

Addressing Workplace Bullying: Practical Solutions and Organizational Approaches

معالجة التنمر في مكان العمل: حلول عملية ومقاربات تنظيمية

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ملخص

تبحث هذه الورقة البحثية في التنمر في مكان العمل وتقدم طرقاً لإنهاء الإساءة، والتحرش، وسوء المعاملة اللفظي وغير اللفظي، والترهيب، والتهديدات. يُعد التنمر في مكان العمل قضية رئيسية في التعليم، والاقتصاد، والخدمات الاجتماعية، وسوء السلوك الفردي والجماعي، بما في ذلك السلوك التعسفي، وخرق القواعد، والقضايا التنظيمية، وهو يضر بأداء الموظفين وكفاءتهم.

البيئات العدائية تدمر الثقة، وتولد الخوف، وتخلق ثقافة من الضغط وعدم اليقين، مما يخفض الإنتاجية والروح المعنوية. إن تحويل مكان عمل آمن ومستقر إلى مكان مليء بالتهديدات، والترهيب، وعدم اليقين الوظيفي يضر بالأفراد والمنظمة.

تناقش هذه الورقة القوى الأساسية التي تجعل مكافحة التنمر في مكان العمل صعبة وتقدم حلولاً لجعل مكان العمل أكثر صحة وإنتاجية. يمكن لبرامج التدريب التي تؤكد على الاحترام والتواصل أن تعزز التعاون والدعم في المنظمات. إن توضيح كيفية الإبلاغ عن التنمر وما سيحدث يمكن أن يمنح الموظفين الشجاعة للتحدث علناً، مما يخلق ثقافة من المسؤولية والاحترام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التنمر، سلوك التنمر، الكياسة والسلوك في العمل. التنمر في مكان العمل. حلول عملية، مقاربات تنظيمية.

Abstract:

This research paper examines workplace bullying and proposes ways to end abuse, harassment, verbal and non-verbal mistreatment, intimidation, and threats. Workplace bullying is a major issue in education, economics, and services. Individual and group misconduct, including abusive behavior, rule-breaking, and organizational issues, hurts employee performance and efficiency. Hostile settings destroy trust, engender fear, and create a culture of pressure and uncertainty, lowering productivity and morale. Changing a secure and stable workplace into one full of threats, intimidation, and employment uncertainty damages individuals and the organization. This paper discusses the primary issues that make workplace

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bullying difficult to combat and offers solutions to make the workplace healthier and more productive. Training programs that emphasize respect and communication can foster collaboration and support in organizations. Making it clear how to report bullying and what will happen can give employees the courage to speak up, creating a culture of responsibility and respect.

Keywords: bullying, bullying behavior, deviant behavior at work, Workplace bullying, Practical solutions, Organizational approaches.

1.Introduction:

The introduction of the article must contain an appropriate overview to the topic, then a discussion of the research problem and the development of appropriate hypotheses, in addition to defining the objectives of the research and its methodology.

Despite the recent and continuous development in the educational, commercial, economic, industrial, and service institutions in Algeria, there are some obstacles and problems that limit the continuity of such development in light of the inside and outside competition in the work environment, especially the organizations' internal environment that experiences organizational and psychological issues leading to some deviant and negative behaviors such as bullying at work. Bullying is a serious threat, as it has serious consequences, including harming individuals, their coworkers, their families, and the organizations in which they work. Over the last decade in the U.S., bullying has attracted the attention of the media, legal experts, and unions. Academics, activists, and research-based organizations have also shown interest in the topic. Bullying has internationally received extensive attention from researchers over the past 20 years. Some EU countries, Scandinavia, Australia, and Canada have passed legislation to protect employees from such abusive behaviors at work in response to the results of several surveys and comprehensive and in-depth scientific research. Three important studies conducted in 2007 and 2008 confirmed the seriousness of the problem in American workplaces: (Teresa & Daniel, 2009)

A survey of 1,000 employees in March 2007 confirmed that nearly 45% of respondents reported having worked for an abusive boss. (American Institute of Stress, 2007). Similarly, a poll conducted in September 2007 found that 37% of American workers, an estimated 54 million employees, reported experiencing bullying at work. (Corporate Leavers Survey, n.d.)

In a joint study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Ethics Resource Center (ERC) in 2008, approximately a third of HR professionals (32%) reported having observed misconduct that they believed violated their organization's ethics standards, company policy, or the law. Of the top five types of misconduct observed, the most prevalent included "abusive or intimidating behavior toward employees (excluding sexual harassment)," with 57% of participants confirming that they had witnessed this type of bullying behavior at work." (American Bar Association, n.d.)

