Workplace Bullying and Employees' Retention: An Enquiry

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Abstract— *Workplace bullying is an organizational concern that poses serious risks for both employees and organizations. It sometimes hide behind the normally accepted organizational culture which make it even harder to manage and control. As bullying places victims/targets under humiliation and known pressure, making them uncomfortable and edgy, their emotional and physical health begin to shiver. Findings of this study suggest that while bullying corners the edge of someone's serenity and morality, this does not expressively corresponds to employees' turnover. Rather, this study looks into other causal factors that may cause an employee to leave an organization despite the lived-experiences of bullying.*

Keywords— *Employees' turnover, organizational culture, workplace bullying.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Bullying 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 this eventually paved the way for more studies to emerge. However, bullying takes various forms, sizes and shapes 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 Hofstedes have significant correlation with cultural tendencies. 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.

On the other hand, in a local study conducted by Tolentino (2016), the author revealed that bullying among teachers in the workplace was prevalent. Her phenomenological study involved twelve (12) informants for the in-depth interview and eight (8) participants for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This study presented various lived experiences of teachers on workplace bullying and how they went about it. The interviews shared with the informants have drawn one common line of perspective – bullying as an adverse treatment towards another person/s with the intent to intimidate, humiliate and put someone into an uncomfortable situation. The concluding findings of the study suggest that workplace bullying has caused emotional and psychological distress among the victims. While some have their ways of coping with these impacts, still it left a mark in their whole being.

Having determined the pervasiveness of workplace bullying and with the government's effort to brush-off this social issue confronting workers nowadays, House Bill No. 85 otherwise known as "An Act Requiring All Government and Non-Government Offices and Establishments to Adopt Policies to Prevent and Address the Acts of Bullying and Other Similar Acts in the Workplace" was filed and introduced by Representatives Alfredo A. Garbin, Jr. and Elizaldy S. Co. The principal authors have stressed the importance of Anti-Office Bullying policies in the workplace. The Bill similarly defines office bullying as [1] an act that causes physical harm; [2] an act that causes harm to a victim's psyche and/or emotional and/or moral being; [3] any slanderous statement or accusation that causes the victim undue emotional distress; [4] Cyber-bullying or any bullying done through the use of technology; and [5] Any abusive acts or behaviour. Mechanisms to address office-bullying, other prohibited acts, sanctions for noncompliance and reportorial requirements formed the salient parts of the Bill.

Oftentimes, workplace bullying hides behind the socially accepted organizational culture which labels such acts as normal. This discreetly provides bullies the protection from their victims/targets. As the study of Tolentino (2016) concludes that teachers who suffered from workplace bullying manifest symptoms of Post-Traumatic Depression and other signs of emotional instabilities, the risk of increased employees' turnover could be underway. Therefore, the relationship of bullying incidences to employees' retention must be well defined to better understand the line of choices employees have at hand. This may similarly contribute to the development of organizational response mechanisms to deal with cases involving office-bullying and to prevent worst-case scenarios where employees leave companies/organizations due to abuses and maltreatments brought about by perceived acts of bullying, hence this study.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Workplace bullying has been a passing concern which most organizations failed to give proper acknowledgement. As the gauges of bullying are vague and ill-defined as reported in the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training conducted last 2013 , its victims are not even able to distinguish behaviours leading to such actions. In the same sense, the Newcastle University in their Final Report for NHS Employees for March 2016 equally underscored the lack of consensus of generally accepted definition of what bullying is and is not. In the lens of administration, the existence of bullying in the workplace may secretly kill an organization. As the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) of Oregon claimed that workplace bullying causes employees to experience emotional and physical distress which may lead to poor performance and decreased employees' retention . The same was supported by the Interagency Round Table on Workplace Bullying conducted on 2005 which developed the Dealing with Workplace Bullying: A Practical Guide for Employees. In this connection, this study would like to determine whether incidences of workplace bullying affect employees' retention in an organization.

It similarly aims to recognize the backdoors of every employee's turnover by looking into the lens of the experiences brought about by workplace-related bullying. Moreover, this specifically aims to answer the following research questions:
1. What is the impact of workplace bullying to employees' retention?
2. What are the coping mechanisms adopted by victims to counter the acts of bullying?
3. How did employees perceive the organization's response measures in dealing with workplace bullying, if any?

III. METHOLOGY

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 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, 72 subjects were obtained and each were provided with 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

A. Incidence of Workplace Bullying and Employees' Retention

TABLE 1. Incidence of Workplace Bullying
Q61. Have you been bullied while at work**?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	26	39.4	39.4
	No	40	60.6	60.6
	Total	66	100.0	100.0

Results of the study suggests that 39.4 percent of the respondents experienced bullying at work. While 60.6 percent responded with "No".

