

STUDIES AND RESEARCHES

Study on workplace bullying exposure among Romanian employees. Gender differences

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Abstract

This study aims to identify workplace bullying exposure among Romanian employees taking into account the possible gender differences in the exposure to stress and the exposure to workplace bullying. The results of the present study revealed a percentage of workplace bullying exposure of 1.6%. This percentage reflects the number of bullying acts encountered in workplace settings with a frequency of at least once a week during a period of at least six months and revealed no gender differences in workplace bullying manifestation. Furthermore, a percent of 7.7% have been exposed to workplace bullying while only 6% have been exposed to workplace bullying. The Chi square test didn't evidenced statistically significant differences between female and male in their exposure to workplace bullying. 64.1% of female have experienced stress at their workplaces and 53.8% of male have felt stress at their workplaces. The Chi square test didn't reveal these differences as being statistically significant. The percentages of workplace bullying exposure are comparable with those existing in the literature. Moreover, the study didn't reveal that there are differences between women and men in workplace bullying exposure.

Keywords

workplace bullying exposure, victimisation, gender differences, perceived stress, mental and physical strain

Rezumat

Studiul de față își propune să identifice procentele de expunere la bullying-ul de la locul de muncă în rândul angajaților români luând în considerare și potențialele diferențe de gen în ceea ce privește expunerea la stres și la fenomenul de bullying. Rezultatele studiului au arătat un procent de expunere de 1.6%, adică întâlnirea măcar a unui comportament negativ de bullying cu o frecvență de o dată pe săptămână timp de șase luni de zile. Studiul de față a arătat că 7.7% angajați de gen feminin din lotul studiat au fost expuse bullying-ului față de un procent de expunere de doar 6% obținut în rândul angajaților de gen masculin. Testele Chi2 nu au arătat diferențe de gen, semnificative din punct de vedere statistic, în ceea ce privește procentele de expunere la bullying. Mai mult, un procent de 64.1% angajați de gen feminin au experimentat stări de stres la locul de muncă și un procent de 53.8% angajați de gen masculin au experimentat stresul la muncă. Testele Chi2 nu au arătat diferențe de gen semnificative în ceea ce privește experimentarea stresului la locul de muncă. Procentele de expunere la bullying la locul de muncă sunt comparabile cu cele existente în literatură.

Cuvinte cheie

expunerea la bullying-ul la locul de muncă, diferențe de gen, încordarea fizică și mentală, stresul perceput

Résumé

Cette étude vise à identifier l'exposition de l'intimidation en milieu de travail chez les employés roumains. Ont été identifiées les différences entre les sexes en termes d'exposition au stress et à l'intimidation en milieu de travail. Les résultats de la présente étude ont relevés un pourcentage, de l'exposition de l'intimidation au travail de 1.6%. Ce pourcentage reflète le nombre des actes d'intimidation rencontrés dans le milieu du travail avec une fréquence d'une fois par semaine pendant une période de six mois. Cette étude a montré que 7.7 % employés ont été exposés à l'imidation en milieu de travail et 6% employés ont été exposés à l'intimidation en milieu de travail. Les tests Chi2 ont montré que ces différences ne sont pas statistiquement significative. En outre, 64.1% des femmes ont déclaré qu'elles se sentent stressées au travail et 53.8 % des hommes ont déclaré qu'ils se sentent stressés au travail. Les tests Chi2 ont

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montrés que ces différences ne sont pas statistiquement significative. Les pourcentages d'exposition à l'intimidation en milieu de travail sont comparables à celles qui existent dans la littérature.

Mots-clés

exposition à l'intimidation, la tension physique et mentale, différences des sexes, le stress perçu

Introduction

Interest for workplace bullying in Romania has increased in the latest seven years. To date, there is a doctoral thesis, a bachelor degree and two European projects about workplace bullying in Romania but unfortunately none of these researches used an international instrument to measure workplace bullying prevalence among Romanian employees. All the measures were done with local instruments so that any of these studies can not be compared to other foreign studies. The present study tries to overcome this limit in order to make the results of the present study comparable with those already existing in the literature.

According to the International Labour Office (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the Public Services International (PSI) bullying 'is repeated and long-term offensive behaviours involving vindictive, cruel, or malicious attempts to humiliate or undermine an individual or groups of individuals.

