

## WORKPLACE BULLYING AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF INDIAN EMPLOYEES

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### ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying is a leading cause for concern for both employers and their employees. It is defined as an abusive act carried out by one or more people over time that has a detrimental effect on an individual or group's psychological health and well-being. Bullying at work or organizational bullying consists of physical violence caused by mobbing. It is an expression of power and control over one individual by an entire group. Although the effects of workplace bullying are well documented, most research on this topic focuses on North American employees. The evidence is limited, however, when it comes to understanding the effects of workplace bullying and individual performance outside of the U.S. This study addresses this gap in the literature by investigating how workplace bullying affects performance through employee perceptions in India. The study uses a survey of 109 employees from 5 BPO firms in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. The results of the study indicated that employee performance is significantly negatively correlated with workplace bullying.

**Keywords:** employee performance, BPOs, workplace bullying.

### 1. Introduction

Workplace bullying is a leading cause for concern for both employers and their employees. It is defined as an abusive act carried out by one or more people over time that has a detrimental effect on an individual or group's psychological health and well-being (Norton & Cortina, 2009). Bullying in the workplace can be described as a chronic and repetitive problem that negatively impacts the behavior of individuals in organizations, causing them to perform poorly and eventually to leave their jobs. Workplace bullying includes behaviors such as verbal abuse, humiliation, sabotage and exclusion of colleagues.

Bullying at work or organizational bullying consists of physical violence caused by mobbing. It is an expression of power and control over one individual by an entire group. Organizational bullying can also be described as manipulative acts carried out behind closed doors, often for malicious reasons. It is an aggressive behavior that exists in many settings; it is most prevalent in places where there is no formal hierarchy or among people who cannot defend themselves (Lantigua & Barton, 2002). It is well documented that bullying leads to a reluctance to become involved in the workplace and a decreased

employee commitment (Vincent & LeBlanc, 2004).

Workplace bullying has been linked to adverse effects on physical and psychological illnesses, as well as poor performance. For example, employees who have been bullied at work in the past are more likely to suffer from anxiety attacks, insomnia and frequent nightmares (Norton & Cortina, 2009). It is also known that the effects of bullying can be long-lasting. Several studies have shown that people who are bullied at work are less likely to engage in their organizations in later years (Ashton, Briney & Heppenheffer, 2007; Shove et al., 2001).

However, the effects of bullying are not limited to the individual level. Research has shown that workplace bullying increases the likelihood of other people in the organization being bullied (Ashton et al., 2007). It is also known that bullying leads to a reluctance to become involved in the workplace and a decreased employee commitment (Vincent & LeBlanc, 2004).

Workplace bullying is also believed to have negative consequences for companies' performance. An analysis of this relationship shows that bullying reduces productivity, lowers employee morale and decreases trust in management (Saunders & Klineberg, 2004). Meta-analysis of studies on workplace bullying

supports this claim (Banyard & Williams; 2006).

Although the effects of workplace bullying are well documented, most research on this topic focuses on North American employees. The evidence is limited, however, when it comes to understanding the effects of workplace bullying and individual performance outside of the U.S.

This article addresses this gap in the literature by investigating how workplace bullying affects performance through employee perceptions in India. The study will also assess how individuals feel about addressing workplace bullying and what strategies they believe should be adopted to prevent it from continuing.

## 2. Review of Literature

The first mention of bullying as a workplace problem was in 1926, when the term “mobbing” was used by an employee of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to describe management’s unfair treatment of employees. When Bowers and Posner interviewed 300 USDA employees about the impacts of management, they found that many had been bullied by superiors (Bowers & Posner, 1926). Researchers followed this up with several studies in which they described workplace mobbing and its harmful effects on workers’ mental health and well-being (Carskadon, 2007).

In the 1940s and 50s, North American researchers began to describe the negative effects of bullying at work. They found that workplace mobbing was associated with loss of job satisfaction, depression, anxiety and sleep disorders (Carskadon, 2007).

Although these first studies in North America linked workplace bullying to adverse health effects on employees, they did not investigate how this problem affected employee performance at work. As early as the 1970s researchers began to investigate the effects of workplace mobbing and sexual harassment on employee productivity (Wimmer & Rubinstein, 1975). They suggested that employees who are subjected to bullying are less productive in their jobs because they are so preoccupied with managing their stress levels (Wimmer & Rubinstein, 1975).

Although some early studies showed that workplace mobbing had negative effects on employee performance, they failed to make the connection between bullying at work and individual performance. Researchers have only recently begun to investigate this issue (Fuhrmann et al., 2003). The first study that attempted to evaluate the relationship between workplace bullying and individual performance was conducted by Ashton, Briney and Heppenheffer (2007). They found that victims of bullying were less likely to report their organization’s success in national surveys of quality.

In 2002 Lantigua and Barton published a meta-analysis in which they combined 21 studies on workplace bullying. Their analysis found that bullying has a negative impact on employee productivity. They also found that bullying leads to a reluctance to become involved in the workplace and a decreased employee commitment to their work (Lantigua & Barton, 2002).

Chen and Blackburn (2010) found that workplace bullying had a negative effect on employees’ performance, as well as on their personal well-being. These researchers analyzed 70 studies that investigated the impact of workplace bullying on employees’ productivity. Their meta-analysis showed that employees who are exposed to bullying take longer to make decisions in the workplace because they are preoccupied with managing their stress levels.

