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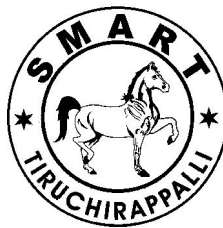**Professor MURUGESAN SELVAM, M.Com, MBA, Ph.D, D.Litt**
Founder - Publisher and Chief Editor

PERSONAL LEVEL CAUSES OF BULLYING AND NEGATIVE WORD OF MOUTH: MIGRANT WORKERS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Bullying behaviors are observed in all organizations and in all cultures, across the globe. Extant bullying literature is found in the context of Europe whereas Eastern perspective has been ignored at large. This study investigated the nexus between causes of personal level bullying, bullying behaviors, and negative word of mouth from a migrant worker's perspective. Under a cross sectional research design, data were collected from skilled migrant workers, working in United Arab Emirates. Scale items were selected for this study in the context of migrant workers and 187 useable responses were retained for final data analysis, with 49.8% response rate. SPSS (20.0) for demographic analysis and Smart PLS 3.2.8 were used for structural equation modeling. Results supported the argument that on the basis of personal causes of bullying, migrant workers experienced work related and personality related bullying behavior, which triggered further negative word of mouth.

Keywords: Personal level causes of bullying, Negative word of mouth, Personality related bullying behavior; Work related bullying behavior, Migrant worker

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1. Introduction

The bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone (or) negatively affecting someone's work task. In order to label bullying (or mobbing) to a particular activity, interaction or process, it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months). Bullying is an escalated process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts **(Nielsen, et al, 2011).**

Bullying strategy follows a pattern of covert and overt harassment, e.g. target is isolated, overloaded with work and given unrealistic deadlines, belittled, constantly criticized, and access to career development and promotion is blocked. Moreover, achievements and successes are not acknowledged and they are credited to someone else, denial of workplace, refusal of stress-leave, intimidation, and so on. The bullying pattern includes delaying tactics, which sometimes included a cat and mouse strategy of repeatedly making false and baseless allegations, arranging disciplinary meetings for trivial non-operational matters with pre-determined outcomes. According to different researchers, workplace bullying and, well-being and health of employees were associated significantly. In many research studies, musculoskeletal and mental health, depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and aggression, and increased rate of psychosomatic complaints have been explored **(Ståle Einarsen and Raknes, 1997; Zapf, et al., 1996).**

2. Review of Literature

Social Exchange Theory provides sufficient grounds to explain the relationship between workplace bullying and its negative effects. Social Exchange Theory (SET) proposes that reciprocity norms of various kinds of exchange relationships influence the behavior of an employee **(Jiwen Song, et al., 2009; Liu and Wang, 2013).** For example, mistreatment from one party to another party, will receive the same treatment indicated the same return from the other party **(Blau, 1964).** Through discretionary behavior and engagement, favorable and productive work should be done by employees **(Liu and Wang, 2013).** The employees will show unproductive and unfavorable performance when they feel that they are treated like inferior and unfavorably **(Jiwen Song et al., 2009).** For instance, when the employees become victims of bullying behavior, they definitely turn their positive behaviors into negative and unproductive behaviors **(Liu and Wang, 2013).**

Consequences of workplace bullying are drastic. Employees experiencing mistreatment at workplace are mostly at higher risk of depression **(Namie, 2003)** and prolonged stress disorder **(Scott and Stradling, 2001).** Organizations face heavy financial cost due to prevalence of workplace bullying in organizational circuits. World Health Organization has called stress as one of greatest health risk of 21st Century. Workplace bullying is a major source of stress, breakdown and malfunction in modern day organizations across the globe. Bullying has been defined by many researchers. According to Einarsen, **Raknes and Matthiesen (1994),** bullying emerges when an individual perceives himself to be on the receiving end of negative actions persistently over a period of time and finds himself unable to defend against these actions.

Lyons et al (1995) defined the term bullying as "persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behavior, abuse of power or unfair penal sanctions which make the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, which undermines their self-confidence and which may cause them to suffer stress".

