

Workplace Bullying and Gender Minority: An Empirical Study

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Abstract— Workplace bullying has been on foot for the past years which results to high rates of employees’ turnover, emotional/mental distress among victims and decreased work productivity. As the relevance of gender minority as a social construct to bullying incidences has always been a question of inquiry, this study purposely aim to confirm or reject existing notions based from an empirical perspective. Bullying is never a uniform experience that affects all employees in a similar way. Thus, empirical studies are key to hold full grasps on the context of bullying looking into the lens of gender minority as a social category. This study adopted the descriptive-quantitative design where survey questionnaires were used as the main research instrument. Sixty-six administrative personnel were taken as samples which were obtained through the lottery random sampling. The organization under study was found to be female-dominated. In a local context, results suggest that workplace bullying is a gender-neutral phenomenon. Nonetheless, regardless of gender-relevance, the need to consider gender construct in designing and implementing response mechanisms is but central in mitigating the outcomes stemmed from bullying behaviors in the workplace.

Keywords— Workplace bullying, gender minority, gender-relevance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a pervasive and widespread concern (Wech,B. et al. 2020;Gonzalez,A. 2012) which confronts most societies globally. It has been a prevalent concern surfacing among students in both public and private educational institutions. Different schools have distinct response mechanisms and administrative measures to deal with complaints arising from perceived acts of bullying. As this topic was flagged as a significant international research topic (Akella, 2016) this eventually paved the way for more studies to emerge. However, bullying takes various forms, sizes and shapes (Tolentino, 2016) which make us lag behind a fully accepted definition and definite indicator. This social issue was never confined to only those of younger ages, rather it appears to come about even to adults and younger professionals.

As Akella (2016) argues in her study, workplace bullying constitutes repetitive and persistent negative actions which aims to intimidate or harm the target or victim. This creates an environment of fear, distress and power imbalance. She further argued that the different cultural norms as highlighted by Hofstede have significant correlation with cultural tendencies (Akella, 2016). Societies which were ranked higher in power distance and lower uncertainty avoidance tend to be more susceptible to bullying. For instance, Malaysia ranked high in power distance and low in uncertainty avoidance

reported higher number of bullying incidences. Hence, Akella (2016) concluded in her study that Asian countries such as the Philippines are more likely to record higher number of bullying cases than those in the European counterparts.

Conversely, with these facts flowing in our consciousness, only few organizations take serious cognizance on the adoption of anti-bullying measures and policies in the workplace (Gonzales, 2012). Some countries paved little to no studies on the concept. In effect, there is little recognition to its existence and people has no full understanding on the impacts it might cause individuals and even organizations (Sayaseng, 2019). In a relevant study (Sayaseng, 2019), findings suggest that there are different risk factors contributory to the occurrence of workplace bullying. Few among these factors were gender, culture, marital status, power distance and westerner privilege. In a similar study, individual issues, hierarchy and work environment were determined as factors leading to bullying behaviours as shown in Figure 1 (Wech et al., 2020).

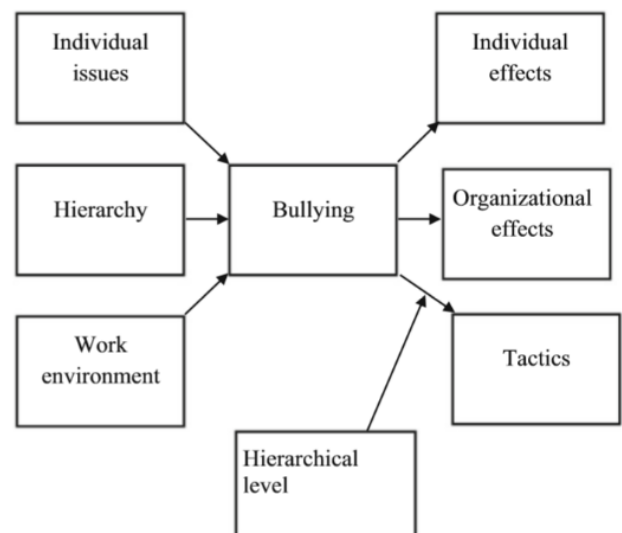


Fig. 1. Grounded Theory Model of Workplace Bullying

However, for purposes of drawing the limitations of this study, gender will be given more highlight. The relationship of gender to bullying incidences poses various questions for inquiry (Hutchinson & Eveline, 2010), hence this study.

