

Workplace bullying, job satisfaction and job performance among employees in a federal hospital in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the individual and interactive effect of workplace bullying and job satisfaction on job performance among employees in a federal hospital in Nigeria. 192 employees of a federal hospital in Nigeria voluntarily participated in the study. Questionnaires were administered on the participants to elicit their responses on the study variables. The study found that employees who perceived low level of bullying performed higher than those who experienced higher levels of bullying at work. In addition, the study found that employees who experienced high level of job satisfaction performed higher than those who experienced low levels of job satisfaction. Expectedly, the study found a significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. However, there was no significant interaction effect between job satisfaction and workplace bullying on job performance. We recommend that employees who experience bullying at work should be given adequate support in order to reduce the negative consequences of bullying on employee well-being and performance.

Key words: workplace bullying, job satisfaction, job performance, hospital, Nigeria.

Introduction

Workplace bullying constitutes a problem to many organizations today, irrespective of size and sector. This antisocial behaviour confronts organizations operating in developed and developing countries alike with the consequences well documented in the scholarly literature. At the individual level, bullying may lead to suicide tendency, loss of self-respect, and self-image (Djukorvik et al., 2004), high stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, phobias, sleep disturbances, and increased depression (Salin, 2003), unhappiness, anxiety, withdrawal, and undue cautiousness, thereby affecting performance (Hoel & Cooper, 2003). At the organizational level, it adversely affects employee commitment, job satisfaction, absenteeism, and turnover (Oghojafor, et al., 2012).

Though difficult to define, workplace bullying could be seen as “all situations in which one or more persons over a period of time feels subjected to negative acts that one cannot defend oneself against” (Einarsen et al., 1994 p.383). Originating from Scandinavian studies (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Vartia, 1996), research on the concept has been carried out in different countries (Rayner et al., 2002), with similar words like “mobbing” and “harassment” used by different researchers to describe the concept (Einarsen et al., 1994; Einarsen et al., 2003). Bullying can take the form of negative behaviours such as attacking the victim’s private life, rumours, verbal aggression, withholding information or depriving responsibility, excessive criticism or monitoring of work (Keashly, 1998; Zapf et al., 1996).

Arguably the most widely researched topic in behavioural sciences (Judge & Church, 2000) job satisfaction is the rallying point of several theories and models explaining individual attitudes and behaviours (Judge & Klinger, 2007). More so, “job satisfaction research has practical applications for the enhancement of individual lives as well as organizational effectiveness” (Judge & Klinger, 2007 p. 393). Whereas many definitions of job satisfaction exist in the scholarly literature, the definition by Locke (1976 p. 1304) as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” has been considered classical and is therefore adopted for this study. And while several measures of job satisfaction exist in the scholarly literature, following Markovits et al. (2010), we take the position that job satisfaction consists of two dimensions; intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. Job performance on the other hand is an organizationally relevant outcome and depends on so many factors in the organization. The importance of job performance on organizational productivity cannot be overemphasized as could be seen from several studies that attempt to link many constructs to it.

Despite the public awareness about bullying, government-funded research in this area, as well as established anti-bullying legislation in many advanced countries (Quine, 2001), the situation in developing countries like Nigeria is rather worrisome. Since there are no policies put in place to guard against the incidence of workplace bullying in many organizations in Nigeria, there is apprehension that the case of bullying may go out of control (Oghojafor, et al., 2012). Several studies have been carried on workplace bullying, albeit mostly in European

countries. The very few studies on this concept in Nigerian work environment suffer from methodological deficiencies. For instance, studies by Adenuga (2009) and Owoyemi and Oyelere (2010) were theoretical in nature, while Oghojafor and his colleagues used descriptive statistics to analyze data, with no statistical hypotheses set to examine the effect of workplace bullying. This present study does not only overcome these methodological deficiencies but also provides the basis for comparing the findings in Western settings with those in a non-Western culture, thereby bridging the wide research gap in this area. This study therefore seeks to establish the relationship between workplace bullying and job performance on one hand and job satisfaction and job performance on the other. In addition, the interaction effect between job satisfaction and workplace bullying on job performance will be examined.

Hypotheses

We formulated the following hypotheses in line with the study objectives.

1. Employees who perceive low level of workplace bullying will perform better on their job than those who experience high bullying in the workplace.
2. Employees who experience high job satisfaction will perform better on their job than those who experience low job satisfaction.
3. There will be an interaction effect between job satisfaction and workplace bullying on job performance.