Furthermore, Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2003) define mobbing or bullying in the workplace as being those acts of "offending, socially excluding or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. It is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted, ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts" (p.15). There are three main factors of the bullying phenomenon: work-related bullying, person-related bullying and intimidation behaviours.

The work-related bullying form contains acts which are meant to negatively affect the person's work performance by hiding important information for the job tasks, by giving tasks which are under employee's attested competence, by giving unreasonable deadline just to assure that the employee will fail to meet the deadline, by being pressured

not to claim something that you are entitled by law, by being exposed to work overload and by being excessively monitored with no objective reason.

The person-related bullying contains acts which are meant to negatively affect the person's integrity and credibility. These acts take the form of humiliation, name-calling, persistent jokes and critiques, repeated reminders of the employee's mistakes, acts of belittlement, gossips and rumours of the person's private life and hints that the employee should quit his job.

The intimidation factor consists of acts meant to physically and psychologically threaten the employee. These acts can take the form of isolation in the work context, removal of important job tasks without any real foundation or argument, acts of intentionally blocking the employee's way on the hole just to give him a hint about who's more powerful in the organization and moreover, actually physical acts and violent acts.

The negative impact of workplace bullying phenomenon

In the latest 20 years different changes appeared in labour market. While the number of employees in fields such as services and information increased, in more traditional fields there was a decrease in the number of employees (Kauppinen, Heikka, Lehtinen, Nayha et al., 2000). Furthermore, the rhythm of changes increased on the labour market which led not only to a need of more flexible and adaptable employees to perform at work but also to job insecurity and to a poor social climate at work. If in the past the risk factors at work were represented by physical incidents nowadays these were replaced by psychosocial ones (Kauppinen et al., 2000). The psychosocial risk factors consist of time pressure, work overload, and increased professional interactions. Moreover, violence

and threats with violence have been recognized as a form of risk factors in fields such as health, education, security, social work and services (Kauppinen et al., 2000).

The negative effects of workplace bullying are felt by employees under the form of lower levels of job satisfaction (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), higher levels of physical and psychosomatic symptoms (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Niedl, 1996; O'Moore, 2000; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996b) and higher rates of premature retirement (Leymann, 1996).

At a health level, the employee experience feelings of stress, anxiety, depression headaches, physical and psychological strain (Einarsen, Raknes, Matthiesen, & Hellesoy, 1994b; Vartia, 2001). Moreover, studies have shown that abusive supervision and workplace bullying acts led to a decreased organisational commitment and to higher levels of perceived organisational injustice (Tepper, 2000).

Researchers explained this relationship through feelings of betrayal which were felt by the targeted employee. The affected employee decreased his organisational commitment because he felt that the psychological contract was violated (Levinson, Price, Munden, Mandl, & Solley, 1962; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The psychological contract refers to the expectations of the contractual parties and if one partner violates these expectations the other will experience betrayal, will decrease his engagement in the work tasks, and will lose his trust in his employer thus conducting to higher rates of absenteeism (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Turnley & Feldman, 1999).

Furthermore, studies showed that the negative effects of workplace bullying are experienced also by those employees who assist to its manifestation. They experienced higher levels of stress and lower levels of job satisfaction comparing to those employees who didn't observed workplace bullying acts displayed in their work context (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Sutela & Lehto, 1998; Vartia, 2001).

At a financial level, workplace bullying phenomenon has a negative impact as well, the phenomenon being considered as time consuming and leading to bad decisions taken by the management department (Krakel, 1997). Moreover, researchers (Hoel &

Cooper, 2000; Rayner, 1997; Sutela & Lehto, 1998) revealed positive associations of bullying acts with turnover and intention to leave the organisation. In other words, workplace bullying has negative implications at a financial level because implies financial costs associated with loss of competence and with the replacement process (Randall, 1997; Hoel & Cooper, 2000).