As Salin (2013) underscored in his study that gender is key to understanding the patterns of bullying. Although, workplace bullying was marked as a gender-neutral phenomenon

(Hutchinson & Eveline, 2010), evidences from other studies suggest that it is otherwise (Salin, 2013). This contradiction was even supported by Hayman (2015) when he concluded in her results that there exists complex relationship among gender, gender minority and workplace bullying. She further argued that the difficulties faced by women in office-related bullying was brought by the gender group one belongs. She then concluded that workplace bullying is a consequence rather than a gender issue. This argument was supported by the findings of her study where women working in a male dominated organization were found to be exposed to higher levels of bullying than men. Nonetheless, the presumption for men working in a female dominated organization was found to be in contrary. There was no significant difference between men and women working in a female dominated organization. Ott (1989) offers a potential explanation when he argued in his study that the results of women being subject to negative behaviours were not impacted by gender minority rather by their gender. He further noted in his findings that men in a female dominated organization received more advantages for being part of the gender minority. Hence, this study aims to either confirm or reject the notion that links gender minority to workplace bullying.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Various arguments and claims in the literature have drawn interest on gender as a factor to be considered in understanding the patterns of workplace bullying. As it (bullying) takes various forms, it is never a uniform experience that affects individuals in the same way (Salin 2013). Hence, this study would like to explore the perimeters of bullying in a local setting. This aims to either confirm or reject the notion that gender minority opens the probability of being exposed to various acts of work-related bullying. This study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Who are more susceptible to workplace bullying, men or women?
2. What is the gender classification of the organization being studied?
3. How is gender minority related to workplace bullying?

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study used the Descriptive-Quantitative design to collect quantifiable information for the analysis and interpretation of the research findings. Survey questionnaires composed of three (3) sub-sections were administered to the pre-selected respondents. The researchers have chosen a tertiary school in the Island Province of Basilan as the target population. Subsequently, as it would be reasonably hard to administer the research instrument to all population-members, the determination of sample out of the bigger population was found necessary. In this connection, the sample was obtained through the lottery random sampling. This was conducted by randomly picking numbers corresponding to the names of prospect respondents within the population. Moreover, in the

selection of the target population, ease of access was primarily considered. For ethical purposes, the name of the school was purposely concealed.

B. Research Respondents

The research respondents were determined using the lottery random sampling method. An alphabetically arranged list of employees was obtained from the Human Resource Management Office (HRMO) of the target school upon approval of written request. After sampling, seventy two (72) subjects were obtained and each were provided with one (1) set of the research instrument.

C. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was fundamentally used for the analysis of raw data. Anchored from the research questions as stipulated in the introductory section, the researchers determined beforehand the variables to be tested. As this study generally aims to define the impact of gender to workplace incidences, these two (2) variables were analysed using the SPSS Descriptive Statistics – Frequencies. Nonetheless, upon encoding of responses to each items, six (6) respondents were confirmed as “missing”. Missing items are those responses with incomplete data. As this may potentially affect the accuracy of the result, the researchers decided to remove them from the sample group. Having this done, the total number of valid respondents dropped to sixty six (66).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1. Gender Classification

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Female	39	59.1	59.1
	Male	27	40.9	40.9
	Total	66	100.0	100.0