Workplace bullying has severe consequences on the organization and individuals also. Consequences of bullying on individuals comprise health issues, like post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and coworker distrust and cruel phases of counterproductive work behaviors **(Cooper, et al., 2004).** Consequences of bullying for the organization can be very counterproductive and costly. High turnover intentions, absenteeism, high rate of job insecurity, cheap productivity and legal expenses are included in the cost of organization **(Cooper et al., 2004; Glambek, et al., 2014).** Other consequences include damage to organizational goodwill, reduced devotion, less organizational commitment and reduced performance **(Fox** and **Stallworth, 2010).**

Bullying is prevalent in organizations and it affects employees, organization and also the society **(Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005; Namie, 2003; Tracy, et al., 2006).** Moreover, workplace bullying is considered the most devastating issue which has severe negative consequences, for both individuals and organizations **(Rayner** and **Keashly, 2005).** Workplace bullying has become a main work-related stressor, which creates the decrements in confidence, health, and performance efficiency at the target-level **(Ståle Einarsen** and **Raknes, 1997; Salin, 2003).**

Word of mouth is defined as an informal, interpersonal communication between perceived communicator and a receiver **(Mahajan, et al., 1991).** Within organizational circuits, communicators can spread both positive and negative information about their specific job, co-workers, or employers **(Ogbonna** and **Harris, 2013; Uen, et al., 2011)** Contrary to official news, word of mouth is an external source of communication which is very difficult for organizations to handle **(Cable & Turban, 2001).**

Researchers of organizational psychology argue that an individual's decision to apply to a particular organization is heavily influenced by that individual's perception of the culture of the target organization. Thus, it is perceived that applicants commonly rely on WOM information, which is typically communicated through their informal networks, to determine whether they should seek employment in particular organizations **(Shinnar, et al., 2004).**

3. Statement of the Problem

Pakistan is the ninth largest labour provider across the globe. Almost 9.7 million migrant workers (Pakistanis) are working all over the world, out of whom 3.2 million are working in United Arab Emirates (UAE). These migrant workers are not only upgrading the life standard of their families but also their remittances are a source for nation building. These migrant workers make their contribution to the development of economy through remittances and this inflow of remittances into Pakistan is the second largest source of foreign exchange, after country's export. Among these, 4.1 million workers are under the category of skilled workers (Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment, Pakistan). Major contributors in the remittances are migrants from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and United States of America (USA). Despite high migration potential and being the ninth largest manpower supplier, the outflow of migrants, leaving for UAE, during recent years, is decreasing. During the year 2015, a total 9,46,571 individuals registered themselves for overseas employment whereas only 8,39,353 workers registered for overseas employment during the year 2016, with a downward trend of almost 1,07,218 registrations. Similarly, for UEA, 3,50,522 workers registered in 2014, 3,26,986 for 2015 and 2,95,647 for 2016, clearly indicating a downward trend (Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment, Pakistan).

4. Need of the Study

The downward trend in registration for overseas employment might be due to the negative word of mouth, restricting the potential entrants to migrate to UAE for employment. Based on this perception, present study intended to explore the bullying exposure of migrant workers, who are working in UAE. Literature provides sufficient support regarding the experience of workplace bullying due to personality factors. Keeping in view the theoretical orientation of this study, skilled migrant workers were considered as the subject of this study.

5. Objectives of the Study

Extant bullying literature has many shortcomings, particularly in relation to its conceptual clarity, process, theoretical underpinnings, underlying and intervening mechanisms **(Branch et al., 2013; Wheeler, et al., 2010).** Thus this study assumed that bullying behavior, which is associated with personality and work, can compel the individuals to spread negative word of mouth, restricting potential entry into overseas employment and from theoretical perspective, this study attempts to address future call to investigate workplace bullying from a cultural perspective **(Rai** and **Agarwal, 2016).**

6. Hypotheses of the Study

H-1: Personal level factors of bullying and personality related bullying behavior has significant association.

H-2: Personal level factors of bullying and work related bullying behavior has significant relationship.

H-3: Personality related bullying behavior and negative word of mouth has a significant relationship.

H-4: Work related bullying behavior and negative word of mouth has a significant relationship.

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Sample Selection

Respondents of this study were Pakistani migrant workers, at present working outside Pakistan.

7.2 Sources of Data

The cross- sectional data were collected through self-administered questionnaires. Keeping in view a downward trend in overseas employment and theoretical nature of this study, migrant workers working in United Arab Emirates were considered as the population of this study. Skilled migrant workers were approached for data collection. 375 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 187 completely filled responses were considered for the data analysis, with the response rate at 49.8%.

7.3 Period of the Study

The period of the study was from 2015 to 2016.

