The Psychological Effects of Workplace Bullying among Bangladeshi Women

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Abstract

Bullying behavior distinct as an aggressive behavior where a victim cannot defend himself/herself. Workplace bullying commonly uses repeated and persistent negative behavior. It includes mistreatment, use of power, verbal abuse, disrespectful, and indiscrimination. In terms of mistreatment refers to incivility, third party violence, sexual harassment [1]. The present study describes the pattern of bullying behavior and the characteristics of the psychological distress of Bangladeshi working women who were a victim of workplace bullying. The perception of bullying behavior varies from culture to culture. From the western perspective, bullying behavior described as a harmful act. Moreover, India, Nigeria, and Turkey people describe the power and power abuse as bullying behavior. Early detection of bullying behavior reduces work-related stress and increase productivity. The concept of workplace bullying in Bangladesh is a comparatively new topic, very few researches conducted in this area. In 2018, Commonwealth Human Rights in Bangladesh released a report about workplace bullying, and the report stated that 10% women police in Bangladesh encountered sexual harassment in their workplace. Another study shows that 12.7% of working women faced harassment in their workplace.

Keywords: Workplace Bullying; Psychological Factors; Physical Violence

Introduction

Bullying behavior in a work setting is a significant organizational and social concern [2]. Workplace Bullying is a persistent and repeated mistreatment of one person or group by one or more perpetrators that cause emotional and physical harm [3]. These mistreatment ranges from verbal to non-verbal such as threatening, intimidation, and work interference. The bullying behavior also includes physical and psychological abuse too. Workplace bullying can be occurred by social media, text, and physical gestures. However, school bullying is different from workplace bullying. A research study shows that workplace bullying rise than before in Britain's workplace [4]. It is not true that only children affected by bullying, adults too. The effects of workplace bullying not limited to the victim employee only but also affects employee's morality and culture within an organization. However, several studies demonstrated that victims of workplace bullying suffering from pain, mental distress, emotional harm, and career damage [4]. The emphasis of the present study was to find out the psychological effects on workplace bullying among Bangladesh women.

The pattern of workplace bullying is persistent, hateful, offensive behavior. This behavior can be intentional or accidental, but the victim perceives as intentional behavior that was trying to control him/her. Some of the countries consider physical violence as bullying behavior, too [5]. Perpetrators of bullying behavior can be individual or group. Hitting, name-calling, making upset, and anger also finds as bullying behavior. Bullying behavior divided into indirect and direct approaches. The example of direct bullying behavior is verbal in the

context of face-to-face interactions such as threatening, showing anger, and verbal abuse. On the other side, indirect bullying is spreading rumors and create stress at the workplace [6]. According to Nielsen and Einarsen, bullying behavior is a situation where a victim receives repeated harmful acts from the perpetrator [7]. Bullying is manageable in a work setting. However, managing bullying in a work setting causes financial losses and destroys employees' career excellence, too [8].

Braithwaite., *et al.* (2005) conducted a survey on Bangladeshi Corporate community where the victim of bullying had a lower score on shame acknowledgment (feeling guilt and shame) and higher score on shame displacement (blaming others and hitting out others) [9]. A study conducted on 27 working Bangladeshi individuals to find out the employee's experience about workplace bullying [10]. The findings of the study show that poor organizational culture was the cause of workplace bullying [10].

In Bangladesh, the topic of workplace bullying is comparatively new from another country. There were few studies found about workplace bullying among working women in Bangladesh. Some of the research found about sexual harassment which is another form of violence. According to the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 10% of Bangladeshi women police face sexual harassment in their workplace (2018). A survey conducted by Care Bangladesh and Kormojibi Nari state that 12.7% of working women encounter sexual harassment in their workplace. However, there is no specific law against workplace bullying in Bangladesh too.

Nevertheless, there were other laws that aid in protecting working women. In Bangladesh, a woman has the equal right to work in any area without bullying and harassment. Women should work without fear of being humiliated or without suffering mentally, physically, and emotionally.

