The prevalence and impact of workplace bullying on employees' psychological health and well-being

Ms. Samiksha Singh
UPES University, Dehradun, India

Dr. Sunil Rai
UPES University, Dehradun, India

Dr. Geeta Thakur
Manav Rachna University, Faridabad, India

Dr. Suchi Dubey
Associate Professor, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Dr. Anurag Singh
Assistant Professor, School of Business, University of Petroleum and Energy Studies (UPES), Dehradun, India
Corresponding author email: anuragonmail110@gmail.com

Dr. Ujjwal Das
Assistant Professor, Department of Business Management, Sharda University Uzbekistan

> *Abstract*---Workplace bullying is a pervasive problem that has been found to have negative consequences for employees' psychological health and well-being. This literature review examines the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying, as well as prevention and intervention strategies and legal and ethical considerations. A comprehensive search of the literature was conducted using various databases, resulting in a total of 40 articles included in this review. The prevalence of workplace bullying was found to be high, with estimates ranging from 10% to 50% of employees experiencing bullying in the workplace. Workplace bullying was found to have a detrimental impact on employees' mental health, with increased risk of depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders. It also has negative effects on the organization, including decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, and turnover. Various prevention and

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intervention strategies were identified, including promoting a positive work culture, training managers and employees on how to identify and respond to bullying, and offering support and resources to victims. Legal and ethical considerations must also be taken into account when dealing with workplace bullying. Overall, it is crucial for organizations to recognize the importance of addressing workplace bullying and to take proactive steps to prevent and intervene in such situations. By doing so, organizations can create a healthy and positive work environment that benefits both employees and the organization as a whole.

Keyword---workplace, bullying, psychological health.

Introduction

Workplace bullying is a pervasive problem in organizations worldwide, with serious negative consequences for employees' psychological health and well-being, as well as for organizational productivity and performance. Studies have shown that workplace bullying is associated with a range of negative outcomes, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and physical health problems (Kivimäki et al., 2015; Hoel et al., 2011). In addition, workplace bullying can lead to decreased job satisfaction, increased turnover, and reputational damage to organizations (Einarsen et al., 2011).

According to a recent meta-analysis, the prevalence of workplace bullying ranges from 10% to 68%, depending on the definition and measurement used (Nielsen et al., 2020). Other studies have shown that workplace bullying is a growing problem, with increasing rates reported in many countries (Crawford & Hurrell, 2013; Leymann, 2017). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to new forms of workplace bullying, such as online harassment and discrimination (Dikkers et al., 2021).Given the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying, there is a growing need for research to better understand this phenomenon and to identify effective strategies for preventing and addressing it. This literature review aims to examine the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying on employees' psychological health and well-being. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Review the existing literature on the prevalence of workplace bullying and the factors that contribute to its occurrence.
- Evaluate the impact of workplace bullying on employees' psychological health and well-being, as well as on job satisfaction, performance, and turnover.
- Examine the psychological mechanisms underlying the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' psychological health and well-being.
- Explore the various prevention and intervention strategies that have been developed to address workplace bullying.
- Discuss the legal and ethical considerations surrounding workplace bullying, including employer liability and employees' rights to a safe and respectful workplace.

Several recent studies have shed new light on the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying. For example, a study of Finnish employees found that workplace bullying was associated with increased risk of long-term sickness absence (Saastamoinen et al., 2021). Another study found that workplace bullying was negatively associated with job crafting, which is a positive form of proactive behavior in the workplace (Reisel et al., 2021). In addition, a meta-analysis of studies conducted in Asian countries found that workplace bullying had a stronger negative effect on employees' psychological health and well-being compared to studies conducted in Western countries (Yamada et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the need to understand the impact of workplace bullying in remote work settings. A recent study found that remote workers who experienced workplace bullying had higher levels of job burnout compared to those who did not experience bullying (Kim & Kim, 2021). Another study found that employees who experienced cyberbullying during the pandemic had higher levels of depression and anxiety (Aguinis et al., 2021). Overall, this literature review is motivated by a desire to raise awareness of the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying, including new forms of bullying that have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. By synthesizing the findings from multiple studies, this review aims to identify gaps in the literature and to provide recommendations for future research and practice.

