

Original Research Article

The individual effects of workplace bullying: Experiences from Namibia

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ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying is known to have detrimental implications for employees, ranging from psychological to physical harm. Bullying in the workplace has a negative influence on organisational and individual performance, which has a knock-on effect on the workplace environment. A call out was conducted using LinkedIn to those who have experienced workplace bullying in Namibia. Using purposive sampling, twelve participants in Windhoek Namibia heeded to the call and were interviewed, an in depth analysis using an interpretive technique, and data were analysed using the content analysis technique. Themes which emerged from coping with workplace bullying were psychological, social, physical and mental fatigue and work performance. anxiety, feeling anxious, feeling edgy, frustration, weight loss, feeling tired, irritated, stress, sleep disturbances, fear, headaches, inability to concentrate, unhappiness, lost confidence in self were the as the individual effects of workplace bullying. The present study contributed to the workplace bullying research by sharing how workplace bullying is experienced in Windhoek Namibia. Studies such as this are key in informing policy in Namibia related to toxicity in the workplace. The researchers recommend inhouse constant mental wellbeing checks; work-life balance strategies, and cost analyses of employee absenteeism and reduced productivity due to workplace bullying.

Introduction

Workplace bullying has been shown to have negative impact on employees, encompassing a range of consequences from psychological distress to physical harm (Dhiman, 2021). The phenomenon of workplace bullying has been linked to a decline in both mental and physical health (Verkuil et al., 2015; Conway et al., 2012). Moreover, workplace bullying exerts a harmful influence on both organisational and individual performance, subsequently affecting the overall workplace environment (Devonish, 2013).

Individuals subjected to bullying in the workplace frequently exhibit a range of distressing symptoms, including insomnia, diminished appetite, nausea, headaches, and heightened emotions such as anger, unease, and vulnerability. They may also experience a decline in self-esteem and confidence, alongside feelings of fear, concern, and worry (Einarsen & Mikklesen, 2003; Magee et al., 2017). Einarsen and Mikklesen (2003) elucidate that workplace bullying can lead to mental repercussions such as depression, anxiety, stress disorder, and various other psychological disorders. Employees subjected to bullying exhibit markedly elevated levels of irritation and anxiety, alongside heightened instances of depression, diminished self-esteem, and stress-related disorders, as evidenced by the findings of Bowling and Beehr (2006).

According to Dhiman (2021), the repercussions of bullying and stress may lead to the victim experiencing physical ailments, including cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal issues, and various other health disorders. Magee et al. (2017) assert that psychological side effects such as low self-esteem, nervousness, irritation, and fear can manifest physically as psychosomatic disorders, including loss of appetite, sleeplessness, headaches, stomach cramps or pains, anger, and difficulties in concentration.

Workplace bullying influences not only the individual perpetrating it but also the organisation as a whole, as it obstructs effective group communication and fosters a hostile work environment (Cuniff & Mostert, 2012). Dhiman (2021) argues that bullying adversely affects the organisational culture, resulting in outcomes that are neither advantageous nor conducive to well-being. Magee et al. 2017 suggest that the occurrence of workplace bullying correlates with heightened absenteeism, strain, and employee turnover, which adversely affects the organisation through escalated costs, potential damage to its reputation, and diminished productivity and motivation. This situation arises from the reality that an employee or employees are grappling with diminished self-esteem, resulting in inadequate customer care or service and an increase in mistakes. Consequently, individuals subjected to bullying in the workplace report diminished job satisfaction and a heightened sense of insecurity regarding their employment (Glambek et al., 2014; Neilsen & Einarsen, 2012). Furthermore, conflict within the workplace engenders adverse emotional responses, consequently diminishing work engagement by eroding employees' motivation and vitality in their professional endeavours (Crowford et al., 2010). Workplace bullying costs significant financial consequences for both the organisation and the individual involved. The purpose of the

study was to investigate the type of effects resulting from the experiences of Namibian employees who were bullied.

Workplace bullying

Leymann (1996) characterises workplace bullying as a protracted conflict that occurs with regularity, wherein the victims find themselves unable to mount a defence owing to the imbalanced power dynamics between themselves and the aggressor. Consequently, bullying encompasses the intention to inflict harm, the execution of harmful actions, an imbalance of power, a recurrent aggressor, and a feeling of subjugation (Akella, 2016). Instead of embracing a definition characterised by depravity and severity, the researchers chose an integrative approach that encompasses both perspectives as the working definition for workplace bullying. By definition, bullying is a persistent and recurring behaviour. Bullying thus affects the person and the organisation both directly and indirectly.

