“Investigating the impact of workplace bullying on employees’ morale, performance and turnover intentions in five-star Egyptian hotel operations”

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INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING ON EMPLOYEES' MORALE, PERFORMANCE AND TURNOVER INTENTIONS IN FIVE-STAR EGYPTIAN HOTEL OPERATIONS

Abstract

In today's competitive business environment, human resources are one of the most critical assets particularly for service-focused organizations. Consequently, employees' morale has become invaluable for maintaining outstanding organizational performance and retaining employees. One of the most important factors which may affect employees' satisfaction is workplace bullying from employers and colleagues at large. It is considered a negative and unethical issue which may degrade, humiliate and create a risk to a healthy working environment. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to investigate the extent to which workplace bullying may affect the organizational outcomes of a sample of five-star hotels in Egypt. Two questionnaires were distributed among the subjects of the sample; bell desk staff, kitchen stewards and head departments. The results of this research confirmed that there is a correlation between workplace bullying, employees' morale and turnover intentions but, showed no correlation between workplace bullying and employees' work performance.

Keywords workplace bullying, morale, performance, turnover, Egypt

JEL Classification J50, J60, L83

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INTRODUCTION

Managing organizational resources is a vital aspect in the success of any organization in today's business world. It is established that human resource is the most critical factor in this respect. Nadiri & Tanova (2010) stated that human resources play a central role and demand special attention. It is recognised as the main differentiating success factor for most organizations especially for the service-focused organizations. Therefore, the challenge facing most organizations is to retain and satisfy their human resources which affect the competitiveness of organizations (Tehrani, 2004).

One of the most important factors which can affect employees' satisfaction is the workplace bullying from employers and colleagues. Workplace bullying is known as the negative and unethical issues in the workplace which are sometimes referred to as workplace harassment (Brodsky, 1976), and workplace abuse (Keashly, 1998).

With regard to the fact that all people expect a convenient environment in their workplace, hostile and unethical events will have a nega-

tive influence on organizational outcomes. These outcomes include employees' morale, employees' work performance and turnover intentions. Bullied employees will not do their predetermined task properly and will not engage in extra-role behaviours which contribute to competitive advantages of the organization. The interaction between employees and customers in the service industry dictates the significant role of employees' outcomes in enhancing the customers' satisfaction level of the service provided (Nadiri & Tanova, 2010). Therefore, it is quite important to deal with and investigate the bullying phenomenon and address its causes and consequences.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

While, there is no single universally accepted definition of workplace bullying, the formal definition by the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI, 2014) defined workplace bullying as "repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons (the targets) by one or more perpetrators. It is an abusive conduct that includes threatening, humiliating, work interference, sabotage and verbal abuse which prevent work from getting done".

Former definitions by authors like Einarsen (2000), Field (1996), Zapf & Einarsen (2003) provided a wide range and perspectives of bullying practices, inter alia, "social isolation", "verbal aggression", "spreading rumors" and even "attacking attitudes" and "physical violence" which may occur occasionally. However, according to Zapf & Einarsen (2003) bullying is predominately psychological rather than physical in nature.

Einarsen, Raknes, Matthiesen, & Hellesoy (1996); Hutchinson, Jackson, Wilkes, & Vickers (2008) stated that workplace bullying has two main categories which are shaped upon. One of these categories is work-related bullying, which are unwanted repeated actions and practices that are directed to one or more workers. It may cause humiliation, distress, and that may interfere with work performance and create an unpleasant working environment. Work-related bullying behaviors may include an unachievable task, impossible deadlines, unmanageable workloads, meaningless task or supplying unclear information, threat about security etc. (Hutchinson et al., 2008).

The other category is person-related bullying which is regarded as a form of stress that is capable of causing negative effects on employees health, probably leads to psychophysical symptoms, psychiatric trouble such as anxiety-depression disorder, chronic adjustment disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Person-related bullying behaviors are ignoring, insulting, public humiliation, spreading rumors or gossips, and intruding on privacy, yelling etc. (Ramsay, Troth, & Branch, 2010).

