

STUDIES AND RESEARCHES

Correlates and predictors of bullying in Romanian workplaces

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to identify those organizational factors associated with workplace bullying. 253 Romanian employees participated at the present study by completing a series of questionnaires in an electronic format. The results showed significant correlations between organisational factors and workplace bullying. Moreover, the predictive model having as predictors the aspects of organizational climate predicted 25% of the workplace bullying variance. These results are important for the organizational field because it shows the triggering effect of some organizational factors and some job characteristics in the appearance of workplace bullying.

Keywords

organizational factors, workplace bullying correlates, job characteristics, workplace bullying predictors, workplace bullying

Rezumat

Studiul de față a dorit să identifice factorii asociați apariției fenomenului de bullying la locul de muncă. La studiu au participat 253 angajați din partea de nord-est a României. Participanții au primit un set de chestionare pe care le-au completat electronic. Rezultatele studiului au relevat corelații semnificative între bullying și variabilele organizaționale precum climatul social, managerial și al comunicării. Modelul predictiv al bullying-ului având ca predictorii aspecte ale climatului organizațional a explicat 25% din varianța bullying-ului. Acest rezultat are implicații organizaționale importante prin faptul că evidențiază că prezența fenomenului de bullying la locul de muncă se datorează unor factori organizaționali, precum climatul organizațional și caracteristici ale postului.

Cuvinte cheie

factori organizaționali, corelate organizaționale, caracteristicile postului de muncă, bullying-ul la locul de muncă, predictorii ai bullying-ului

Résumé

Le but de cette étude est d'identifier les facteurs organisationnels qui sont associés avec le harcèlement au travail. 253 employés roumains ont remplis les questionnaires d'une forme électronique. Les résultats ont montrés des corrélations significatives entre les variables organisationnelles et le harcèlement psychologique. Le model predictif ayant les aspects du climat organisationnel comme predicteurs a expliqué 25% de la variance du harcèlement. Ces résultats ont des importantes implications organisationnelle car elles montrent le fait que la presence du harcèlement psychologique dans le milieu du travail est une consequence des certains facteurs organisationnels tels que le climat organisationnel et les caracteristiques du poste.

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Mots-clés

les facteurs organisationnels, les antécédents organisationnels, les caractéristiques du poste, les prédicteurs du harcèlement psychologique et le harcèlement psychologique en milieu du travail

Introduction

European Union (Paoli & Merllie, 2001) and International Labour Organization (1998) have recognized workplace bullying as being a real problem of the European workplaces and showed a high interest in studying the effects of this phenomenon on employee's subjective well-being and physical health.

The workplace bullying research started in Germany when Leymann (1992) conducted the first interviews with the victims of this phenomenon and started to develop a first questionnaire able to measure it.

Over the time, workplace bullying or mobbing received several definitions but the most comprehensive is the one offered by Einarsen, Zapf, Hoel and Cooper (2003). The above authors described bullying through the acts of harassment, social exclusion of a person, acts meant to affect someone's work tasks. It is a bullying situation the case where these acts are repetitively displayed, during a period of at least six months, and with a frequency of at least once a week (Leymann, 1992). These acts have a negative impact not only on the person itself but also on the entire organization (Chirilă & Constantin, 2013).

Bullying was defined through its negative consequences on employee's health. The immediate consequences are high levels of anxiety, depression, physical complaints, mental and physical strain (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994; Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin & Patton, 2001; Hyung-Park & DeFrank, 2010).

The environmental perspective emphasizes the role of organizational factors in triggering workplace bullying acts. According to this view, the bullying phenomenon is seen as a symptom of organizational dysfunction.

Empirical studies have shown that bullying is related to certain job characteristics and to different business sectors (Leymann, 1992). Until now, bullying literature have shown that the most associated

variables with workplace bullying are those related to job characteristics such as role conflicts, low levels of personal control on the job, work-tasks overload, global organizational problems, higher levels of stress, organizational restructuring, changes in management, dissatisfaction with leadership practices, dissatisfaction related to the present organizational climate, impossible deadlines, dissatisfaction related to the quality of interpersonal relations at work, the organizational conflicts and the difficulty encountered in solving the conflicts or problems existing in the department or the entire organization (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Björkqvist, 1992; Einarsen & Raknes, 1991; Einarsen et al., 1994; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Kearns, McCarthy & Sheehan, 1997; Sutela & Lehto, 1998; Zapf, 1999).

