

Effect of Perceived Bullying at Workplace on Emotions Related to Job Commitment

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Abstract

Workplace bullying is a well-documented phenomenon that has been associated with a number of negative consequences. However, employees face difficulty sharing their experiences of bully and many of such incidents go unreported. We have attempted to make the sharing less threatening in this research by developing some scenarios (depicting bully, extracted from the real-life situations) and asking the participants to 'imagine' themselves in similar situation of bully and feel it then complete a questionnaire for evaluating the emotional state. This way, we would not be able to study the direct psychological effects of bullying on employees however, this technique may enable us to see the moderation effect of (perceived) bullying on job commitment. This exercise would be neutral on people who were never bullied but it may trigger the post trauma in people who had been bullied and they may report their emotions similar to the emotions when they were bullied. We asked 290_n people; working in different organizations of Karachi, Pakistan; to complete the activity of imagination, reporting their emotional state, and their job commitment. Instruments used for this purpose included: especially developed organizational bullying scenarios, Positive and Negative Affect Schedule scale (PANAS; Watson & Clark, 1988) and Organization Commitment Scale (OCS; Cook & Wall, 1974). Findings suggested that bullying at workplace is related to both an increased negative effect and a decreased job commitment. If employees relating these perceived bullying incidents to negative emotions and lower job commitment then it may be detrimental in real situations

Keywords: workplace bullying, job commitment, positive effect, negative effect

The concept of bullying in the workplace has had numerous competing definitions, for instance, it is defined as circumstance during which single or multiple people, persistently consider themselves as victims of negative actions of their colleagues or seniors and finds him or herself unable to defend oneself from these negative actions (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Olweus, 1993). Meaning, although many situations that can be categorized by aggression or individual episode of general unpleasantness in the workplace, they are different from workplace bullying because, this construct is characterized by prolonged and persistent experiences of negative and hostile behaviors. These behaviors are primarily of psychological nature and may include passive aggressive acts such as exclusion from social circle (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011; Leymann, 1990). Livne and Goussinsky (2017) posited that bullying at workplace is related to the dimensions of stress especially burnout.

The current study aims to focus on the effect that workplace bullying has on an individual's emotions and their job commitment. In order to study this issue, a thorough analysis has been done on already conducted studies and their trends. The damaging outcomes of bullying on students in school during childhood are well documented. However, it should be noted that bullying can be just as detrimental to a person's wellbeing (both physical and emotional) and socioeconomic functioning when experienced in adulthood (Sansone & Sansone, 2015).

In theory, one is not surprised to find that, being exposed to workplace bullying can be detrimental towards victim's mental and overall health. In fact, a well-studied aspect of many models of occupational stress consists of dysfunctional environment at the workplace that is characterized by negative physical, psychological and behavioral factors that influence individuals in various ways, and manifest themselves in long-term stress reactions, which include, decline in health, poor performance at work and dissatisfaction with work. Many researchers (e.g. Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper & Einarsen, 2011; Hogh, Mikkelsen & Hansen, 2011) took it upon themselves to investigate the possible negative effects associated with workplace bullying. They found experiencing unpleasant behavior at workplace to be linked to wide variety of individual level outcomes, many of which have been discussed above.