The consequences of workplace bullying are significant and cannot be overlooked. The negative effects on individuals lower self-esteem, stress, anxiety, fatigue, burnout and depression (O'Moore, Seigne, & McGuire, 1998; Zapf, 1999; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001;Vartia, 2001; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002; Namie, 2003; Cassitto, Fattorini, Gilloli, Rengo, & Gonik, 2004; Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2008; Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, 2007; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik, Alberts, & Tracy 2008). Moreover, bullying is also associated with threats to individual identity (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2008) and post-traumatic stress disorder (Kudielka & Kern, 2004; Scott, Blanshard, & Child, 2008).

Outside work environment, bullying can also affect the quality of employees' life and is associated with increasing feelings of powerlessness and reducing the feelings of personal dependence and control (O'Connell, Calvert, & Watson, 2007).

Workplace bullying has also detrimental consequences for the organization. Targets of workplace bullying have a higher rate of absenteeism, less job satisfaction, organizational commitment and work motivation, in addition to the likelihood of leaving the organization (Keashly & Neuman, 2005; Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Burnes & Pope, 2007; Harvey et al., 2007; O'Connell et al., 2007; Sheehan, McCarthy, & Kearns, 1998; O'Connell & Kung, 2007).

As a result of the negative consequences of workplace bullying on both individuals and organiza-

tions, a real need to respond to combat bullying has become a necessity. Attempts to deal with this phenomenon include identifying the essence of the term and scope (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006; Namie, 2006). Another step is documenting formal and informal complaints, as targets may tend to report a formal complaint (Macintosh, 2006, Namie & Namie, 2000; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006).

At the organizational level, commitment of management at all levels to handle this phenomenon is essential (Tehrani, 2001). Further steps may require engagement of all levels of management to assess the current communication environment, determining areas for improvement, and implementing changes (Keashly & Neuman, 2005). In addition, developing anti-bullying policies as organizations may wish to create an explicit anti-bullying policy (Richards & Daley, 2003). Finally, organizations may consider training to enable employees to recognise bullying practices and to protect those who reported bullying acts (Keashly & Neuman, 2005).

It is often a challenge for hospitality industry management to maintain employees' morale at a high level so as to retain them, and offer the efficient, good service that customers expect (Cheng, 1995). Regarding employees work performance, every organization performs its task with the help of resources as human resources, machine, materials and money. It is universally acknowledged that work performance is the most important variable considered in industrial and organizational psychology research (Borman, 2004; Farh, Seo, & Tesluk, 2012; Kacmar, Harris, Collins, & Judge, 2009). This is based on the fact that job performance has always been reported as a significant indicator of organizational performance regardless of how it is conceptualised (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2010).

Regarding employees turnover intentions, the hospitality sector is one of the world's fastest-growing industries. According to Cho, Johanson, & Guchait (2009) and Riley (2006), turnover intentions imply to one's intention to leave his employing organisation which shows a breach in the relationship between employees and the organization. The costs of turnover include opportunity cost, retraining and reselection and decrease in the morale of current employees which may result in serious losses to the firms (Cho et al., 2009).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Bullying often involves an abuse or misuse of power. In addition bullying behavior creates feelings of defenseless and injustice in the target and undermines an individual's right to dignity at work, which may lead to reducing morale, performance and finally to leave work. Therefore, the problem of the study can be stated in the following question "what are the impacts of workplace bullying on the organizational outcomes, which are embodied in employees' morale, work performance and turnover intentions?".

2.1. Objectives of the study

This study has three specific objectives:

1. To explore the phenomenon of workplace bullying and deepen the understanding of such negative behavior.

2. To investigate the extent to which workplace bullying can affect the organizational outcomes (employees' morale, work performance and turnover intentions).

3. To propose practical strategies for practitioners to assist them in preventing/avoiding workplace bullying if it occurs.

2.2. The Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses can be formulated as follows (figure 1):

H1: Workplace bullying has a significant negative impact on employees' morale.

H1a: Work-related bullying has a significant negative impact on employees' morale.

H1b: Person-related bullying has a significant negative impact on employees' morale.

H2: Workplace bullying has a significant negative impact on employees' work performance.

H2a: Work-related bullying has a significant negative impact on employees' work performance.

H2b: Person-related bullying has a significant negative impact on employees' work performance.

H3: Workplace bullying has a significant influence on turnover intentions of employees.

H3a: Work-related bullying has a significant influence on turnover intentions of employees. H3b: Person-related bullying has a significant influence on turnover intentions of employees.