Psychosomatic symptoms

Brill et al. (2001) consider psychosomatic symptoms to be clinical manifestations that lack any underlying organic pathology. To put it differently, these are bodily manifestations that do not have a medical basis, arising instead from psychological distress (Li et al., 2019; Torchyan et al., 2022). The symptoms identified in the study are being recognised for their potential to contribute to disease stemming from stress encountered in workplace settings. Bullying victims have been found to exhibit significantly higher rates of depression and psychosomatic symptoms (Fekkes et al., 2004).

Who is the workplace bully?

Einarsen et al. (1994) outline managers and supervisors as the perpetrators of bullying. Power dynamics constitute a significant factor in bullying (De Cieri et al., 2019; Horton, 2020). It is essential to recognise that workplace bullying is not limited to managers and supervisors. Negative workplace behaviour, along with an imbalance of formal or informal authority among individuals, (Salin & Hoel, 2020). Formal power pertains to the disparities in authority between a manager and a subordinate, whereas informal power concerns the differences in influence among employees at the same hierarchical level, where one individual possesses greater social leverage or sway over colleagues within the organisation. Dhiman (2021) summarises a bully as a coworker, supervisor, subordinate, or employer. Many bullies perceive their behaviour as situational and intrapersonal, thus viewing it as justifiable and necessary (Oade, 2009). The prior discussion demonstrates that no ambiguous traits exist for identifying a bully. Li et al. (2019) shed light on the structure of occupations and how bullying exposure is related to how work is regarded. Bullying is recognised as an issue within both the education and healthcare sectors; however, it can manifest in any profession, irrespective of rank or economic status (Erwandi et al., 2021). Thus, a deeper understanding of

the inherent complexity of power dynamics in bullying and their implications for individuals is necessary.

Types of workplace bullying

The improper allocation of tasks, unrealistic timelines, and the withholding vital information, are compounded by more personal behaviours, including verbal abuse, excessive or unjust criticism, and the dissemination of falsehoods (Caponecchia, et al., 2020). Niedl (1996); Nielsen (2020) posits that bullying ought to be understood through subjective constructs, emphasising the perceptions of the victim or target. The actions in question are characterised by their repetitive, hostile, humiliating, and intimidating nature, specifically directed at the individual in question. Nevertheless, the primary notion of bullying ought to be understood as subjective bullying, given that differences in power become more evident from the perspective of those who endure it (Einarsen et al., 2003). Objective bullying pertains to circumstances where there exists unequivocal observable evidence or declarations from external parties indicating that bullying is occurring. The responses of individuals who experience bullying can be categorised into three distinct types: assertiveness, avoidance, and the pursuit of formal assistance. As research on workplace bullying and harassment progresses, there is an increasing acknowledgement that a critical examination of power dynamics and cultural contexts, along with their persistence, is essential for effectively addressing bullying in professional environments (Mannix-McNamara, 2021).

Contemporary and classic workplace bullying

Due to the severity and complexities of bullying, Erwandi et al. (2021), note that bullying has become one of the issues in the field of Occupational Health and Safety. Within the workplace, bullying is a counterproductive behaviour and there are no specific laws that prohibit workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is considered both as direct and indirect behaviour on a spectrum of violence, which is not necessarily any type of misconduct or violence (Fielden et al., 2020). Workplace bullying comes in a wide variety of behaviours, which include public humiliation and criticism, verbal abuse, intimidation, spreading rumours, ignoring people for a long period of time, social exclusion, impartial deadlines, separation threats, shifting opinions, allocating menial task to the individual being bullied, applications for leaves are denied, dismissal, openly flaunting power and status, mocking and professional elimination (Cunniff & Mosert, 2012; Akella, 2016; Fielden et al., 2020). Thus, bullying encompasses mistreatment ranging from verbal hostility to acts of social exclusion (Einarsen, 1999).