7.4 Tools Used in the Study

A five point Likert Scale, ranging from 5 to 1, was used to rate the responses. On the basis of established literature, questionnaire for this study was developed. This study adopted relevant and suitable items, best suited in the context of migrant workers, from the study of **Qureshi et al., (2015)** and five items for personality and four items for skills were included to measure personal causes of bullying. Negative Acts Questionnaire, developed by **Einarsen, et al., (2009)** was used in this study, covering the dimension of work and personality-related bullying behavior. Four item scale, developed from qualitative study of

Harris and **Obgonna (2013),** was used in this study, to assess the negative word of mouth of migrant workers.

8. Data analysis

This study followed a variance based approach (PLS-SEM) and Smart PLS 3.2.8 **(Ringle, et al., 2015)** was used to analyze the data. Partial Least Square was best available option in case where theory is less developed and in case of thoery on migrant workers, pertaining to NWM, is less developed **(Joe F Hair, et al., 2011)**. Small sample size was another reason for using Smart PLS 3.2.8 as PLS-SEM works efficiently with small sample size. Prevalence of bullying was assessed on the basis of direct questions which were addressed to the respondents **(Figure-1),** First, respondents were provided with definition of bullying to report bullying exposure with a option YES or NO. 92.5% respondents reported that at workplace, they experienced bullying whereas only 7.5 % reported in the negative. This state of affairs clearly indicated that Pakistani migrant workers experienced bullying in the host country **(Table-1)**.

Keeping in view the nature of relationships among constructs, a reflective measurement model was established **(Hair Jr, et al., 2016),** which was assessed on the basis of reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, rho-A & composite reliability) and validity **(Bacon, et al, 1995).** Convergent validity **(Hulland, 1999)** was assessed on the basis of Average variance extracted (AVE) and outer loadings **(Mela** and **Kopalle, 2002)** whereas discriminant validity was assessed through cross loadings, **(Fornell** and **Larcker, 1981a)** Criteria and HTMT criteria **(Hair Jr et al., 2016).** All the indicators of construct reliability, which were "alpha coefficients, CR estimates, and rho-A, had values greater than threshold values **(Joseph F Hair, et al., 2013),** which confirmed reliability

of the measurement model. Some items from constructs were dropped due to poor outer loading i.e <0.40. On the other hand, discriminant validity was assessed through **Fornell** and **Larcker, (1981)** criteria and HTMT results **(Table-2** and **Table-3**).

Structural model **(Figure-1)** was assessed on the basis of Coefficient of determination (Level of R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance Q^2 and path significance **(Joseph F Hair et al., 2013) (Table-3** and **Table-4).** In order to obtain best parameter estimation, multicolinearity was assessed through VIF and it was observed that almost all values were less than the cut off value of $\pm$ 5.0 **(Joseph F Hair et al., 2013).** Coefficient of determination (R^2) was observed as large enough and it was found that 58 % of change in NWOM could be explained by personal causes of bullying, work related bullying behavior, personality related bullying behavior. 29% of variation in work-related and 24 % variation in personality related bullying behavior were recorded due to personality related causes of bullying. Predictive relevance (Q^2) was higher than zero. Hypothesis testing was made on the basis of *β, t and p* values. All the paths were statistically significant **(Table-4)** and thus all study hypotheses were accepted.

9. Findings of the Study

Empirical results of this study showed that personal factors of bullying became a source of bullying behavior for migrant workers **(H-1** and **H-2).** The impact of personality related bullying behavior, on negative word of mouth, was found to be positive and significant **(H-3 and H-4)** as *β=0.43, t=5.9246 and p<0.000*. Sign of beta was positive, which indicated that migrant workers experienced personality related bullying behavior and as a result, they were engaged in discussing negative aspect of their job and organization **(Blau, 1964).** Negative word of

mouth was related to bullying behavior. Migrant workers experiencing work related bullying behavior, were engaged in the negative word of mouth about their employer or organization ($\beta=0.27$, $t=5.0446$ and $p<0.000$). These results indicated that migrant workers, experiencing work related bullying behavior, were involved in spreading negative aspects of their organization and job.

10. Suggestions

Majority of literature, pertaining to the workplace bullying, had explored from the western perspective and few studies adopted the eastern perspective. Very little is known regarding the prevalence of workplace bullying in South Asian Societies. This study indicated an alarming situation by showing higher prevalence of bullying among migrant workers, which demands immediate response. Positive relationship between personal level causes of bullying and negative word of mouth indicated that migrant workers discussed negative aspect of job and organizations in their formal and informal circles. This negative word of mouth can discourage the potential workers from opting for overseas employment. This can cause economic down turn for nations which sustain themselves on the remittances.

