Physiological and Psychological Effects of Workplace Bullying on Employees: An Exploratory Study in American Organizations

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Abstract

Workplace Bullying Institute (2021) defines this concept as "repeated mistreatment: abusive conduct that is threatening, intimidating, or humiliating; work sabotage or verbal abuse." It is estimated that around 79 million Americans are bullied at work, with 67% of them could face a job loss. Overall, 49% of working Americans were affected by bullying at work, directly or indirectly. Target's ethnicity, age, type of employment, number of years of service, etc., played a role in the type and amount of harassment experienced. The current study explored the physiological and psychological effects of workplace bullying among employees in the United States. Data from a sample of 176 employees were analyzed for this article. (More responses are still being collected.) A 60-item questionnaire included quantitative and qualitative questions regarding demographic information, workplace culture, bullying experiences (personal and witnessed), and responses to bullying. Finally, their awareness of current policies on harassment and bullying was explored. For the present article, two important research questions will be explained – regarding (i) physiological and emotional health issues and (ii) on-the-job stress and work-life balance. Other aspects of the survey will be elaborated on in future publications. Additionally, theoretical foundations, a discussion of major findings, conclusions, and recommendations are included.

Keywords: Bullying, Emotional impact, Employment, Harassment, Mental health

1. Introduction

Workplace bullying (WPB) is a social problem that has been around for decades. Until the Workplace Bullying Institute was created, many people had no guidance on addressing the issue. Workplace bullying can happen to anyone within the workforce, regardless of age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Workplace bullying is a critical topic because it is increasing in all employment domains, even though society is aware there are few laws addressing it. Workplace bullying is defined as anyone in an organization repeatedly causing health or physical harm to a colleague within the workplace or after hours by mistreating them through a series of toxic behaviors (Wiedmer, 2011). It has been reported that full-time working Americans spend more than one-third of their day, five days per week, at the workplace (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Employers must provide a safe and hazard-free workplace at all costs; however, some employers have failed to protect employees from each other in recent years. There are employees within organizations who seek power and control; they are the ones who do the bullying. They try to induce harm, jeopardize one's career and job, destroy employee relationships, and ravage profit (Wiedmer, 2011). According to the Global Workplace 2021 Report, workers' daily stress reached a record high in 2020; forty-three percent of respondents in over 100 countries claimed to have experienced stress which increased from the previous years. Western European workers' stress decreased from 46% to 39%. On the contrary, the United States and Canadian employees recorded the highest stress levels at 57%.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Workplace bullying affects not only the victim but the organization as well. It is estimated that victims of workplace bullying miss 1.8 million days of work yearly (Lype, 2017). This leads to about 55 million dollars in lost wages, and these wages do not include psychological costs and effects on productivity (Lype). Recent numbers (Namie, 2021) showed that 49% of all working Americans are affected by WPB, of which 30% suffer from WPB directly while 19% witness it at work. Besides missing workdays, sometimes things escalate to violence due to the long-term effects of bullying. According to the violence at work journal, fatalities in Tennessee because of workplace violence remained steady from 2013 to 2014 and have increased consistently over the past five years (Lype).

The number one witness of workplace bullying are coworkers, perpetrators, or both. Seventy-two percent of workers admit that they are aware of abuse towards coworkers; however, many of these cases go unreported despite knowing a victim or being a victim (Lype, 2017). Individuals in the HR field play a vital role in WPB. Human Resource Professionals (HRPs) are essential to all companies because they oversee critical functions: manage the

hiring and firing process of employees, investigate all complaints made by employees and consumers, are aware of the organizations' policies and procedures, and have insight into what is working for the company and what can be changed or added to make the company thrive. When individuals in the workplace are bullied, many bystanders are unaware of their actions and often stay neutral (Hellemans, Cason, & Casini, 2017). These types of situations should not be dealt with lightly by HRPs. They must take into consideration the outcomes of how each case is handled. However, many do not know how to handle these situations because of the administration's lack of policies and procedures (Fox & Cowan, 2015).

WPB affects individuals in many ways. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), nearly 2 million workers report being victims of some form of abuse each year (Lype, 2017). There is another form of bullying within the workplace that is not always noticed, called workplace incivility. Incivility is defined as many rude and discourteous behaviors with low intensity and lack conscious intent (Hutton, 2008). An employee's productivity confirms the working environment. A decrease in productivity is when incivility crosses into WPB (Meires, 2018). Evidence has shown that workplace bullying affects victims' health, productivity, and home life. The research found that employees who reported weekly bullying exposure experienced more health problems, poor well-being, and more frequent absences from work. Additionally, bullied employees reported lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of induced job stress, anxiety, and depression scores.

WPB affects individuals working at an organization and even after they have left. Teodora and Duffy (2017) stated that individuals might become psychologically injured after long-term exposure to WPB. A healthy work environment is crucial to organizations. Evidence has also shown that having access to organizational policies that list specific behaviors and define bullying criteria can lift the burden and confusion off HRPs' shoulders. This can give them more power to address these situations, thus, creating a norm of civil behaviors. Fox and Cowan's (2015) studied the importance of human resource management's role in defining and addressing workplace bullying. They suggested that defining bullying would help clarify the roles of HRPs in bullying situations and ultimately inform anti-bullying policy formation and execution in the United States. Fox and Cowan further stated that engaging HRPs' perspectives on what constitutes bullying would shed light on where HRPs and victims converge on definitional characteristics and bullying behaviors.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research focuses on how employees within an organization handle workplace bullying experiences. Everyone has their way of dealing with challenging situations. Therefore, exploring past work experiences sheds light on how victims cope and how to eliminate these behaviors within the workplace. This research practice is essential to human development and family studies because managers and CEOs can use it to understand better why bullying is occurring within the workplace and minimize its occurrence. The current research builds upon prior work by focusing on what can be done to decrease workplace bullying in organizations. The present study utilizes the exploratory research design set up in a mixed-method format, including quantitative and qualitative data.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Workplace bullying can severely impact an individual's mind and family/home life and cost the organization too much money. Research shows that employees in high-ranking positions are responsible for 60% of workplace misconduct (Valentine et al., 2015). The purpose of this study is to address the problem of workplace bullying from three approaches: to examine the current nature of employee interactions in the workplace environment, both face-to-face and online; to investigate differences in the treatment received by diverse employees (regard to their position, length of employment, education level, race, age, gender, sexuality, or other demographics); and to review the awareness of current policies about workplace bullying.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