The interest of capitalist owners (profit) set up the social and technological frameworks (Akella, 2016), thus the organisation employ control strategies (Edward, 1980). The control approaches insured that there would be little labour process opposition (Burawoy, 1982). Control strategies became increasingly indirect, hegemonic, and devious throughout time (Akella, 2003). As a result, workplace bullying revolves around

direct control.

Theory X posits that employees possess an intrinsic avoidance to work, exhibit laziness, and tend to shirk responsibility, thereby requiring management to guide, compel, or even coerce them into fulfilling their duties (Akella, 2016; Robbins et al., 2016). This managerial perspective posits that the utilisation of bullying or coercive strategies could be implemented to attain organisational objectives. Nevertheless, when examined through the lens of power theory, inadequate organisational reactions to workplace bullying frequently stem from a reductionist, functionalist interpretation of power, which perceives it merely as a hierarchical tool for enforcing adherence (Hodgins et al., 2020). This limited perspective fails to account for the intricate, interconnected, and systemic dimensions of power, resulting in inadequate or superficial solutions to the issue of bullying.

Workplace bullying is mostly observed from direct and authoritarian management style and is a control tactic (Akella, 2016). Another cause for the presence of workplace bullying is the concealment of less competent employees' shortcomings (Dhiman, 2021). Bullying is used to eliminate competitors and reduce competitiveness at work. Furthermore, Oade (2009) noticed that bullying happens when employees are not emotionally mature, lack interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, are less competent at handling professional obligations, and hence undermine colleagues rather than dealing with their job challenges. Park et al. (2021). also emphasise that bullying goes undetected, which further complicates dealing with it.

Absenteeism

One of the negative consequences of bullying is absenteeism, or neglecting to report to work on time (Taibi et al., 2022). It is a major source of lost productivity (Johns, 2006). Factors influencing workplace absenteeism include poor mental health, low job satisfaction, restricted job autonomy, inadequate leadership, and physical health (Hoel et al., 2020). Although not thoroughly explored, there is evidence that workplace bullying correlates to absenteeism (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). If a person is unmotivated at work, the likelihood of voluntary absenteeism increases; on the other hand, if a person is motivated at work, the likelihood of voluntary absenteeism decreases (Magee et al., 2017).

One way that workplace bullying affects absenteeism is through health impairment (Neilson & Eriksen, 2004). Bullying in the workplace has been connected to psychological difficulties such as depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances (Fielden et al., 2020; Magee et al., 2017). However according to Magee et al. (2017), psychological difficulties manifest physically as psychosomatic illnesses such as sleeplessness, loss of appetite, irritability, and headaches. Magee et al. (2017) anticipated that workplace bullying will increase absenteeism by interfering with an individual's ability to attend work.

Organisational environment

Bullying has an impact on the organisational environment, productivity, and innovativeness inside the organization (Rai & Angrawal, 2018; Mage et al., 2017). Increased absenteeism, conflict, and employee turnover impacted the organization's image by degrading it and raising organisational costs (Magee et al. 2017). Organisational expenditures have risen in response to a growing need for employee support initiatives; however, this has coincided with a decrease in productivity and motivation, attributed to lower self-esteem. Implications for the organisation include poor customer service and errors brought on by rapid choices. Additional consequences of employment, as noted by Quine (2002), encompass reduced levels of satisfaction and commitment in the workplace, which manifest in poor performance (Jex, 2002).

Rai and Agrawal (2018) examined how bullying affects creative behaviour. They revealed that workplace bullying affects workplace creativity because people adopt a passive approach, resulting in the concealment of data issues, ideas, and points of view linked to the organisation (Brinsfield, 2012). The company's reputation, is harmed its image and making future employee recruitment and retention more difficult (Jex, 2002; Magee et al., 2017).

Psychological effects

Workplace bullying endangers the psychological well-being of the employee or individual being bullied (Vatia, 2001). Workplace bullying includes harassment ranging from verbal antagonism to social isolation or becoming the department's laughingstock (Einarsen, 1999). Such instances of maltreatment or verbal hostility can be unpleasant, destabilising, and very stressful, making the one being bullied feel as though their sense of belonging is under attack and their psychological needs are being challenged or compromised (Fielden et al., 2020).