A recent review of 100 studies conducted over 21 years comparing the consequences of employees' experience of sexual harassment and workplace aggression found that workplace bullying inflicts more harm on employees than sexual harassment. According to the study, employees who experience bullying, incivility, or interpersonal conflict were more likely to quit their jobs, have lower well-being, and be less satisfied with their jobs. (Hershcovis & Barling, 2008)

Practical strategies and solutions can be put forth to help HR professionals and psychologists proactively deal with such a problem.

Based on the above, what is bullying? What are its types? What are the strategies and solutions to stop workplace bullying?

2. Defining Concepts of the Study:

2.1. Bullying:

Suleiman & Al-Beblawy (2010) define bullying as “an attack on a weaker individual by a bully who enjoys witnessing the suffering of the target and may cause them some pain.” (Suleiman & Al-Beblawy, 2010)

2.2 Bullying Behavior:

It is the infliction of physical, psychological, emotional, or verbal harm on one or more individuals. It also involves threats of physical harm with a weapon, extortion, violation of civil rights, assault and beating, working in gangs, attempted murder or threats, in addition to sexual harassment. (Al-Subhiyan, 2013)

2.3. Deviant Behavior at Work:

Gualandri (2012) defines deviant behavior at work as voluntary actions that harm or intend to harm organizations, individuals working therein, clients, or supervisors. (Gualandri, 2012)

2.4. Bullying in the Workplace:

Bullying in the workplace refers to “the repeated mistreatment of a target individual that manifests in verbal abuse or behavior that is threatening, humiliating, intimidating or sabotaging and interferes with work. It can also be a combination of the three.” (Hornstein, 1996)

3. Workplace Bullying:

One of the earliest definitions of workplace bullying was introduced by Dr. Carroll Brodsky, an American psychiatrist, who defined workplace harassment (which he used as a synonym for bullying) as:

... repeated and persistent attempts by one person to torment, wear down, frustrate, or get a reaction from another. It is a treatment that persistently provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates, or otherwise discomforts another person. (Brodsky, 1976)

It has recently been described by Drs. Gary and Ruth Namie, who are among the promoters of the term “workplace bullying,” as:

... repeated health-harming mistreatment, verbal abuse, or conduct that is threatening, humiliating, or intimidating, or sabotage that interferes with work, or a combination of the three. (Namie & Namie, 2003)

Social psychologist and researcher Loreleigh Keashly referred to workplace bullying as:

... emotional abuse characterized by hostile verbal and non-verbal, non-physical behaviors directed at a person(s) such that the target’s sense of him/herself as a competent person and employee is negatively impacted. (Hoel & Cooper, 2001)

Professor Joel Neuman, a prominent researcher on workplace aggression and conflict, briefly defined bullying as involving “deliberate, hurtful, and repeated mistreatment of a target” (Neuman, 2004)

Researchers Noa Davenport, Ruth Schwartz, and Gail Elliott emphasized the effects of abusive group behavior on the individual, adopting the term "mobbing" (which is commonly used in Europe). They described bullying as

An emotional assault that begins when an individual becomes the target of disrespectful and harmful behavior. Through innuendo, rumors, and public discrediting, a hostile environment is created in which an individual gathers others to willingly, or unwillingly, participate in continuous malevolent actions to force a person out of the workplace. (Davenport & Schwartz, 2005)

Legal scholar and author of model anti-bullying legislation David Yamada suggested that each of these definitions includes certain characteristics that should be included in any understanding of workplace bullying. He summarized bullying as follows:

Intentional infliction of a hostile work environment upon an employee by a co-worker(s), usually through a combination of verbal and non-verbal behaviors. (Yamada, n.d.)

Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik, an academic researcher from Arizona State University, expanded Namies' earlier description of bullying by saying that:

Workplace bullying, mobbing, and emotional abuse – which are essentially synonymous phenomena – are persistent, verbal, and nonverbal aggression at work that

include personal attacks, social ostracism, and many other painful messages and hostile interactions. (Cranshaw, 2005)

Finally, the Workplace Bullying Institute defined bullying as:

... repeated health-harming mistreatment of one or more individuals (the targets) by one or more perpetrators that takes one or more of the following forms: offensive conduct (including non-verbal), behavior or behaviors involving threat, humiliation, or intimidation, or sabotage which prevents the completion of work.

This definition is the most widely used among the previous definitions. It was introduced and proposed in the proposed model anti-workplace bullying legislation.

4. What is workplace bullying?

Workplace bullying has been described as a global concept that includes harassment, intimidation, and aggressive and sometimes violent behaviors. Several terms have been used by researchers to describe the same phenomenon.