WPB is significant because employers want employees to feel welcomed, safe, and happy in their place of business, and many people who have jobs are failing to have healthy work environments. The main objectives of the study are (1) to explore various physical and emotional effects of WPB on employees, (2) to examine organizational cultures that facilitate WPB, (3) to study the effects of WPB on employees and their families, and (4) to find out the level of awareness of employees on policies related to WPB. This study sheds light on the lived experiences of WPB and the impacts it had on employed individuals, organizations, and those organizations' policies and procedures. As mentioned, only two of these objectives will be elaborated in this article. Findings from the other objectives will be released in the upcoming publications. The result of this research explains whether these hypotheses are true or false. The author aims to test the above hypotheses through measurable tools and collect evidence or lack of support. The study's outcomes help shed light on the significance of WPB, its impact on employees and their families, and the level of familiarity related to organizational policies. For this article, objectives #1 and #3 will be discussed in length.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Physical and Mental Effects

Research has shown that exposure to WPB can impact victims in several ways. It can affect the individual internally and externally by causing health risks in the form of cardiovascular problems, gastrointestinal issues, immunological impairment, autoimmune disorders, fibromyalgia, diabetes, skin disorders, diarrhea, rapid heartbeat, rapid breathing, elevated blood pressure, chest pain, nausea, and throwing up at work (Giorgi et al., 2016). Teodora and Duffy (2016) found that "it is not uncommon for people under extreme stress to develop symptoms of heart disease and gastrointestinal disorders" (p.37). WPB causes extreme stress, which can lead to the health conditions listed above.

WPB can also cause an individual to become mentally unstable with ongoing subjection or witness of others. Forms of mental instability have many effects, such as an overwhelming sense of injustice, uncontrollable crying, guilt, and shame. WPB can also cause other impacts, such as chills and profuse sweating. Perminiene, Kern, and Perminas (2016) suggested that WPB may be considered one of the most severe workplace stressors and that it is linked to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, fatigue, loss of self-confidence, aggression, insomnia, apathy, muscle pain, headaches, stomach problems, and hand tremors. In 2016, Armstrong's study (n=1039) found that 70% of his sample expressed burnout and stress as the number one workplace hazard. It was observed that "the stress from bullying can trickle into thyroid problems, gastrointestinal problems, elevated blood pressure, mood disorders, self-harming behavior, and eating disorders," among other health conditions (Colin, 2017). In a 2015 study, it was found that victims of workplace bullying have double the risk of experiencing suicidal ideation over the subsequent five years" (Lohmann, 2017).

In a more recent study, Elflein (2021) examined various factors affecting work-related stress and found that 40% of employees worried about job security, and 36% had trouble balancing work with personal obligations like childcare and spousal matters. Overall, work seems to be a root cause of most physical and emotional stress bothering working adults, often spilling over into their personal and family lives.

2.2 Work-Life

WPB can affect job performance. Individuals can have trouble making decisions, become less committed to their position, and experience a natural loss of concentration. It can also cause low self-esteem and low productivity. Victims lose time during work hours because they become preoccupied with defending themselves, avoiding the bully, networking for support, pondering the situation, and planning how to deal with it. Individuals who are victims of workplace bullies are traumatized to the point where they often feel isolated, powerless, disoriented, confused, and helpless (Colino, Dec 15, 2017).

Further, Colino said bullied employees reported sleep loss, headaches, muscle pain, anxiety, depression, frequent sick days, etc. Contrary to bullying among children, adult types of bullying can include subtle and passive-aggressive forms such as political backstabbing, silent treatment, belittling or humiliating publicly, social ostracism or undermining of an employee, etc. In severe cases, it was reported that 77% of bullied employees leave their jobs each year (Walter, 2013). Workplace norms can play a role in WPB. For instance, reports have found that women in work environments carry an unconscious bias against other women, which seems to cause multiple woman-on-woman bullying cases.

Leaders who use managing tactics such as job competition, reward systems, and survival of the fittest have set a negative tone for the working environment, motivating bullying. Often bullies target individuals who might threaten them in the workplace. Authority figures will frequently target someone intelligent, competent, and well-liked. Their main goal is to make the target less confident and may feel inadequate" (Colino, 2017). The models listed above are helpful in that they manipulate the employee to increase their motivation and productivity for their organizations. These tactics are deemed rational by management because they cause employees to work harder and longer, even though the results they yield are short-lived (Valentine et al., 2015). The long-term effects are disastrous and have expensive outcomes for employees, managers, and the organization (Rajalakshmi, 2016).

2.3 Family Life

Stressed victims of WPB often lead to a stressed family unit. In 2021, the Workplace Bullying Institute estimated that 49% of the workers in the United States, or 79 million people, were experiencing or had previously experienced bullying at work. Given the sheer number of individuals affected, millions of children and spouses become victims of the effects of workplace bullying as well (Sreenivasan, 2016). Many victims of WPB regularly displace the anger and shame of being bullied onto their families, causing secondary trauma when brought into the home. When driven employees return home after a workday, they are anxious, making others in their microsystem who are exposed to their energy feel the same way.

WPB affects families more than expected. Victims of bullying trauma are often emotionally withdrawn from their families, creating separation between spouses and sometimes causing relationships to end. A WBI article

reported that some spouses feel helpless for not being able to help or stop bullying behavior at work. It drives a wedge in spousal relationships, and workplace bullying can sometimes deprive young children of the intimate connection they need with their parents. Young children can also become socially impaired. The adverse emotional climate in the home can cause children to be hypersensitive and prone to bullying themselves.

3. Theoretical Foundations

Like any research, the present study rests on various theoretical underpinnings: conflict theory, grounded theory, Gidden's Theory of Structuration, Workplace Cultural Model, and Role theory. Only three are discussed here: conflict, grounded, and role theories.

3.1 Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is a macro theory designed for significant sociological phenomena such as workplace bullying. This theory suggests that societies are in constant perpetual conflict and competition for limited resources. Workplace bullying has been noted as a conflict between employees within the company. The conflict develops when employees experience repeated aggressive behavior and harassment at work. The founder of conflict theory, Karl Marx, used the expression "the haves and the have-nots" to explain how his theory works. The phrase refers to two groups: "The haves" refers to wealthy and powerful individuals. The second group, "have-nots," are poor and often exploited by "the haves" to increase their wealth. This power struggle is most often won by "the haves" and lost by ordinary people with ordinary means.

3.2 Grounded Theory

Ciby and Raya (2014) used the grounded theory approach to explain the evolution of bullying through phases and stages, namely antecedents, bullying, and outcomes (See Figure 2.). The antecedent phase or antecedent describes actions or events that activate bullying behaviors. The significant workplace antecedents of bullying are job demands, leadership and management styles of supervisors, and interpersonal conflict. Job demands were found to be the most important source of workplace bullying. Work behaviors such as unrealistic deadlines, excessive monitoring, assigning a menial task, and unmanageable workloads which force overtime are all job demand antecedents (Gaffney et al., 2012).