All the negative consequences associated with workplace bullying manifestation determined researchers all over the world to increase their interest in studying its prevalence rates, psychological correlates, predictors and consequences. In the past twenty years, American researchers (Keashly, 1998; Allen & Lucero, 1998; Neuman & Baron, 1998), British researchers (Hoel & Cooper, 2000), Scandinavian researchers (Bjorkvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994b; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Vartia, 2001), German researchers (Leymann, 1990; Niedl, 1996; Knorz & Zapf, 1996) and Australian researchers (McCarthy, 1996; Sheehan, 1996) have studied and published paper referring to workplace bullying prevalence, correlates, determinants and consequences but no Romanian studies appeared in the meanwhile. This study attempts to fulfil this gap by presenting the prevalence rates of workplace bullying among Romanian employees.

Workplace bullying prevalence among international studies

Literature shows that workplace bullying prevalence is different from one country to another and from one organizational setting to another. Furthermore, studies in the field (Leymann, 1996; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Salin, 2001) have evidenced that health and educational sectors are the most exposed to workplace bullying acts and that public sectors have higher workplace bullying prevalence than private sectors. Moreover, Einarsen (2001) have shown that not only the health and educational sectors are exposed to workplace bullying acts but also production sectors are exposed to such phenomenon.

Vartia (2003) studied the workplace prevalence among 1037 employees of public institutions such as banks, prisons and

hospitals and have obtained a 10.1% prevalence rate. This prevalence rate of exposure to workplace bullying is similar to those already published in Finland (Piirainen, Elo, Hirvonen, Kauppinen, Ketrola, Laitinen, Lindstrom, Reijula, Riala, Viluksela, & Virtanen, 2000), in Norway, in public sector 8,2% (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996) or in England a prevalence rate of 14% (UNISON, 1997) and in Romania- a prevalence rate of 15% (Chirilă, 2012). Furthermore, Scandinavian studies didn't revealed the health sector as being at a greater risk of workplace bullying exposure which is why there were obtained prevalence rates between 3% and 5% (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen, Matthiesen, & Skogstad, 1998; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001, Vartia, 2003) but, in general, European studies have shown that there are high prevalence rates among employees of health sectors (Austria-26.5%, Niedl, 1996; North Ireland-46.9%, McGukin, Lewis, & Shevlin, 2001). Scandinavian researchers have explained these differences through differences existing in the research methodology so that, even though all the studies have used a bullying definition to describe the phenomenon, these definitions might have evidence different aspects of the same phenomenon which led to differences in workplace bullying prevalence rates (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003).

Literature interested in studying workplace bullying phenomenon have evidenced another work sector which is at a greater risk of exposure and this is prison sectors. Nuutinen, Kauppinen and Kandolin (1999) concluded that, in general, the masculine fields (i.e. army, police and prisons) are the most exposed to workplace bullying acts. The workplace bullying exposure in prisons was between 16.2% and 22.6% (Thylefors, 1999; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Vartia, 2003).

A third sector exposed to workplace bullying acts is the academic field (Leymann, 1992; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Sutela & Lehto, 1998; Paolli & Merllie, 2001) and that, workplace bullying appears more frequently in big than small organizations (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Piirainen et al., 2000).

In general, studies interested in reporting workplace bullying prevalence rate revealed values between 2% and 30% (Vartia, 2001;

Leymann, 1992; Bjorkvist et al., 1994a; Kaucseck & Simon, 1995; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Rayner, 1997; UNISON, 1997; Einarsen et al., 1998; Quine, 1999; Nuutinen et al., 1999; Cowie et al., 2000; Hubert & Van Veldhoven, 2001; Quine, 2002; Chirilă, 2012).

The prevalence rates differs with every activity sector thus in fields such as army, prisons, health and university, the prevalence rates seem to be higher than in sector such as services and trade. Furthermore, the prevalence rates might differ as a consequence of the country's degree of knowledge about what workplace bullying is. There might be countries with a better knowledge about this phenomenon while there are countries with less knowledge about workplace bullying. This difference in knowledge of the phenomenon might lead to differences in bullying exposure rates. This might be the case of Romania since this phenomenon is new and less studied.

The aim of the present study is to investigate exposure to bullying acts and to identify if there are gender differences in workplace bullying exposure.

Gender differences in exposure to bullying acts

On one side, there are studies (DiMartino, Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Leymann, 1992; Quine, 1999) which revealed that there are gender differences in that women are more prone than men to be exposed to bullying acts in work contexts. On the other side there are studies (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Vartia, 1996) which didn't evidenced gender differences in workplace bullying exposure.