TABLE 2. Employees' intent to leave the organization
Q23. At present, I am considering leaving the school?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Strong Disagree	10	15.2	15.2
	Disagree	34	51.5	51.5
	Neither Disagree nor agree	9	13.6	13.6
	Agree	8	12.1	12.1
	Strongly agree	5	7.6	7.6
	Total	66	100.0	100.0

On the other hand, 15.2 percent of the respondents denied the possible intent of leaving the school. A higher 51.5 percent similarly disagreed; whereas 13.6 percent chose to remain in the status quo with no definite stand; while 12.1 percent agreed on leaving the school and a minimal 7.6 percent strongly highlighted their plan to leave.

While the results of the study underscored the presence of workplace bullying incidences in the organization, its influence towards employees' retention was not definite. This can be well presented by the results of the cross-tabulation conducted between Item 23 and Item 61 as shown in Table 3.

Cross-tabulation shows that out of 26 respondents who claimed to have experienced bullying in the workplace, only 6 agreed on leaving the organization; 13 denied the idea of dropping from their present post; while 7 were still uncertain. Having this result as a reference point, it can said that experiencing bullying at work does not directly entail

resignation or dropping from the organization. Contrariwise, a number of employees who have not experienced bullying agreed on leaving. This notes that apart from workplace bullying, there may be other underlying factors pushing employees to resign or transfer.

TABLE 3. Employees' Retention and Incidences of Workplace Bullying
Q23 * Q61 Cross-tabulation

		Yes	No	Total
	Strong Disagree	4	6	10
	Disagree	9	25	34
Q23	Neither Disagree nor agree	7	2	9
	Agree	3	5	8
	Strongly agree	3	2	5
	Total	26	40	66

TABLE 4. Response Mechanisms against Workplace Bullying
Q71 * Q61 Cross tabulation

		Q61 Yes	Total
	Talked with co-worker about the behaviour	7	7
	Talked with family and friends	4	4
	Told HR about it	1	1
Q71	Asked my collegues for help	1	1
	Lowered my productivity	1	1
	Acted as if I don't care	2	2
	Stayed calm	5	5
	Ignored the behaviour or did nothing	3	3
	Total	24	24

In terms of the victims' coping mechanisms against workplace bullying, 7 out of 24 who responded with "Yes" (with bullying experiences) stated that talking with co-workers about the incidence was their main emotional support; 5 claimed to have been calm despite the persistent acts of intimidation; 4 believed that talking with family and friends made a difference; while 3 respondents thought that ignoring the behavior was the best thing to do; other responses included asking colleague for help, referring the concern to the HR In-Charge and perceived lowering of work productivity.

TABLE 5. Awareness on Workplace's Environment Policy and Employee Complaint's Procedure
Q74. I believe that information about the workplace's environment policy and the employee complaint procedures has been communicated to all employees.

		Frequency	Percent
	Strongly Disagree	3	4.5
	Disagree	10	15.2
Valid	Agree	40	60.6
	Strongly Agree	13	19.7
	Total	66	100.0

TABLE 6. Awareness on behaviors that considered are considered as bullying
Q75. I believe that employees are aware of the behaviors/acts considered as bullying.

		Frequency	Percent
	Strongly Disagree	3	4.5
	Disagree	7	10.6
Valid	Agree	44	66.7
	Strongly Agree	12	18.2
	Total	66	100.0

TABLE 7. Effectiveness of policies and practices to prevent bullying
Q76. I believe that the workplace's policy and practices are effective in preventing the recurrence of all forms of workplace bullying

		Frequency	Percent
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.0
	Disagree	7	10.6
Valid	Agree	44	66.7
	Strongly Agree	13	19.7
	Total	66	100.0

TABLE 8. Complaints will be taken seriously
Q77. I believe that if I file a complaint about bullying, the complaint will be taken seriously.

		Frequency	Percent
	Strongly Disagree	2	3.0
	Disagree	7	10.6
Valid	Agree	44	66.7
	Strongly Agree	13	19.7
	Total	66	100.0

Results as shown in Tables 5,6,7 and 8 suggest that the organization's office-bullying policies are laid and well-established. The same are widely disseminated and generally accepted by employees. Most notably, employees have full confidence on the organization's capacity to handle relevant complaints surfacing from various acts of bullying. In effect, it can be concluded that the organization's capacity to handle workplace bullying incidences has contributed and helped out in retaining employees despite the claimed experiences. In light of this, it would be worth stressing that the adoption and practice of anti-office bullying policies are key to employees' retention.

V. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be noted from the findings of this study that the relationship of workplace bullying to employees' retention can never be true at all times. Though some studies claim that acts of bullying causes emotional and even physical distress among victims, their response in terms of employment choices can't be generalized. There might be other factors at hand that refute the idea of resignation/transfer despite the incidence. Factors to be considered may include age,educational/professional status, employment rank and others. Nevertheless, this knowledge gap poses another research opportunity for future studies to look into. As workplace bullying is an even broader research topic, future studies still have a wide range of scope to explore.

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