

Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying on Governmental Employees in Public Sector Organizations of Pakistan

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Abstract

Bullying at the workplace has been identified as a major problem, which affects both the psychological health of the people and organizational effectiveness. While the majority of the literature in this area is concentrated in private organizations, the present research assesses the effects of workplace bullying within governmental organizations in Pakistan. These organizations which are characterized by rigid hierarchies and bureaucratic structure might result in promoting bullying but few studies have explored this question. This paper aims to discuss the state and impact of workplace bullying on employee's psychological health and wellbeing in Pakistan's public sector organization which forms a significant portion of this country's employees base. Based on the literature review, the paper analyses the negative psychological, emotional and physical outcomes of bullying such as stress, anxiety, depression and burnout. The findings suggest that there is a growing need to address this problem among governmental organizations to enhance the employees' well-being and organizational output.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, Psychological health, Organizational effectiveness, Public sector organizations

Introduction

Bullying at the workplace is a serious problem for organizations all over the world with consequences to individuals and the organizations as a whole. The World Health Organization defines workplace bullying as repeated, unwanted negative acts towards a person or persons by one or more fellow employees; these acts are clearly intended to be unpleasant and painful (Salin, 2003). Majority of the discussion: on workplace bullying has often been directed towards private sector sectors but governmental organizations are not immune to these challenges. This is especially the case in organizations that adopt a

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structural system of organization of work, authoritarian and bureaucratic which is common in many countries' public sector organizations in Pakistan included.

Regarding the Pakistani scenario, it is interesting to note that the government organizations are a major segment of the workforce since a large number of employees are serving in the government sectors. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2011) points out that yet a big amount of the population of the country is involved in public sector employment. However, the work culture pertaining to the governmental institutions has been criticized mostly for fostering the organizational premises inefficient, hierarchical, and the employee unsupportive. Based on these organizational characteristics, it is feared that workplace bullying might be prevalent in Pakistan's governmental organizations; however, research studying this aspect is limited.

Workplace bullying has a detrimental impact on the health of the employees as has been evidenced from literature across the globe. Studies show that workplace bullying is rated among the main sources of stress, anxiety, depression and burnout (Nielsen, Matthiessen & Einarsen, 2008). Bullied employees display signs like headache, sleeplessness and stomach problems, among others, according to Nielsen, (2016). In addition, workplace bullying has been found to decrease levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior in a study conducted by Einarsen et al., (2011). However, research on the impact of workplace bullying on the human resource of the Pakistani public sector has remained very limited. This is as a result of the fact that workplace bullying in Pakistani governmental organizations has not been studied and therefore it is imperative to how it presents itself in Pakistani governmental organizations as well as the effects it has on employees.

In Pakistani context, generally in governmental organizations and especially where there is hierarchical power relation, the chance of bullying might tend to increase. Another factor is that civil servants have structured roles for operation with clear differentiation between the hierarchical level for the position (Hasan, 2018). This kind of power relations may set up the scene where bullying practices may occur unnoticed or even unopposed. Moreover, there is a cultural barrier where employees are not free to stand up against authority by reporting bullying incidents throughout without worse coming to them or at worse they will be transferred out of their job positions (Abbas & Nawaz, 2018).

Considering these issues, this research aims to investigate the nature and consequence of workplace bullying in general and its effects on the psychological, physical, and emotional health of employees working in governmental organizations in Pakistan. The research aims to answer the following questions: The study aimed at identifying various types of workplace bullying from the list of common forms of workplace bullying experienced by the employees of the public sector in Pakistan. In what ways is bullying in the workplace manifesting an impact on their psychological and physical health? What policies and or practices are in place to prevent or handle bullying at the current organizational level and to what extent?

This study will make a significant contribution towards the current knowledge on workplace bullying especially within governmental organizations in Pakistan. Also, it will offer important information regarding probable ways to prevent and overcome bullying, as well as promote more beneficial organizational climates. This research seeks to give a brief policy recommendation that will be useful to the policy maker, managers of organizations, Human

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Resource personnel and other stakeholders tasked with the responsibility of ensuring a safe workplace for government employees.

Literature Review

Bullying at the workplace involves a repeated negative interaction where a person targets a subordinate employing threatening power and leads to significant negative impact, both physical, and psychological in the light of studies that have highlighted this issue in the recent past. Widely described as persistent and premeditated unwanted conduct against a colleague or subordinate, workplace bullying comprises verbal harassment, ostracism, gossiping, or meddling with another person's assignments (Einarsen et al., 2011). Effects of such behavior invasion do not only confine the emotional suffering that ensues to the victims but strike the organizational climate, employees' efficiency, and wellness. Even though workplace bullying cannot remain unnoticed at the global level, empirical studies to investigate it especially in the context of governmental organizations in Pakistan are scanty. This literature review gives an overview of research done in the area of workplace bullying particularly in relation to the causes, effects, and ways to minimize the act in organizations; particularly in the public sector.