Threats to psychological needs cause the one being harassed to become more stressed (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). Furthermore, victims of bullying exhibit higher levels of anxiety and irritability than non-bullied individuals (Einarsen et al., 2003). Bullying may also cause melancholy, low self-esteem, stress disorders, sleep disruptions, fear, anxiousness, and susceptibility, as well as psychosomatic problems including insomnia, lack of appetite, stomach pains, headaches, difficulty to focus, wrath, and disruption in family life (Magee et al., 2017; Bowling & Beehr, 2006).

Stressors, according to the cognitive activation hypothesis of stress, induce cognitive activation and physiological reactions such as increased sympathetic nervous system activity and hormone alterations, which result in psychological responses

such as stress, rumination, and poor detachment (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). Although it is not detrimental in the short term, continuing bullying can damage the psychological health and well-being of the one being bullied, resulting in health disorders such as depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties, and migraines (Fielden et al., 2020; Magee et al., 2017; Neilsen & Einarsen, 2012).

Physiological effects

Magee et al. (2017), further add psychological health difficulties, in addition to the previously mentioned psychosomatic symptoms such as sleeplessness, loss of appetite, wrath, and headaches, can manifest physically.

Prolonged arousal can harm the body and the individual in the long run (Magee et al., 2017). Peoples stress reaction is common and not obsolete; Ursin and Eriksen (2010) argues that it is a necessary response and alert since it only elevates arousal in a potentially dangerous environment, and that it is essential for little and major difficulties in everyday life. Prolonged stress reactions, on the other hand, provide a risk of disease and illness if they are prolonged (Ursin & Eriksen, 2007). Decreased social life, professional life, and sickness, since persons with prolonged cognitive activity have health issues such as muscular discomfort, mood changes, headaches, exhaustion, anxiety, and gloomy thoughts that interfere with everyday living (Ursin & Eriksen, 2010). Dhiman (2021), concludes that workplace bullying causes mental stress, unproductivity, the loss of skilled resources, and affects the targeted individual's self-esteem. Persons who were bullied have greater stress levels than those who were not. As per the cognitive activation hypothesis of stress, cognitive pressures such as anxiety and rumination lead to poor health (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). The target of workplace bullying focuses on determining how to combat the bullying, which is a sort of rumination, and it impacts their productivity, decreases job satisfaction, and extracts psychosomatic, physical, physiological, and psychological reactions (Quine, 2002; Sheehan & Griffiths, 2011).

As workplace bullying consists of continual verbal and nonverbal antagonism and hostility for a long length of time inside the job, it can lead an individual into a mediocre position, leaving them to be the victim of social exploit, resulting in emotions of powerlessness and dread (Magee et al., 2017). This gives them the impression that they have little control over how they deal with the bully, which adds to their sense of powerlessness. Furthermore, the expectation of the outcome has been connected to anxiety and despair (Ursin & Eriksen, 2007).

Methods

In this study, the interpretive technique was employed to

comprehend and interpret what the participants were thinking or meaning (Kivunja & Kuyini 2017). In other words, the participants understood the subject and issue, as well as how they interact with their environment. Furthermore, the interpretivist point of view opposes the concept of a unified subjective reality. Instead, they accept a socially created point of view on a variety of facts (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Rehman and Alharthi, (2016) go on to say that people engage with one another and with society, and that they attach meaning to and recognise a wide range of social phenomena.

This study employs a qualitative approach (Goldkuhl, 2012). As a result, this study used a qualitative data gathering technique, allowing for a more in-depth knowledge of the psychological consequences of workplace bullying and how participants experience it. Women (n=8) and men (n=4) who had been bullied at work were targeted. Since there were no defined organisational goals or an emphasis on the public or private sectors, all participants were permanently employed. Workplace bullying is not frequent in organisations, due to lack of reporting. As a result, focusing on varied organisations allows for a more comprehensive understanding of individuals' experiences. The chosen population is information-rich and hence provides the necessary data (Cresswell, 2008).

To better understand the effects of bullying in the workplace, the researchers interviewed people who had been bullied at work or were being bullied. The primary goal of the study was to conduct interviews with these individuals to ascertain the impact of workplace bullying on their overall well-being. Participants were drawn from both the private and public sectors. The researchers implemented purposeful sampling alongside snowball sampling techniques, leveraging word of mouth and telephonic outreach to identify and engage potential participants.