Under the antecedent phase, the second factor of workplace bullying is the supervisors' leadership and management styles (Figure 1). Supervisors' management style can be autocratic, display unsupportive actions, and possess unprofessional behaviors. The supervisors' only focus is output, causing low job autonomy. They do not support their team members or recognize their opinions and suggestions. The behaviors of these leaders are perceived as unethical and against accepted norms and practices of society. The behaviors displayed include taking employees' onsite opportunities, repeatedly borrowing money without returning it, presenting someone else's ideas as their own, taking ownership of others' tasks and achievements, withholding information, verbal abuse or comments in meetings, talking about others without being aware, and favoritism.

The third factor of workplace bullying antecedents is interpersonal conflicts. This type of conflict develops because of work-related and/or personal issues, which can cause strain on the working relationship with employees. The problems that can arise from interpersonal conflict are jealousy, ego trips, and internal competition. Change of dynamics creates instances that lead to bullying situations. Victims joining new organizations or projects or having a new supervisor join a project have found it hard to adapt to the change because of different behavioral patterns than other employees, the workload, and the stress caused by it (Ciby & Raya, 2014) (Figure 2).

The antecedent phrase makes way for the bullying phase, the second phase of the conceptual model of workplace bullying. The bullying phase is prolonged exposure to negative behaviors in work environments. These behaviors can be work-related and/or personal bullying behaviors. Work-related negative behaviors are work overload, forced overtime, excessive micromanagement, overruling of decisions, removal of responsibility, unrealistic goals and deadlines, attack of professional character, judging work wrongly, unfair criticism, and blocking promotions.

Personal/Emotional bullying includes belittling remarks, persistent criticism, intimidation, staring, manipulation, threats, isolation, hoodoo, undermining, and false accusations. New bullying behaviors were identified and are seen in forms such as: taking ownership of one's work, presenting ideas or working papers without giving due credit, grabbing others' challenging assignments, and repeatedly borrowing money. Frequencies of bullying behaviors were felt by employees at least weekly and up to daily. The intention of bullying behavior was reported as relevant in cases of interpersonal conflicts and leadership styles by supervisors. The primary source of bullying came from supervisors. The final phase of the conceptual model is the outcome phase. This phase highlights the negative consequences of bullying faced by victims. Emotional reactions, personal effects, work-related consequences, self-coping mechanisms, and perceived lack of organizational support led to exit behavior.
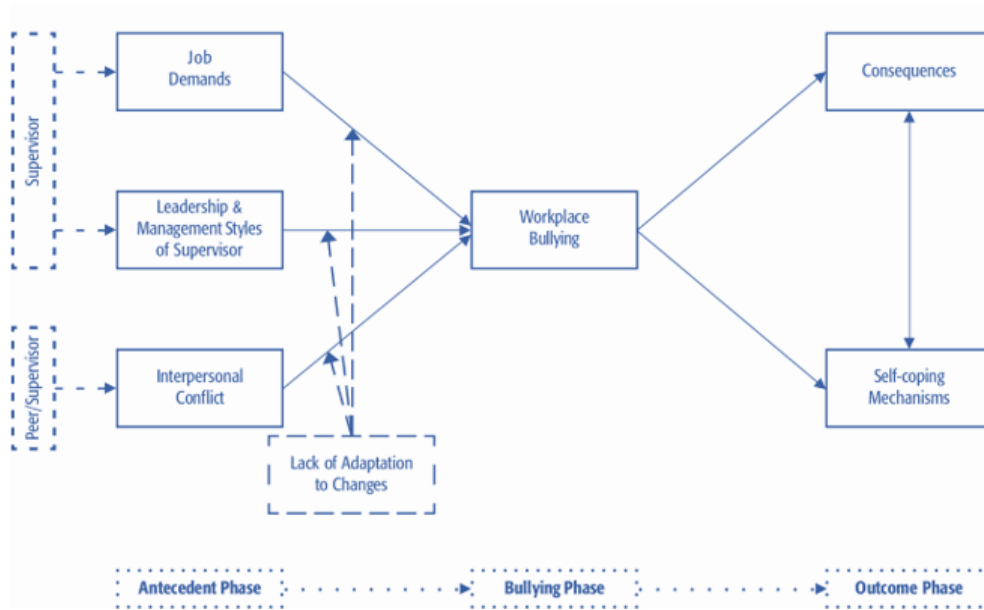
Figure 1. Conceptual Model of WPB Using Grounded Theory

[Source: Ciby, M., & Raya, R. (2014)]

3.3 Role Theory

Finally, the role theory explains how work-family conflict results from the incompatibility of role demands from time, strain, and behavior conflict. This theory occurs in two directions: work to family and family to work. Time-based competition happens when time demands from work and family compete, for example, working overtime which takes away hours a parent can spend with their children. Strain-based conflict occurs when strain in one role can constrain an individual's ability to perform another capacity. For example, exhaustion and anxiety from work can spill over to the family or life domain, limiting individuals' role performance. Lastly, behavior-based conflict happens when behavior patterns related to work and family are not compatible.
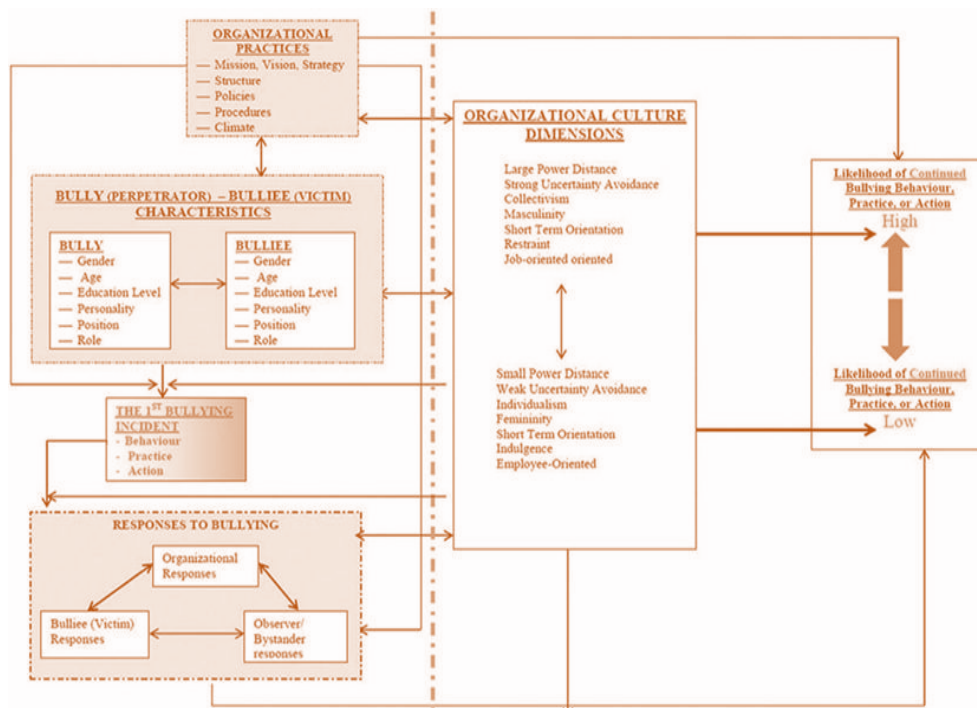