The first issue at hand is the negative impact that workplace bullying has on a person's psychological wellbeing. Numerous studies suggest that workplace bullying results in an increase in stress and overall psychological strain levels (Finne *et al.*, 2011; Lahelma, Lallukka, Laaksonen, Saastamoinen, Rahkonen, 2012), and this effect is no means short term but can haunt the victim for the rest of their life (Finne *et al.*, 2011). Researchers investigating this domain have identified many harmful outcomes associated with being bullied at the workplace, such as disturbed sleep (Lallukka, Rahkonen, & Lahelma, 2011; Rafnsdottir & Tomasson, 2004); increased anxious and depressive symptoms (Hansen *et al.*, 2006); lethargy in women and lack of energy in men (Taniguchi *et al.*, 2012) major depressive disorder (Rugiles *et al.*, 2012); mood disorders, anxiety, and adjustment disorders (Nolfe, Petrella, Zontini, Uttieri, 2010) and unfortunately, also suicide (Routley & Ozanne-Smith, 2012). In addition to that, studies also show an elevated use of hypnotics (Vartia, 2001) and various psychotropic medicines (Niedhammer *et al.*, 2011; Lallukka, Haukka, Partonen, Rahkonen, & Lahelma, 2012) in victims of workplace bullying, possibly in an attempt to deal with emotional difficulties (Sansone & Sansone, 2015). Job commitment depends on job satisfaction researches suggested earlier. Bullying affects employee's emotional state making her/him dis-satisfied and lowering the motivation and commitment. Findings of a study conducted in India and US simultaneously, show a significant positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Chordiya, Sabharwal, & Goodman, 2017). Another study suggest that job satisfaction depends significantly on emotions that are deep and their exhaustion affect satisfaction that defines commitments (Cho, Rutherford, Friend, Hamwi, & Park, 2016). There are substantial research evidences that link it to various occupational outcomes such as, morale, turnover intension and absenteeism (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). A study conducted by Rebecca *et al.*, (2018) investigated the cognitive appraisal of negative acts (may be bully) and found, that how individuals relate themselves to bullying and their coping strategies to handle the negative acts, affects their reporting of the event (i.e., bully). Employees who identify with bullying show detrimental effects than employee who do not consider themselves as being bullied.

Keeping in view the above-mentioned review of the factors involved in this research, the study aimed to understand the impact that workplace bullying can have on an individual's emotional state and the commitment towards the job. Another aim of this research is to strengthen or weaken the findings of previous researches and be a catalyst in devising an organizational policy regarding workplace bullying in Pakistan.

Research Objectives:

- Explore the effect of bullying on emotions related to job commitment.
- Evaluate gender differences in emotions related to job commitment.

Research Methodology

Participants

A sample of 290 participants (men = 119; women = 171) was drawn from five (5) different organizations. We were interested in employees who have been working for at least one (1) year in the organization therefore, the total population of such employees in these five organizations were 12,100. For this population a sample around 270-290 was able to make us 95% confident within a range of ± 6 of our results.

To study the moderation effect, we have divided that sample into; may be called; passive group and active group. Passive group to whom no stimulus i.e., bullying scenario was administered and active group who were administered with stimulus (i.e., scenarios). Forty-eight percent (48%) of the sample was taken as passive group.

Procedure and Materials

Participants of the study were asked to imagine themselves being bullied through the scenarios of work place bullying. When they have reported a stabilized imagination and that they can relate to the imaginary situation, they were asked to fill out the PANAS questionnaire that gave us an insight of their emotional state (PANAS scale) in particular frame of mind after visualizing and living into the presented scenario. It was followed by another questionnaire that gave an insight on their commitment (OCS scale) towards the job after they had imagined themselves in a bullying situation.

Informed consent forms were signed by the participants that outlined the necessary information regarding their rights on withdrawing from the research at any given point of time without any consequences. The participants were assured that their confidentiality will be maintained, and the data will only be used for research purposes.

Demographic Sheet. A demographic sheet was given to the participants that inquired about their gender, age, marital status, work experience etc.

Workplace Bullying Scenarios. We developed 5 scenarios reflecting workplace bullying in our corporate setup. These scenarios were sent to 15 raters of varying designations in organizations similar to organizations our sample would have been drawn. They were asked to rate (on a 5-point scale) scenarios on three points namely; *which scenarios are close to the naturally occurring bully in organizations, does the story of the scenario easy to comprehend and imagine, and suggestions to make scenarios /story more relevant and easier to comprehend.*

On the data obtained by these raters a CVI was calculated and two scenarios with highest ratings were selected. These scenarios based on workplace bullying were presented to each participant and they were asked to imagine themselves in that situation.