The participants were assured their personal information, such as names and places of employment, would be kept private and would not be published or included in the research. Participation was voluntary and participants understood they could stop the interview at any time with no repercussions and could refuse to answer any of the questions. The sample for the study consisted of 12 participants, the vast majority of which were women (n=8). From the call, all 12 participants who responded were interviewed. The subjects ranged in age from 25 to 50 years. 11 of the 12 patients examined had previous experiences with bullying, and 1 was experiencing bullying at the time of the interview.

Data analysis

Qualitative data serves a crucial purpose as it gives context for obtaining important information. In-depth interviews were

performed, and the data acquired from the participants were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of analysis (familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report). The Otter transcribing tool was used to convert the spoken material into written form. Since all transcriptions were verbatim records of what the participants said, any errors in the transcription were manually corrected.

The written information was then reviewed over and over again to become acquainted. Following initial data familiarisation, the initial codes were produced by highlighting phrases or words and then coming up with labels or codes to characterise the content. During the coding process, a coding book and coding framework were used to ensure the data's trustworthiness.

Following the coding, trends were identified among the codes, and grouping began as they were sorted into the appropriate themes. Labels and other visual representations were employed to assist categorise various codes into distinct themes. Finally, the themes were given names and checked to verify they were helpful and correct.

Measures of ensuring data integrity

The study was conducted in a manner that adhered to ethical standards throughout its entirety. All participants granted informed consent. All authors declare that they possess no conflicting interests. Moreover, to substantiate the dependability of the findings, the codes were systematically categorised into themes, and direct quotations were employed in the presentation of the data outcomes. Moreover, a coding book and a coding framework were utilised throughout the coding process to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

The researchers sought to answer the following research question.

What are the individual effects of workplace bullying and how do the targets of bullying experience it?

Results

Participants encountered the adverse effects associated with bullying. Their experiences included an assortment of obstacles, including decreased appetite, feelings of frustration, anger, anxiety, familial conflict, and trouble sleeping. Table 1, summaries the psychological effects as well as the participants who had similar experiences or psychological effects.

Table 1 Frequency of psychological effects

Common Psychological effects of bullying	Participants that experienced them
Anxiety, feeling anxious, feeling edgy	Kate, Patrick, Brendon
Frustration	Alice, Sandra, Magdalene
Weight loss	Kasey
Feeling tired	Patrick, Kasey
Irritated	Marry, Timothy
Stress	Patrick, Kasey
Sleep disturbances	Marry, Brandon, Alice, Kate, Timothy, Debra, Kasey
Fear	Kasey
Headaches	Debra
Inability to concentrate	Brandon
Not happy	Patrick
Lost confidence in self	Kate
Anger	Marry, Kate
Loss of appetite	Debra, Sandra, Elena, Kasey

In the presentation of the results, direct quotes from interviews are used. Table 2 provides examples of codes representing the effects of bullying on the individual, their description and representative quotes from interviews.

From the research question, the individual effects of workplace bullying identified, the themes which emerged were categorised *psychological or physiological effects, social effects, and physical effects* all which affected work performance.

Psychological effects

Kate, Patrick, Debra, and Mary described how bullying had affected their work and home life. Kate alluded that to date she still experienced anxiety as she has developed insomnia post the experience of workplace bullying. Patrick added on how workplace bullying has made him paranoid as he the event and the aggressor made him stressed.

“Anxiety. I still struggle with anxiety till today. Uhm, Yeah, I had a lot of anxiety. I’m still working through the anxiety as we speak. Sleepless nights. I don’t sleep. You can go for two days, you know, you’re just you’re just there you don’t sleep. You’re always edgy, you’re always nervous around uhm your boss. Yeah, the anxiety and just the sleeping disorder, was basically what I experienced.” (Kate)

“Sometime, sometimes i would feel stressed and then uh, a bit anxious, and you think of what will happen next, because you know, when you’re looking for a job, you have to work according. Sometimes I will feel anxious but mostly I was stressed most of the time.” (Patrick).

Debra’s eating patterns were disrupted as she went extreme by either eating a lot or not at all. Insomnia was another development for her and she adopted isolation as a survival strategy. Marry also shared how bullying made her emotionally irrational as she would transfer the anger to her students by snapping at them even when they are not at fault.

“I uhm started getting headaches, I a tend to want to

sleep a lot, I just want to be left alone. Uhm I don’t eat, and sometimes it’s the opposite way, when I want to sleep a lot then there’s a time I just stay awake. But mostly I just want to be left alone yeah. That is how I deal with...(hand gestures).” (Debra).

