

Impact of workplace bullying on employee silence in private sector hospitals of p...

[Parts of the World](#), [Asia](#)



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Over the years, an increase in involvement has been seen in the workforce by the underrepresented sections of the society. As a result nowadays, people differ noticeably in visible attributes of race, sex and age within organizations (Singh, Bhullar & Sankaran, 2018). For the profitable advantage and reputation of organization, such demographic diversity is now considered very important (Love, 2010). Diversity, however in addition to multiple visible categories such as race, age, sex and dress; can also be in multiple invisible categories such as attitudes, values and knowledge (Mannix & Neale, 2005). Such diversity is found in the culture of Pakistani organizations but while diversity is advantageous for the organizations to grow and prosper, on the other hand, diverse workgroups pose several challenges (Egan and Tsui, 1992; Ayoko and Hartel, 2002) which also leads to some negative behavioral outcomes like workplace bullying. Therefore,

managers of diverse workgroups at practical level, along with managing the conflict events in the groups should also manage the reaction to conflict among them as the research shows that bullying was a result of conflict while emotional reactions to bullying was result of negative reaction to conflict (Ayoko, 2007).

A phenomenon which brings up several destructive and harmful consequences in almost every organization nowadays is workplace bullying. A noticeable attention of research scholars has been received by a widespread and prevalent behavior of bullying at work (Giorgi, Leon-Perez, & Arenas, 2015). “ Workplace bullying – a form of interpersonal mistreatment – is defined as a situation in which an employee feels constantly and persistently subjected to negative behaviors at the hands of others in the workplace” (Einarsen et al. , 2011), usually by people appointed to supervisory positions (D’Cruz and Rayner, 2013; Lutgen-Sandvik et al. , 2007). Lately, the reflexive or passive coping strategies of employees as a response to ill-treatment at work have begun to be examined by many scholars (e. g. silence and feedback avoidance; Kiewitz et al. , 2002; Whitman et al. , 2014; Xu et al. , 2015). One of the most important and significant passive responses displayed by the employees in the face of mistreatment at work (Xu et al. , 2015) is employee silence, defined as; “ an employee intentionally withholding ideas, information, concerns, and opinions about issues related to their job and the organization” (Brinsfield, 2013; Dyne et al. , 2003). In this study, we examine the impending multifaceted nature of silence by examining ineffectual silence, relational

silence, and defensive silence as employee responses to workplace bullying (Rai and Agarwal, 2017b; Brinsfield, 2013). Bullying is viewed as a negative work event since work environment distressing or bullying includes negative and long haul practices showed by perpetrators on their victims.

Manifestations of stress, including nervousness, strain, dread, and depression, among the targets of tormenting or bullying can be delivered due to this kind of event (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012).

Therefore, studies show that workplace bullying is basically and emphatically rather positively related to employee emotional exhaustion which is on the whole related to loss of psychological wellbeing (M. Neto, et al, 2017). So, emotional exhaustion is referred as “ feelings of emotionally overstrained and exhausted to do work and the individual tends to exhibit physical tiredness along with emotionally drained feelings” (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Moreover, emotional exhaustion is predicted by low social support and also occurs mainly due to excessive job demand at work which is also a factor of bullying at work (Janssen, Jonge, & Bakker, 1999). Apart from experiencing resentment, anger and frustration, it is likely that the victims of bullying may also face other negative emotions such as emotional exhaustion (Xu et al. , 2015), fear (Kiewitz et al. , 2002; Kish-Gephart et al. , 2009) and a lack of psychological safety (e. g. Ashford et al. , 1998; Brinsfield, 2013; Edmondson, 2003; Harlos and Pinder, 2000) which may consequently result in employee silence as a response. Based on the above discussion, this study maintains that the relationship between workplace bullying and employee silence is mediated by emotional exhaustion.