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). Participants' emotional state was assessed using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) scale (Watson & Clark, 1988). It is a 20-item questionnaire out of which 10 items focus on the positive affect while the rest on negative affect. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the Positive Affect Scale has been found to be .86 to .90; for the Negative Affect Scale, .84 to .87 (Watson *et al.*, 1988). In the current study the alpha coefficients for Positive and Negative Affect subscales were .61 and .89 respectively.

Organization Commitment Scale (OCS). Lastly, job commitment was measured using the Organization Commitment Scale (Cook & Wall, 1980). It is a 9-item questionnaire and its internal consistency for the entire scale was found to be .92, intrinsic job satisfaction is .85 and extrinsic was found to be .87. In the current study the alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.75.

Data Analysis and Results

Table 1. *Attributes of the sample (N:290)*

		%ages	
Age	Mean	34	
Gender	Female	171	59
	Male	119	41
Marital Status	Single	86	29.6
	Married	204	70.3
Education	Bachelors	151	52
	Masters	139	48
Total Experience	1-3 years	35	12
	4-7 years	78	27
	8-12 years	97	33
	Above 12 years	80	28

Table 1, presenting sample demographics. Mean age of the sample was 34 years; 59% were females and 41% were males having a work experience of 1 to above 12 years.

Table 2. *Negative emotions (under the influence of bully) and job commitment*

		Commitment
Negative Effect	Pearson Correlation	-.842**
	P	0.000

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

Table 2, shows relationship between negative emotions (emotions related to job-commitment) and job-commitment it self when participants presented with the bullying scenarios. It shows that participants (employees) feel less committed when they perceive bully. Data was suitable for moderation analysis as it was normally distributed continuous, homoscedastic,

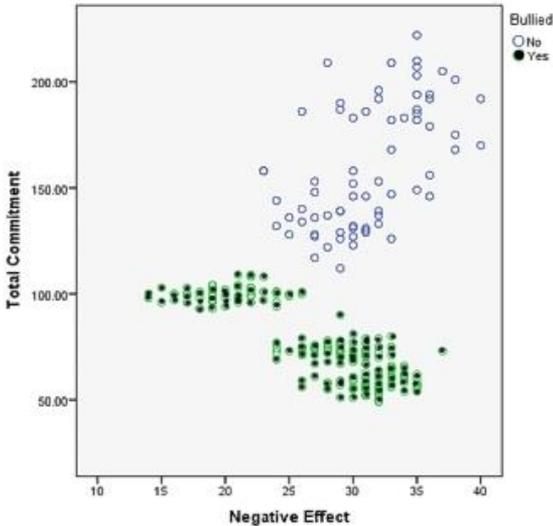
independent of residuals (DWT: 1.14), showed no multicollinearity, however, in the test on Mahalanobis, Cook's, and leverage we found outliers on Cook's and leverage. We eliminated the outliers and sample reduced to 251 from 290. However, it maintained the confidence interval i.e., 6; thus providing us a 95% confidence of results within the range of ± 6 .

Table 3. Model Summary Moderation Analysis (N: 251)

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.9397	0.8830	129.3281	621.6607	3.0000	247.0000	0.0000
Model						
	coeff(b)	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant (a)	84.7828	0.7534	112.5286	0.0000	83.2989	86.2668
NegEffect	-2.3801	0.1531	-15.5462	0.0000	-2.6816	-2.0786
Bullied	-80.5686	2.6107	-30.8612	0.0000	-85.7106	-75.4266
Int_1	-3.3263	0.5908	-5.6299	0.0000	-4.4900	-2.1626
Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):						
Bullied	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-0.8606	0.4824	0.5709	0.8448	0.3990	-0.6422	1.6069
0.1394	-2.8439	0.1520	-18.7149	0.0000	-3.1432	-2.5446

Table 3, shows the moderation effect of bullying on job commitment. This model defines 88% of variance. Negative effect (NegEffect) is significant ($p < .001$) and predicts 2.38 units decrease in job commitment with increase of 1 unit in negative effect. Whereas, this impact rises to 80.56 units decrease in job commitment with 1 unit increase in bully. On conditional effects, moderation effect is significant and produces 2.84 units decrease in job commitment.

