper (2011), posited that most researchers defined workplace bullying as requiring two factors; a power differential and a pattern of harmful behaviour that was pervasive, persistent and repeated. The two conclusions cited above suggested that a conflict could not be called bullying if the incident was isolated or if two parties of approximately equal strength were in conflict, (Pinkos -Cobb, 2012).

Whilst most researchers seemed to agree that the repeated nature of workplace conflict or harassment qualified it as workplace bullying. Olsen (2010) further noted that workplace bullying had four elements; (i) unwanted, (ii) unwarranted, (iii) repeated (iv) detrimental behaviour. Thus, as Hor (2012) conceded, where behaviour was neither serious nor repeated, it was unlikely to be found to constitute an occurrence of workplace bullying. Olsen (2010) also noted that some people were offended by the term 'workplace bullying' but he argued that the practice was more offensive and a disgrace to the notion of a civilised society.

Other terms for workplace bullying as revealed by Einarsen et al (2011) were 'mobbing at work,' a term used in the Scandinavian and German countries and, 'bullying at work,' as it was referred to in English speaking countries. Pinkos -Cobb (2012) further pointed out that another term for workplace bullying was 'status blind harassment.' However, some authors distinguish workplace bullying from mobbing. According to the Workplace Bullying Institute (2012), workplace bullying was one on one mistreatment while mobbing had multiple perpetrators who ganged up on a single target. Synthesising the various definitions that were explored, the working definition for this research is that workplace bullying is a serious and repeated mistreatment of an employee or employees in the workplace which could cause harm to the recipient.

Workplace bullying, unlike school yard bullying is a subject that many researchers seem to have evaded. While school yard bullying has been given a lot of attention for over three decades, the same cannot be said of workplace bullying. The term, workplace bullying, invokes negative feelings

but, defining bullying in the context of adults at work might not be as easy as defining school yard bullying. Researchers continue to expose the reality of workplace bullying and its chronic effects on the workers.

The meaning of work in our society is intimately linked with human dignity and work plays a critical role in the very constitution of a society, posited Heap and Harvey (2012). In the Nordic Region, Hansen (2011) observed that research on bullying at work started in the 1980's in Sweden and soon spread to Finland and Norway, with Denmark and Iceland catching up during the late 1990's. Similarly, Keashly and Neuman (2010) observed that in the 1990's, researchers began to discuss and explore bullying among adults in the work settings.

In recent decades, bullying has come to be realised as a problem that was ultimately counter-productive, (Mata, 2012). In the same vein, Einarson, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper (2011) suggested that exposure to bullying had been claimed to be a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than any other work related stress put together. Thus, Lisa and Harvey (2012) lamented that it was distressing to acknowledge that for an increasing number of workers, their experience of work and their treatment within the workplace, was a negative one.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a Monster Global Poll conducted in May 2011 revealed that 64% of the respondents had been bullied at work, 36% had never experienced it and 16% had seen it happen to others, as cited by Pinkos-Cobb (2012). Unfortunately, while bullying at work was reported to be more rampant, Thompson (2012) pointed out that such behaviour had been frequently overlooked as an area of concern.

Within occupations, teachers reported the highest level of difficulties with managers (86.4%), while health service (53.6%) and university employees (51.4%) are the most frequent targets of peer bullying, Hoel, cited in Weinberg, Sutherland and Cooper (2010). To drive home the seriousness of this issue and bullying in general, Turbul Hill Lawyers (2013) reported that in 2012 (Australia) more than 2,500 people committed suicide and in more than 80% of the cases, bullying was found to be a major contributing factor.

The trend of workplace bullying seems to be increasing and thus Oade (2009) bemoaned the fact that as incidents of workplace bullying increased, so did the degree to which the workplace became an unsafe place for the people who were bullied and for those who observed what was happening and worried that they might be next in line. Unfortunately too, Hansen and the Nordic Bullying Network Group (2011) revealed that research had shown that the security granted the individual worker by law was not necessarily enforced by employers or health and safety authorities.