Managerial, social, and communication climate as triggers of workplace bullying

Leymann (1992) proposes a first hypothesis of bullying appearance. The author considers that a poor psychological climate triggers workplace bullying behaviours.

Those organizations which can not solve the problems appeared in a fair and firm manner are at greater risk of workplace bullying manifestations. Later, Agervold, and Mikkelsen (2004) associated different stress factors with the manifestation of workplace bullying behaviours. The authors stated that the presence of stressors in organization increases the stress felt by the employee who, under the pressure of this tension, will engage in different forms of interpersonal conflicts. If these conflicts escalate might turn into different forms of bullying situations.

Tedeschi and Felson (1994), on the hand, and Neuman and Baron (2003), on the other hand, explained the workplace bullying situation through the social-interactions theory. According to this theory, stressful work climates indirectly influences employee's aggression through the effects

observed in the targeted employee's behaviour. The stressed employee will relieve his tension by aggressing one of his colleagues, and if the aggressed person actively responds to aggression, she will even more annoy the aggressor who, in his turn, will continue to display harassment acts over a longer period of time. From this perspective, the affective and behaviourally responses of the targeted employee are responsible for the maintenance of workplace bullying acts. Neuman and Baron (2003) consider these acts as being acts of regaining social control. Neuman and Baron's (2003) explanation can be based on the frustration-aggression theory (Berkowitz, 1989; Fox & Spector, 1999) which explains the appearance of workplace bullying acts as a consequence of the frustration produced by the environmental stressors experienced at work. The frustrated and stressed employees will engage more frequently in interpersonal conflicts at work (Aquino, Blouin, & Stout, 1999; Coyne, Seigne, & Randal, 2000; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2005) and will have a tendency of maintaining the conflict situation over a longer period of time.

Zapf, Knorz, and Kulla (1996) and later, Aquino and Thau (2009) offered another explanation of workplace bullying acts. According to these authors, in those environments which require higher levels of cooperation between employees or, in those sectors which require frequent employee-client interactions, bullying behaviours are seen as a punishment technique of uncooperative employees.

Role ambiguity, work-tasks overload, anticipated changes, and work-tasks control as triggers of workplace bullying

Empirical studies have shown that the targeted employees reported also higher levels of role conflict and role ambiguity (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Einarsen et al., 1994; Jennifer, Cowie, & Ananiadou, 2003; Notelaers, De Witte, & Einarsen, 2009), lower levels of work-tasks control (Vartia, 1996; Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006;

Vartia & Hyyti, 2002; Zapf et al., 1996), higher levels in requests of cooperation (Zapf et al., 1996), higher levels of work-tasks overload (Einarsen et al., 1994; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Salin, 2003), a poor social climate (Einarsen et al., 1994; Vartia, 1996; Varia, 2003), lower levels of social support (Hansen, Hogh, Persson, Karlson, Garde, & Orbaek, 2006), and poor management styles (Einarsen et al., 1994; Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007; Vartia, 1996). Moreover, Baillien and DeWitte (2009) showed a mediation role of job insecurity and role conflict on the relationship between organizational changes and workplace bullying. The above authors also evidence that there is a positive association between workplace bullying and job insecurity, work-task overload, conflict role, and role ambiguity. Furthermore, the authors showed that organizational changes directly triggered workplace bullying behaviours (Heath, Knez, & Camerer, 1993; Tversky & Kohneman, 1992, De Vries & Balazs, 1997; Baron & Neuman, 1996; Vartia, 2003) so that, O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire, and Smith (1998) showed that the promotion of the aggressors or the arrival of a new manager triggered workplace bullying acts.

Later, Hoel, and Salin (2003) showed that there is also an indirect relationship between organizational changes and bullying. There were tested the mediation roles of job restructuring, retrogradation as a consequence of eliminations of some managerial positions, managerial practices used in case of organizational changes, and competition. All these organizational variables mediated the relationship between organizational changes and workplace bullying (Sheehan, 1996; Greenglass & Burke, 2000). Another explanation was offered by Salin (2003). The author said that, after a period of organizational changes, often the organizational chart changes and usually becomes flatter and will increase the competition between employees who will make an appeal to unorthodox methods to advance. Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper (2002) concluded that even though an organizational change is made in order to increase

productivity, in reality it leads to a worsening of interpersonal relations in work contexts.

In Romanian work contexts, until now, there are no international studies published on the topic of workplace bullying and its organizational correlates.

The general aim of the present study is to fulfil this gap by exploring the organizational factors can acts as triggers for workplace bullying appearance.