Plot 1: Visualization of the moderation effect among employees in the sample (N: 251)



Picture 1, is the graphical depiction of the same moderation effect. Plot displays comparative decrease in commitment with increase negative effect that is caused by bullying.

Table 4. Mean Differences Across Gender on Study Variables (N = 251)

Variables	Men n = 117		Women n = 134		t	P	95 % CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Negative Effect	25.77	5.44	28.52	5.03	3.83	.000	1.34	4.17	.52
Job Commitment	97.77	15.57	86.68	15.92	-5.08	.000	-15.37	-6.80	.70

Table 4, displays the means differences between genders for emotions and commitment. Cohen's *d* suggests moderate difference in emotional effect whereas males show more commitments with large effect.

Table 5. Analysis of multi-variance for gender specific effect (N: 251)

Source		Type III	d	Mean	F	Sig.	Partial	Observe
		Sum of					Square	
Intercept	Negative	154389.41	1	154389.41	5717.36	.00	.963	1.000
	Effect	8						
Commitment	Negative	1782057.1	1	1782057.1	7146.51	.00	.970	1.000
	Effect	36						
Gender	Negative	397.564	1	397.564	14.723	.00	.063	.969
	Effect							
Commitment	Negative	6440.409	1	6440.409	25.828	.00	.106	.999
	Effect							

Table 5, analysis of variance, shows that gender is a significant factor in determining the negative emotional effect and job commitment.

Discussion

The construct of workplace bullying has attracted more and more research attention in the last four decades, due to substantial empirical evidences establishing it as a far-reaching social problem, having detrimental effects not only on professional lives of the victims, but their mental health as well (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). In light of this, the present research was designed to study the effect of perceived bullying on emotional state of employee and its impact on job commitment.

The results of correlational analysis (Table 2) showed a significant relationship between job commitment and negative effect that was inversely correlated to job commitment, in other words, employees having negative emotional effect apparently are less committed to their jobs. This can be because employees that continuously face an unpleasant work environment develop negative effect and may be more inclined towards leaving their job, thus showing poor job commitment. An employee that is satisfied and happy, that is the one having high positive and low negative effect, is naturally more committed to his or her job (Kaplan, Ogut, Kaplan, & Aksay, 2012; Markovits, Davis, Fay, & Dick, 2010). However, to understand this phenomenon well we looked into moderation effect of bullying on job commitment (Table 3). Model under analysis studied the effect of negative emotions related to job on employee commitment to their job – and how bullying affects (as a moderator) this relationship. The overall finding for the model ($F(3, 247) = 621.66, p < .001, R^2=.88$) shows that 88% of the variance is defined by this model. The negative effect ($b = -2.38, t(247) = -15.54, p = .001$) is significant and depicts a 2.38 units decrease in job commitment with increase of 1 unit in negative effect. However, this effect gets unproportionally high in bullying situations ($b = -80.56, t(247) = -30.86, p = .001$) where it decreases the job commitment by 80.5 units with a 1 unit of bullying. This situation makes employee vulnerable to negative state of emotions as described by Park and Ono (2016) "Specifically, we perceive that job insecurity unfolds through an interpersonal process in which negative experiences, such as bullying, make employees feel less valuable in their workplace". In conditional analysis, the effect of negative emotions is marginally significant ($b = 0.48, t(247) = 0.84, p = .04$) with only 0.48 units decrease in job commitment; however, in bullied situations this effect ($b = -2.84, t(247) = -18.71, p = .001$) rises to 2.84 units decrease in commitment. This finding is especially interesting that negative emotional effect is significant, without bullying, and produces negligible decrease in commitment however, if

employee perceive bullying it produces strong negative emotion that produces high decrease in commitment. A graph (Plot 1 – negative effect with commitment by bullying) shows how job commitment decreases with increase in negative effect by bullying.