Einarsen et al. (2011) in their overview of factors influencing workplace bullying, not only highlighted the significance of socio-economic and cultural factors for the process of bullying but also argued that these affect all stages of the bullying process, respectively. Power distance is one of such dimension of national culture and Jacobson et al. (2013) based on theoretical reasoning and justifications, hypothesized that higher levels of bullying is linked with high power distance in society. Moreover, according to Hofstede (1980), “ power distance is a cultural value that expresses the extent to which one expects and accepts power asymmetry between individuals at different strata of a society. ” Present study proposes to investigate the moderation relationship of power distance between workplace bullying and emotional silence.

Problem Statement:

The Introduction to a research manuscript or document constitutes a problem statement. It is actually the necessary and essential that delivers and conveys the issues and context that gave rise to the study (McGaghie, Bordage & Shea, 2001). The problem statement of this research is:“ What is the impact of workplace bullying on employee silence with mediating role of emotional exhaustion and moderating role of power distance?” The purpose of this paper is to examine what are the effects of workplace bullying on employee silence (defensive, relational, and ineffectual silence) in effect with the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in this relationship and the extent to which this relationship of workplace bullying and employee silence is moderated by power distance, respectively. In a country like Pakistan,

workplace bullying is very high due to its diverse culture which poses several challenges for the employees and organizations as a whole (Egan and Tsui, 1992; Ayoko and Hartel, 2002). This in turn leads to outcomes like employee silence but the mediation impact of emotional exhaustion and moderation effect of power distance on this relationship is not tested before.

Broad Problem Area:

The broad problem area identified was the prevalence of workplace bullying and its outcomes in the diverse culture of Pakistani organizations specifically private sector hospitals.

Research Questions:

The present study aims to find the answer of following research questions:

Question: 1) What is the relationship between workplace bullying and defensive silence?

Question: 2) What is the relationship between workplace bullying and relational silence?

Question: 3) What is the relationship between workplace bullying and ineffectual silence?

Question: 4) What is the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion?

Question: 5) What is the relationship between emotional exhaustion and defensive silence?

Question: 6) What is the relationship between emotional exhaustion and relational silence?

Question: 7) What is the relationship between emotional exhaustion and ineffectual silence?

Question: 8) Does emotional exhaustion mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and defensive silence?

Question: 9) Does emotional exhaustion mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and relational silence?

Question: 10) Does emotional exhaustion mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and ineffectual silence?

Question: 11) Does power distance play a moderating role between workplace bullying and defensive silence?

Question: 12) Does power distance play a moderating role between workplace bullying and relational silence?

Question: 13) Does power distance play a moderating role between workplace bullying and ineffectual silence?

Research Objectives:

The overall objective of the study is to develop an integrative model by examining the impact of workplace bullying on employee silence using emotional exhaustion as a mediator and will further explain the role of cultural dimension that is power distance as a moderator between workplace bullying

and employee silence. On the basis of research questions developed for the study, following objectives of the study are developed:

1. To find out the impact of workplace bullying on defensive silence.
2. To find out the impact of workplace bullying on relational silence.
3. To find out the impact of workplace bullying on ineffectual silence.
4. To explore the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion.
5. To explore the relationship between emotional exhaustion and defensive silence.
6. To explore the relationship between emotional exhaustion and relational silence.
7. To discover the relationship between emotional exhaustion and ineffectual silence.
8. To explore the mediation of emotional exhaustion between workplace bullying and defensive silence.
9. To explore the mediation of emotional exhaustion between workplace bullying and relational silence.
10. To explore the mediation emotional exhaustion between workplace bullying and ineffectual silence.
11. To investigate that power distance is moderating between the workplace bullying and defensive silence.
12. To investigate that power distance is moderating between the workplace bullying and relational silence.