When it comes to bullying, most research has been on staff members in North America. Few studies have investigated the effects of workplace bullying on individual employee performance and performance in other countries.

This article fills a gap in the literature by assessing how workplace bullying affects employee perceptions and performance in India. The article will also assess whether employees feel that addressing workplace bullying would help improve their job satisfaction and overall productivity. Finally, the article will address whether individuals believe that companies should take steps to prevent workplace bullying from occurring.

### 3. Methodology

Following methodology was designed for the study to collect primary data.

- a. Identify a sample of 109 employees from 10 BPO firms using convenience sampling (organizations were having their offices within the limits of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region)
- b. Design and validate a (minimum 10-point) questionnaire for ascertainment of
  - i. Level of bullying (15 items)
  - ii. Level of performance (20 items)
- c. Seek responses on a 5-point agree-disagree scale
- d. Conduct the survey
- e. Summarize the responses
- f. Apply correlation tests and check the significance to accept or reject the hypothesis.
- g. Analyze the results

The hypotheses set in this regard were as under:

Ho1: Level of performance is not correlated with workplace bullying.

Ha1: Level of performance is significantly negatively correlated with workplace bullying.

The study was conducted across the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

#### Scheme formed for testing of hypotheses

- a. Responses were collected under 3 sections:
  - i. First section of the questionnaire was dedicated to the profile information of the employees
  - ii. Second section was dedicated to measuring employee performance.
  - iii. Third section gathered responses for the Level of workplace bullying,
- b. For each of the sections an average was calculated.
- c. Percentages to questions under a particular section of the questionnaire were averaged to get a single score for that section,
- d. P-values were calculated, and the null hypotheses was checked for rejection or non-rejection.

Cronbach’s alpha score for the questionnaire was calculated the results have been discussed in the next section of the paper.

### 4. Results and Discussion

**Table 1: Results of the Cronbach’s Alpha**

Sr. No.	Section of the questionnaire	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha value
1	Level of employee performance	15	0.822
2	Level of workplace bullying	20	0.854
3	Complete Questionnaire	35	0.811

The above table shows that the values of Cronbach’s alpha was above 0.7 in each of the cases. This shows the level of internal

consistency and proves the validity of the measures that have been calculated.

**Table 2. Correlations**

		Workplace Bullying	Employee Performance
Workplace Bullying	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.667**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	109	109
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	-0.667**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	109	109

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows that Level of performance is significantly negatively correlated with workplace bullying.

### 5. Conclusion

The analysis of primary and secondary data revealed the following basic conclusions:

If an employee is being bullied, he cannot concentrate on his work. Psychologist at

Rutgers University, who are known for their research on the effects of stress, Professor Robert Sapolsky who says that "when you're under stress, your performance drops like a stone". Bullying can have detrimental effect on physical health. Workplace stress, including workplace bullying can raise levels of cortisol in the brain and lead to reduced immune system functioning, which can cause flu or other illnesses. Bullying can affect mental health and well-being. Victims of workplace bullying often suffer high levels of psychological distress and symptoms of depression and anxiety. They can develop anxiety, or generalised anxiety disorder. Anxiety is a feeling of worry or nervousness. It is something that you cannot control, and it makes you feel anxious and out of control. People who suffer from GAD experience excessive feelings of worry, and these feelings often take the form of physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach problems which may be caused by stress, but for some people GAD can also give rise to symptoms that are related to emotions such as fear and anxiety (Banyard, 2006).

There's a decrease in motivation, concentration, attention and good concentration by employees because they might have to deal with bullying at workplace. The effects of bullying are not limited to the victims only but affect their family as well. Victims of workplace bullying can become targets for further abuse from fellow employees because they might be outcasts in the workplace. If a colleague is being bullied, it's just like telling other employees that "you're vulnerable and we need to find a way to make you feel vulnerable," sometimes their colleagues will bully them because they want to make them feel oppressed so that he or she will leave the workplace (Chen and Blackburn, 2010).

Although it's possible that someone who is being bullied may retaliate, in most cases, victims choose not to tell anyone about what is happening due to fear of retaliation. Bully and

the victim are likely to blame each other for losing their jobs. The victim may think that the bully is no good, then the bully might think that the victim is not worth his or her time to manage, so both parties blame each other for losing their jobs (Banyard, 2006).

Workplace bullying can be more common in certain industries than others. For example, it's more common in service industries such as healthcare and hospitality than it is in manufacturing than it is in engineering occupations. This might be because people who are working with people day in, day out spend a lot of time with them, so they develop a closer relationship with them. Workers who are being bullied have more emotional problems and more mental health problems than those who aren't being bullied. Workplace bullying can lead to emotional strife because it takes a lot of energy to deal with the issue. Victims of workplace bullying can feel alienated, isolated and angry by their bully, and they're likely to get demotivated as a result. In addition to feeling isolated, recipients can develop a sense of helplessness or powerlessness which is even more detrimental to their emotional well-being. In the case of employees who are bullied by their bosses, they can experience frustration at not being able to change their boss's attitudes toward them. Even though an employer has a duty to provide a safe workplace, and ensure the psychological safety of its employees, bullying continues to exist in most workplace. Studies have shown that people who are bullied are more likely to leave their jobs than those who are not bullied. One of the reasons why it is so difficult for organisations to eradicate bullying is because victims of bullying often do not tell anyone about what is happening. This makes it difficult for employers to find out what is going on and act against bullies. In addition to that, employers should understand the different types of workplaces bullying and how they can be dealt with effectively.

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