11. Conclusion

It has been found that Pakistani migrant workers who were working in UAE, were subject to bullying. A higher trend was observed and 92.5% of respondents reported their exposure to bullying at workplace. Personality related cases of bullying was a predictor of work related and personality related bullying behavior, which further aggravated negative word of mouth among migrant workers. The impact of personality related bullying behavior on negative word of mouth was found positive and significant, indicating that employees

experiencing personality related bullying behavior, were engaged in negative word of mouth, by spreading negative aspects of their job and organization. Similarly, work related bullying behavior predicted negative word of mouth, implying that migrant workers who experienced work related bullying behavior, tended to engage in negative word of mouth and discussed the negative aspects of job and organization informally.

From the theoretical perspective, this study was significant because it investigated personal causes of bullying, bullying behavior and negative word of mouth from migrant workers' perspective. First, prevalence of bullying among migrant workers was investigated and not even a single study, especially in the context of South Asia, had investigated the prevalence of bullying among Pakistani migrant workers. Personal factors of bullying were tested in predicting two types of bullying behavior i.e work related bullying behavior and personality related bullying behavior from the perspective of migrant workers. There was relationship between work related bullying behavior and personality related bullying behavior and negative word of mouth. **(Blau, 1964)** also added important insights into the literature from migrant workers' perspective. Newly developed scale for negative word of mouth was used in this study and it was validated by this study and was also a unique contribution to the literature. A variety of scales are available to measure workplace bullying, but this study used questionnaire, which provided support to test two types of bullying behavior. Thus this study validated the NAQ-R **(Einarsen, et al., 2009).** Relationships, tested in this study, confirmed the premises of social exchange theory, social interaction theory and work environment hypotheses in the field of organizational behavior.

12. Limitations of the study

This study being cross sectional in nature, did not allow causal inferences. Secondly, sample size was not large enough and hence in future, large sample size might show different results. Thirdly only a single cause of workplace bullying i.e personality related bullying factors were tested and other factors such as social factors and organizational level factors were not tested **(Qureshi et al; 2015).** Power distance and leadership styles were ignored, which might bring important insights in future. Only two types of bullying behavior i.e work related and personality related bullying behavior were tested. Including physical intimidating bullying behavior can also help to explore the consequences at in-depth level. In future, incorporating the physical stress in frameworks would be an interesting area to explore.

13. Scope for Further Research

The outcome variable of this study was negative word of mouth, which was tested as a coping strategy. In future, it may measure the shape of job related gossips and non-job related gossips.

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Figure-1: Path Diagram
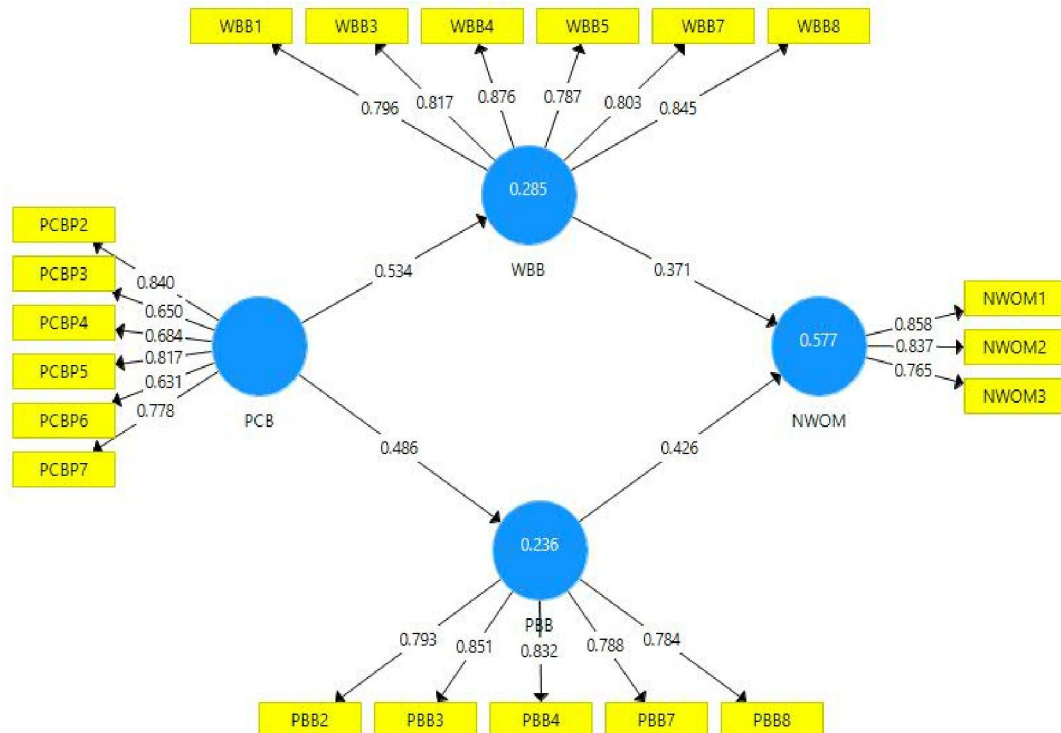
Source: Developed by the Authors