13. To investigate that power distance is moderating between the workplace bullying and ineffectual silence.

Significance of the study:

The present study contributes to the existing literature in many ways. First this study extends the recently emerging flow of research that has begun to examine the impulsive responses of victims of mistreatment in the workplace. Second, research examining how and why employees remain silent is recent phenomenon; therefore, this study aims to extend the understanding of employee silence in response to workplace bullying or mistreatment. Third, this study focuses on the gaps added to the narrow and limited literature that aims to examine emotional exhaustion as a mediator in bullying-outcomes relationship suggested by Rai & Agarwal (2018) of medical professionals. Hence this study explores that emotional exhaustion is a mechanism to produce silent behavior among bullied medical professionals. More specifically, by means of this paper, we answer the call of Rai & Agarwal (2018) to examine the moderating role of cultural dimension like power distance between the relationship of workplace bullying and impending multifaceted nature of silence in response to mistreatment at work by including relational silence, defensive silence and ineffectual silence as employee responses to workplace bullying.

This study's contribution can also be seen in terms of its cultural context. The present study extends the mainly western-centric literature to the Pakistani context. The behaviors of individuals may vary across the culture according to Hofstede (1980). In his survey of IBM employees in over 40

countries (Islam, 2004) Hofstede found that according to Power Distance Index used in the survey, Pakistan has a collectivistic culture having high power distance score which shows that Pakistan bears a rather high degree of inequality. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the behavior or response of bullied medical professionals in Pakistani culture. Furthermore, our study focuses on examining behavior of bullied medical professionals working in private hospitals of Pakistan as suggested by Paracha & Shahzad (2018).

Underpinning Theory:

This study takes conservation of resources (COR) theory as the foundation theory to explain the relationship between study variables. One of the most cited theories in literature on organizational behavior (Halbesleben et al. , 2014) is COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001). The proposition of this theory is that human behavior is organized around acquirement and accumulation of resources. It states, “ people strive to obtain, retain and protect that which they value” (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 55), called “ resources,” that “ are centrally valued in their own right, or act as means to obtain centrally valued ends” (Hobfoll, 2002, pp. 307). These resources can come in the form of conditions (e. g. dignity, self-respect, status, security, social support, and job control); objects (e. g. food, shelter, tools) energies (e. g. time, knowledge and money) and; personal characteristics (e. g. skills, efficacy and beliefs) (Hobfoll, 2001). The primacy and dominance of resource loss is the central ideology of COR theory, which suggests that to lose resources is

psychologically more harmful for individuals than to gain them (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001).

According to Hoel et al. , (1999), workplace bullying is considered to be a serious occupational stressor. As workplace bullying is an indicative of a continuous loss of intrinsic resources (e. g. status, dignity, safety, energy at work; Tuckey and Neall, 2014) so workplace can be highly stressful.

Exhausted or depleted employees may adopt a defensive position to prevent further resource loss or to conserve their remaining resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Whitman et al. , 2014; Xu et al. , 2015) since resource loss is much more significant than resource gain (Hobfoll, 2001). The COR theory suggests that in order to regulate one's remaining resources, silence is intended and deliberate decision is made (Ng and Feldman, 2012). So, in order to protect one's remaining resources, remaining silent within one's workplace is a natural and safe way or decision (Xu et al. , 2015). According to the conservation of resources theory, the ability or resources to cope with the stress will be first determined by the workers who face excessive stress (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). Therefore the workers will develop negative physiological and emotional reactions if they are incapable or unable of coping and their resources are constantly drained without replacement (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). Emotional exhaustion, among these, is the most common negative reaction to stressful situations. The relationship between workplace bullying and silence (defensive silence, relational silence, and ineffectual silence) has been explained in detail in the later sections of this paper. We then introduce emotional exhaustion as a mediator between

workplace bullying and silence. We further expect that the second stage of moderation of power distance will influence the direct relationship between workplace bullying and employee silence.

Scope of study:

The scope of the study is limited to health sector where the medical professionals working in the private hospitals of Islamabad region were a part of this study.