Whilst there has been much interest in workplace bullying, it is important to note, as suggested by Hor (2012), that there was no single universally accepted definition of workplace bullying because different working definitions of the term were used by various courts, government bodies and other organisations. In Africa, the two countries where research on workplace bullying had been done are Nigeria and South Africa, for example by Cunniff and Mostert (2012) in South Africa and Owoyemi (2012) in Nigeria. However, neither of the afore-mentioned were researches that particularly focused on workplace bullying in education. In Zimbabwe, there seemed to be no documented scholarly research on workplace bullying. There was a gap in knowledge on the experience of workplace bullying among teachers in Zimbabwe and this research focused on Kuwadzana District.

Statement of the Problem

Bullying is an existing antisocial behaviour that had been frequently overlooked as an area of concern and as such, bullying among teachers merited interest for many reasons including its possible detrimental effects on the students, its ability to cause low morale among teachers, a high turnover of trained staff and, poor quality of pupils' results. The impact of bullying extended beyond teachers, to the students, the parents and society as a whole. There had been no research to determine the experience of teachers with workplace bullying in Kuwadzana Cluster, Zimbabwe. This research examined the extent to which teachers experienced the various types of workplace bullying as well as determine the degree to which teachers experienced the effects of workplace bullying.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following research questions

1. What are the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of gender, age, qualification and teaching experience?
2. To what extent do teachers experience workplace bullying in terms of
 - Verbal bullying
 - Non-verbal bullying
 - Practical bullying
 - Performance related bullying?
3. To what degree do teachers experience the effect of workplace bullying in terms of:
 - Stress and stress related health problems
 - Mental health problems
 - Career problems?

4. To what extent is teachers' experiences of workplace bullying in terms of verbal, non-verbal, practical and performance related workplace bullying affected by their demographic characteristics?
5. To what degree are the effects of workplace bullying affected by demographic characteristics of teachers and the extent to which they experienced workplace bullying?

Research Methodology

This study examined the experience of workplace bullying among teachers in Kuwadzana Cluster, Harare, Zimbabwe. The survey research design was used for the study. The population for the study was five hundred and twenty six (526) teachers from Kuwadzana Cluster. The sample for the study was made up of one hundred and eighty (180) teachers, from nine (9) schools; twenty (20) teachers from each school. The teachers were selected using the simple random sampling technique. The research instrument for the study was a questionnaire of the five point Likert scale developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was face and content validated and the reliability determined using the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability method. A reliability coefficient of 0.951 was obtained for the instrument. The questionnaires were administered personally by the researchers. The data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive statistics and regression analysis was used for the analysis of data.

Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis are presented in relation to the research questions.

Research Question One

What are the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of gender, age, qualification and teaching experience?

On gender, out of a total of 180 teachers 51 (28.3%) were male while 129 (71.7%) were female thus forming the majority of respondents. The majority of the respondents (43.3%) fell in to the "41 years and above" age group. There was also a corresponding decrease in the number of respondents as the age group decreased. The "20-25years," "26-30," "31-35," and "36-40 years" age groups made up 5.0%, 12.8%, 16.7% and 22.2% respectively. On qualification, the majority of respondents (61.7%) were diploma holders, 62 (34.4%) were bachelor's degree holders and only 7 (3.9%) were master's degree holders. Most of the respondents (58.9%) had teaching experience of 11 years and above.

Research Question Two

To what extent do teachers experience workplace bullying in terms of:

- Verbal bullying
- Non-verbal bullying
- Practical bullying
- Performance related bullying

Table 1 shows the extent to which teachers experienced verbal workplace bullying. It is evident from the table that teachers were sometimes subjected to belittling remarks about their work or personal life (mean, 2.57). However, the teachers rarely experienced being undermined especially in front of others, being blamed unfairly, being taunted where the intention was to embarrass and humiliate. The overall mean of 2.48 showed that teachers in Kuwadzana Cluster rarely experienced verbal workplace bullying.