“If a learner does a simple mistake, I would snap like get angry and shout at the child even if at. And deep inside me I know that the child is not at fault and even if the child was at fault, that is not how I’d normally react. But because of how I was feeling emotionally, I’d react that way.” (Marry).

The experience of workplace bullying presents a significant threat to the psychological well-being of the participants involved, resulting in a reduced sense of belonging and compromised psychological needs. The situation was further exacerbated by victimisation based on race and tribe. Kasey articulated her experiences of being marginalised in professional opportunities due to her lack of affiliation with the favoured group, which has adversely affected her career advancement.

“Uhm, yes that one what a lot. Uhm, tribalism and racism was the most that I experienced. Because uhm, you will find that now for a certain tribe there was favouritism and for certain tribes, they don’t favour you at all.” (Kasey).

Magdalene encountered similar exclusionary conduct as Debra, arising from her racial differences and facing indirect attacks. The exclusion became more pronounced when her colleague, who was serving as the acting head of the department, directed another acting head to deny her study loan application.

“I think it was more...I suspected things that I felt like there was a bit of, you know exclusion, you know, when even if it has to do with my direct work, this person would not talk to me, but we’ll go around and go seek for whatever. So, this for the first time was more direct to me. You’re refusing to sign.” (Debra).

“Point I think I remember, there was another one. We were in a meeting in the boardroom. There was a complaint and I would call it a light complaint about the quality of my work. And this person is not my supervisor. No, we Yes, though, we work together in the same department, but our responsibilities are very different from each other. This person just out burst, you know, started saying on how ill the municipality has become, uh, not talking to me directly, but trying to influence everyone you know, to

at least maybe gang up on me, that you know, I'm not doing my job. However, but then he was ignored until I confronted him. And then again, he kept quiet for 30 minutes or at least until the meeting was ended. So yeah, that's when I started picking up something like something is not right with this person." (Magdalene).

Social effect

Kate and Mary both experienced disturbances in their family life. Bullying from the workplace spills over to the house and affects employee intimate relationships with spouses and children.

"Uhm...I developed an attitude where I was always angry. I was always uhm edgy. It affected my relationship with my partner, with my friends, with my son. I was always angry, always in a bad mood. And it with my partner, all I ever spoke about was how bad it was. That was the topic of the day, every single day. Uhm, oh, this happened at work, this happened at work, and you know, we started drifting apart because of that." (Kate).

Marry also had more arguments with her husband because the bully was her husband's friend. She experienced an intense feeling of alienation within her own home, as she found herself unable to share her experiences candidly, given that her husband had aligned himself with the aggressor. This exacerbates the sense of humiliation experienced, as if the individual's partner is oblivious to the unfolding events, prompting a profound questioning of one's own sanity.

"That this specific person like became it just like it's been, it's a name that even we even decided not to mention that name in our house anymore, because every time you know when I'm trying to tell him that this is how I feel about this person. He doesn't see any wrong in it.", "And the fact that they are friends, it was just hard for me to tell him about it. And now what made it worse, like what I could not even tell him anymore is the fact that this other specific individual will come to the other person's house. Then you tell this person that I don't like it when you go to the other house and even go there to meet this other person. And it brings a whole different argument." (Mary).

Physical and mental fatigue

Physical and mental fatigue were experienced by Patrick and Kasey. Patrick felt overworked, he was not happy at all to be in that environment as it drained him. Fatigue affected the meaningfulness of his work.

"At first, physically I thought it did not affect me. The

only thing that I felt like I was a bit more like overworked a bit. I was feeling more like overworked; I think is a mental thing that made me to get connected to the physical part of being tired. Also, the environment in which I was, I was not feeling like happy, so mostly awake here and there, but in a way, physically not that much." (Patrick).

Kasey lost weight due to fatigue experienced at work. The feeling of unhappiness was given as the main reason to the experiences of mental and physical fatigue.

"Uhhhh... Okay maybe the Workload and knowing that you are uhm knowing that you are not happy. it affected me negatively like I was always tired, weight loss, all that. Ya, so it affected me both physically and emotionally." (Kasey).