Theoretical Framework:

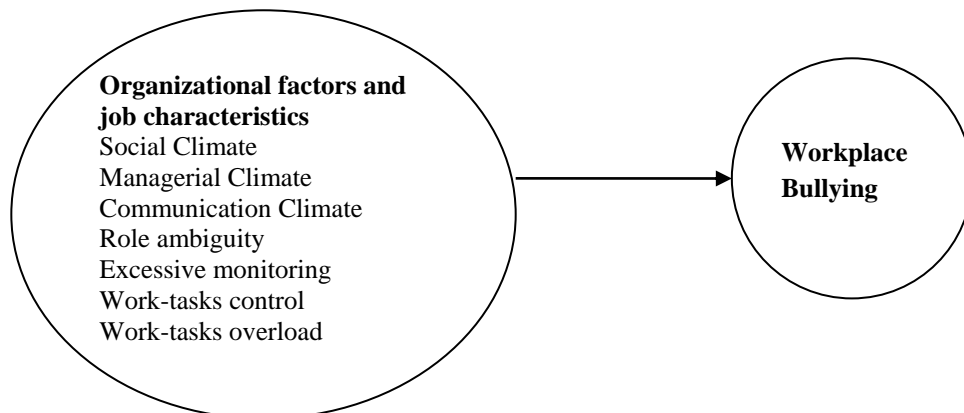


Figure 1. Correlates and predictors of workplace bullying

Method

Study aim

Study aim was to identify the organizational factors that may predict workplace bullying.

Hypotheses:

H.1. Jobs characteristics such as role ambiguity, excessive monitoring and work-tasks overload positively correlates with workplace bullying and work-tasks control negatively correlates with workplace bullying.

H.2. Organizational factors such as managerial climate, social climate and communication climate negatively correlates with workplace bullying.

H.3. Organizational factors and job characteristics can predict workplace bullying.

Participants and procedure

A number of 253 Romanian employees from the Nord-East of the country participated at the present study. Their ages were between 19 and 64 years ($M=33.11$; $SD=9.93$). 156 worked in private Romanian firms, and 97 worked in public institutions. 199 were female employees and 54 were male employees with a work-experience between 6 and 480 months (i.e. 6 months and 40 years). 24 of employees had a high-school degree; 127 had a bachelor degree and 102 had a master degree.

The employees completed the questionnaires in an electronic format via a google docs link.

The study was presented as being one interested in the interpersonal relationships dynamics at work and words which may lead to bullying acts were not presented in the instruction.

Inclusion criteria: All employees had to have at least six months experience at their work at the moment they had to complete

questionnaires. For this employee was considered a bullying victim if he encountered at least one of the 22 bullying behaviours with a frequency of at least once a week during the last six months. According to these criteria, only 33 (13.04%) employees were considered a bullying victim and the other 220 (86.96%) were considered as being observers of bullying victims (i.e. the participant had to specify if they had witnessed to bullying acts at their workplace during the last six months). Furthermore, for the present study the response of both groups (victims and observers) were taken into consideration when calculated for workplace bullying correlates and predictors.

Variables measurement:

Organizational factors measured with a single-item

Job characteristics factors included variables such as role ambiguity, work-tasks overload, work-tasks control, anticipated organizational changes, excessive monitoring. These variables were measured using one single item specially constructed for the present research except for role ambiguity.

Organizational factors included variables such as communication climate, social climate and managerial climate. These variables were measured with a number of five items (for communicational and social climate) and a number of three items (for managerial climate), specially developed for the present study.

Role ambiguity

Role ambiguity was measured by using one single item from the Occupational Stress Questionnaire (OSQ developed by Elo, Leppanen, Lindstrom, & Ropponen, 1992). The response scale was a Likert scale in five points: 1 meant total disagreement and 5 meant total agreement.

Work-tasks overload

Work-tasks overload was measured using one single item with a Likert response scale in five points were 1 meant total disagreement

and 5 meant total agreement. *“In general, at work I have a big volume of work-tasks”*.

Work-tasks control

Work-tasks control was measured by using one single item with a response scale in five points were 1 meant total disagreement and 5 meant total agreement. *‘At my work, I have the possibility to organize my work-tasks in my own way’*.

Excessive monitoring

Excessive monitoring was measured with one single item with a scale response in five points were 1 meant total disagreement and 5 meant total agreement. *“During my working hours I am excessively monitored”*.