Table 1: Verbal Workplace Bullying

Verbal Workplace Bullying	Mean	Std. Deviation
Subjected to belittling remarks about your work or personal life	2.57	1.37366
Undermined, especially in front of others	2.48	1.35887
Blamed unfairly	2.50	1.28990
Taunted where the intention is to embarrass and humiliate	2.42	1.34443
Verbal Workplace Bullying Average	2.48	1.11551

The high standard deviation for the items showed that the teachers were heterogeneous in their responses. These findings seem to contradict Marszalek (2012)'s report that revealed a culture of character assassination, threats and spying in schools. This conclusion, however, could have been context specific.

Table 2 shows the extent to which teachers experienced non-verbal workplace bullying.

Table 2: Non Verbal Workplace Bullying

Non-verbal Workplace Bullying	Mean	Std. Deviation
A threatening posture	2.41	1.47113
Glaring or rolling of one's eyes	2.18	1.48796
Finger pointing	2.23	1.32000
The silent treatment	2.31	1.32768
Non Verbal Workplace Bullying Average	2.29	1.01763

The overall mean of 2.29 shows that teachers in Kuwadzana Cluster rarely experienced non-verbal workplace bullying. The various types of workplace bullying were all rarely experienced. Teachers were heterogeneous in their responses as evidenced by the high standard

deviations. The results of the investigation on practical workplace bullying are shown in Table 3

Table 3: Practical Workplace Bullying

Practical Workplace Bullying	Mean	Std. Deviation
Subjected to humiliating jokes	2.47	1.41944
Denied access to your office and its property	1.93	1.28184
Subjected to insulting memos, e-mail, text messages or phone calls	1.66	1.18562
Practical Workplace Bullying Average	2.00	.98098

Teachers in Kuwadzana Cluster were rarely subjected to humiliating jokes, denied access to their office and its property, subjected to insulting memos, e-mail, text messages or phone calls, with means of 2.47, 1.93 and 1.66, respectively. The overall mean of 2.00 showed that teachers rarely experienced practical workplace bullying.

Table 4 shows the extent to which teachers experienced performance related workplace bullying.

Table 4: Performance Related Workplace Bullying

Performance Related Workplace Bullying	Mean	Std. Deviation
Constantly criticised and subjected to trivial fault finding	2.34	1.41486
Isolated from what is happening in the school	2.49	1.48549
Given unrealistic goals which are changed without notice	2.36	1.45940
Prevented access to opportunities such as promotion or manpower development	2.21	1.42081
Subjected to excessive monitoring	2.10	1.33669
Performance Related Workplace Bullying Average	2.30	1.08135

Teachers rarely experienced being constantly criticised and subjected to trivial fault finding, isolated from what is happening in the school, given unrealistic goals which are changed without notice, prevented access to opportunities such as promotion or manpower development and subjected to excessive monitoring with means of 2.34, 2.49, 2.34, 2.21 and 2.10 respectively. The overall mean of 2.30 shows that teachers in Kuwadzana Cluster rarely experienced performance related workplace bullying. The high standard deviation showed that teachers were heterogeneous in their responses. These findings contradict Riler, Duncan and Edwards (2012)'s suggestion that experiences of workplace bullying peculiar to the teaching profession included the questioning of one's judgement, being set impossible targets, deadlines or workload.

Research Question 3

To what degree did teachers experience the effect of workplace bullying in terms of:

- Stress and stress related health problems
- Mental health problems
- Career problems?

Table 5 shows the extent to which teachers experienced stress and stress related health problems.