Work performance

Patrick, Timothy, and Kasey articulated that the phenomenon of workplace bullying significantly hindered their capacity to adhere to deadlines, culminating in poor customer service and a heightened likelihood of errors, as a considerable portion of their energy was diverted towards managing the bullying. Kasey observed that operating in high-pressure environments significantly increased the likelihood of mistakes, resulting in diminished productivity and wasted resources, as tasks frequently required repetition to attain the intended outcome or standard of quality. As a result, workplace bullying significantly undermines the quality of work and adversely impacts the self-esteem of individuals who are affected.

"No, it affected in a way that I was always late with my reporting. And I always have to go and re-do the collection of data which was very strenuous on the... on the on the other colleagues that are involved in in, in collecting data. But I just had to do it again. So this... it affected I was always delayed. I was always behind with my work just because... of this kind of behaviors". (Timothy).

"My performance to some extent, but not that much, because there are things that are supposed to do, meaning when he calls me I stop, I drop those things. So it degraded a bit , so I do the things that he thinks are important while leaving the other work, carried forward for tomorrow, something like that. So the performance was slightly because I did not meet my targets. I fell a little bit short of my target." (Patrick).

"Working under pressure there is like, there is a very high possibility of uh mistakes, making many mistakes." (Kasey)

I will never recommend someone to work here

Lastly, due to participants experiences, the participants were asked if they would ever recommend the organisation to other individuals. What they have to say about the organisation, affects the reputation of the organisation, as well as their ability to obtain new employees and keep the current employees. Kate shared the effects of not doing a background check when one selects an employer and she was living with the consequences.

“No. I would be setting up; I would set a friend or family or a stranger into a disaster. I would not do that. It's not to say that I am bad mouthing the company. But it seems like there is the culture that they had since the inception. I regret not doing thorough research on it before I joined. I regret that and unfortunately the damage is already done.” “So, the answer will be a fat, no, I would not recommend to anyone.” (Kate)

On the other hand, Kasey response was, a yes, he would recommend the organisation to someone, only if certain people are removed from the organisation. He explained that it's not the organisation itself, but rather the individuals within the organisation. He added that there is a lot to earn and many benefits that come from his previous organisation. Alice and Patrick held a similar answer to his which focused on skill building.

Discussion

Magee et al. (2017); Taibi et al. (2022) indicated that increased absenteeism, strain, and manpower turnover affected the image of the organisation in terms of tarnishing it and increased organisational costs. These assertions resonate with the experiences by participants from Namibia. As evident from Kate who strongly felt that she would not recommend people to work at her current employer.

Kates assertions that she will not recommend anyone to work in her organisation is in line with Jex, (2002); Magee et al., (2017) who speak of reputational damage to the organisation. This affects attraction of competent employees. The study adds to the gap in knowledge in relation to workplace bullying in the Namibian context. Study findings affirm Erwandi et al. (2021), as workplace bullying needs to be incorporated into Occupational Health and Safety in Namibia.

It is evident from the themes which emerged that workplace bullying has psychological consequences. Moreover, the results indicated that there are significant negative consequences to workplace bullying that can range from psychological to physical effects as stated by Dhiman (2021). Identifying the consequences of bullying appropriate action

can be taken to proactively address the issues around bullying. Moreover, workplace bullying programs can be developed to equip employees with effective behaviours that can be used to decrease bullying. The results of the study concur with Magee et al. (2017) who found that the side effects of bullying can be irritation, fear, nervousness which could manifest themselves as psychosomatic disorders such as a loss of appetite, sleeplessness and the inability to concentrate. In addition, Einarsen and Mikklesen (2003) who found that mental effects of bullying can range from anxiety, depression and other mental disorders. Participants reported feeling anxiety, stress, having sleepless nights and loss of appetite, which concur with findings from Einarsen and Mikklesen (2003) and Magee et al. (2017). Moreover, a few participants reported having reduced self-esteem and or self-worth. This needs to be further explored within the Namibian context to enhance the understating thereof.

The most common reported psychological consequences were sleepless nights (6 participants), loss of appetite (4 participants) and frustration (3 participants). Two participants reported disturbance within their family life which included increased arguing with the spouse and a drifting relationship with children. This indicated that problems at work can affect family life, thus disrupting the social support system that is meant to support individuals going through bullying, thus possibly worsening the effects of being bullied.