Figure 2. Workplace bullying organizational culture conceptual model

[Source: Pheko, M. M., Monteiro, N. M., & Segopolo, M. T. (2017)]

Overall, these theoretical perspectives shed light on clarifying and elaborating on the various components of WPB and its influence and role in the organizational culture (Figure 2). Different models utilize phases, stages, and elements involved within the context. The current study bears these foundations when interpreting and discussing the findings.

4. Methodology

The current study examined the effects of workplace bullying on employees and organizational culture across the nation. This study aims to explore how workplace bullying transforms employees and their employers and examines if current policies and procedures are adequate. This study is detailed by a descriptive research method. The researcher provides information on participants and criteria for this study. An explanation of the type of research design used and why it was chosen is provided in this thesis. The instrument used for data collection is also described, and the procedures followed in carrying out this study are also included. The methods used to analyze the data are discussed. Finally, the ethical guidelines that were followed are also addressed.

4.1 Study Design

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to investigate variables within this study. The design used for this research is a descriptive research design that identifies specific characteristics, trends, frequencies, and correlations. This design was chosen because it describes workplace bullying situations. Investigative questions (such as what, when, where, and how) can be answered based on the findings of this research. Further, an explorative approach is utilized in the current study. Six variables are investigated to provide a wide variety of information to be measured and analyzed—the research examined the interactions between employees, face-to-face and online, within the workplace. Perceived treatment of diverse employees, their health, and how workplace bullying affects the family is investigated. Current policies and procedures on what to do when bullying or harassment situations arise are examined. This study investigates employees' existing knowledge of laws, policies, and regulations of workplace bullying.

4.2 Participants

The sample for this study consisted of individuals who have experienced any form of WPB throughout their employment history, age twenty-one and older. The participants were chosen by soliciting either face-to-face or online. The sample included employed individuals from educational, sales, customer service, manufacturing, and clerical occupations. Initially, a sample of 100 individuals was selected randomly to complete surveys and interviews and participate in focus groups. But, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the group settings such as interviews and focus groups were canceled. Also, face-to-face data collection was moved to online surveying. Intentional efforts included diverse workplace settings: hospitality, clerical, educational agency, manufacturing, public and private sector, hourly-waged, salaried, contract-based jobs, and others. The participants were male or female and belonged to any age group, race, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic background. They were given a choice to not participate or withdraw from the study at any point without any questions. All participants' identities remained anonymous, and only the researcher and the principal advisor had access to the raw data.

The participants were selected using the heterogeneous purposive sample. This type of sample provides a diverse range of case relevance in WPB. A snowball sampling was used in which participants recruited others to participate in the study. The snowball sample benefitted the data collection because participants recruited additional interested individuals in the research. Participants were recruited from the United States, most of whom lived in the southern parts of the nation. The study used human subjects to collect the results. Potential participants were given an informed consent form. Once accepted, the provider presented a Google Forms link distributed electronically through email and social media. Flyers about the study, the survey link, and paper copies of the survey, along with a confidentiality agreement and consent form, were distributed across the United States. The survey consisted of past workplace experiences, including if the participant has ever experienced workplace bullying or been a witness.

4.3 Instrument(s)

The tool used in the data collection was designed to measure the interactions and treatments of individuals affected by workplace bullying while also measuring the effectiveness of the policies and procedures. The researcher noted that this measure was designed to answer how, what, when, and where. The Institutional Review Board approved the instrument at Alabama A&M University. The questionnaire consisted of ten demographic questions about personal and employment history. The demographic questions were designed to help the researcher better understand the participants' occupational status and practices. The goal of this study was to collect as much information as possible on various factors influencing the effects of workplace bullying. The questionnaire was administered on the paper form and online form. The questionnaire was anonymous; occupation was requested to confirm the participants' employment status. A self-report survey compiled by the researcher consisted of 60 questions, designed in the form of a Likert scale model, multiple answers model,

fill-in-the-blank style responses, and yes/no questions. Initially, the survey consisted of 72 questions but was later condensed to include only 60. These questions were deemed to be critical in addressing the research questions of the study. When converting the survey from a face-to-face to an online format, the scope of the study was expanded. It was conducive to distributing to anyone across the country and beyond. But one additional question on the state of residence was included to help explore possible variations due to the working environments and context. In all, the survey hence had 61 questions when used for final data collection.

The survey consisted of seven sections: Section I consisted of demographic questions (10), Section II consisted of interactions within the workplace (12), Section III had questions regarding face-to-face and online dynamics (13), Section IV consisted of questions related to the perceived treatment by diverse employees (11), Section V consisted of questions on the perceived effects on health and family unit (6), Section VI addressed a review of the current policies on workplace bullying/harassment (4), and finally, Section VII consisted of WP-related laws, policies, and regulations (5). The survey took about 15-20 minutes to complete. Employees were asked if they would participate in focus groups to gather in-depth information about their survey answers and workplace bullying experiences. It was initially planned to conduct individual interviews and focus groups of the interested participants. But these two steps of interviews and focus groups were canceled due to the high risks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.4 Data Collection

For the current study, participants were selected in 2020 and 2021. Initially, an official request letter was planned to be sent to the organization/agency that serves various employees upon receiving IRB approval. Once permission was obtained, the researcher approached the potential participants, introduced herself, and explained the purpose of the study. Then, the participants were given the informed consent form to be read and signed. After that, the survey with 60 questions was provided to them electronically through Google Forms. The survey had directions on how the questions should be answered. Participants were given paper copies of the survey or emailed the web address. Heterogeneous purposive sampling and snowballing sampling methods were employed. The response rate was difficult to estimate as the survey was distributed via online sources, emails, Facebook, Linked In, and Twitter. It was initially planned to follow up with a random sample via one-on-one interviews and focus groups to gain further insights into their survey answers. However, with COVID-19 upsetting the social milieu, that plan was dropped.