Table 5: Stress and Stress Related Health Problems

Stress and Stress Related Health Problems	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety	2.18	1.26725
Sleeplessness	1.90	1.17107
Fatigue	2.30	1.35194
High Blood Pressure	2.18	1.42536
Mood swings	2.33	1.31795
Stress and Stress Related Health Problems Average	2.12	1.00088

The table shows that teachers rarely experienced anxiety, sleeplessness, fatigue, high blood pressure, and mood swings, with means of 2.18, 1.90, 2.30, 2.18 and 2.33. The overall mean of 2.12 revealed that teachers in Kuwadzana Cluster rarely experienced stress and stress related health problems caused by workplace bullying. The Australian Institute of Employment Rights (2012) suggested that there was compelling evidence that mental health was directly affected by workplace culture. Similarly, the effects of workplace bullying on mental health were also investigated.

Table 6: Mental Health Problems

Mental Health Problems	Mean	Std. Deviation
Depression	2.11	1.35697
Confusion	1.94	1.18521
Self-Doubt	1.86	1.15194
Mental Health Problems Average	1.97	1.03719

It is evident from the table above that teachers rarely experienced depression, confusion and self-doubt with means of 2.11, 1.94 and 1.86. The overall mean of 1.9683 showed that teachers in Kuwadzana Cluster rarely experienced mental health problems as effects of workplace bullying.

This research used the behavioural approach to assessing workplace bullying. Farmer (2011) suggested that individuals who had higher levels of negative affectivity were more inclined to magnify potential threats such as workplace bullying. The research revealed that teachers in Kuwadzana

Cluster rarely experienced the four categories of workplace bullying and as such they also rarely experienced mental health problems.

The effects of workplace bullying on career problems are shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Career Problems

Career Problems	Mean	Std. Deviation
Absenteeism	1.58	1.04486
Sickness leave	1.68	1.03546
Retarded career development	1.74	1.09539
Decreased job satisfaction	2.48	1.40761
Reduced commitment to the organisation	2.25	1.32622
Low morale	2.81	1.44465
Career Problems Average	2.04	.80943

Table 7 shows the extent to which teachers experienced career problems as effects of workplace bullying. Teachers sometimes experienced low morale as evidenced by the mean of 2.81. Teachers rarely experienced absenteeism, sickness leave, retarded career development, decreased job satisfaction and reduced commitment to the organisation with means of 1.58, 1.68, 1.74, 2.48, and 2.25 respectively. The overall mean of 2.04 showed that teachers in Kuwadzana Cluster rarely experienced career problems due to workplace bullying.

The high standard deviation for the items showed that teachers were heterogeneous in their responses. These findings are consistent with Burke and Cooper (2010) who posited that being exposed to workplace bullying could change the target’s perceptions of their work environment and life in general into one of threat, danger, insecurity, and self-questioning. Since the research reveals a rare exposure to workplace bullying, it tallies with the rare effects on the career.

Research Question Four

To what extent were teachers’ experiences of workplace bullying in terms of verbal, non-verbal, practical and performance related workplace bullying affected by their demographic characteristics?

Table 8a: Regression Verbal Workplace Bullying on Demographic Characteristics

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Statistics				
					R Square Change	F	df1	df2	Sig.
1	.157 ^a	.025	.019	1.10483	.025	4.380	1	173	.038

a. Predictors: (Constant), Qualification

Table 8a shows that qualification of teachers accounted for 1.9% variance in workplace bullying. The F value of 4.380 was found to be significant, an indication that the result of the regression analysis was true and not by chance. The correlation coefficient of 0.157 shows a weak relationship between teachers’ qualifications and verbal workplace bullying.

Table 8b below, shows that the Beta value of 0.307 was positive, an indication that, the more qualified the teachers, the more they experienced verbal workplace bullying. These findings seem to agree with Osterman (2010)’s claim that the incidence of bullying was higher among workers with higher educational qualifications. Haley, Stein and Dingwell (2010) also reported, as highlighted earlier, that 84 percent of victims had either some college experience, undergraduate degree or an advanced degree.

Table 8b: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.354	.104		22.631	.000
	Qualification	.307	.147	.157	2.093	.038

a. Dependent Variable: Verbal Workplace Bullying Average

Table 9a and 9b show the regression analysis for the effect of demographic characteristics on practical workplace bullying.