In his study made on young doctors, Quine (2003) showed that 43% of women where exposed to bullying acts while only 32% of men were exposed to bullying manifestation. Furthermore, studies made on university employees evidenced that more female than male were exposed to different forms of harassment and bullying acts (Bjorkvist, Osterman & Hjelt-Back, 1994a; Vaez, Ekberg & Laflamme, 2004).

Zapf and Einarsen (2003) explained the results presented above trough the fact that

women were overrepresented in the sample than men and that differences in bullying exposure are due to the differences in the number of women and men in the samples used. Furthermore, Salin (2005) conducted a study in which he took into account Zapf and Einarsen (2003) assumption and used a sample in which the number of women and men were equally represented. The results of Salin's (2005) study showed that women are significantly more exposed than men to bullying acts in work context so that Zapf's (2003) assumption was not viable anymore. Moreover, Chirilă (2012) conducted a study in which women were overrepresented and didn't reveal any significant gender differences in bullying exposure.

Another explanation was that women are more sensitive than men to psychosocial factors (Andre-Petersson, Engstrom, Hedblad, Janzen, & Roswall, 2007; Denton, Prus & Walters, 2004), that women were more accurate in detecting workplace bullying behaviours than men and that women are more sensitive to detect the acts of discouragement of power behaviours existing in the organization (Ostrov, Crick & Keating, 2005).

So far, it seems that studies showed that women are more sensitive to the social aspects of work environment and that they are more prone to detect earlier the bullying behaviours than men. Vaez and colleagues (2004) argue that this explanation is not viable because all the above mentioned studies used samples in which women were overrepresented in more field activities than men and that women were more overrepresented in working under permanent contract, under full-time program and under profession requiring more theoretically knowledge than men and that these differences might have influenced the results.

The present study investigate potential gender differences in workplace bullying behaviour taking into account the research results of previous studies.

Present study

Until now there are few studies showing the workplace bullying prevalence rates among Romanian employees published in

international journals (Chirilă, 2012) which led to a lack of information about the presence of this phenomenon among Romanian employees. The present study tries to cover this gap by studying workplace bullying prevalence rates among 313 Romanian employees using not only the bullying definition followed by several items referring to exposure but also using an international standardized instrument in its Romanian version (i.e. negative acts questionnaire revised, NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009-original form and translated and adapted Romanian form by Chirilă & Constantin, 2014). Using the Romanian version of NAQ-R (Chirilă & Constantin, 2014), the present study highlights which are the worst forms of workplace bullying acts as they were perceived by Romanian employees.

Exploratory aims

First aim. To identify the workplace bullying exposure taking into account possible gender differences.

Research question 1: Which is the workplace bullying exposure rate among Romanian employees?

Are there any gender differences in workplace bullying exposure?

Second aim. To identify the forms of bullying acts which are best correlated with perceived mental and physical strain.

Research question 2: Which are the associations of the three bullying categories (i.e. person-related bullying, context-related bullying and intimidation acts) and employees' perceived mental and physical strain?

Participants and procedure

For the present study a number of 313 Romanian employees with ages between 19 and 64 years ($M = 33.11$; $SD = 9.93$) completed online the questionnaires. From this 313 Romanian employees, 140 were employees of public institutions, 156 were employees of private institutions, and 9 were employees of non governmental organizations located in three different

districts of the North-Eastern part of the country. These Romanian employees works in three different sectors such as production (N=46), services (N=139), commerce (N=34), and education (N=92). Two hundred and twenty-six employees are female and 84 are male, with a work experience between 6 months and 480 months (i.e. 40 years). Their education level were between hi-school diploma (N=54), bachelor's degree (N=127) and master's degree (N=129).

All the employees completed the questionnaires online. The study was presented as being one interested in investigating the dynamics of interpersonal relations at work and words such as abuse, aggression, intimidation, and harassment were not included in the consent form.