H4: Workplace bullying has a significant impact on employees, according to their demographic data (gender, age and educational level).

3. METHODOLOGY

The researchers have considered the descriptive analytical approach to deepen the understanding and investigate the phenomenon of workplace bullying that may occur within a selected sample of hotel operations. The descriptive method assisted in developing the hypothesis of the study, and subsequently, the analytical approach was used for testing their validity. The data collection instrument involved questionnaire surveys to test hypotheses and answer questions (Collis & Hussey, 2009). As a result, the methodology employed two main phases; desk research and field research. The desk research was used to collect data and form the hypothetical background of the workplace bullying phenomenon.

The population of the study consisted of all five-star hotels in Egypt which amount to 156 five-star hotels (EHA, 2012). A purposive sample of 47 five-star hotel operations was selected representing 30% of the total population in two main Egyptian tourist regions namely, Sharm-Elsheikh and Alexandria. The target respondents were 30% of the mean calculation of a total number of department employees in each of the selected sample population.

The field research used two forms of questionnaires in order to test the hypotheses of the study. The first was directed to both, front- and back-of-the-house employees, selecting a random sample of bell desk employees and kitchen stewards to address the hypotheses of the research. All the sample respondents have the same nationality (Egyptian citizens) due to the fact that the type of the jobs they undertake requires low skill level. Therefore, local staff is employed and no expats are recruited for such jobs. The second questionnaire was addressed to the managers of the selected group of respondents to evaluate the respondents' work performance.

The first questionnaire was distributed to an equal random sample of 10 employees (five em-

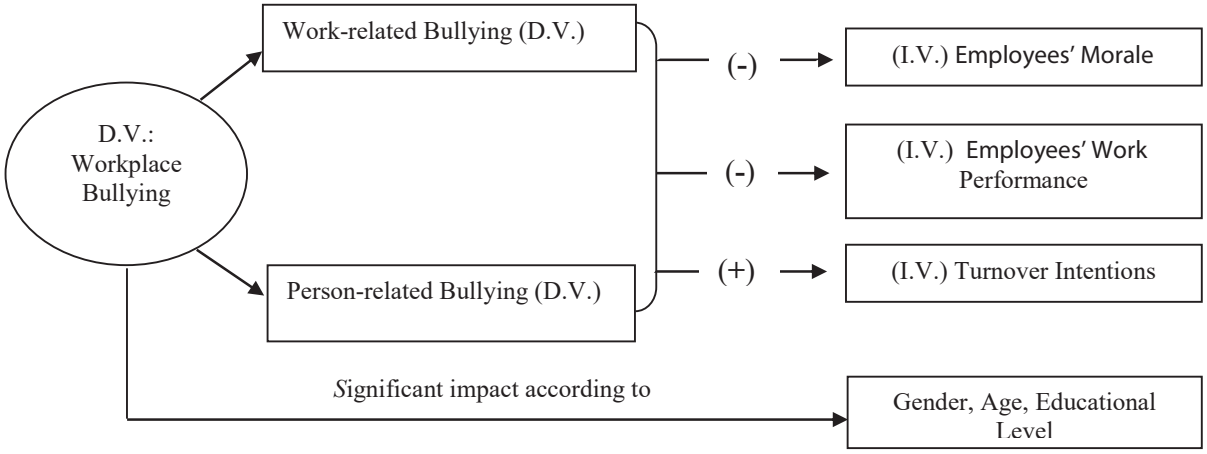

Figure 1. Hypothetical Model of the Research

ployees working at the back-of-the house and five employees working at the front-of-the house). Only three hundred and four questionnaires were valid for analysis out of the 470 questionnaires sent out for the survey. A five-point Likert scale was used for all the statements included in the two questionnaires. The first questionnaire contained five main sections; measuring work-related bullying, personal-related bullying, employees' morale, employees' leaving intention, and finally collecting demographic information about the respondents. The second questionnaire contained only one section, asking managers to evaluate the respondents' work performance. Response categories ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) in both questionnaire surveys.

Before the distribution of the questionnaires, a pilot stage was considered to uncover any difficulties which respondents may face while answering the questions. A number of 10 hotel employees and 6 departments' managers were contacted to answer the pilot form of the questionnaires and give their feedback about the clarity of wording, layout and correlation of the questions. The result of the pilot test revealed confusion of some of the words in the employees' questionnaire. Hence, the researchers provided an Arabic translation for all the questions to avoid misperception and to get reliable answers. There were no negative comments as regards the managers' questionnaire. All the pilot survey participants were excluded from the selected sample.