Adult bullies are different from school bullies because students bully more likely to be physically aggressive, and coworkers or superiors prefer to use a psychological harassment approach. A high occurrence of mental health problems arises from stress, sleep disturbance, and depression [11]. 40% of respondents among 418 participants reported that they experienced bullying and 59% observed bullying incidents in the workplace (Business research lab, 2003, p.1). The victims or targets were showing a higher level of anxiety and depression level [2]. Some of the employees show withdrawal symptoms in the work environment, and sometimes they leave their jobs [12].

Maintaining psychological well-being in the workplace brings several positive outcomes, such as mental health, productivity, and organizational effectiveness. Giorgi., *et al.* (2016) state that maintaining a good relationship with coworkers develops emotional intelligence, which is essential in a work setting [13]. The mass communication media always highlighted workplace bullying, which involves physical violence and ignores subtle types of bullying, such as abusive words, humiliating, and spreading rumors. Non-violent bullying occurs more than physical abuse [14]. Workplace bullying affects employees' physical and psychological health because it is considered the most stressful phenomenon in the work setting [13].

Workplace bullying has the potential to affects an employee's career and family life [15]. In Bangladesh, there was a lack of research on workplace bullying and no research conducted on female workers. Lack of knowledge regarding bullying behavior in the workplace can lead to turnover problems [16]. Many people are experiencing bullying in workplace; among them, approximately two out of five employees bullied at work (Mental Health America, 2019). The victim and the observer of bullied take more leave from work than who are not bullied [15]. A comparative study shows that workplace bullying causes more harm than sexual harassment to the victim [17].

The present study will focus on the psychological effects among women victims of workplace bullying. Moreover, there was no study found on workplace bullying among Bangladeshi women. Previous research on workplace bullying focused on the effects of bullying behavior on productivity, loss of employees' morality, high level of absence caused by work-related anxiety and depression [15,18]. The present study was trying to find out another dimension of bullying among women, especially a country from Bangladesh, where women still fight for their primary education. Bullying is the least recognized cause of negative work environment, and employees spend more

time to avoid bullied situations and less time for duties [8]. Though many large organizations have policies against hostile behavior in a work environment, a large work environment triggers the opportunities of bullies. United States acted less proactive than European countries in passing law and regulation against workplace bullying. So, a country like Bangladesh, the situation is worse than here. For the following reason it is necessary to conduct research on workplace bullying among women employees and to find out the psychological effects of workplace bullying.

Literature Review

Bullying at work means offending, humiliating, isolating, or showing a negative attitude to someone [14]. Workplace bullying also refers to harmful acts because it is a repeated process where perpetrators targeted victims for bully [7]. The destructive actions are repeated over a long period (at least six months). An Individual who exposed to bullying behavior may be left their job or suffered severe [7]. Workplace bullying occurs in a work environment, such as emotional, physical, and psychological harassment [19]. In bullying behavior, there were two parties involve; one the victim and other was a perpetrator [7]. The pattern of bullying behavior is repeated and unwanted. The mistreatment and abusive behavior include threatening, humiliation, intimidating, sabotage, and visual abuse. The victim of bullying behavior felt frightened and irritated, and they also thought they deprive and isolation from their rights [20]. Work-related stress is not unusual, because people spend most of their time at the workplace. Stress theory defines that exposure to bullying behavior is a source of distress and poor mental health condition. There was a correlation between bullying, and the nurses left their organization [21].

Workplace bullying considers as a source of emotional distress. A descriptive study conducted among the USA registered nurses, where they reported that they perceive bullying behavior during work [22]. Early detection of negative or bullying behavior might decrease workplace bullying [23] - suicidal ideation related to many factors such as stress, work overload, personal loss. The psychiatric syndrome can be trigger suicidal ideation too, but not all people who have psychiatric syndrome they attempt suicide. There was a positive correlation found between suicidal ideation and being bullied [24]. Workplace bullying leads to an increase in suicidal ideation, too [25]. The cross-sectional study identifies the circumstantial evidence that related to the suicidal ideation and suicide. However, to understand the direct association with the cause of death and suicidal ideation longitudinal study is needed. A survey conducted among the European population shows that 7.8% of the participants suffer from a mood disorder, and 14% suffer from anxiety disorder [26]. One-third of British workers experience incivility and mistreatment in their workplace [27]. Bullying behavior at the workplace affects job satisfaction and job performance too. Bullying behavior decreases productivity and motivation [20]. Victim of bullies' behavior affects their social relationships such as isolation, social anxiety, and fear of judgment. NHS UK staff showed a symptom of depression and anxiety, which are the victim of bullying [28].