The term "bullying" has mostly been used by researchers in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and Northern Europe, while German researchers have usually used the term "mobbing".

There are different terms for workplace bullying. Research in the U.S. to date is still viewed as somehow fragmented. Among others, these terms include:

- "workplace harassment,"
- "abusive disrespect,"
- "employee abuse,"
- "generalized workplace abuse,"
- "workplace aggression,"
- "victimization,"
- "counterproductive deviant workplace behavior,"
- "Social undermining,"
- "petty tyranny,"
- "workplace incivility."

Researchers who study workplace bullying and its effects have offered several explanations for this phenomenon, but they have struggled to establish one agreed-upon definition for the problem. The existing literature reveals a relatively large number of definitions that confirms the difficulties of defining bullying (Teresa & Daniel, 2009)

5. Typical Actions of Workplace Bullying:

Now that one has a solid understanding of workplace bullying, the focus is going to be directed to the specific actions of a bully at work so that one can identify them more quickly.

The 2007 U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey, a collaborative project between the Workplace Bullying Institute and Zogby International researchers, included interviews with 7,740 participants. According to this research, the negative actions committed by a workplace bully (along with the percentage of respondents who reported such conduct) typically included the following:

- Verbal abuse (shouting, swearing, name-calling, threats to safety, etc.) 53%;
- Behaviors and actions (public and private that were threatening, intimidating, humiliating, hostile, inappropriately cruel, etc.) 53%;
- Abuse of authority (undeserved evaluations, denial of progress, stealing credit, tarnished reputation, arbitrary instructions, etc.) 47%;
- Interference with work performance (sabotage, undermining, ensuring failure, etc.) 45%;
- Destruction of workplace relationships (among co-workers, bosses, or clients) 30%;

Similarly, early studies by Harvey Hornstein indicated that there were about 30 to 80 “daily cases of abuse” of bullying bosses. These “cases of abuse” included the following negative boss behaviors:

- Deceit: lying, giving false and misleading information through omission;
- Constraint: restricting subordinates’ activities in areas outside of work (for example, where they live, the people they live with, friendships, and social activity);
- Coercion: threatening excessive or inappropriate harm for noncompliance with the boss's wishes;
- Selfishness: protecting themselves by blaming subordinates and making them scapegoats for any problems that occur;
- Inequality: providing unequal benefits or punishment to subordinates due to favoritism or non-work-related criteria.
- Cruelty: harming subordinates in usually illegitimate ways, such as public humiliation, personal attack, or insults.
- Disregard: behaving in ways that violate normal standards of politeness and fairness, in addition to showing a flagrant lack of concern for subordinates’ lives;

- Deification: implying a master-servant status where bosses can do or say anything they like to subordinates because they feel that they are superior people.

As noted above, bullying is a repeated, persistent and continuous behavior “characterized by features of frequency, intensity, duration, and power disparity.” For example, isolated occasions where a person is given a job that is below their level of competence or given a tight deadline are, unfortunately, just a fact of most people’s work lives and would not be considered bullying. However, such actions can become bullying behaviors when used in a systematic manner over a long period, resulting in an unpleasant and hostile work environment. (Teresa & Daniel, 2009)

6. A Systematic Perspective of Workplace Bullying:

When considered from this perspective, HR practitioners must consider five closely linked key factors; they include:

- The personality of the bully: e.g. (is the bully so self-centered that they fail to follow company policies?)

-The organizational culture (“How are things done around here”, including management style, work environment, stress, ethics, organizational structure, etc.)

-The personality of the target (e.g., is he or she weak, poor performer, dependent, defiant, or too aggressive, etc.)

-External factors that may affect the organization (the current situation of production, downsizing).

-The event that initiated the conflict (did the organization fail to train its employees on how to manage and resolve the conflict, or did the company avoid the issue, even after being notified that a problem was developing?). (Hoel & Cooper, 2001)

7. Degrees of Workplace Bullying:

Bullying can be identified according to degrees based on the different effects of bullying on an individual. Similar to the way different degrees of burn injury are classified, bullying is classified based on three degrees as follows:

7.1. First-degree bullying: The individual is able to resist, escape at an early stage, and is fully rehabilitated in the same workplace or somewhere else.

7.2. Second-degree bullying: The individual is unable to resist or escape immediately, has a temporary or long-term mental or physical disability, and has difficulty returning to work.