1. Concept of Workplace Bullying

Organized workplace bullying has been defined as deliberate and repetitive attempts to control or harm another person within the workplace either through physical or psychological means (Zapf and Einarsen 2001). Einarsen et al. (2011) defined workplace bullying as being observable in terms of number, frequency and severity of the following; verbal abuse, submitting false reports or gossiping about an employee or using techniques designed to diminish an employee's credibility or performance. It is a repetitive process of using power to control and to harm the other person, and can range in duration from several weeks up to several years and it can have negative impacts on the target, the offender and the organization. This behavior not only implies a negative impact on the target's health state of both mind and body but also on the overall organizational climate, resulting in deterioration of morale and work productivity (Nielsen et al., 2008).

Employers can use different methods of bullying which may be divided into overt and subtle. We can distinguish between overt and subtle forms of bullying. Organized workplace bullying is more observable and is frequently simpler to detect than the less obvious dispersed sort of aggression (Mitchell et al., 2010). It is also necessary to differentiate between bullying and maltreatment or negative interactions and incidents as bullying is repeated and intentional targeting of the victim.

2. Prevalence and Causes of Workplace Bullying

Stress studies indicate that workplace bullying is a problem in the global workplace that cuts across most organizations, including the public sector. Average statistics given for this type of aggression was demonstrated by Hoel, Rayner, and Cooper, according to whom around 10-15% of the UK's employees reported being bullied at work. Consequently, a study conducted in Sweden established that 12 percent of workers said they had been bullied while at work, especially in organizations with a hierarchical system (Einarsen, 2000). In Pakistan, though

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there is scanty empirical literature on workplace bullying, there are informal indications that bullying behavior is common in governmental organizations, most specifically in bureaucratic departments with clear-chain of command (Abbas & Nawaz, 2018).

The reasons associated with workplace bullying are numerous and varied. When studying workplace bullying specifically targeting organizational workplace, Einarsen et al., (2011) have noted that organizational culture, power relations and organizational management malfunctioning are considered to be the main causes of bullying. The structural characteristics of governmental organizations such as the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure of many can also distort these tendencies. Administrative and organizational power differentials may also help to explain why bullying is often either not reported or actively encouraged within organizations – especially where employees know they can be dismissed, demoted, or otherwise penalized for reporting such conduct (Hasan, 2018). In Pakistan particularly, where culture and societal modelling leans against power confrontation, this organizational hierarchy is believed to create the space for students to thrive as bullies (Hashim & Butt, 2019).

Additionally, key reasons which have been found to influence bullying at the workplace include job insecurity, high workload, and role ambiguity. Research work indicates that when workers are losing or lack opportunities for promotion, they can likely turn around and become aggressive bullies as a way of regaining their authority (Zapf, 2001). In the case of Pakistan, due to uncertain position of job and voluntary nature of employment in public sectors, these factors can play an influential part in bullying.

3. Impact of Workplace Bullying on Employee Well-being

This research has established that there are negative impacts of workplace bullying to employees. Nielsen et al. (2008) revealed that bullying is a strong risk factor when it comes to psychological and physical health. Victims of workplace bullying, therefore, reported higher levels of strain, anxiety, depressive symptoms and actual physical health complaints including headaches, gastrointestinal upset, and sleeping problems (Rossi, 2020). Emotional effects of workplace bullying were also identified such as burn out, feeling of hopelessness and decreased self-esteem among the respondents (Hoel, et al 1999).

In addition, bullying has been shown to negatively affect the employee's organizational commitment, job satisfaction and their intention of turnover (Mas surreal, 2011). According to other research, indirect bullying targets may have a demoralized mental workspace, which disconnects them from their duties and tasks resulting in poor performance (Nielsen et al., 2008). These effects can be problematic in the public sector where such cascading impacts may disrupt the provision of public services, deteriorate citizens' confidence in governmental institutions, and alter the perception of governmental performance (Hashim & Butt, 2019). Bullying also has ripple repercussions beyond the targeted employees and percolates into the rest of the organization. Zapf et al. (2011) established that workplace bullying results in an organizational climate that is unhealthy; full of mistrust, poor word usage and low moral standards. In such environments, the level of cooperation, information exchange or productivity among employees is low. This not only poses a serious problem to the well-being of the target but also acts as a hindrance to the achievements of the organizational goals.