There was various research conducted on workplace bullying throughout the world, the result of those research show that workplace bullying has severe consequences, such as; stress and anxiety [29]; somatic symptom [14]; depression [30]; and fatigue [31]. Workplace bullying- are linked with poor psychological well-being and dysfunctional behavior [13]. Workplace bullying recognized as the most active cause of anxiety and depression compared to another job stressor [32]. A longitudinal study was conducted on workplace bullying; the result of that study revealed that there was a link between workplace bullying and depression [33]. Sometimes individuals who experience bullied committed suicide due to unbearable trauma [34].

The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder due to workplace bullying are social withdrawal, irritable, numbing, and anger and difficult to concentrate [35]. These symptoms lead an individual to impede their competencies. That means exposure to bullying behavior develops distress that decreases self-management ability.

The indirect relationship with bullying, such as witnesses of bullying or observe bullying behavior, also effects on psychological health. The nurse who sees or witness bullied incidence had a higher level of psychological distress and high level of burnout [36]. The individual

who experiences burnout has lack of achievement drive and adaptability [37]. There was an association between self-management ability and psychological distress [38]. For example, psychological distress describes the relation between peer achievement and peer abuse, which is the element of self-management ability. Workplace bullying may develop psychological pain that leads to impaired decision-making ability and lack of insight [27].

A systematic review stated that 20% of the employee had an adverse health effect caused by workplace mistreatment [39]. The frequently bullied person's report more sleeps difficulties than never bullied or occasionally bullied person [40]. There was a positive correlation found between workplace bullying and psychological distress [15]. 11% of workers report experience bullied in the workplace, and the categories of workers are from blue-collar to unskilled [7]. Job areas and types of jobs can be one predictor of bullying behavior in the workplace. Administrative and retails jobs report the highest rate in contrast to technology and finance job. There were several variables related to workplace bullying; for example, reduce work productivity and job satisfaction, increase absenteeism, and drug abuse [41]. Workplace bullying among nurses affected patients and staff tour over. There was a correlation between bullying and the job quit among nurses [42].

The theoretical perspective of bullying behavior describes that bullying behavior occurs from the cause of victim and perpetrator's personality traits or work-related characteristics [43]. Elfi Baillien., *et al*. 2009 conducted a qualitative study where they explore the three-way model of bullying behavior. The first model describes that a lack of coping strategy creates frustration as a result of being bullied. Berkowitz proposed a hypothesis of frustration-aggression; according to this, hypothesis stress in the workplace produces psychological discomfort [44]. Tension and frustration trigger aggressive behavior toward other people [45]. Fox and Spector stated that the stress-emotion model that describes stress behavior happens because of counterproductive work behavior [44]. According to social-interactionist perspective, stressful situation impacts social and family environment, which creates tension within them. The second model describes that interpersonal conflict arises from workplace bullying. The third and final model espouses that reinforcement encourages others to repeat the behavior again and again.

The Center for Disease Control in the USA revealed that workplace homicide is a serious public health concern that requires immediate attention by policymakers [46]. Workplace bullying is costing money employer money because it decreases productivity and costing employee's health [47]. Workplace bullying, directly and indirectly, costs to the organization. Direct costs are associated with absence, turnover, legal fees, and security fees [8,15]. Indirect damages are challenging to identify because of the visibility of indirect cost less. The indirect cost can be perceived in stressful environments, such as lead to job satisfaction.

Workplace bullying usually involves power play within the work environment where superior shows power and pressure toward a subordinate. Sometimes supervisors and managers express intimidating behavior toward their colleagues and assistant [5]. The target of the victim can be men or women. There was no difference according to gender as a victim [48]. Gholipour., *et al*. found that 2% of clerks report bullying at their work station [49]. The conflict and mistreatment between the same parties are not considered as bullying [14]. The victim must be felt inferior when bullying occurred - the power balance, not necessarily based on hierarchical position.