4.5 Data Analysis

Appropriate statistical tests were used to analyze quantitative and qualitative data. The raw data were entered into spreadsheets and analyzed using IBM SPSS version 27. The results were tabulated and presented in the next chapter. Descriptive analyses were conducted to examine workplace bullying in individual and organizational cultures. The responses to open-ended questions were collected and analyzed for common themes and patterns.

4.6 Ethical Procedures

Participants were assured that all their responses would be kept confidential and that no further retaliatory actions or penalties would be incurred. Further, recalling and recollecting workplace bullying experiences they may have encountered might cause emotional, mental, or physical pain to participants. The results shed light on the impact of WPB, awareness of policies related to handling WPB, and any further revisions that need to be made. Also, counseling referrals were provided to employees for seeking any additional assistance after experiencing workplace bullying. All the investigations were only handled only by the principal investigator and the major advisor. No one else had access to the research materials. Utmost care was taken to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, their identity, and their responses. No names or identifying features were written anywhere on the survey or other documents. The researcher always saved surveys and their reactions under lock and key. The researcher did not discuss or distribute the materials to anyone else. The results of the study are used only for scholarly purposes. All these matters were described in detail before taking the survey, allowing the participant to make an informed decision to partake in the study voluntarily.

5. Results and Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the physical and emotional effects of workplace bullying, organizational cultures that facilitate workplace bullying, the impact on employees and their families, and employees' awareness of the different policies on workplace bullying and harassment. This chapter presents the participants' responses regarding their daily work life and how they cope with WPB. The responses depict the participants' face-to-face and online interactions, perceived treatment by diverse employees, perceived effects on health and family units, and their knowledge of the current policies on workplace bullying and harassment. The data analyses discussed in this article include two research questions: 1) What are the various physical and emotional effects of workplace bullying? 2) What are the effects of workplace bullying on employees and their families due to organizational culture?

4.1 Demographic Information

The first section consisted of demographic information such as age, sex, type of employment, places of work, and race/ethnicity (See Table 1.). Table 1 shows that out of 176 participants, the majority were female, 85.23%. The highest number of participants (39%) were in the age group of 29-39 years old. Most of the participants (59%) were in the field of customer service. Most of them (67%) were working full-time.

Table 1. Demographic Details of the Participants

| Gender	Count	Percentage (%)
Male	24	14.45
Female	150	90.00
Prefer not to say	2	1.20
Age	**Count**	**Percentage**
18-28	63	37.95
29-39	69	41.56
40-50	28	16.86
51-60	12	7.22
61-70	3	1.80
71 & above	0	0
Place of Employment	**Count**	**Percentage**
Sales	51	30.72
Customer Service	104	62.65
Manufacturing	31	18.67
Clerical	36	21.68
Educational	70	42.16
Employment Status	**Count**	**Percentage**
Full Time	118	71.08
Part-Time	31	18.67
Self Employed	20	12.04
Unemployed	10	6.02

Most participants, ages 18 – 39, were African Americans working a full-time job, while 2 Asians were unemployed (Table 2). Therefore, the study results may be more generalizable to only the African American population of this age group.

Table 2. Participants According to Age and Ethnicity

Employment Status by Ethnicity					
Age range	Asian	African American	Hispanic/ African	White	Biracial/ Middle Eastern
18 – 28	2- U	26-F 20-P	African-1-P	2- P 1-F	1-F 1-SE

		1–U 8–SE			
29 – 39		51–F 4–P 5–U 1–SE		5– F	
40–50	1–P	18–F 3–P 1–SE		1–F	
51–60	1–F	9–F		1– U 3– F	
61 & above		2–F 1–U			
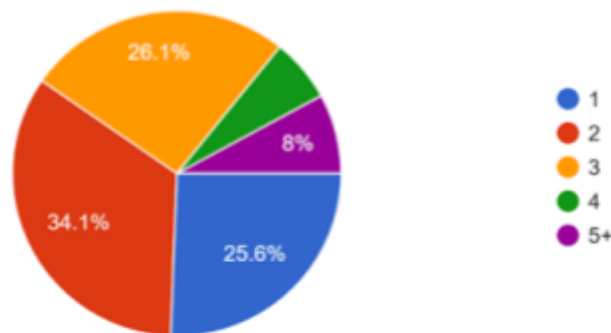
Figure 3. Number of Places of Employment Within the Last Five Years

About 84% of the participants worked 1–3 jobs during the past five years. 15% of the participants had three or more jobs within the past five years (Figure 3). This data can be interpreted as employees having multiple job changes due to unhealthy working environments caused by WPB. Organizations have high turnover rates because of issues within their working environment. Anjum (2018) and Erkutlu and Chafra (2014) examined employees' experiences of WPB in higher education institutes and the effects on intuitions regarding their turnover intentions. Erkutlu and Chafra found that, per their presumptions, results indicated both psychological safety and psychological contract fulfillment have significant and positive relationships to workplace bullying. They further examined how and why ethical leadership is more effective in reducing employee bullying behaviors by highlighting the importance of psychological safety and followers' perception of psychological contract fulfillment. Thus, they provide a complete view of translating ethical leader behavior into follower action, such as reducing workplace bullying. Jolly and Krylova (2015) argue that when employees experience bullying in the workplace, they feel identity threat, and such victimization compels employees to leave the organization. Employees tend to be unhappy and go due to issues that fall under workplace bullying. Competition with coworkers was positively correlated to the number of past employment places (r= 0.525, p < .01).

Table 3. Number of Places of Employment in the Past Five Years

	Total Count	Sex		Percentage	
Response	166	Female	Male	Female	Male
5+ places	14	11	3	6.6	1.8
4 places	10	9	1	5.4	0.6
3 places	45	44	1	26.5	0.6
2 places	59	54	5	32.5	3
1 place	23	14	9	8.4	5.4

Our research indicated that the higher the participant's age, the greater their experience of WPB (Table 3). As these participants reported experiencing WPB, they reported an increased number of missing workdays because of the issue. It was found that competition with coworkers positively correlates to the number of past employment places. As the age increases, the participants are less likely to change employers (r= – 0.525, p < .01). In other words, the older a participant is, the more experienced they gain in handling WPB situations or having found an organization with a healthy atmosphere. Participants of this study sometimes responded to WPB instances by resigning from their employers. Leaving multiple employers creates the reputation of past employment places, hence the positive correlation.

4.2 Research Question – What are the various physical and emotional effects of workplace bullying?

Qs 1–15. What are the various physical and emotional effects of workplace bullying?