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4. Strategies for Preventing and Addressing Workplace Bullying

Combating workplace bullying involves both personal and organizational change strategies. Research has also pointed out that an appropriate policy or a code of conduct against bullying must be in place, and that employee training must be mandatory, and there must be an efficient means by which an employee can complain against being bullied (Nielsen et al., 2008). Nevertheless, it has been seen that the organizational culture has a great impact on the extent of bullying happening in an organization. Productive organizational climate, free from bullying, and where employees have an opportunity to report, and prevent such behaviors sufficiently decreases the misuse rate in the middle management (Zapf & Einarsen, 2001).

Einarsen et al., 2011 noted that organizations should have written policies against bullying coupled with clear descriptions of the types of behaviors that are prohibited, manner in which employees are allowed to report bullying incidents and finally measures put in place to shield bullied employees from retaliation. Further, it is necessary to work on the appointment of power training in the field of combating bullying in the workplace, in familiarization with the impact of the given phenomenon on people's health, and acquaintance with the methods by which managers can solve disputes. However, emerging studies point out that many organizations do not have these policies or where they exist, they remain a paper-tiger, unenforced especially in large organizations like government entities where those in authority frown upon reporting such vices.

There remains one major bottleneck in governmental organizations, including those in Pakistan, which relates to an unavailable or ineffective support reporting system. Research shows that workplace aggression is underreported because employees are scared of being punished for their whistleblowing; they do not believe that their employers will protect them; and they cannot confidently bring their complaints to someone in authority because there is no clear, anonymous way of doing so (Hasan, 2018). There should always be a well-defined and secure process put in place so that the employees feel free to report any case of bullying with no consequences that come with it.

5. Workplace Bullying in the Pakistani Context

The public sector of Pakistan has high power distance and a highly centralized and hierarchical structure that may increase possibilities of power abuse and employees' bullying (Hashim & Butt, 2019). Moreover, Pakistani workplace culture promotes positivity to seniors and one must not report a conflict to seniors, which may explain why employees remain silent despite the harassment (Abbas & Nawaz, 2018). Unfortunately, studies done for Pakistani organizations are insufficient, but evidence indicates that respondents from the Public sector were less likely to report co-worker aggression because of their working status and the belief that organizations would not take any action (Hasan, 2018).

The study on organizational culture and employee behavior conducted by Hashim & Butt (2019) found that the Pakistani governmental organization has no strong grievance procedure and training program to deal with the bullying. This indicates that workplace bullying could be rife in public sector organizations more than is perhaps appreciated. Since bullying poses threat to employee well-being, as well as the effectiveness of their organization, combating this vices ought to be a priority in the policy agenda and for

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organization leaders in Pakistan.

Conclusion

This paper established that workplace bullying is prevalent and its effects cut across productivity, physical, psychological health of the employee, and organizational culture in the workplaces. In the present literature, the majority of the research on workplace bullying has been executed in western nations; however, new studies concerning workplace bullying in public sector organizations of Pakistani background signify that this is just as relevant in the governmental sector. Since Pakistani governmental organizations have traditional authoritarian organizational structures, weak power relations, and little possibility for presenting grievances, they are potentially prey to workplace bullying. For this reason, its solution is an important factor, which can help to enhance the condition of employees and effectiveness of governmental organizations. Future research should extend the understanding of form and effects of WLB detailed for the Pakistani context with an emphasis on prevention and management strategies for the public sector establishment.

Methodology

This research proposes a quantitative approach since a structured questionnaire is used to determine the incidence of workplace bullying in governmental organizations in Pakistan along with the features and effects. The emphasis placed on the collection of quantitative data enables the accumulation of large data samples to draw from thereby ensuring the generalizability of the results obtained to the entire population of government employees. The subsequent sections provide details on the design of the research, sample, data collection techniques used and the analysis of data in this study.

Research Design

A cross sectional research design was used to sample data from a single point of time. This design was adopted because it will enable the assessment of the extent of the WB in the governmental organizations in Pakistan and its impact on the well-being of the workers. Since no prior research has focused on this particular context, this design offers a practical means of taking a 'snapshot' of the phenomenon to inform future studies and intervention.

Survey Development

The research survey was developed from other scales and questionnaires that assess workplace bullying and employee's psychological health, but contextually modified for Pakistan. The survey was structured in two main sections: the first section was basic demographic that included age, gender, education level, job title, and job experience with the organization. The second part provided an estimate of the extent, the characteristics and the consequences of workplace bullying for well-being.