Workplace bullying is a sensitive issue nowadays all over the world. The area of bullying issues comparatively new among the South Asian population; there has been a little amount of research conducted on bullying among working women. The reason for this study was to do a descriptive study to understand the nature of workplace bullying among working women in South Asia and the psychological effects on them. The present research helps us to understand the bullying behavior from the perspective of women and the psychological effects of bullying behavior. This following study will be helping to understand the knowledge related to workplace bullying among South Asian women who are suffering from psychological distress as a cause of bullying. Working adult, report bullying in their workplace are 15 - 19% [37]. The perpetrator ratio of male and female are 70% and 60% accordingly, and 60% of victims are women [15]. In South Asian female are more vulnerable as a victim of bullying. The present study may help government or law enforcement officer to create

rules which are beneficiary of the victim.

Bullying in the workplace can be harmful to the victim, both physically and psychologically [29,31,36]. Although the relation between bullying and health is not parallel to people with poor physical and psychological health may be more vulnerable to becoming a victim of bullying [45]. Workplace bullying causes various symptoms, such as somatic disorder and sleeping difficulties [28].

From the discussion above, it can be determined that bullying can occur in many ways in many forms. Workplace bullying can affect harmfully on the mental health of a victim and can result in various psychological symptoms.

Conclusion and Summary

The literature of workplace bullying describes that bullying behavior is repeated hostile acts toward another within in workplace. The victim may find it difficult to protect themselves from being bullied due to power imbalance [50]. According to Leymann (1990), bullying behavior must occur with some amount of frequency, at least once in a week and over some time (at least six months). Workplace bullying is different from physical violence in the workplace.

The purpose of the present study is to find out the psychological effect on Bangladeshi working women who were bullied in the workplace. The objective of the present study is to observe the various form of workplace bullying, including physical violence. The study provides a clear definition of bullying and differentiates bullying from aggression and violence.

Literature related to the study revealed that workplace bullying affects an employee's physical and psychological well-being. The first research on workplace bullying conducted by Leymann in 1990, that research consider as a foundation of subsequent research on workplace bullying study. Research on workplace bullying has crossed more than 25 years of study, which helps us to find the prevalence, antecedents, and intervention. The perception of workplace bullying varies from culture to culture. The participants from Austria and Finland reported social exclusion as a bullying behavior; on the other hand, India, Turkey, and Nigeria mention the use of power as bullying behavior [51]. Workplace bullying creates various mental health problems such as anxiety, and the prevalence rate of mental health problems was higher among men [7]. The prolonged suffering from anxiety and stress develop somatic disorder [41]. Most of the research about bullying behavior conducted based on systematic review and collected data from a self-reported survey. In the future, the qualitative research method or large sample size might mitigate the drawback of previous studies. The study focusses on working women in Bangladesh who were bullied in their lifetime. 30% of the employee who participates in a bullying survey reported that they encounter workplace bullying in their professional lives [52]. Also, employees who are bullied take more sick leave than who are not bullied [15].

Several studies emphasized that there was an association between exposure to bullying and personality factors. Victims of bullying show low self-esteem and report high anxiety [36]. After reviewing all the literature, it is evident that there was an association between workplace bullying and psychological distress. The present study helps to understand the prevalence of workplace bullying among Bangladeshi women and helps to find out the psychological effects of bullying. Moreover, analyze the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological distress.

Appendix

Though bullying is most prevalent in the school context, it still occurs in the workplace. Over a decade, researchers were working on workplace bullying [3]. The primary purpose of the present study was to observe the psychological effects of the victim of workplace bullying. The research question of the study was "what are the psychological effects on working women who are the victim of workplace bullying?" To find out the answer to the question, the descriptive study was used to understand the scenario and the psychological effects of being bullied among Bangladeshi Women in workplace. The results of the research may help employers to identify and eliminate bullying behavior because managing bullying behavior cost more money than prevention bullying behavior. The research study determined the prevalence of workplace bullying examined the association between bullying and the psychological effects that may impact on an employee's mental health and their productivity.

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