Literature Review

Workplace Bullying

Several definitions and explanations abound in the scholarly literature on workplace bullying. As many as these views exist about the concept, Quine (2001) rightly observed that the definitions of workplace bullying share three common themes namely, impact on the recipient, negative effect on the victim, and persistence nature of bullying behaviour. As for the impact of bullying on the recipient, bullying exists when the individual is subjected to a range of intimidating behaviours which make him or her feel bullied or harassed. The key issue here is the feeling of the victim about this behaviour. Salin (2003) lent credence to this by suggesting that bullying is perceived by the subject(s) in negative light. This implies that even if an incidence intimidating or antisocial behaviour at workplace, such can only be qualified as bullying provided that the recipient views or perceives it in negative light. Second, bullying has a negative effect on the victim in the sense that the victim feels upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, it undermines their self-confidence and may be a cause of stress. Third, bullying behaviour must be persistent since “it has to occur repeatedly and regularly” (Einarsen et al., 2003 p.15). Similarly, Salin (2003) defined workplace bullying as “a repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individual(s), which involve a perceived power imbalance and create a hostile environment”. The emphasis in this case is on persistency and duration (Einarsen et al., 1996).

There are different approaches to the study of workplace bullying (Lewis & Gunn, 2007; Leymann, 1996; Salin, 2004), hence different typologies, forms and tactics of workplace have been identified. Rayner et al (2002) suggest five categories of bullying which include threat to professional status, threat to personal standing, isolation, overwork, and destabilization. In a study of emergency service organizations in UK, Owoyemi and Sheehan (2011) identified three types of bullying namely, personal bullying, administrative bullying, and social bullying. Several forms have been identified in the literature such as insults, verbal abuse, excessive teasing, and aggression (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Rayner et al., 2002; Salin, 2004). The type of bullying experienced depends to an extent on the type of task or positions of employees in the organization (Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). A typical example is the supervisor-subordinate relationship (Owoyemi & Sheehan, 2011). While sexual harassment has been identified as a form of workplace bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2003), sexual harassment is a less reported bullying and concerns exist as to whether it should be considered as a form of workplace bullying (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Sheehan, 2006).

Though there is a distinction between bullying and conflict (Hoel & Salin, 2003), in some instances, unresolved conflicts may result to incidences of bullying (Leymann, 1996). Hence, Einarsen et al (2003) observed that workplace bullying can be better understood with an understanding of roles and dynamics of conflict escalation process. Bullying is difficult to identify in the early stages since perpetrators engage in acts that are not easy to figure out. At this stage, such behaviours are usually indirect and discreet. With the passage of time however, these aggressive acts are brought to the fore as they become more direct (Einarsen et al., 1996). This is a serious challenge in the workplace because indirect aggressive behaviours are more prevalent (Vartia, 2003).

Efforts have been made by scholars to identify the antecedents of workplace bullying. The general consensus is that bullying occurs mainly as a result of power imbalance. The victim of this antisocial behaviour is usually not on an equal standing with the bully and hence cannot defend his or herself (Salin, 2003; Vartia, 2003). The victims feel inferior defending themselves and according to Archer (1999), this is common in organizations that are highly structured with ranks and grades. The power imbalance is often a reflection of the formal authority in organizations whereby the bully occupies a higher position than the victim (Fox & Spector, 2005). Workplace

bullying can and does occur among co-workers, by superiors against subordinates, or by subordinates against superiors (Neuman, 2004). The abuse of powers by superiors against subordinates has been identified as a key reason behind workplace bullying (Lee, 2000) but bullying can occur at the social group (Salin, 2004). The culture of the organization is also an antecedent of workplace bullying. That is why bullying occurs mostly in organizations where dominant subordinate hierarchical relationship exist (Vartia, 2001). Leadership style, job design, features of work (Salin, 2004; Vartia, 2001) as well as gender (Vartia, 2003) have been identified as antecedents of bullying in organizations.

Effect of Bullying on Job Satisfaction and Job Performance

The effect of workplace bullying on job satisfaction, job performance and other employee attitudes and work outcomes has been well documented in the scholarly literature, albeit in developed nations. Research by Quine (2001) to determine the prevalence of bullying in community nurses in an NHS Trust in UK indicated that nurses who had been bullied reported significant lower levels of job satisfaction, higher levels of anxiety, depression, and propensity to quit. Support at work was however able to protect nurses from some of the damaging effects of bullying. Similarly, other studies (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel et al., 2003; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Leymann 1996; Vartia, 2001) have reported the effect of bullying to include lower levels of job satisfaction, psychosomatic symptoms and physical illnesses, possible expulsion from the labour market, higher absenteeism, decreased commitment and productivity, higher turnover and intent to quit. As a form of affective relationship conflict, bullying has negative effects on job performance. However, different factors such as dissatisfaction, absenteeism, sickness, turnover, among others (Einarsen et al., 2004) makes it difficult to ascertain clearly the impact of bullying on job performance as employees may perform even if bullied. The review of literature suggests that despite the definition, form, categorization and approach to the study of workplace bullying, it has an effect on employee attitudes and behaviours. The present study seeks to examine the relationship among workplace bullying, job satisfaction and job performance in a developing economy since most of the research has been carried out in developed economies.