Concerning the scale type, the study applied the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) developed by Einarsen et al. (2009) since it is popular in the literature to assess bullying behavior in different sectors. The NAQ comprises a list of questions that relates to concrete bully behaviors such as verbal aggression, relational aggression and workplace aggression. Participants were then asked to provide an estimate of how often they had encountered each

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of the behaviors described over the preceding six months, in a scale from 'never' to 'daily'. This method enables a numerical approximation of bullying occurrences within a firm and a general picture of the extent of the issue in the organization.

The survey on the effect of workplace bullying on the state of employees utilized a combination of existing scales. The psychological impact of bullying was measured using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) which consisted of symptoms such as anxiety, depression, emotional disturbances and others. Further, physical health symptoms, which include headaches, sleep disturbances, and gastrointestinal problems were assessed using items from the Somatic Symptoms Scale (Gervais and Barling, 2007). The choice of these tools was based on the reliability and construct validity in assessing effects of workplace bullying on mental and physical health.

Sample Selection

The target population for this research encompassed employees working in governmental organizations in Pakistan. These are as follows: The organizations to be included in this study were chosen because they contribute more than half of the labor force in this country; and because they tend to have rather more highly structured and bureaucratized workplace hierarchies; bullying is likely to be more prevalent. To increase reliability and validity of the study, stratified random sampling method was adopted to increase the government staff coverage of various sectors, from administration, technical and managerial levels.

Cochran (1977) provided the formula for determining the sample size for large population samples, which was used to determine the sample size in the present study. Because the expected response rate is set at 50% and the level of confidence required stands at 95%, the estimated population size of 400 employees was deemed as a suitable sample size. The survey was administered on the selected employees of the governmental departments in the large cities such as Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. Three hundred fifty usable surveys were completed and returned with an overall estimated response rate of 87.5%.

Data Collection

The data collection was done through online and paper based questionnaire disbursement. The web-based survey links were sent through email and organizational web-sites, and paper surveys were provided to employees who for any reason, did not receive electronic communications, or who preferred writing on paper. Concerning the participants' information, they were first read a brief description of the survey; its objective, a word on anonymity and their willingness to participate. The research protocol for the study was cleared by the relevant ethical committee and each participant signed consent.

The survey was conducted over a two-month interval to ensure that all the respondents who agreed to participate in the survey were given ample time to do so. Therefore, to ensure more people completed the survey, the participants were reminded using follow-up emails. All the questionnaires administered were self-administered, and participant identity could not be traced to the data collected in this study.

Data Analysis

The data collected were then analyzed by computer through the use of descriptive statistics

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to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying in governmental organizations. Quantitative data were collected using frequency distribution and percentage of bullying behavior categories by employees and the mean scores of the perceived effects that bullying behaviors have on employees.

For analyzing the data collected from GHQ-12 and Somatic Symptoms Scale to find out Workplace Bullying's effect on Wellbeing of employees, the responses were correlated. It was employed in establishing the kind of the relationship that exists between workplace bullying and psychological and physical health status. The data, therefore, were subjected to regression analysis to assess the extent to which the identified workplace bullying significantly predicted change in well-being. This made the results free from the possibility of other factors like age, gender and job position influencing both bullying and well-being causing a spurious relationship between the two.

The statistical analysis of data was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 with the help of which it becomes possible to undertake a successful handling of big data samples and also employ numerous techniques and tools of analysis. The significance level used in the current study for determining relationships of concern was 0.05 level whereby any p-values less than 0.05 were deemed statistically significant.

Limitations

The following are some of the limitations of the quantitative approach. The use of the quantitative approach enables the researcher to work with a large sample and generalize the findings of the study based on the response of the respondents. First, self-report data often contain some bias, for example, social desirable bias, in which the participants may underestimate their experience of bullying or overstate their symptoms, to fit the societal norms. To prevent this, anonymity was leading as a guise to candid opinions being given out. Second, as noted above, cross-sectional research design severely restricts the possibilities of establishing the causal relationship between workplace bullying and employees' well-being. Delayed cross sectional surveys could have offered better proof of cause association. Last, the survey reached all the government departments but the results are not generalised for the government employees working in rural areas or in comparatively less urbanized areas where situations may vary.

Results

This section offers the findings of the cross-sectional survey which aimed at determining the rate of workplace bullying and the impact that it has on the psychological well-being of employees in Pakistani governmental organizations. The method of data analysis includes information regarding demographics of participants, the incidence and kind of experiences of bullying in respondents, and the health effects related to workplace bullying.