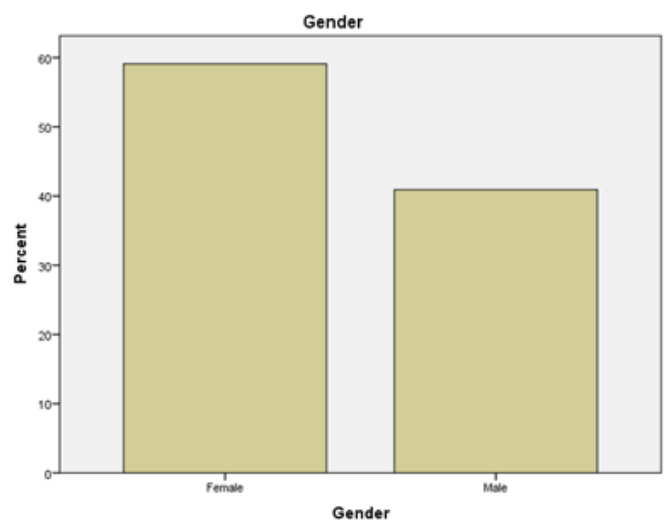


Fig. 2. Gender Classification

Table 1 as supported by Figure 2 shows that the organization under study is dominated by women (59.1%) than men (40.9%) – thus is considered female dominated.

TABLE 2. Gender of Victims

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Female	19	28.8	38.8
	Male	4	6.1	8.2
	Both	26	39.4	53.1
	Total	49	74.2	100.0
Missing	System	17	25.8	
Total		66	100.0	

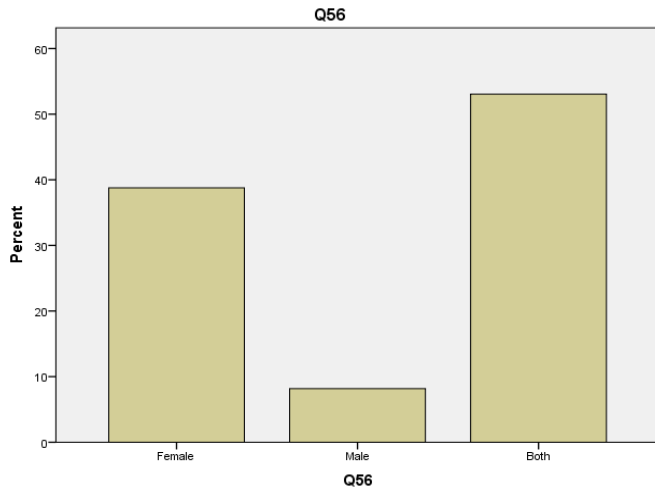


Fig. 3. Gender of Victims

Table 2 as graphically presented in Figure 3 indicates that women are more susceptible to bullying behaviors (28.8 %) than men (6.1%), though there were similar incidences seen in both men and women (39.4%). A relevant study (Hayman, 2015) suggests that women working in a male-dominated organization are more likely to experience higher levels of exposure to negative bullying behaviors than men. In the contrary, men working in a female-dominated organization are exposed to more advantages from being part of the gender minority (Ott, 1989). Nonetheless, the study conducted by Hayman (2015) failed to give limelight to the experiences of women in a female-dominated organization. Though the findings of this study supports the claim of workplace bullying as a gender-neutral phenomenon where bullying holds prevalence in both men and women (53.1%), still there remains a question on gender-relevance. Though bullying was found prevalent in both men and women, still a significant number of respondents considered women to have more exposure to bullying than men. This leads to the notion that women irrespective of the gender classification of the organization are expected to be exposed to bullying behaviors. Hence, the question of gender minority reverts to whether gender groups really influences the prevalence of bullying in the workplace. This opens another notion that there might be other underlying factors contributory to bullying susceptibilities. Few among the many potential factors that may be considered for future studies are hierarchy, social power, social division, ethnicity and age.

Table 3 as graphically supported by Figure 4 presents the gender classifications of perceived bullies in the workplace. Respondents claimed that female (21.2%) shows more bullying behaviors than men (9.1%), though majority of

incidences still involved both men and women (42.4%).