A total of 64.5% of participants reported they experienced some form of workplace bullying during their employment history. In other words, six out of ten employees (more than half) experienced at least one instance of workplace bullying during their employment history (Figure 4).

Our study showed that a total of about 80% of the participants very frequently (35%), frequently (28%), and occasionally (36.5%) witnessed bullying in the workplace more than they experienced it (Figure 5). Only 21% of employees said they rarely or never saw workplace bullying. Also, most participants who witnessed bullying were females, and those bullied were African American females.

Q. 12.   I have experienced some form of workplace bullying during my employment history.
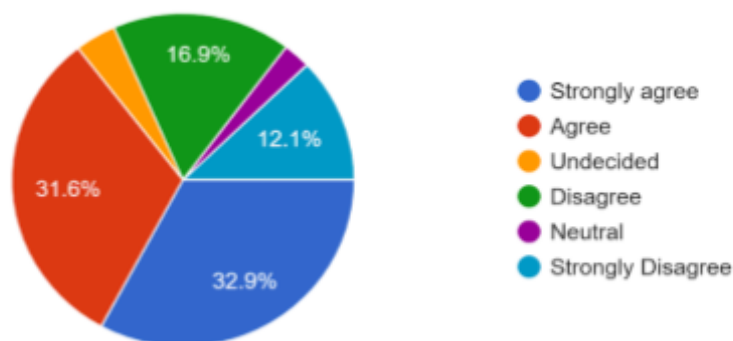
Figure 4. Experienced WPB During Employment History
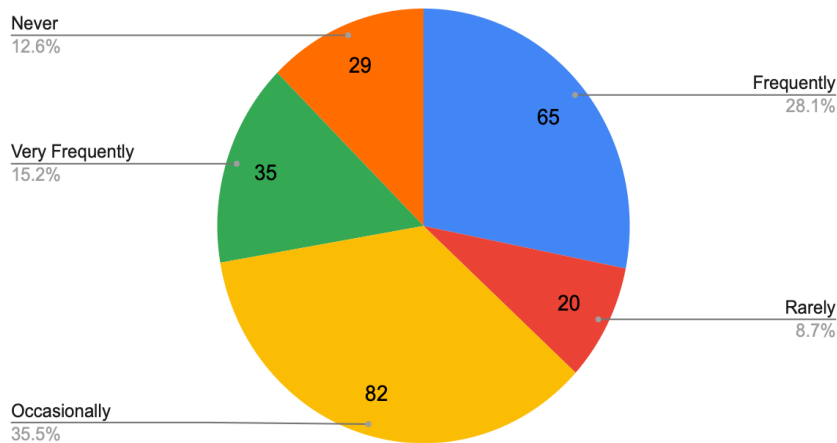
Figure 5. Witnessed Incidents of WPB During Employment History

Q. 13. I have witnessed workplace bullying more than I have experienced it myself.

Q. 15.   Since experiencing or witnessing workplace bullying, I have had more significant on-the-job stress.
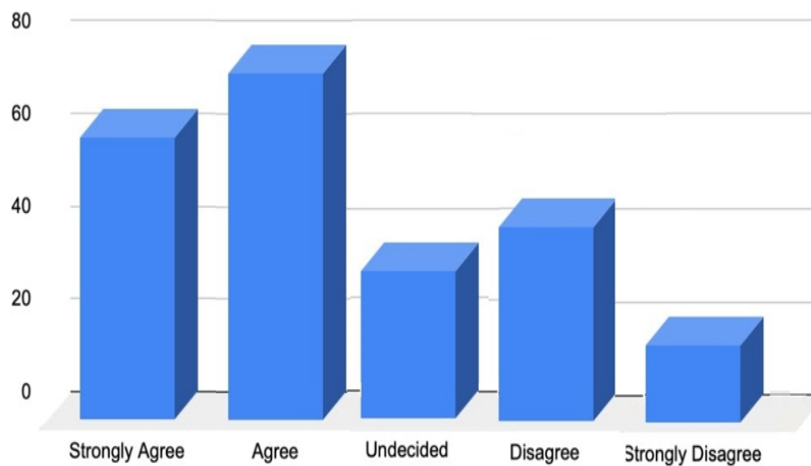
Figure 6. Experienced or Witnessed WPB Created Greater On-the-job Stress

Figure 6 represents responses to witnessing or experiencing WPB that developed on-the-job stress. Participants reported their on-the-job stress increased when witnessing than experiencing WPB ($r = .471$, $p < .01$). Participants also reported that their on-the-job stress increased when they experienced WPB on the job ($r = .622$, $p < .01$). The results interpreted from the data in this study determined that anytime a participant experienced or witnessed any form of negative behavior from coworkers or supervisors, their stress-levels have increased.

Table 4. Participants' On-the-job Stress After Witnessing or Experiencing WPB

Response	Total	Sex		Percentage	
	158	Female	Male	Female	Male
Strongly Agree	41	38	3	22.8	1.8
Agree	52	42	10	25.3	6
Undecided	23	20	3	12	1.8
Disagree	33	27	6	16.2	3.6
Strongly Disagree	9	9	0	5.42	0

Females strongly agree or agree (48.1%) with feeling more stressed while at work when witnessing or experiencing WPB (Table 4). This percentage was compared to 7.8% of males who strongly agreed or agreed. It was reported that participants felt stressed when coworkers and management belittled them (r = .465, p < .01), felt pressure due to deadlines (r = .522, p < .01), received rude and unsettling emails (r = .432, p < .01), or faced coercion (r = .503, p < .01). The results determine that males do not experience on-the-job stress as much as women. That can be because men typically handle stressful situations better than women.

4.3 Research Question – What are the effects of workplace bullying on employees and their families due to WPB?

Qs. 45 – 51. What are the effects of workplace bullying on employees and their families due to workplace bullying?