1. Demographic Distribution of Respondents

The demographic data also shows the age of the respondents of the study. The participants in the survey were divided into five age groups: The age preponderance result shows youthful age groups of 18-25 years, 26-35 years, 36-45 years, 46-55 years, 56+ years. Age distribution findings revealed that the largest group of respondents including 120 of the 350 respondents

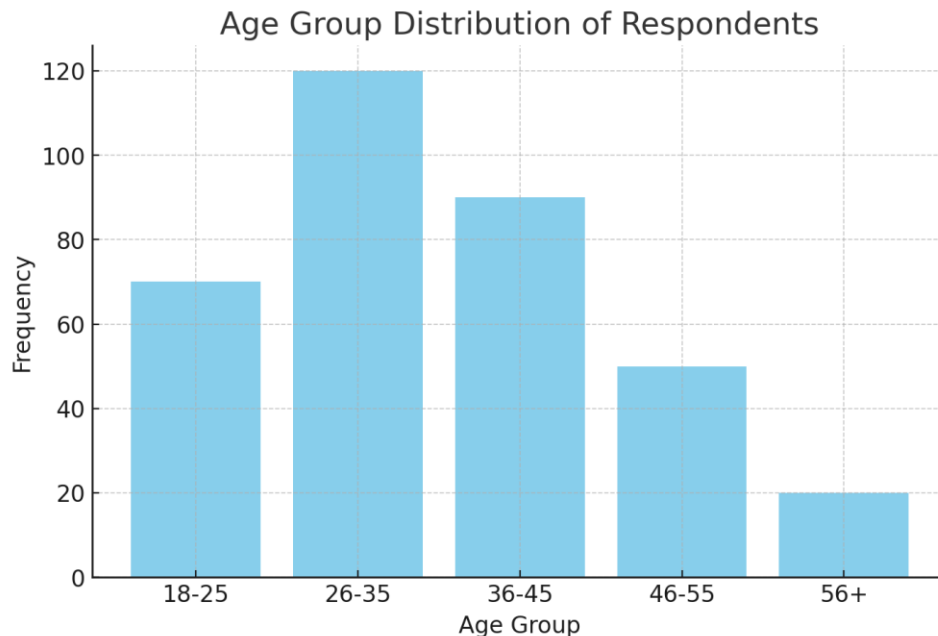
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were in the age bracket of 26-35 years followed by the 36-45 age bracket which had 90 respondents. The least represented group was the 56+ age category, with twenty respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency
18-25	70
26-35	120
36-45	90
46-55	50
56+	20

Figure 1 Age Group Distribution of Respondents



This demonstrates that the majority of the survey takers were young to middle age employees within the working population. This is in line with the general practice in

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workplace diversity in governmental organizations where more than half of the workforce is between 25 and 45 years. The lower proportion of the older generation (56+) can be attributed to the youthful employee population in many governmental organisations in Pakistan where youth is joining the public sector more often. The findings of this study imply that workplace bullying may be a potential issue with regards to its impact to the careers of employees at various periods of their career lives, although it may pose a larger threat to youngsters who may be dominated or bullied easily in the course of their working practice.

2. Frequency of Bullying Behaviors Experienced by Employees

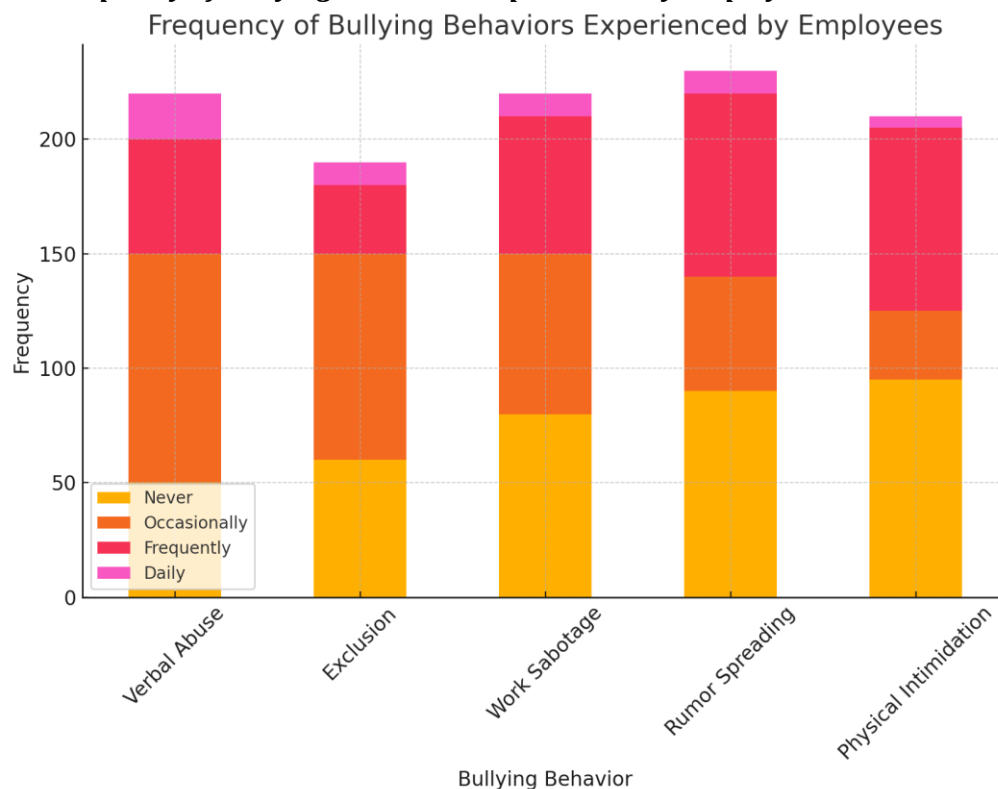
The second part of the analysis focuses on the frequency of various bullying behaviors experienced by employees in governmental organizations. Respondents were asked about five types of bullying: verbal abuse, exclusion, work sabotage, rumor spreading, and physical intimidation. The responses were categorized as "Never," "Occasionally," "Frequently," or "Daily."