Instruments

Workplace bullying instrument (Romanian version of NAQ-R, Chirilă & Constantin, 2014)

To measure workplace bullying exposure it was used the Romanian version of negative acts questionnaire, the revised form (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al., 2009; Romanian version adapted by Chirilă & Constantin, 2014). The instrument has 22 items referring to 22 negative actions considered as being workplace bullying actions. The response is given on a five-point frequency Likert scale in which 1 means never and 5 means daily. The exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses revealed a structure composed from three different dimensions such as person-related bullying, context-related bullying and

intimidation (Chirilă & Constantin, 2014). On this sample, the first dimension of workplace bullying such as intimidation there was obtained an alpha Cronbach of .78, for context-related bullying the alpha Cronbach obtained was .82 and for person-related bullying, the alpha Cronbach was .84. The alpha Cronbach for the entire scale was .92.

Perceived stress

Perceived stress was measured using a single item from Elo, Leppanen, Lindstrom and Ropponen (1992) Occupational Health Questionnaire. The authors have tested the content validity, the construct validity and the predictive validity of this item on four different samples and the item proved to be valid.

Mental and physical strain

In order to measure mental and physical strain it was used the scales of Occupational Stress Inventory (Evers, Frese & Cooper, 2000). To measure the frequency with which the symptom was experienced we referred to a period of the latest six months. The responses to the items were given on a six-point Likert scale in which 1-never and 6-always. 12 items measured physical strain ($\alpha = .82$) and 17 items measured mental strain ($\alpha = .83$).

Results

Research question 1: Which is the workplace bullying exposure rate among Romanian employees?

Table 1. *Frequencies and percentages of workplace bullying exposure, of observing workplace bullying in work context and of perceived stress*

Variables					
Gender	Feminine				
	72.9% (226)	Masculine		27.1% (84)	
Perceived Stress	No	Yes			
	38.2% (117)	61.1% (187)			
Exposure Bullying	No	Yes, now and then	Yes, 2 or 3 times/week	Yes, several times/week	Yes, almost day
	71% (219)	21.8% (67)	4.9% (15)	1.6% (5)	0.6% (2)
Observing Bullying	No	Yes			
	54% (168)	46% (143)			

The descriptive results showed in the table, evidenced that 72.9% (226) from entire sample were female employees and 27.1% (84) were male employee which means that the female group was overrepresented in this study. From 313 Romanian employees, 51% (151) were young employees with ages between 19 and 29 years, 48.3% were employees with ages between 30 and 60 years and .07% were employees with ages over 60 years.

According to the descriptive data presented in the table, 46% (143) of employees have witnessed in the latest six months to bullying acts according to the definition. When it came to being exposed to bullying acts, only 4.9% (15 employees) said

that they have encountered at least one negative behaviour with a frequency of once or twice/month and only 1.6% (6 employees) have encountered at least one negative behaviour with a weekly frequency and only 0.2% (1 employee) said he encountered at least one negative acts with a daily basis.

According to Leymann's (1990) criterion, a person is considered a bullying victim if she is exposed to at least one negative act for at least once a week. Thus, the results showed a percent of 7.1% (22 employees) exposed to bullying acts with a frequency of twice a week. From all 313 Romanian employees, a number of 187 (61.1%) employees have perceived stress in their work settings in the last six months.

1.1. Are there any gender differences in workplace bullying exposure?

Table 1.2. *Exposure to bullying, observing bullying and exposure to stress factors-gender differences*

Exposure to stress	No		Yes		
Feminine	35% (78)		64.1% (143)		
Masculine	46.3% (37)		53.8% (43)		
Exposure to bullying	No	Yes, now and then	Yes, 2 or 3 three/week	Yes, several times/week	Yes, almost daily
Feminine	69.8% (155)	22.4% (50)	5.4% (12)	1.8% (4)	0.5% (1)
Masculine	73.5% (61)	20.5% (17)	3.6% (3)	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)
Observing Bullying	No		Yes		
Feminine	52.4% (118)		47.6% (107)		
Masculine	56.6% (47)		43.4% (36)		

Sixty-four percent (143) female employees perceived themselves as being stressed and 53.8% (43) male employees themselves as being stressed.

According to Leymann (1990) criterion a percent of 7.7% (17) of female employees have been exposed to bullying acts and a percent of 6% (5) male employees were exposed to bullying acts. A percent of 47.6% (17) of female employees said they had witnessed in the latest six months to bullying acts in their workplaces and a percent of 43.4% (36) male employees said they had

witnessed to bullying acts in their workplaces.