4. RESULTS ANALYSIS

The Spearman correlation coefficient and other statistical tests such as Mann Whitney were used to test the study's hypotheses. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 20) program for Windows was used to interpret the results. A reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items. All values of Cronbach's alpha for constructs were considerably high indicating that the reliability and validity of all constructs used in this study were supported. Results are presented in Table (1).

Table 1. Reliability and validity test using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha

Measures	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Validity
Overall Questionnaire	55	.873	.934
Workplace Bullying	21	.868	.931
Work-related Bullying	10	.795	.891
Person-related Bullying	11	.719	.847
Employees' Morale	8	.840	.916
Employees' Performance	23	.798	.891
Turnover Intentions	3	.714	.844

Table 2 presents the Spearman correlation coefficient which was interpreted in terms of its statistical significance to p-values (probabilities of relationships). The first hypothesis which test the impact of overall workplace bullying on employees' morale had a significant correlation with a value of –.263 and $P = .001$. The results also showed a significant correlation between work-related bullying, person-related bullying and morale.

As regard the impact of overall workplace bullying on employees' performance, results showed no correlation between the two variables, as P-value recorded .059. Results also showed that work-related bullying was correlated to work performance based on a record of *P*-value of 0.182. On the other hand, no correlation was valid between person-related bullying and work performance as the *P*-value was 0.103.

As regard the third hypothesis, the influence of overall workplace bullying on employees turnover intentions demonstrated a very significant correlation with a value of 0.649 ($P = .000$). More specifically, results proved a significant correlation between work-related bullying, person-related bullying and turnover intentions, as it recorded a value of .651 ($P = .000$), and 0.561 ($P = .000$) respectively.

Table 2. Correlation between workplace bullying and morale, performance and turnover intentions

Workplace bullying	Morale	Performance	Turnover intentions
Overall bullying			
Spearman correlation	–.263**	.147	.649**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.059	.000
Work-related bullying			
Spearman correlation	–.267**	.182*	.651**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.020	.000
Person-related bullying			
Spearman correlation	–.245**	.103	.561**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.189	.000

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The respondents' profile which is shown in Table 3 contains the different characteristics of the sample as gender, age, and educational level and department. Table 4 presents the correlation between workplace bullying and gender which recorded –.219 and a value of $P = .005$, which is considered significant. Besides there was a correlation between workplace bullying and respondents' age, as Spearman correlation recorded 0.156 with value of $P = 0.046$. Finally, there was no correlation between workplace bullying and educational level, based on Spearman Correlation of 0.147 and a value of $P = 0.059$.

Table 4. Correlation between workplace bullying and demographic data for respondents

Workplace Bullying	Gender	Age	Educational Level
Spearman Correlation	–.219**	.156*	.147
Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.046	.059

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Respondents' Profile

Item	No of employees	%
Gender		
Male	146	88.5
Female	19	11.5
Age		
20–30	135	81.5
31–40	30	18.5
Over 40	00	00
Educational level		
Non-educated	51	31
Middle-level Education	88	53.3
University Graduate	26	15.8
Department		
Front-of-the-house employees	100	60.6
Back-of-the-house employees	65	39.4

CONCLUSION

The main aim of the study was to determine the impact of workplace bullying on employees' morale, performance and turnover intentions. The research findings are consistent with those of Rayner (2007); Agervold & Mikkelsen (2004); Einarsen et al. (2010); Lewis (2007), who found significant effects of workplace bullying on the multiple organisational outcomes including morale and turnover intentions. Other drawbacks of these practices include undermining teamwork, lowering productivity and increasing staff sickness, absence and turnover rates. It also costs time and money, affects the quality of service delivery, and damages the organization's reputation (Cauley, 2014).

The research results were also consistent with the findings of Buchanan (2013), which indicated that people who are working in the hospitality industry are highly affected by bullying acts. The influence includes negative impact on employees' job security, potential career advancement and healthy working environment.