7.3. Third-degree bullying: The affected person cannot return to work, because the physical and mental injuries are so severe that rehabilitation seems unlikely. (Davenport & Schwartz, 2005)

8. Explanations for Bullying Behavior at Work: (Teresa & Daniel, 2009)

There have been many studies that have attempted to explain why workplace bullying occurs. Some of the possible explanations include the following:

8.1. Personalities of the Individuals:

In the U.S. workplace bullying survey (2007), when asked why bullying happens, the participants reported the following:

- Because of some aspect of the bully's personality: 56%.
- Because of the target: 13% said it was due to aspects of the target's personality, while 7% noted performance deficiencies.
- Only 14% suggested that bullying may be a systemic issue resulting from the organizational work environment.

8.2. Economic and Social Trends:

Some have suggested that the modern workplace is “prepared for abusive behavior toward workers.” Five often-interrelated economic and social trends have been noted by researcher David (Yamada, n.d.). These include:

- Growth of the service-sector economy which requires a great deal of personal interaction; as a result, the more people interact, the more likely it is that personalities will clash and individuals who possess bullying tendencies will act on them.
- Profit squeeze which requires managers and employees to provide more and better goods and services at a lower cost, therefore fueling more stress in the work environment.
- Decline of unionization resulting in the loss of union representatives as a potential “safety valve” in resolving disputes.
- Diversification of the workforce: with increased differences, an individual can expect more conflict and aggression in the work environment.
- Increased reliance on temporary workers: part-time or temporary workers (generally with no real interest in the company) may not care, resulting in an environment of more conflict and abusive behavior.

8.3. Reward and Recognition Programs:

Employers sometimes implicitly provide a positive response to aggression at work by rewarding people who exhibit aggressive behaviors, often with promotions, bonuses, positive recognition, or a combination of these types of rewards.

8.4. Organizational Culture:

Many researchers have suggested that organizational culture plays a significant role in the manifestation of workplace bullying. In some organizations, bullying and other forms of harassment seem to be accepted to a certain extent. As a result, they can become normal allowing the work climate to support and encourage these types of behaviors. If an organization does not have an anti-bullying policy or does not have training or policies that require all employees be treated with respect and dignity, or regularly fails to deal with interpersonal conflict, employees might legitimately assume that the organization accepts such conduct.

8.5. Stressful Work Conditions:

Factors in the work environment such as noise and heat may contribute to employee dissatisfaction, resulting in increased aggression at work.

8.6. Imitation of Other Successful Managers/ Leaders

It would not be surprising that employees tend to model and imitate the behavior and style of managers who are perceived to be 'successful'. This imitation may influence the prevalence of bullying.

8.7. Loyalty to the Organization:

Many targets seem to consider complaining about bullying to be an act of disloyalty to their supervisor or to the organization. This fact was confirmed in the U.S. workplace bullying survey (2007) where 40% of the targets indicated that they never reported the problem to their employer as loyalty held them back. As a result, bullying is higher in environments where employees are extremely loyal and reluctant to complain to the employer.

8.8 Job Insecurity and Chaotic Work Environments:

One of the most common ways of bullying is job insecurity and organizational chaos. When employees feel threatened with future job loss, they may feel less constrained to act civilly because of reduced expectations of having a continuing relationship with their co-workers in the future. This leads to higher pressures and more stress, lowering thresholds for aggression and increasing the potential benefits for a bully to seek to eliminate colleagues and subordinates who now appear to be a potential "threat" or, in some cases, are perceived to be a "burden" on the organization.

There are several studies that attempt to provide possible explanations for why bullying happens in organizations. The explanations have dealt with four aspects: the individual personality of the bully, the individual personality of the target, the role of the organization, and situational factors.

9. Consequences of Workplace Bullying (the Damage and Costs):

Researchers have studied this in-depth and shown that profits increase when bullying is eliminated; profits fall when bullying runs rampant. Bullying, thus, is bad for business.

Workplace bullying affects the target, the workers, the organization, and the target's family and friends in different ways. The bully is not usually directly affected. The consequences of bullying on each of these parties will be discussed below:

9.1. The Victim (the Target):

Employees who are constantly abused report higher levels of anxiety and are at higher risk of substance abuse, depression, and heart disease than non-abused workers. Victims often suffer from long-term psychological and occupational disabilities. Considerable evidence suggests that bullying is a "crippling and devastating problem." Employees subjected to repeated abuse are also at increased risk of prolonged stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and even suicide. Some targets are so damaged that they cannot reintegrate back into work, and can only do so after extensive and specialized rehabilitation therapy.

9.2. The Organization:

In addition to causing stress and social harm to victims, bullying also has significant economic consequences for organizations. The U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey (2007) reported employers bear intangible costs in the following areas:

- Staff turnover, including costs associated with recruitment, interviewing, and hiring.