Table 2: Frequency of Bullying Behaviors Experienced by Employees

Bullying Behavior	Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Daily
Verbal Abuse	50	100	50	20
Exclusion	60	90	30	10
Work Sabotage	80	70	60	10
Rumor Spreading	90	50	80	10
Physical Intimidation	95	30	10	5

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Figure 2 Frequency of Bullying Behaviors Experienced by Employees



The findings further reveal that verbal abuse and exclusion received the highest ranking among the identified bullying behaviors. About 100 respondents said they experience verbal abuse either occasionally or frequently, while 50 respondents labelled it as frequent. Exclusion also had a significant participation with 90 percent of the respondents indicating that it happens to them occasionally and 30 percent recording it happens often to them. Also, similar to work sabotage, rumor spreading had a relatively high percentage of responses indicating occasional behavior. However, physical aggression as a bullying behavior was cited least frequently and of the respondents who acknowledged bullying in their classroom, the vast majority rated physical aggression as “Never” (95 respondents).

The findings indicate that verbal abuse and social exclusion are the most frequent types of PI in governmental organizations, and these results match the cross-national studies on PI that highlight the increased prevalence of these behaviors in organizational contexts that involve organizational hierarchies. The relatively high incidence might be because of barriers employees experience in the bureaucratic organizations; social exclusion in these organizations may be a form of punishment or concentration in the workplace. The high prevalence of volunteer reports of work sabotage and rumor turnover indicates that bullying in governmental organizations might involve indirect aggression manifested by sabotaging coworkers and spreading rumors about them. The low prevalence of physical threats may reflect the general structure of government employment, wherein hitherto unlawful actions are sold to follow a standard, legal approach.

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3. Impact of Workplace Bullying on Employee Health

The third part of the analysis is devoted to psychological and physical consequences of workplace bullying through using GHQ-12 and Somatic Symptoms Scale. Stress, anxiety, sleep problems, physical pain, and depression were measured using the visual analogue scale where the scores ranged from 0 through 4.

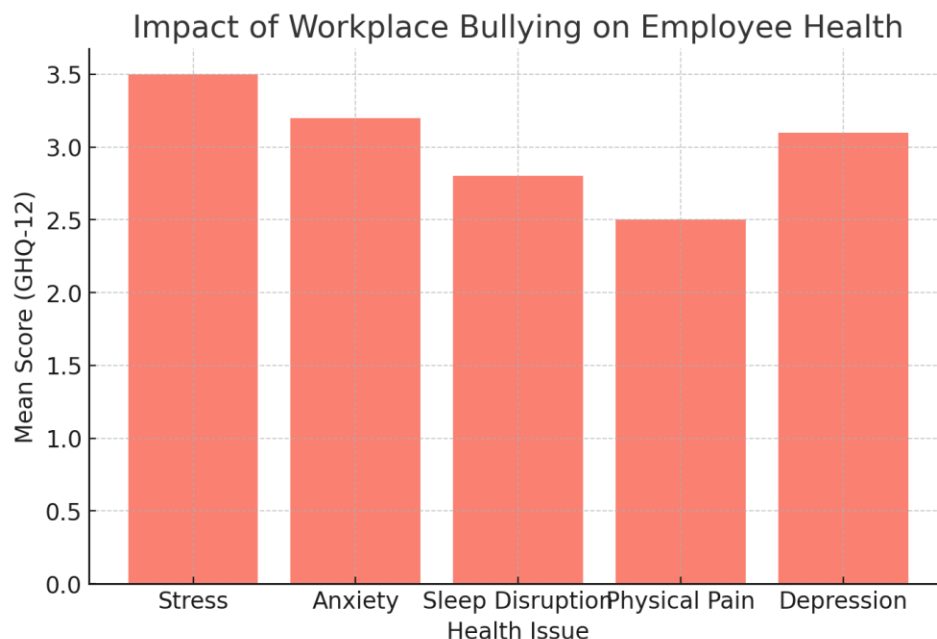
The results indicate that the level of stress as expressed by the participants scored was high and had a mean of 3.5 while the level of anxiety was also high as shown by the mean of 3.2. The effect on depression was also substantial with a mean score of 3.1. However, sleep disruption was only indicated with a slightly lower mean score of 2.8 while physical pain had the lowest mean score of 2.5.