Communication climate

Communication climate was measured with 5 items with a response scale in five points were 1-total disagreement and 5-total agreement. Alpha Cronbach’s coefficient for these five items is .897. As an example of items: *“In my department, any problem appeared is listened with full consideration”*.

Social climate

The social climate was also measured with 5 items with a response scale in five points were 1 meant total disagreement and 5 meant total agreement. All these five items have obtained an Alpha Cronbach’s coefficient of .874. As an example of the item: *“In my department, the differences in opinions appeared are openly discussed with all employees”*.

Managerial climate

The managerial climate was measured with three items having a response scale in five points in which 1 meant total disagreement and 5 meant total agreement. Alpha Cronbach’s coefficient for the three items is .759. An example of the item used: *‘In my organization exists a high level of trust between the management department and employees’*.

Workplace bullying

The well-known workplace bullying questionnaire revised form (Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised, NAQ-R, Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009) was used to measure workplace bullying acts. The questionnaire was translated into Romanian and factor structure, and psychometric properties were tested. The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) used the Varimax method with 125 rotations. EFA results revealed a factorial structure formed from three factors (Determinant = .001; KMO = .862, $p < .05$; Bartlett test = 1802.625, $p < .05$, non-redundant standardized residuals = 47%; total variance explained = 51.75%). All 22 items were loaded in three main factors (with eigenvalue >1 and factors loading greater than .60). The Romanian NAQ-R model as revealed by EFA was also tested with the aid of confirmatory factor analysis and the results showed good absolute and relative indicators ($\chi^2(209)=78.01$, $p=.001$; RMSEA =90% CI=113[.105; .122]; NFI=.598; IFI=.668; CFI=.588; PCFI=.545).

The response scale was in five points were 1 meant never and 5 meant daily. The exploratory factor analysis revealed three factors: (1) intimidation (items 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 22-example of the item: '*Intimidating behaviour such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring*

the way') with an Alpha Cronbach of .844; (2) work-related bullying (items 1, 3, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, example of the item used: '*Someone is hiding from you important information which can affect your work performance*') with an Alpha Cronbach of .784 and (3) person-related bullying (items 5, 8, 10, 12, 15, 17, 20, example of the item- '*Someone is spreading rumours about your personal life*') with an Alpha Cronbach of .826. The entire questionnaire has a total of 22 items with an Alpha Cronbach of .922.

Results

The aim was to identify the organizational factors that may predict workplace bullying

Testing the first two hypotheses:

H.1. Jobs characteristics such as role ambiguity, excessive monitoring and work-tasks overload positively correlates with workplace bullying and work-tasks control negatively correlates with workplace bullying.

H.2. Organizational factors such as managerial climate, social climate and communication climate negatively correlates with workplace bullying.

Table 1.1. Means, standard deviations, correlations between workplace bullying, organizational factors and job characteristics ¹

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.RA	2.14	1.04	1								
2.WTO	3.39	1.02	.06	1							
3.WTC	3.68	1.01	.17**	.02	1						
4.EM	2.39	1.12	.26**	.21**	.36**	1					
5.MC	3.22	.89	-.30**	-.11*	-.22**	-.29**	1				
6.SC	3.27	.85	-.36**	-.07	-.33**	-.31**	.67**	1			
7.CC	3.21	.86	-.38**	-.05	-.42**	-.39**	.65**	.84**	1		
8.OC	9.71	2.35	-.38**	-.09	-.36**	-.36**	.86**	.92**	.92**	1	
9.B	1.57	.50	.37**	.22**	-.22**	.41**	-.41**	-.46**	-.49**	-.50**	1

N=253, *, $p < .01$, **, $p < .001$

¹ Role ambiguity (RA), work-tasks overload (VTO), work-tasks control (WTC), anticipated changes (AC), excessively monitoring (EM), managerial climate (MC), social climate (SC), communication climate (CC), organisational climate (OC), and bullying (B).

In the above table, workplace bullying significantly best correlates (strong correlations) with the organizational climate ($r = -.50, p < .05$), with managerial climate ($r = -.41, p < .05$), with social climate ($r = -.46, p < .05$), with communication climate ($r = -.49, p < .05$). Moreover, there are medium and significant correlations of bullying with role ambiguity ($r = .37, p < .05$), and small correlations with work-tasks control ($r = -.22, p < .05$), and with work-tasks overload ($r = .22, p < .05$).