In order to calculate gender differences in exposure to bullying acts, witnessing bullying acts and perceived stress Chi square test was computed.

a. Chi square test-gender differences in exposure to bullying acts

Chi square test, $\chi^2(4) = 1.27$, $p = .86$ there are no gender differences in exposure to bullying.

b. Chi square test, χ^2 -gender differences in witnessing bullying acts

Chi square test, $\chi^2(1) = .42$, $p = .51$ - there are no gender differences in witnessing bullying acts.

c. Chi square test, χ^2 -gender differences in perceived stress

Chi square test, $\chi^2(3) = 3.77$, $p = .70$ - There are no gender differences in the level of perceived stress.

Generally chi square tests revealed no gender differences in exposure to bullying, in witnessing bullying and in perceived stress. In other words, it can't be said that the fact of being in one of the two groups increases the risk of being exposed to bullying acts,

witnessing bullying acts in workplaces or in perceived personal stress. It can not be said that the fact of being a female or a male employee you are at a greatest risk of experiencing bullying acts, of witnessing bullying acts or perceiving high levels of personal stress.

Research question 2: Which are the associations of the three bullying categories (i.e. person-related bullying, context-related bullying and intimidation acts) and employees' perceived mental and physical strain?

Table 2. Pearson correlations between the three different categories of bullying acts and mental and physical strain

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intimidation	1.41	.50	1				
2. Context-related bullying	1.83	.64	.72**	1			
3. Person-related bullying	1.51	.52	.83**	.70**	1		
4. Physical strain	2.43	.77	.24**	.29**	.28**	1	
5. Mental strain	3.15	.49	.09	.09	.06	.44**	1

** $p < .001$

The three dimension of workplace bullying (i.e. intimidation, context-related bullying and person-related bullying) are positively and significantly medium correlated with physical strain but not significantly correlated with mental strain ($r = .09$, $p > .05$). The biggest correlation obtained was the one between context-related bullying and physical strain ($r = .24$, $p < .001$) meaning that the more the context is negatively manipulated the more the employee will resent physical strain.

Discussions

This study aimed to identify workplace bullying exposure rates among Romanian employees using the same methodology presented in the previous European studies and to explore potential gender differences in workplace bullying exposure.

The results showed a general workplace bullying exposure rate of 1.6%, prevalence rate compared with those of Einarsen and

Skogstad (1996), Einarsen, Matthiesen and Skogstad (1998), Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001) and Vartia (2003), a exposure rate between 2% to 5%. For the present study, a person was considered as being exposed to workplace bullying acts in her work context if she encountered one of the twenty two negative behaviors listed in the Romanian version of NAQ-R (Chirila & Constantin, 2014), in a persistent manner which means with a frequency of at least once a week for a period of at least six months.

According to the results of the present study, only a percent of 1.6% (6 employees) from 313 employees have been exposed to workplace bullying acts in their work contexts with a frequency of once a week. Moreover, 4.9% (15 employees) were exposed to workplace bullying with a frequency of at least once or twice a month and only 0.2% (1 employee) was exposed to workplace bullying behaviors with a daily basis.

According to Leymann's (1990) criterion only 1.6% (6 employees) were exposed to

workplace bullying acts with a frequency of at least once a week. The small percentage may reflect that workplace bullying is not often encountered in Romanian workplaces, or that the employees have less knowledge about what is in fact the workplace bullying phenomenon or they didn't reveal their real opinion in order to protect themselves and to maintain their jobs. Another possible explanation is that workplace bullying phenomenon is perceived as being a normal behavior in Romanian workplaces and being a part of the leadership behaviours so that it wasn't perceived as being the manifestation of workplace bullying phenomenon.

The situation changes when it comes to the fact of being a witness to workplace bullying behavior. A percent of 46% (143 employees) stated that they have witnessed to workplace bullying behaviours targeted to one or more colleagues. It seems is much easier to recognize the phenomenon when it comes to other's situation comparing to your own situation. This can be explained through the fact that the person's tries to protect his own identity and self-esteem in order to maintain his job and to resist at work.