Table 3: Impact of Workplace Bullying on Employee Health

Health Issue	Mean Score (GHQ-12)
Stress	3.5
Anxiety	3.2
Sleep Disruption	2.8
Physical Pain	2.5
Depression	3.1

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Figure 3 Impact of Workplace Bullying on Employee Health



The results of the study corroborate that workplace bullying is positively correlated with psychological sequelae in target employees in governmental organizations. The most serious health problems stated by the students were stress, anxiety and depression, results that are consistent with other studies on the psychosocial impacts of bullying (Nielsen et al., 2008). The mean score for stress is high, indicating that bullying as one of the sources of workplace-related stress can predict burnout while reducing one's emotions. Anxiety and depression as other effects of bullying therefore clearly demonstrate that the vice not only has an impact on mental health but also extensively and profoundly exposes individuals to future emotional and psychological scars. It is, therefore, only fitting that the scores in sleep disruption and physical pain are a tad lower than the psychological outcomes of bullying. These findings underscore the need for organizations to seriously consider mental health problems that afflict their employees, especially in governmental organizations where formal hierarchy might contribute to perceived fostered helplessness and alienation.

4. Summary of Findings

In conclusion, the findings of this research offers systematic accounts regarding the incidence and organizational repercussions of workplace bullying in governmental organizations in Pakistan. The results show that the majority of the personnel were victimized and the most frequent types of bullying were verbal abuse and social isolation. These are behaviors that relate to employees' stress, anxiety, and depression among other related illnesses. According to the findings, workplace bullying is a significant problem that, if treated in the government workforce, will enhance the psychological well-being of its members. Based on the employees' scores for psychological distress, it is apparent that more anti-bullying policies and mental health support proposals are required to address the effects of workplace

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bullying and create a healthier working culture in the public sector.

Discussion

The findings of this work will help to establish the approximate rate of workplace bullying, as well as reveal the consequences of such activity for the actual employees of governmental organizations in Pakistan. These studies show that bullying is very rampant in these organizations with the two most common types of bullying being verbal and relational. Moreover, the investigation also shows that workplace bullying also has psychological and physical impacts on employees especially stress, anxiety and depression. This discussion will then situate the findings in its respective literature and compare results to previous research, concluding with the future workplace policies and practices recommendations.

Prevalence of Workplace Bullying in Governmental Organizations

The survey showed that workplace bullying in Pakistani governmental organizations is quite common and includes verbal aggression and ostracism as the two most frequent forms of abuse. These findings corroborate the study done by Hoel et al. (1999) on a survey of workplace bullying which pointed out that verbal abuse and social isolation as some of the many types of bullying that happen in different facilities. In a cross sectional study Zapf (2001) showed that social exclusion and verbal aggression are among the most often reported types of workplace bullying by sectors.

When it comes to governmental organizations, the kind of workplace environment that is characterized by hierarchy and bureaucracy might be responsible for these forms of bullying. Organizational structures of government organizations in Pakistan like those organizations in many other countries have hierarchical organizational structures in which authority and power are centrally controlled and disseminated at different levels of operation. This can result in an atmosphere where employees can experience their exclusion or oral abuse by their superiors or co-workers. Zapf and Einarsen (2001) posit that these power relationships, especially in organizations lead to workplace bullying.

However, it is important to note that physical bullying was reported to be the least observed in this study. This is detected with other research in other industries since despite the fact that physical bullying is not as common as verbal or relational bullying it still plays a huge role (Einarsen et al., 2009). Verbal bullying and relational bullying may be more common in governmental organizations because physical aggressive behaviors are prohibited by the official rules and regulations, as well as ethical codes of conduct.

Impact of Workplace Bullying on Employee Well-being

The study also shows a directly significant negative effect on the psychological well-being of the employees due to workplace bullying. Respondents identified high levels of stress, anxiety and depression, which is in line with Nielsen et al (2008) indicating that workplace bullying results to high levels of emotional and psychological effects. Alarming is the observed mean value of the stress, which is 3.5 in this study meaning that employees endure pressure from bullying behaviors. Stress is understood to predict burnout, job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Rossi, 2020). These outcomes are even more worrying for governmental organizations, for example, turnover and low job satisfaction can mean large losses.