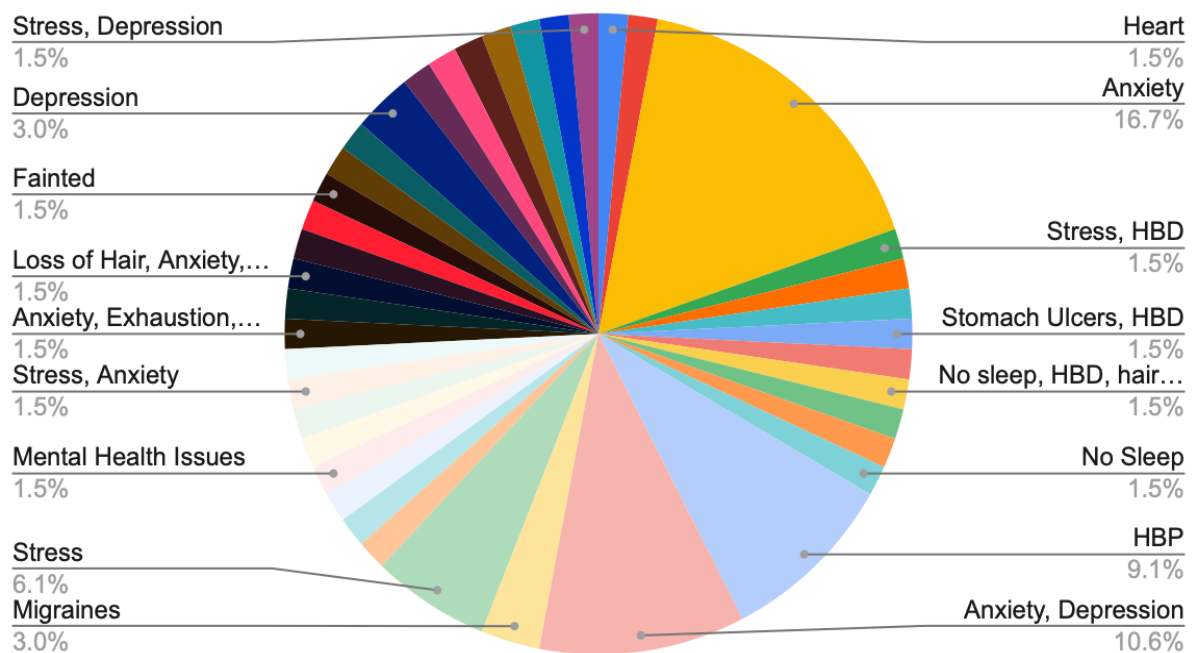Q. 47. What kind of health issues have you experienced due to WPB?

Figure 7. Physical and Emotional Health Effects Reported Due to WPB

The current study found that health-related issues in this study are positively correlated to age. The older participants experienced more significant health issues (Figure 7). Regardless of the type of employment, all participants faced some health issues due to workplace bullying. Therefore, the researchers can conclude that similar health issues found in previous studies were also found in this current study. It was also determined that employees who witnessed WPB experienced an increase in health-related stress (r= 0.221, P<.01) and managing stress (r= 0.289, P<.01). The increase is due to how the participant responded to the WPB. Participants who experienced health issues due to workplace bullying are more willing to take up for themselves or others in response to the behaviors (r=0.456, P<.01).

Previous researchers found that "it is not uncommon for people under extreme stress to develop symptoms of heart disease and gastrointestinal disorders" (Perminiene et al., 2016, p.37). It was found that 12 participants gave short answers on having developed some heart or gastrointestinal issue. Research studies support the notion that workplace bullying has a relationship and affects employees and their organizational culture. One may wonder why leaders start to bully their employees. Evidence has shown that people in leadership positions have picked up bad habits from bosses in previous jobs. These leaders are detrimental to their employees' well-being and career success (Tokarev et al., 2017). Often managers who bully are rewarded with promotions for their behavior, which makes some managers believe that bullying is acceptable and even cover it up because it produces the results they need. Leaders who use negative consequences are not always aware of the negative emotions it can stir up in their employees, causing them to be counterproductive in the workplace.

Literature supports the concept that there is no relationship between workplace bullying and its impact on its culture. This represents an area worthy of continued study, as gender differences and resilience should be

examined further. Research by Perminiene et al. (2016) suggested that WPB may be considered one of the most severe workplace stressors. It is linked to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, fatigue, aggression, insomnia, headaches, and stomach problems.