Regarding employees work performance, the research findings revealed that there was no correlation between workplace bullying and employees' work performance. The present research findings disagreed with the research findings of Namie (2003) and Judith (2008) as bullying acts have a negative impact on employees' job performance due to the stressful working atmosphere for and the creation of job dissatisfaction and consequently the loss of productivity for the organisation. Moreover, the present research findings also contradict with the findings of Yahaya, Ing, Lee, Yahaya, Boon, Hashim, & Taat (2012) which indicated that person-related bullying influences negatively employees' productivity level. The main reasons behind this contradiction relates to the challenging motivation and spirit that these nuances may create and the disposition that the employee may have in order to prove himself/herself as worthwhile, productive and top performer.

Regarding the influence of workplace bullying on employees turnover intentions, the research findings recorded a very strong correlation that workplace bullying has a negative influence on employees' turnover intentions. This finding agreed with the findings of Hogh, Hoel, & Caniero (2011); Tanova & Holtom (2008) which suggested that the risk of turnover increase with frequency of exposure to bullying practices as those intentions may provide the bullied with some psychological protection from the bullying behavior. The risk of turnover was three times higher among the frequently bullied and 1.6 times higher among the occasionally bullied compared with the non-bullied respondents. Further, the study found that turnover intentions are actually stronger in those that do not experience the bullying. This may be due to the fact that their own treatment provides a standard against which the discrepancy in treatment can be measured; highlighting the level of mistreatment being inflicted on others in the workplace.

Generally speaking, it was obvious that the three independent variables of the research which are "employees' morale, work performance and turnover intentions" develop consequently. There was also a lack of awareness about bullying practices which the term encompasses, which often prevents people from realizing that a boss or co-worker is a bully.

In addition, regarding the relationship between workplace bullying and demographic data for respondents, the results of the current research indicated that there is a correlation between workplace bullying and employees' gender and age. This result is consistent with studies done by Di Martino, Hoel, & Cooper (2003); Ariza-Montes, Muniz, Montero-Simo, & Araque-Padil (2013), O'Connell et al. (2007) which indicated that employee's response to bullying behaviours are affected by their demographic data including age, gender and educational level. On the other hand, it contradicts with the results of Sheehan (1999); Hogh et al. (2011) and O'Connell & Kung (2007).

Finally, all studies on employees' bullying provided useful information for the hospitality service management to improve and develop procedures to enhance the morale level of hospitality employees, to reduce absenteeism and turnover rates, to boost their awareness of the negative consequences of workplace bullying, to implement appropriate mechanisms to decrease the phenomenon of workplace bullying and to improve the employees' workplace environment. As a result, the management will be able to provide a convenient motivational approach to maintain morale, support employees to achieve their goals and those of the organisation as well.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The current research investigated the impact of workplace bullying in five-star hotels in just two main touristic destinations in Egypt. Further research can enlarge the sample size to investigate the impact on other hotel categories like three or four-star hotels in more geographic areas and even in other sectors of the hospitality industry. Additionally, this research focused on a particular segment of the hospitality workforce i.e. bellmen and stewards. It would be a good opportunity to investigate other segments of employees, e.g. housekeeping, food and beverage staff and others. Furthermore, other variables rather than employees' morale, performance and turnover intentions could be investigated to deepen the understanding of the effects of workplace bullying which can affect the work environment, for instance, job satisfaction, employees' loyalty and further the potential impact on personnel health. Further research can also be extended to investigate the impact of workplace bullying on customer relations and satisfaction. Moreover, it should also investigate how the workplace bullying phenomenon impacts on inter-departmental/colleagues communications and work relations.

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APPENDIX

This is to certify that

Ashraf A. Tag-Eldeen
Alexandria University and SRH Hochschule Berlin

Mona Barakat and Hesham Dar
Alexandria University

were shortlisted for the

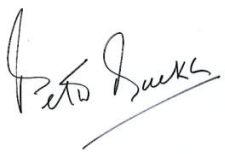
Institute of Hospitality
Education Research Award 2016

for their paper titled

"Investigating the Impact of Workplace Bullying on Employees' Morale, Performance and Turnover Intentions in Five-star Egyptian Hotel Operations"

This award commends an individual piece of research that has made a significant contribution to the hospitality industry and to education

Dr John Fong
President
EuroCHRIE 2016 - 2017



Peter Ducker FIH
Chief Executive
Institute of Hospitality