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The psychological outcomes of bullying in the current research aligned with prior research in Pakistan. For instance, Shah et al. (2020) working on a study commissioned to investigate the effects of PWOB on psychological distress among public organization employees in Pakistan found that workplace bullying raises the levels of psychological distress, anxiety and depression. This study also found that employees who experienced bullying were more likely to report physical symptoms such as headaches and sleep disturbances, as is seen in this study's findings on sleep disruption (mean score: 2.8). This supports the observation made by Rossi (2020) that bullying has a physical impact on the body due to the stress it causes psychologically thus making it a profound health issue.

Compared to the findings from western countries where psychological impact of bullying is directly correlated with organizational loss in terms of productivity and this and employee engagement (Einarsen et al., 2009), the study in Pakistan reveals the need to address the mental health issues in countries with emerging economy and where government sectors, in particular, may not have adequate strategy and/or resources dedicated to mental health. The impact of bullying on physical pain in this study was less severe (mean score: 2.5), but still noteworthy. Health problems cited in the study on the health cost of workplace bullying by Gervais and Barling (2007) include more Israelis experiencing musculoskeletal pain, gastrointestinal problems and headaches due to stress.

Comparisons with Global Literature

The research study interacts with several other research studies done on other countries that show strong similarities in the current study where verbal abuse and exclusion are the most reported form of bullying behaviors. For instance, Hoel et al., (1999) reported that voice based bullying was the most common in the private and the public sectors. In our systematic review, Nielsen et al. (2008) have also reported that major psychological outcomes of bullying are depression, anxiety, and stress and are therefore consistent with this study.

Such a comparison can also be made to studies that have been conducted in western countries; the results obtained from Pakistan might differ because of cultural and contextual variations. The cultures of anti-bullying legislation and practices in many Western nations are already fairly developed, and workplace bullying is acted on and discussed much more vociferously. However, Pakistani organizational governments might not have standard and effective procedures or adequate support prerequisites to curb such matters as bullying, thus explaining why the employees do not report such conduct (Ali & Khan, 2017). This lack of organizational support may be attributed to the high levels of psychological distress in this study.

Furthermore, the authoritarian structure of government workplaces is strict compared to organizations working in the private sector. It is more so; this setup may contribute to the development of power relations that gives support to bullying. According to Zapf, and Einarsen (2001) where an organization has a highly formalized structure with clear lines of authority, the type of workplace bullying that is likely to occur includes social isolation and verbal aggression. This agrees with the findings of the present study where most of the observed bullying behaviors were relational in nature.

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Implications for Policy and Practice

Based on the previous findings of this study, there is evidence of bullying in governmental organizations of Pakistan and, therefore, calls for profound anti-bullying measures and related support. Thus, knowing the vast and profound effects on the psychological and physical well-being of individuals exposed to workplace bullying it becomes necessary for the respective government institutions to establish procedures for curbing bullying behaviors. Some of the structural improvements should include; designate a clear reporting procedure for bullying behavior, offer counselling services to victims, and offer information campaigns against bullying behavior at workplace.

However, the integration of leadership training for employers and employees in relevant government institutions is also necessary for the organization of a humane and fair management system. According to the findings of Nielsen et al (2008) supervisors who understand the effects of bullying and are especially trained to correct such behaviors are central to addressing the problem. Furthermore, setting up procedural complaints management may allow individuals to report cases of bullying within their organizational structures without being punished; provided in bureaucratized organizations, power relations are skewed.

Limitations and Future Research

However, since this study was constructed, there are some limitations which are worth considering. The static nature of the cross-sectional design limits precise determinations of the relationships that may exist between workplace bullying and employee well-being. Longitudinal research could provide more definitive conclusions concerning the impact of bullying in the long run. Also, the study relied on self-compiled information which can be affected by the social desire bias. Future research should employ both qualitative and quantitative methods such as interviews and focus groups to capture the realities of employees in governmental organizations.

Conclusion

Therefore, the present research also underscored the high incidence of workplace bullying in the governmental organizations in Pakistan and the debilitating effect on employees' health. The results corroborate the global research highlighting the negative impacts of bullying, and especially in organizations with ordered rank structures. The study suggests that there should be a serious concern about workplace bullying in the public sector in Pakistan especially: Vocational measures like formulating a concrete anti-bullying policy, enhancing mental health facilities and having a civilized working culture. Further research should be directed into the outcome of interventions and also on the culture of organisations that is related to workplace bullying.

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