However, in adopting the study findings it is important to note that even though participants felt the above effects and symptoms of the disorders, majority of participants were not diagnosed with any of the disorders and only one participant sought professional psychological help. Other participants used their close social network, such as friends and family to cope with the stressor (or bullying).

Debra and Kasey attributed their experience of bullying to culture or tribalism. They stated that they noticed a difference in treatment when compared to other colleagues of a different culture or tribe. This is a unique find and is a key thorn for organisations in Namibia to combat. Racial and ethnic differences were identified as being involved in bullying experiences. Another area affected by bullying as reported by respondents was the social impact the bullying had on participants, as some reported problems at home that were directly related to the bullying. Problems within their social support system came as a result of the respondents being angry and irritated- as they would take it out on those closest to them unintentionally. These results of the study showed that workplace bullying also affects the organisational culture and environment within the organisation. Findings from Crawford et al. (2010) indicate workplace conflict triggers negative emotions which leads to lower work engagement by

undermining employees motivation and energy at work. Participants report doing the bare minimum and lacking motivation to put in more effort into their work.

The bullying behaviours reported by participants correlate with the findings of Cunniff and Mosert, (2012); Akella, (2016) and Fielden et al. (2020) who stated that bullying behaviours include public humiliation and criticism, verbal abuse, intimidation, spreading rumours, ignoring people for a long period of time, social exclusion, impartial deadlines, separation threats, shifting opinions, allocating menial task to the individual being bullied, applications for leaves are denied, dismissal, openly flaunting power and status, mocking and professional elimination. Study findings affirm that bullying is attributed to aggressive leadership style, which was result oriented. While another participant reported being socially isolated as she was the only member of her tribe within a workplace. These highlights bullying behaviours across tribal and racial lines. Based on the findings of this research, the reasons attributed to bullying align with Dhiman (2021), who stated that less talented individuals often use bullying as a camouflage for their own shortcomings and as a means to eliminate competition. As noted by Akella (2003), the techniques of control within professional environments have evolved to be more indirect, hegemonic, and insidious, thereby rendering workplace bullying an extension of control frequently defined by obvious manipulation.

Power proximity is a major player in the bullying relationship, the results indicated that the bully was both co-workers and supervisors or managers. According to Einarsen et al. (1994), managers and supervisor are seen as the bullies. However, the results also concur with Dhiman (2021) that workplace bullying can come from co-workers. Some participants reported bullying from their co-workers, while others reported bullying from their managers or those in high positions.

In the context of workplace bullying, significant concerns emerge regarding the psychological ramifications for those subjected to such treatment. Moreover, the lack of established policies and effective communication channels within numerous organisations to tackle and mitigate different forms of bullying serves to reinforce and entrench the issue.

In this study, we found that the psychological consequences experienced by employees in their organisations, are no different from the psychological consequences experienced by other in a different context and studies (Brill et al., 2001; Fekkes et al., 2004; Li et al., 2019; Torchyan et al., 2022). The present study of psychological impact or consequences of workplace bullying, contributes to better understanding and awareness of the experiences of those who have went through and are being bullied. The study also identifies

bullying behaviours that would in turn help identify the bullies within the organisation.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend mental wellbeing checks for employees. Most employees are falling sick and organisations are losing a lot of productive time as a result of mental health. Workplace bullying if combated creates a functional work environment. Consulting mental health specialists is key for employees to ensure they do not bottle up destructive emotions. The workplace environment plays a role in facilitating or reducing workplace bullying behaviour. With appropriate structures in place to fight it, it can be reduced, therefore reducing the negative psychological effects experienced by those being bullied. The overall impact of bullying on the individual needs to be documented as organisation strive for wellbeing in the workplace.

Implications for future research

The organisational implications of workplace bullying needs to be explored. A mixed method approach can be vital as the voice of the researcher is fundamental in informing policy. The costs (financial and social) of toxic organisational environments needs to be extensively within Namibia to inform organisational policies. The cost of bullying considering the financial strain and the loss in productive time needs to be explored.

The bullied shared their experiences, the effects to the individual were identified. The study also adds to the definition of bullying as, there was a discrepancy in their understanding of the construct of bullying. Which the researchers did not invalidate despite the discrepancy, most of the participants who shared their stories reflected an awareness towards the definition of bullying.

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