Workplace bullying positively correlates with role ambiguity, work-tasks overload and excessive monitoring which means the more the employee's has a role ambiguity, work-tasks load and is being excessively monitoring the more he will be at risk of experiencing workplace bullying behaviours. The first hypothesis (H1) is assumed. Furthermore, work-tasks control is negatively associated with workplace bullying. When employee has control of his work-tasks he is at small risk of being bullied at work. Once again, hypothesis one is being confirmed.

Workplace bullying negatively correlates with work-tasks managerial, social and communication climate which means that if these three dimensions are efficient at work the employee is protected from workplace

bullying. This is also the case for organizational climate. The second hypothesis is assumed (H2).

Predictors of workplace bullying

H.3. Organizational factors and job characteristics can predict workplace bullying.

Because not all of the variables respected the necessary condition to apply regression analysis (i.e. all the independent variables have to be normal distributed, variables such as role ambiguity, work-tasks control, work-tasks overload, and excessive monitoring was not included in the prediction model).

In the prediction model were included only three independent variables referring to organizational climate such as communicational climate, social climate and managerial climate. Because the correlations among these three variables were greater than .50, there were understood as being one simple independent variable named organizational climate. The table below represents the coefficients of the regression analysis.

Table 1.2. Regression predicting workplace bullying

Variable	B	β	R ²	F
Constant	2.64			
Organizational climate	-.10	-.50	.25***	106.74***

The predicted variable: workplace bullying

***, $p < .001$

The adjusted regression coefficient of organizational climate predicted 25% of the workplace bullying variance.

Unstandardized equation Workplace bullying = 2.64 - 10x organizational climate

Standardized regression equation Workplace bullying = - .50x organizational climate

Organizational factors predict 25% from workplace bullying variance.

Discussion

The results of the present research showed that there are significant correlations between organizational variables and workplace bullying, thus confirming the results already existing in the literature (Vartia, 2003; Salin, 2003; Einarsen et al., 1994; Hoel & Cooper, 2000). The results of the present research showed significant positive correlations between workplace bullying and job characteristics such as role ambiguity, work-

tasks overload, and excessive monitoring. This means that the more employee has a high role ambiguity, high levels of work-tasks control and high levels of excessive monitoring his has a high risk of experiencing workplace bullying behaviours.

Moreover, the results showed negative correlations among workplace bullying and one job characteristic (i.e. work-tasks control) which means that if the employee has little control of his own work tasks he is at greatest risk of being exposed of bullying acts in his work context.

Furthermore, there were negative correlations among workplace bullying and social, managerial and communication climate which means that if these three dimensions of organizational climate are not efficient at work this fact will bring to workplace bullying acts.

The regression analysis revealed that the organizational climate predicts bullying with 25% of the variance explained. This result is congruent to that obtained by Vartia (2003). In his study, the author showed that a poor organizational climate predicted bullying with 24% of the variance explained.

Vartia (2003) evidenced that there are a unique perspective of the victims and the observers on the causes of workplace bullying appearance. Both groups of persons have said that one of the causes of workplace bullying appearance is some difficulties appeared among organizational factors such as a poor social climate, an inefficient managerial climate or past violent behaviours which weren't punished by the organization. Furthermore, the author showed that observers said that a competitive organizational climate can be a predictor of workplace bullying. The results of the present study confirmed the information existing in the literature about the potential risk factors of workplace bullying.

So far, this is the first Romanian study interested in workplace bullying antecedents and conducted in Romanian workplaces so that it represents a good start point for the development of this topic not only in Romanian workplaces but also in East-European workplaces eventhough this study has it's limits and represents only a replication of the studies conducted in the

latest twenty years in West-European countries. Furthermore, the results of the present study revealed no significant differences in workplace bullying antecedents revealed by West-European countries. It seems there aren't differences between West-European countries and the Eastern ones in bullyings' antecedents at work although further investigations are highly recommended.

The results of the present research have important practical implications for HR practitioners because it brings important information about the link between organizational factors, job characteristics and the appearance of workplace bullying.

Study limits

A first limit of the present study is the transversal character of the data. The results were obtained having a sample of employees who completed the questionnaires one single time. The causal links discussed in the present research were obtained with the aid of advanced statistical techniques (i.e. regression models). These techniques cannot clearly identify the cause and the effect of a phenomenon. Longitudinal designs are preferred and recommended in order to clarify the relationship between organizational climate and workplace bullying.

A second limit refers also to the way in which organizational variables were measured so that role ambiguity, excessive monitoring, work-tasks overload and work-tasks control were measured using a single item. Future research should measure more complex these organizational variables by using standardized instruments existing in the literature.

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