Table 9a: Regression of Practical Workplace Bullying on Demographic Characteristics

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Statistics				
					R Square Change	F	df1	df2	Sig.
1	.217 ^a	.047	.042	.96033	.047	8.564	1	173	.004

a. Predictors: (Constant), Qualification

Table 9b: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.842	.091		20.283	.000
	Qualification	.373	.127	.217	2.926	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Practical Workplace Bullying Average

From the model summary, teachers’ qualifications accounted for 4.2% variance in practical workplace bullying. The F value of 8.564 was

found to be significant, an indication that the result of the regression analysis is true. The Beta value of 0.373 indicates that the more qualified the teachers are, the more they experience practical workplace bullying such as being subjected to humiliating jokes, being denied access to their office and its property and being subjected to insulting memos, e-mail, text messages or phone calls. These findings correspond to Pinkos-Cobb (2012) who stated that the most likely victims of workplace bullying were the most skilled.

Table 10a shows the regression analysis for the effect of demographic characteristics on performance related workplace bullying.

Table 10a: Regression of Related Workplace Bullying on Demographic Characteristics

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Statistics				
					R Square Change	F	df1	df2	Sig.
1	.333 ^a	.111	.105	1.02286	.111	19.939	1	160	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Qualification

Teacher’s qualification accounted for 10.5% variance in performance workplace bullying. The F value of 19,939 was found to be significant, an indication that the result of the regression analysis is true. The correlation coefficient of 0.111 shows a weak relationship between teachers qualification a performance related workplace bullying.

Table 10b: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.030	.100		20.203	.000
	Qualification	.623	.140	.333	4.465	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Performance Related Workplace Bullying Average

The positive Beta value of 0.623 indicated that the more qualified the teachers were, the more they experienced performance related workplace bullying.

Research Question Five

To what degree are the effects of workplace bullying affected by the demographic characteristics of teachers and the extent to which they experienced workplace bullying?

On how the teachers’ experience of the effects of workplace bullying is affected by the experience of workplace bullying the model summary

(Table 11a) revealed that the experience of workplace bullying accounted for 49.7% variance on the effects of workplace bullying. The F value, at 133.227 was significant. The correlation coefficient of 0.707 shows substantial positive relationship between experience of workplace bullying and the effects of workplace bullying.

Table 11a: Regression of the effects of workplace bullying on the experience of workplace bullying

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Statistics				
					R Square Change	F	df1	df2	Sig.
1	.707 ^a	.500	.497	.55326	.500	133.227	1	133	.000

From Table 11b below, the beta value of 0.621 was found to be positive. This indicates that the more teachers experienced workplace bullying, the more they experienced the effects of workplace bullying. As noted earlier, Giacalone and Promislo (2013) suggested that a lot of research had been done to study the effects of workplace bullying and the results were highly consistent. Bullying had severe effects on wellbeing.

Table 11b Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.625	.131		4.783	.000
	Experience of Workplace Bullying	.621	.054	.707	11.542	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Bullying effects

a. Predictors: (Constant), Experience of Workplace Bullying

Conclusion

It emerged from the findings that teachers rarely experienced verbal workplace bullying, non-verbal workplace bullying, practical workplace bullying, and performance related workplace bullying. However, the high standard deviation indicated that respondents were heterogeneous in their responses. The study also revealed that the more qualified the teachers were, the more they experienced workplace bullying in terms of verbal, practical and performance related workplace bullying. In the same vein, the more teachers experienced workplace bullying, the more they experienced the effects of workplace bullying.

It is therefore recommended that the Human Resources Department in the Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe treat cases of workplace bullying seriously even though they may appear to be minor. The department could, for example, draft an instrument to define workplace bullying and the procedure for redress. Effort should be made by the responsible authority to remunerate and/or promote teachers according to their qualifications since it emerged that the more qualified the teachers were, the more they experienced verbal workplace bullying.

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