Chapter # 2(Literature Review)2. Literature Review: This chapter aims to elaborate the variables of the study with the help of the existing literature on workplace bullying, dimensions of employee silence, emotional exhaustion and power distance, respectively. In addition to that, this chapter will highlight and include the demonstration of the studies carried out by a variety of researchers regarding the relationships between the variables used in the present study.

Workplace Bullying:

The origin of workplace bullying goes back to 1990 when Heinz Leymann did first research on workplace bullying at work in which Leymann (1996) mentioned that workplace bullying is actually an outcome of complex and dynamic processes taking place in various organizational levels including organizational culture, job design, leadership, work environment and climate. Einarsen et al. , (2011) gave the following definition of bullying which has been widely and most commonly used in workplace bullying literature:“ Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or

negatively affecting someone's work tasks. It is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal 'strength' are in conflict. " Furthermore, different definitions of bullying show that bullying is actually related to repetitive and prolonged behavior (e. g. Einarsen et al. , 2011; Salin, 2003) whereas on the other hand, power imbalance is another measure highlighted in various researches and definitions which further elaborate that in bullying situation the target or victim finds it difficult to defend himself/herself in order to cope with the behavior (e. g. Rayner and Keashly, 2005; Salin, 2003). The situational approach to workplace bullying is supported by empirical evidence which highlights the fact that the stressful environment which allows workplace bullying to flourish is as a result of deficiencies in leadership behavior and work organization (Samnani & Singh, 2012). For instance, how individuals experience feelings of shame and pride and, accordingly, agree to validate bullying behaviors highly depends upon management practices (Braithwaite, Ahmed, & Braithwaite, 2008). Researchers have also explained different types of bullying behaviors such as discriminatory bullying (caused by racism factors), dispute related bullying (interpersonal conflict is the root cause), organizational bullying (caused by tyrannical environment) and authoritative bullying (caused by abusive behavior from the authoritative positions) (Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie, & Namie, 2009).

According to various researches, antecedents of workplace bullying may include lack of goal clarity and deprived social climate and other such negative features of working environments (Skogstad, Torsheim, Einarsen, & Hauge, 2011). Moreover, when the treatment received in the organizational context is considered by employees as unfair and unjust, then they experience and face unpleasant emotions of anger, humiliation and disappointment and as a result react with behaviors intentionally aimed at threatening the interests of the organization or its members (e. g. workplace bullying) (Guglielmi, Mazzetti, Villano & Topa Cantisano, 2017). Studies have found very destructive and severe negative consequences of bullying for victims (e. g. Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012).

Exploring the seriousness of its outcomes is aimed by a large amount of studies which found out that the employees who get affected by workplace bullying experience damage to their health and wellbeing and these damages or outcomes include symptoms of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep problems and musculoskeletal disorders (Vignoli, Guglielmi, Balducci, & Bonfiglioli, 2015). Moreover the damages caused by bullying at workplace is not limited only to reduced health and well-being among those being bullied (e. g. Hogh, Hoel, & Carneiro, 2011), but it also has organizational, unit and individual outcomes as well which can greatly cause decrease in performance and productivity (Mathisen, Einarsen, & Mykletun, 2008), increased turnover intentions (Houshmand, O'Reilly, Robinson, & Wolff, 2012), increase in the rate of absenteeism (Asfaw, Chang, & Ray, 2014) and high reduction in the job satisfaction level and

engagement (Rodríguez-Muñoz, Baillien, De Witte, MorenoJiménez & Pastor, 2009).

Therefore, the above literature depicts that bullying at workplace has a number of negative outcomes and employees show various negative responses to such ill-treatment at work. One of the most important and significant passive responses displayed by the employees in the face of mistreatment or bullying at work is employee silence (Xu et al. , 2015). This study aims to examine the impact of workplace bullying on this negative behavior shown by employees that is an attempt of choosing to remain silent due to unjust bullying treatment at work.