These results are important because the literature evidenced that only assisting to workplace bullying acts has a negative impact on individuals levels of stress and mental and physical strain. As being presented before, the previous research (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Sutela & Lehto, 1998; Vartia, 2001) showed that employees who assist to workplace bullying acts in their work contexts experience also higher levels of job dissatisfaction, job stress, and intention to leave the organization.

Gender differences in workplace bullying exposure

Previous studies, (DiMartino, Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Leymann, 1992; Quine, 1999; Bjorkvist, Osterman & Hjelt-Back, 1994a; Vaez, Ekberg, & Laflamme, 2004) have evidenced that there are gender differences in workplace bullying exposure in that women are more exposed than men to this phenomenon.

Interested in potential gender differences in workplace bullying exposure, Vartia (2003) evidenced that 5% of male employees reported workplace bullying exposure and 11.6% of female employees reported exposure to bullying acts in their work settings. Furthermore, Quine (2003) revealed that there are gender differences among young doctors in exposure to workplace bullying acts. According to Quine (2003) a percent of 43% women were exposed to bullying acts while only 32% men were exposed to bullying phenomenon. Zapf and Einarsen (2003) contested these results by saying that, in general the samples in the studies overrepresented females and this may affect the difference appeared in prevalence rate. Taking into account, Zapf and Einarsen (2003) explanation, Salin (2005) used a sample in which women and men were equally represented and evidenced that there gender differences in bullying behaviours in that women are more exposed to bullying acts than men.

The present research obtained also a higher exposure rate among female employees (7.7%, 17 female employees) than the rate of male employees (6%, 5 male employees) but this differences may be explained by Zapf and Einarsen (2003) assumption that there is a difference in bullying prevalence rates which due to the fact that female are overrepresented in the sample, which is, in fact the case of the present study. Even though the sample was overrepresented by female, Chi square test was computed in order to see if this difference in exposure rate is statistically significant. The results showed no significant differences between women and men in workplace bullying behaviour.

The results of the present study seem to confirm Andre-Peterson and colleagues (2007) and Denton and colleagues (2004) assumption that women are more sensitive than man to psychosocial factors in the work environment, that women are more sensitive in detecting behaviours meant to discourage the manifestation of power in the work environment and that women are more prone to detect earlier than men the manifestation of workplace bullying behaviours.

Further research should test this assumption by using a sample of equally female and male employees.

Furthermore, there were also gender differences in the levels of perceived stress in that 64.1% of female employee reported they have experienced stress in the past six months and only a percent of 53.8% of male employees have reported that they have felt stress in the past six months at their job. The Chi square tests didn't reveal these differences as being statistically significant.

The forms of bullying acts which are best correlated with mental and physical strain

The present research was also focus on the associations of the three bullying acts categories (i.e. work-related bullying, person-related bullying and intimidation) and the two categories of strain (i.e. mental and physical strain). According to the results, the employees felt more physical strain when they encountered behaviours from work-related bullying (i.e. acts of sabotage) and person-related bullying (i.e. acts of humiliation or name calling in public).

The results of the present study confirmed Vartia (2003) results which showed that actions such as undermining employee's performances, persistent criticism and the ironical remarks made in respect with the employee's personal life had negative effects on their levels of mental and physical strain. Those employees who had encountered these forms of bullying acts had also higher levels of mental and physical strain. Furthermore, the results of the present study, confirmed the results existing in the literature which showed that different forms of social isolation at work had significant negative correlations with employee's psychological well-being

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(Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Zapf, Dormann & Frese, 1996a).

Research limits

The main limit of the present research is one referring at the methodology used: self-report questionnaires which can trigger workplace bullying acts in those cases were it couldn't be the case of bullying acts. Studies have shown, that in general workplace bullying studies, using self report questionnaire and using two different perspective : (1) personal perspective in the case of future experience of bullying acts and (2) perspective on others experiencing bullying acts have shown that there are significant differences in perceived isolated negative acts as being workplace bullying acts. More precisely, when people were ask if these actions could be considered bullying acts in their personal case they significantly labelled more non-bullying situations as being actually bullying situation comparing to the case where they have to label a series of isolated negative acts experienced by others. To exceed this limit, future studies should employ the 360 degrees technique in order to obtain a more realistic and objective picture of the workplace bullying situation.

Furthermore, future research interested in identifying potential gender differences should use samples formed from equally female and male employees.

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