Q. 50. What type of problems has workplace bullying caused in your family unit?
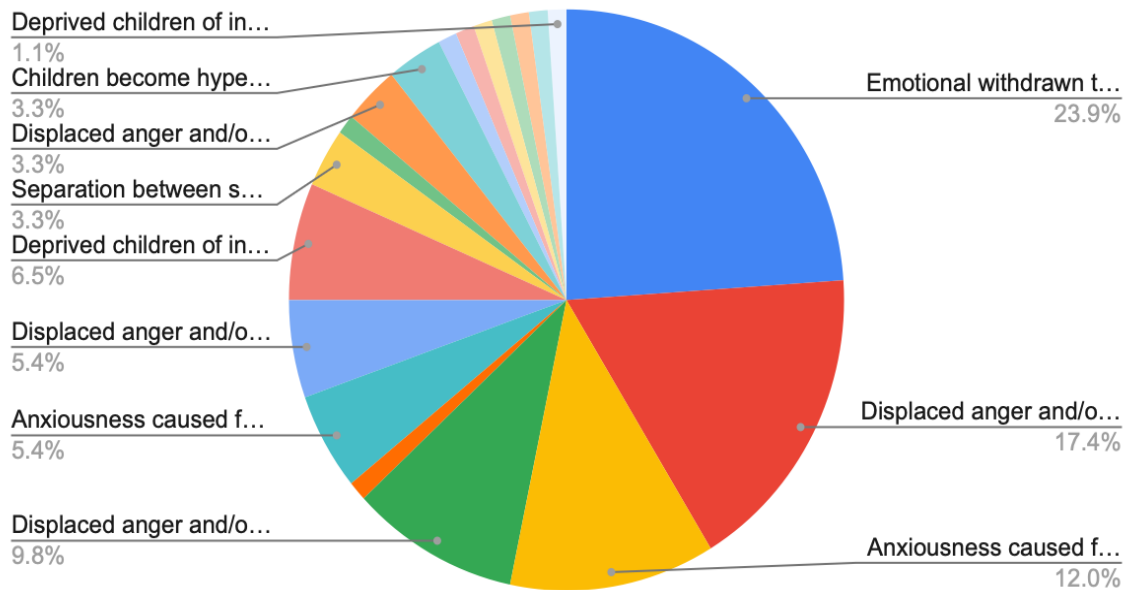

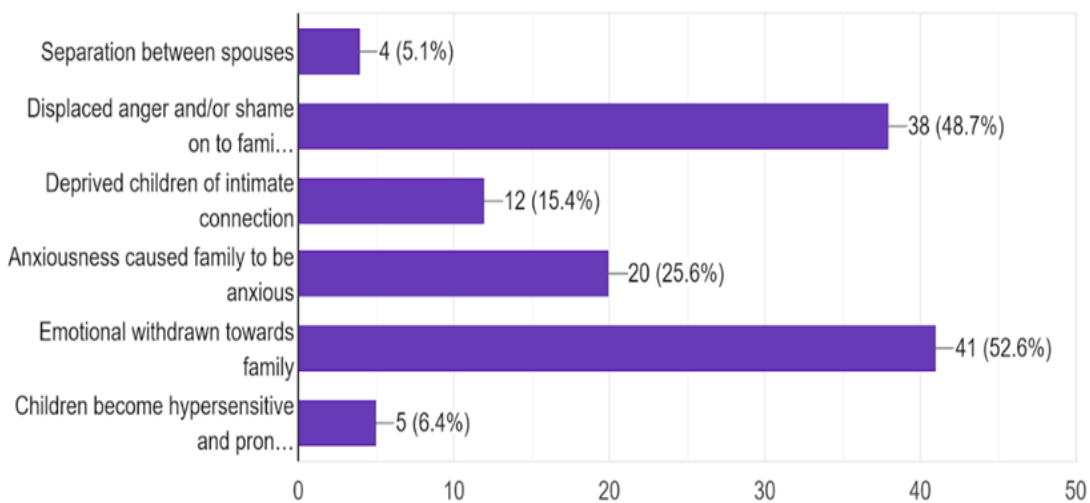**Figure 8. Impact of WPB on Employees and Their Families**

Figure 9. Possible Problems WPB Created in Victims' Family Unit

Our results indicated that the family unit helping with the participants' ability to destress from WPB situations is positively correlated with witnessing workplace bullying more than experiencing it (r =0.259, p <.01). In a two-wave field study by Sprigg et al. (2018), discussed the emotional impact of witnessing workplace bullying. How the participants responded to WPB determined what variables they used to distress (Figures 8 & 9). Some participants chose coping mechanisms such as exercising, writing journals, smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol, venting to someone trusted, or doing nothing (p= 0.416, p < .01). Other individuals confided in their families to help them go through the WPB they witnessed or experienced. Families helped the employees with love and support, focused on positive thoughts, offered coping tips, and gave helpful advice. Some families also used other methods such as joking about the incident, meditation, reminding that family is most important, talking/venting, listening, spending family time, praying, family therapy, allowing decompression time, being

encouraging, vacationing, and planning a suitable course of action (r = 0.308, p < .01) or negative ways (r=0.353, p <.01).

The current study found that WPB caused problems within the family unit when participants felt more on-the-job stress (r=0.438, p < .01) (Figures 12 and 13). The problems WPB created in the home were: separation between spouses, displaced anger or shame onto spouses and family members, depriving children of intimate connection, anxiousness causing the family to be worried, emotionally withdrawing from family, and children becoming hypersensitive and prone to bullying. Sreenivasan (2016) found that stressed victims of WPB often led to a stressed family unit. The Workplace Bullying Institute (2014) estimated that 27% of the workers in the United States, or 65.6 million people, were currently experiencing or had previously experienced bullying at work. Given the number of individuals affected, millions of children and spouses also become victims of workplace bullying. The present study found that problems caused in family units are positively correlated with age. It was found that older participants faced more problems in the family unit (p=0.289, p < .01). Comparatively, more senior employees were found to have more issues due to WPB than younger participants.

Researchers have found that corporate practices may influence or be influenced by individuals and general organizational behavior (Rajakshmi, 2016). The study found that many participants respond to WPB by lowering their productivity. Some participants said they were belittled by management, felt pressured by WPB due to deadlines, received rude and unsettling emails, and dealt with forced coercion, which positively correlated to on-the-job stress. Other stressed participants due to WPB said they were not proud to be a part of their organization or dissatisfied with their job. One question asked of participants in this research study was their response to the bullying they experienced. Over 25% of the participants reported that they asked to be transferred to another company area or quit.

5. Conclusions

The current exploratory research contributes to the existing knowledge about workplace bullying and its effects on employees and the organizational culture. The study aimed to identify the root of WPB and its impact on the employees' health, families, and overall working environments. In doing so, several key findings have surfaced. It was identified that the health of the participants was affected due to WPB. The most significant health issues found included: heart problems, high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression.

Furthermore, the current study found a relationship between competition caused by management and work culture. It was reported that employees who witnessed WPB suffered an increase in health-related stress (r= 0.221, p<.01) and struggled to manage stress (r= 0.289, p<.01). The study validated the past literature that employees felt stressed when they experienced or witnessed WPB in their work environments or when they went home to their families. It was also found that when employees reported WPB situations that HRPs handled the incidents somewhat using the organizational policies (r= 0.700, p < .01) and guidelines (r=0.504, p < .01).

Lastly, this study suggests that the employees' experiences of WPB have affected their families in multiple ways. The relationship between the WPB and the family was examined throughout the study. The findings suggest that employees respond to their experiences by self-coping, lashing out towards their family in various ways, or leaning on their family positively (r =0.259, p <.01). Bullying situations do not have to occur persistently to be labeled as bullying. It was observed that human resource professionals are hard to access and respond to employee complaints of bullying because of unclear boundaries, lack of formal barriers, conflict among their roles in the organization, and clarity of guidelines, definitions, and criteria for the behavior to be considered bullying (Fox & Cowan, 2015). Studies have shown that the United States of America lacks effective anti-bullying policies and procedures, and the ones in place do not explicitly define bullying behaviors (Fox & Cowan, 2015). The lack of these anti-bullying policies and procedures leaves employers inoperative and employees' efforts futile. The result is suffering and anguish for the workers, resentment, and retaliation on the employers' side, which leads to an inefficient and conflicting working environment.

6. Recommendations

After exploring the incidences of workplace bullying and its impact on employees and their families, the author makes the following recommendations. A larger sample from diverse working backgrounds can be beneficial in understanding WPB in different contexts. Further, it would be ideal for examining participants from other states in equal numbers to make valid comparisons. Similarly, an equal and large number of participants can be invited from diverse professional backgrounds to examine WPB and its impact on the employees.

Besides the sample size, there could also be a few methodological revisions. For example, in addition to the anonymous surveys, focus groups (with 10-15 members) can be conducted to explore the effects of WPB on employees and their families. Along the same lines, focus groups can be conducted to investigate their points of view on WPB and how they think it can be minimized. It is critical to study if the employers fully know WPB, its impact, and its seriousness on the employees and their families.

Besides the sample and methodological recommendations, the author makes a few recommendations on the analytical side. Investigating the significance of organizational culture on the WPB and overall on-the-job stress among the employees is recommended. Also, suppose the WPB impacts the relationships at work and home. In that case, the long-term impact of WPB can be examined to explore the employees' morale, productivity, and sense of belongingness to their organization. The author finally recommends standard measures to be enforced by employers to educate their workers, disallow any WPB, and ensure a safe and productive organizational culture.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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