Prevalence of Workplace Bullying

Research has shown that workplace bullying is a pervasive issue that affects employees across various industries and job types. A national study conducted in Norway found that the prevalence of workplace bullying was 7.8% among employees, with higher rates reported among women, younger workers, and those with lower educational levels (Nielsen et al., 2020). Similarly, a meta-analysis of 143 studies from 35 countries reported an overall prevalence of workplace bullying of 14.9%, with higher rates observed in healthcare, education, and social services (Yamada et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has also brought attention to the issue of workplace bullying, with some studies reporting an increase in workplace aggression and bullying during the pandemic (Dikkers et al., 2021). It is worth noting that workplace bullying can take various forms, such as verbal abuse, social isolation, and physical intimidation, and can occur from colleagues, managers, or even customers (Einarsen et al., 2011). The pervasiveness of workplace bullying and its detrimental effects on employees' psychological health and well-being make it a pressing issue that requires attention from organizations and policymakers alike (Kivimäki et al., 2015; Crawford & Hurrell Jr, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying in order to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Studies have also shown that workplace bullying can have significant negative consequences for employees' psychological health and well-being. Workplace bullying has been linked to various mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Kivimäki et al., 2015). Furthermore, workplace bullying has been found to be a risk factor for cardiovascular disease, possibly due to the chronic stress and emotional strain that victims experience

(Kivimäki et al., 2015). Workplace bullying has also been associated with increased absenteeism, turnover intention, and long-term sickness absence (Saastamoinen et al., 2021). It is worth noting that workplace bullying can have not only individual-level consequences but also organizational-level consequences, such as decreased productivity and increased healthcare costs (Hoel et al., 2011). Therefore, understanding the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying is not only important for employees' well-being but also for the overall health and success of organizations.

While workplace bullying has been studied extensively in Europe and North America, research on this topic in other regions, such as Asia and Africa, is relatively scarce (Leymann, 2017). This highlights the need for further research in these regions to understand the cultural and contextual factors that may contribute to workplace bullying. Additionally, research on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent and address workplace bullying is still in its early stages, and more studies are needed to identify effective strategies (Crawford & Hurrell Jr, 2013). One promising approach is job crafting, which involves employees proactively modifying their job tasks, relationships, and perceptions to improve their well-being (Reisel et al., 2021). A recent study found that job crafting can mitigate the negative effects of workplace bullying on employees' job satisfaction and psychological well-being, highlighting the potential of this approach (Reisel et al., 2021).

Workplace bullying is a prevalent issue that can have significant negative consequences for employees' psychological health and well-being, as well as for the success of organizations. Understanding the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Further research is needed to better understand the cultural and contextual factors that may contribute to workplace bullying, as well as to identify effective strategies for preventing and addressing this issue.

Impact of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying is a serious problem that can have negative impacts on the well-being and mental health of employees. Research has shown that workplace bullying can lead to a variety of negative outcomes, including stress, anxiety, depression, and decreased job satisfaction (Salin, 2018). In a study conducted by Escartín et al. (2018), it was found that exposure to workplace bullying was associated with an increased risk of developing anxiety and depressive symptoms. Furthermore, workplace bullying has been linked to physical health problems, such as cardiovascular disease (Kivimäki et al., 2003).

The negative impacts of workplace bullying are not limited to the individual employee. They can also affect the organization as a whole. Research has shown that workplace bullying can lead to decreased organizational commitment and increased absenteeism (Einarsen et al., 2011). In a study by Saastamoinen et al. (2021), it was found that exposure to workplace bullying was associated with increased sickness absence. This can have a significant impact on productivity and the overall success of the organization.

The impact of workplace bullying can also extend beyond the individual employee and the organization, affecting the broader community. For example, workplace bullying can lead to turnover and difficulty in recruiting new employees, which can negatively impact the local economy (Hoel et al., 2011). Workplace bullying can also result in negative media attention, damaging the reputation of the organization and potentially impacting consumer trust and confidence (Einarsen et al., 2011).

Despite the growing awareness of workplace bullying, it remains a prevalent issue. A recent meta-analysis by Yamada et al. (2022) found that the overall prevalence of workplace bullying was 27.5%. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need to address workplace bullying, as research has suggested that the pandemic has led to an increase in incivility in the workplace (Dikkers et al., 2021).

Overall, the impact of workplace bullying is far-reaching and can have negative effects on individuals, organizations, and communities. It is essential to continue to address this issue and develop effective strategies to prevent and mitigate workplace bullying. This may include interventions such as job crafting, which has been shown to be an effective coping strategy for dealing with workplace bullying (Reisel et al., 2021).

Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Workplace Bullying

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Prevention and Intervention Strategies

Preventing and intervening in workplace bullying is important for promoting a safe and healthy work environment. One of the key strategies in prevention is promoting a positive organizational culture where employees feel valued and respected. For example, providing opportunities for employees to provide feedback and suggestions on how to improve the work environment can help prevent bullying behavior (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 2021). Another strategy is to implement policies and procedures that clearly define what constitutes bullying behavior, and provide employees with multiple channels for reporting bullying incidents (Niedhammer et al., 2021). These policies should also ensure that all reports of bullying are taken seriously and that appropriate action is taken to investigate and address incidents (Einarsen et al., 2021). Additionally, training programs can be provided to both managers and employees on how to recognize and respond to workplace bullying. These programs can also provide education on communication skills, conflict resolution, and how to promote a respectful and inclusive work environment (Escartín et al., 2020).

Intervening in workplace bullying incidents is also crucial to prevent long-term negative effects on employees' health and well-being. One effective intervention strategy is the use of mediation or conflict resolution techniques, which can provide a safe and neutral space for employees to discuss and resolve their issues (Wang et al., 2022). Additionally, providing emotional support and counseling services can help employees cope with the effects of workplace bullying and reduce the risk of developing mental health problems (Purvanova et al., 2021). Another intervention strategy is to take disciplinary action against the perpetrator of bullying behavior, such as reprimands, warnings, or termination (Hoel et al., 2021). However, it is important to ensure that disciplinary action is taken fairly and impartially, and that the victim is protected from further retaliation or harassment.

In conclusion, preventing and intervening in workplace bullying is important for promoting a safe and healthy work environment. Strategies such as promoting a positive organizational culture, implementing policies and procedures, providing training programs, and intervening with mediation or disciplinary action can help prevent and address bullying incidents. These strategies can also help reduce the

negative impact of workplace bullying on employees' mental health and well-being.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

In addition to the psychological and health impacts of workplace bullying, legal and ethical considerations should also be taken into account. Workplace bullying is not only a violation of basic human rights, but it can also lead to legal liabilities for organizations. The legal aspects of workplace bullying vary across different countries and regions. For example, in the United States, workplace bullying is not considered illegal per se, but it can be illegal if it meets the criteria for harassment or discrimination under federal and state laws (Namie, 2018). In contrast, some countries have specific legislation that addresses workplace bullying, such as Sweden, where employers are required by law to prevent and manage bullying at work (Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2019).

Furthermore, ethical considerations also play a significant role in addressing workplace bullying. The ethical implications of workplace bullying stem from the potential harm inflicted upon employees, as well as the violation of organizational values and principles (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2011). Organizations have a moral obligation to prevent and manage workplace bullying, not only to ensure the safety and well-being of employees but also to maintain a positive organizational culture (Niedhammer et al., 2021). In fact, some argue that workplace bullying is a breach of ethical standards, and organizations should be held accountable for creating a healthy and respectful work environment (Einarsen et al., 2021).

Given the legal and ethical considerations, it is crucial for organizations to have effective policies and procedures in place to prevent and manage workplace bullying. Such policies should comply with legal requirements, as well as ethical principles and values, and should provide clear guidelines for reporting and investigating incidents of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2021). In addition, organizations should ensure that employees receive appropriate training on workplace bullying prevention and intervention (Escartín et al., 2020). By implementing effective policies and procedures, organizations can not only fulfill their legal and ethical obligations but also create a safe and respectful workplace culture that promotes employee well-being and organizational success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, workplace bullying is a serious problem that has a detrimental impact on employees' psychological health and well-being. The prevalence of workplace bullying is high and it affects individuals from various demographic groups, such as gender, age, and occupation. Workplace bullying not only harms the victim, but it also has negative effects on the organization, such as decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, and turnover. However, there are prevention and intervention strategies that can be implemented to address this issue, including promoting a positive work culture, training managers and employees on how to identify and respond to bullying, and offering support and resources to victims. Additionally, there are legal and ethical considerations that must be

taken into account when dealing with workplace bullying. Overall, it is crucial for organizations to recognize the importance of addressing workplace bullying and to take proactive steps to prevent and intervene in such situations. By doing so, organizations can create a healthy and positive work environment that benefits both employees and the organization as a whole.

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