Table-1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=187)

Description	Participant	Percent
Gender		
Male	187	100
Qualification		
Metric	8	4.27
Intermediate	33	17.64
Technical Diploma	51	27.27
Graduation	37	19.78
Master/MPhil	22	11.76
Professional Degree holder	36	19.25
Age (years)		
20-25	67	36
26-30	14	7
31-35	74	40
36-40	13	7
41-45	19	10
Away from home experience		
Less than one year	105	56
2-5 years	51	27
6-10 years	22	12
Above 10 years	9	5
Length of service in the present organization		
1-5 Years	156	83.4
6-10 Years	31	17

Source: Author's own calculation

Table-2: Indicator reliability, Cross loadings, VIF, Alpha, Rho-A, CR and AVE

Constructs	Indicator	Indicator reliability	Cross loadings	VIF	Alpha	rho-A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Negative word of mouth	NWOM1	0.8581	0.8581	1.7193	0.758	0.764	0.86	0.674
	NWOM2	0.8369	0.8369	1.6179				
	NWOM3	0.7653	0.7653	1.3863				
Personality related bullying behavior	PBB2	0.7927	0.7927	1.9734	0.869	0.872	0.905	0.656
	PBB3	0.8507	0.8507	2.3025				
	PBB4	0.8318	0.8318	2.1448				
	PBB7	0.7878	0.7878	1.9818				
	PBB8	0.7838	0.7838	1.8893				
Personality related causes of bullying behavior	PCBP2	0.8404	0.8404	2.1255	0.830	0.856	0.876	0.644
	PCBP3	0.6498	0.6498	2.6894				
	PCBP4	0.6841	0.6841	1.5632				
	PCBP5	0.8165	0.8165	2.2892				
	PCBP6	0.6306	0.6306	2.6111				
	PCBP7	0.7780	0.7780	2.2447				

Table-2: Indicator reliability, Cross loadings, VIF, Alpha, Rho-A, CR and AVE   (contd.,)

Constructs	Indicator	Indicator reliability	Cross loadings	VIF	Alpha	rho-A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Work related bullying behavior	WBB1	0.7964	0.7964	2.1283	0.903	0.906	0.925	0.674
	WBB3	0.8167	0.8167	2.3218				
	WBB4	0.8757	0.8757	4.7611				
	WBB5	0.7865	0.7865	2.1103				
	WBB7	0.8033	0.8033	2.2861				
	WBB8	0.8448	0.8448	3.9993				

Source: Author's own calculation

**Table-3: Fornel-Larcker (1981) Criteria, HTMT,
Coefficient of determination and Predictive relevance**

Construct	NWOM	PBB	PCB	WBB	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	Q^2
NWOM	**0.8211**	0.8970	0.4950	0.8610	0.58	0.57	0.37
PBB	0.7289	**0.8098**	0.5560	0.9190	0.24	0.23	0.14
PCB	0.4057	0.4855	**0.7378**	0.5970	-	-	-
WBB	0.7189	0.8184	0.5339	0.8212	0.29	0.28	0.18

Source: Author's own calculation

Table-4: Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses		β	t	p	Status
H-1	**PCB -> PBB**	0.49	8.3736	0.0000	Supported
H-2	**PCB -> WBB**	0.53	9.1067	0.0000	Supported
H-3	**PBB -> NWOM**	0.43	5.9246	0.0000	Supported
H-4	**WBB -> NWOM**	0.37	5.0446	0.0000	Supported

Source: Author's own calculation