TABLE 3. Gender of Bullies

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Female	14	21.2
	Male	6	9.1
	Both	28	42.4
	Total	48	72.7
Missing	System	18	27.3
Total		66	100.0

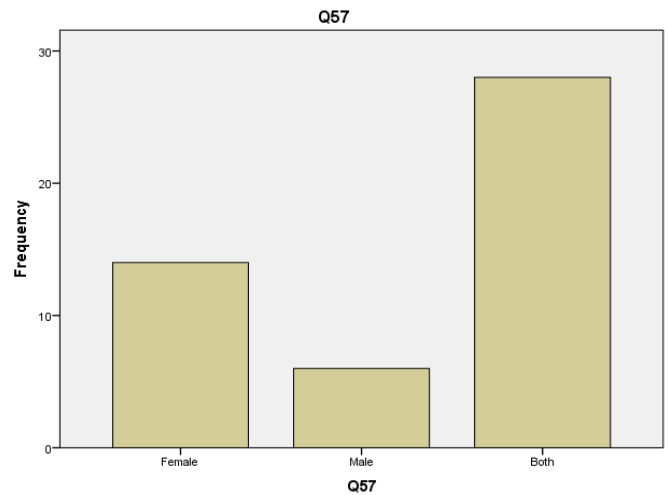


Fig. 4. Gender of Bullies

Missing entries as shown in Table 1 reflects the responses of respondents who answered “No” in Item No. 54 of the research instrument (*Have you ever witnessed (actually seen) anyone (other than yourself) being bullied at work?*). Hence the total valid responses were only 48. These figures lead to a confined conclusion that perpetrators of workplace bullying were mostly women. Though the results of this study may not be used to generalize other population with different context and social category, still in this local setting, the long-drawn belief of bullying confined to only female employees was put into question. All this time, women has been the center of bullying issues, isolating the incidence from potential male-victims.

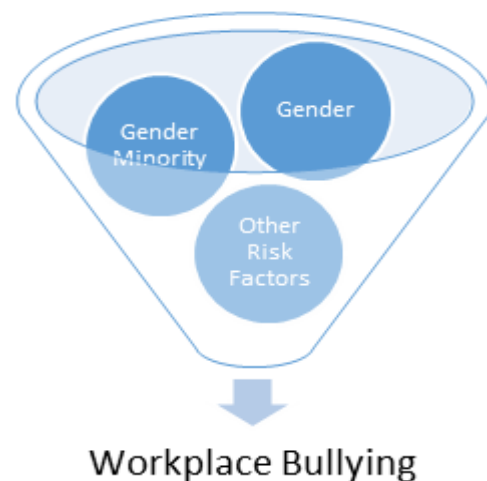


Fig. 5. Conceptual Framework

In summary, this study suggests that gender and gender minority are lenses to fully understand the context of workplace bullying. However, other risk factors are equally significant in the process of gauging bullying behaviors. As the relationship of gender to bullying incidences may not be generalized to other population, looking into other perspectives may add up to what the literature provides us. That perhaps we are looking at bullying from a half-finished puzzle board that needs to be finished. And who knows, the final piece of this incomplete puzzle rests on our hands – as researchers.

V. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study suggest that irrespective of the gender classification of an organization, women are more likely to experience and be exposed to bullying behaviors. The population under study was marked as a female-dominated organization. The results obtained supports the argument that workplace bullying is a gender-neutral phenomenon; thus reverting the interest for future studies to other risk factors in the workplace. It is worth stressing that regardless of gender-relevance, acknowledging gender aspects is key to designing/implementing response mechanisms to mitigate workplace outcomes brought about by bullying behaviors such as employees' turnover, decreased productivity, employees' emotional instabilities and others. Thus, gender minority and gender-relevance should always form part of any policy initiative drawn towards addressing bullying incidences. Moreover, as the results of this study suggest, workplace bullying is never confined to one gender category (female). For future studies, social constructs other

than gender may be explored to draw a clearer line of understanding on workplace bullying and its implications to organizations and individual employees. Furthermore, future efforts in this area of inquiry may also look into the living experiences of men from office-related bullying.

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