- Absenteeism and loss of productivity (poor performance).

- Workers' compensation.

- Disability insurance (short-term and long-term).

There are also intangible costs which include employee sabotage, difficulty in recruitment, and the organization's tarnished reputation as the "worst place to work."

9.3. Observers of Bullying:

Bullying observers report higher levels of generalized stress than those who have not experienced bullying or observed it happening. Similarly, one in five witnesses has stated that they considered leaving their organization as a result of having witnessed

bullying. It has been said that a “climate of fear” exists within an organization characterized by frequent bullying. Researchers have also found increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic complaints in those who were not the actual victims of the abuse, but who were simply witnesses present in the work environment.

9.4. The Target’s Friends and Family:

In addition to the damage to individuals in the workplace, friends and family of the targets are often affected as well. Relationships suffer, and normal family functioning is disrupted, often leading to divorce and estrangement. (Daniel, 2009, pp. 48-49–51).

10. Strategies for Confronting the Bully in the Workplace:

“Until there is a public commitment and action to back that commitment, a policy is just words on paper.”

The strategies and steps for confronting a workplace bully include:

10.1. The Confrontation Strategy:

It is conducted through the following steps:

- Soliciting support from family and friends.
- Consulting a physician or therapist.
- Soliciting witness statements from people who may have seen the bullying happen.
- Confronting the bully.
- Filing an internal complaint to the board.
- Preparing a case against the bully in terms of evidence and mental and emotional readiness.
- Presenting the case to senior managers and the internal board.
- Taking the case public. (Hornstein, 1996)

10.2. Self-Adjustment Strategies:

Researchers have suggested a variety of strategies individual targets can use to respond to a workplace bully. Harvey Hornstein refers to these efforts as the "change the victim" approach. Suggested tactics under this approach involve limiting physical contact with the bully, emotion-focused therapy, self-adjustment, and accessing support from family, friends, coworkers, or the company’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP). (Davenport & Schwartz, 2005)

Gary and Ruth Nami, founders of the anti-bullying movement in the USA, suggest that family and friends are the first group of people who can help the targets of bullying through support, empathy, and sharing of personal experiences. Targets can also seek help from therapists (work and organization psychologists), counseling services, employee unions, and legal services. (Nami & Nami, 2003)

10.3. Emotional Intelligence Strategies:

The researchers further suggested the victim's "emotional intelligence strategy" for dealing with workplace bullies. Since the main motivation for bullies is seeing the pain of their targets, targets are encouraged to stay out of the bully's way and not let them see that their behavior is in any way intimidating to them. Targets are also encouraged to remain as calm and unperturbed as possible when under attack, to try to identify patterns of aggressive behavior, and to avoid bullying during periods of anger (McCord & Richardson, 2001)

10.4. Exit Strategies:

In addition to the strategies that focus on confrontation, self-adjustment, and emotional intelligence, there is also the strategy of leaving a job with dignity and seeking new opportunities. Often, the critical question for the target of workplace bullying is "should I stay and fight, or should I give up?" (Futerman, 2004)

11. Strategic HR Manager Tools to Stop Workplace Bullying:

Here are some strategic tools to help build a "culture of respect" where workplace bullying and harassment are not tolerated, including:

1- Sample Survey of Employees and Managers - a survey that can be used to assess the extent of bullying within the organization.

2- Culture of Respect Climate Assessment - a quick inventory of the organization's implementation of the most effective strategies that work together to create a positive climate for employee relationships.

3- Developing a "Culture of Respect" Strategy: long-term action and planning, and strategic planning to help assess the current state to reach the desired goals.

4- The "Brutal Boss" Questionnaire - a survey to help determine whether or not there is a bully boss.

5- SHRM Policy on Workplace Bullying - a model policy that can be used as a starting point for developing an anti-bullying policy in the workplace.

6- A Checklist to prevent bullying in the organization. (Teresa & Daniel, 2009)

12. Conclusion:

Negative phenomena in the workplace can be prevented by taking anti-deviant organizational behavior measures by the board, conducting studies on such phenomena, developing a common understanding among employees in all educational, cultural, and economic areas, and spreading awareness in the work environment, as the whole system is eventually going to be affected, including the target and the organization, if the appropriate strategies are not developed to stop this silent epidemic that damages individuals, groups, and organizations. Organizational specialists play a crucial role in recognizing such organizational and legal abuses in the workplace and emphasizing them as an issue that causes instability, mistrust, and loss of well-being in all aspects of work life.

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