Numerous researchers present a negative relationship between workplace bullying and mental health of employees (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Workplace bullying was found significantly related to emotional exhaustion and psychological wellbeing (Neto, Ferreira, Martinez, & Ferreira, 2017). Consequences of being victims of workplace bullying include mental health issues such as depression (Kivimäki *et al.*, 2003), psychosomatic issues and negative effect (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). Additionally, a study by Laschinger, Leiter, Day, and Gilin (2009), showed that workplace bullying, characterized by intentional harmful behaviors that offend the norm of mutual respect in the workplace, emerges as a crucial factor leading to lowered job commitment, especially affective job commitment, in staff nurses.

On one hand these results can be understood by means of considering that when exposed to workplace bullying, employees develop negative effect and thus are prone to lower job commitment. Goodboy *et al.* (2017) relate to this effect in their article as, "...study revealed that workplace bullying indirectly disengages employees from their work by denying them of their autonomy and relatedness needs and thwarting their motivation to perform work in a fulfilling way".

Gender is an element of significance (Table 4). Computed Cohen's D for the mean differences in gender depict that the emotional effect is not different for both the genders, however, it shows a medium effect size (0.50d), whereas, males appeared to be more committed with a large effect size (0.70d). Analysis of multi-variance (Table 5) on gender intercepting negative effect and commitment shows that gender is a significant factor in determining the negative emotional effect (covering 6.3% of the population variance) and later on job commitment (covering 10.6% of population variance). Observed power of almost one (1) makes us sure that this research is sufficiently powerful to detect significant effects.

Male employees reported higher job commitment as opposed to the women counterparts. It isn't an unprecedented finding, in fact previous researches have consistently shown similar results (Dodd-McCue & Wright, 1996; Şentuna, 2015). Two theoretical models offer competing explanations for this consistent observation. The gender role model postulates that varying degrees of organizational commitment for male and female employees relate to their gender role socializations; which may include the distinction of gender roles ascribed to both the genders. On the other hand, the job model argues that this gender difference reflects different organizational experiences that male and female employees face (Dodd-McCue & Wright, 1996).

Conclusion

Participants of the research were perceiving the bullying situation, they may or may not have experienced bullying in real work situations. However, their responses revealed their emotional association to such a situation. Participants were highly sensitive to bullying situations that produces negative emotional state and this reduces their commitment to their job. If bullying is a detrimental factor for job commitment even in a perceived situation it may be quite disturbing in real situations. Therefore, organizations must deal with bully elements in the environment.

Limitations

It should be acknowledged that the findings of this study are restricted to a very limited sample. Therefore, in order to make these finding more generalizable, replication studies, preferably using larger and diverse sample, are recommended. Second, participants have responded on a perceived scenario of bullying; to appraise the phenomena well a sample from victimized population would be preferable. Furthermore, the current study focused on only one factor affecting job commitment and employee's emotions: workplace bullying, whereas there could be multiple factors affect it such as relationship between colleagues, relations between manager and subordinates, type of work and responsibilities associated with it, salary and scope of growth and advancement; and lastly, overall conditions of work. For future purposes, this study can be enhanced by tapping on more factors affecting job commitment and emotions other than workplace bullying as it will give us the bigger picture.

Implications

The above results shed light on constructs related to organizational psychology, the present research too adds weight in the scientific and empirical works in this field as well as offers practical implications in the work place. The findings put forth by this research help one get a better knowhow of the association between workplace bullying, negative effect and job commitment. Future researchers can utilize the findings of this study to extend this line of work

further. In addition to that, this research will be helpful for practitioners and human resource managers that are looking to enhance job commitment of the employees in their organization, by minimizing and eventually eliminating work place bullying and while creating a safe and productive work environment and thus enhancing positive effect in employees. Tailoring intervention plans against job turnover, while keeping at risk and vulnerable groups in mind, can enhance their effectiveness in increasing job commitment.

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