Job Satisfaction and Job Performance

Research on the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance is not without controversy. Christen et al. (2006) observed that the idea that satisfied employees are more productive held through the 1970s. It was difficult however to obtain support for the view that job satisfaction has a significant impact on the job performance. Rendering support to this, Saari and Judge (2004) note that most of the earlier studies reported a weak and somewhat inconsistent relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. However, Judge et al. (2001) found that contrary to earlier views, job satisfaction is a predictor of job performance and that there is a stronger relationship for professional jobs. Rashed (2001) also found a significant relationship between job satisfaction and job performance but noted that the relationship was inconsistent. This means the nature of the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance is inconclusive.

Method

Design

The study was a survey. It assessed the individual and interactive effect of job satisfaction and workplace bullying on job performance of hospital staff in Nigeria.

Participants

A total number of 192 employees of a Federal Hospital in Nigeria participated in the study. They were drawn from various departments on the basis of availability and accessibility. 108 (56.2%) of the participants were males while 84 (43.8%) were females. 15 (7.8%) of the respondents were management staff, 128 (66.7%) were senior staff and 43 (22.4%) indicated they were junior staff. Similarly, 167 (87.0%) of them had worked in the hospital between 1 and 5 years. Majority of them, that is 113 (58.9%) were between 26-35 years of age. Further investigations show that most 124 (64.6%) of the participants had first degree or Higher National Diploma. 113 (58.9%) of them showed they were married.

Instruments

Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) consisting of 20 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale was used to assess job satisfaction of participants. The MSQ was originally developed by Weiss, Dawis, England and Lofquist (1967) to measure workers job satisfaction which is the fulfilment a worker derives from his or her job environment. The scale was adopted for local use in Nigeria by Mogaji (1997). For this sample a high reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained for MSQ. Sample questions of the MSQ include : the chance to work alone on the job, the chance to do different things from time to time, my pay and the amount of work I do.

To measure workplace bullying, the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) which consists of 22-items was used. The NAQ is based on the definition of Einarsen et al. (1996). The NAQ, assesses how often workers have been

subjected to various negative acts during the past six months. When occurring, the negative acts are considered bullying (Mikkelsen, 2001). Workplace bullying was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never), 2 (yes, but rarely), 3 (yes, now and then), 4 (yes, several time a week) to 5 (yes, almost daily). Research indicated that NAQ has high validity and reliability in previous studies (Einarsen et al., 1996; Einarsen and Raknes, 1997; Hoel et al., 2001). A high alpha reliability coefficient of 0.94 was obtained using this study's sample for NAQ. Sample questions on the NAQ include: have you experienced the following situations in the past six months in your organization? (1) Had information withheld that affected your performance, (2) Been exposed to an unmanageable workload (3) Been intimidated with threatening behaviours.

To measure job performance of the participants, the Job Performance Questionnaire (JPQ) was adopted from Fisher (3003). The instrument has 6 items with a Likert rating scale of 1 (very low), 2 (low), 3 (not sure), 4 (high), to 5 (very high). The questionnaire assessed the work performance of respondents in terms of quantity, quality, effectiveness etc. The total ratings of the respondents on these items were considered their overall performance. The alpha reliability coefficient of the JPQ for this sample was 0.82.

Procedure

A total number of 230 questionnaires were randomly administered to participants in their work stations in the hospital. Out of this number, 201 were completed and returned representing 87.39% response rate. From the questionnaires returned, 10(4.98%) were lost to improper completion and only 192(95.52%) were used for analyses.

Result

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlation among study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1 Satisfaction	61.27	3.65	1		
2 Bullying	34.0737	14.66	-.15*	1	
3 Job Perf	61.2703	5.72876	.16*	-.01	1

Note: * = p < .01.

The results of the correlational analyses show that workplace bullying was significantly and negatively related to job satisfaction (r = -.15; p < .01). Job satisfaction was also found to be significantly and positively related to job performance (r = .16; p < .01).

Table 2: Mean and standard deviations of groups on job satisfaction and workplace bullying.

Factors	Group	M	SD	N
Job satisfaction	Adequate	24.10	2.49	93
	Inadequate	23.12	4.43	89
Workplace bullying	High	21.90	4.80	20
	Low	24.41	3.46	162

Table 2 shows that employees who experienced low workplace bullying showed the highest job performance (M = 24.41, SD = 3.46) followed by employees that experienced adequate satisfaction (M = 24.10, SD = 2.49). Whereas those with inadequate job satisfaction and high workplace bullying showed lower job performances (M =23.12, SD =4.43) and (M = 21.90, SD =4.80) respectively. ANOVA was conducted on the means to determine if the differences were significant.

Table 3: ANOVA summary on workplace bullying and job satisfaction on job performance of hospital staff.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	eta square
Workplace bullying	53.62	1	53.62	4.37*	0.02
Job satisfaction	140.67	1	140.67	11.48**	0.06
Workplace bullying * Job satisfaction	31.92	1	31.92	2.61 [#]	0.01
Error	2180.45	178	12.25		
Total	2472.84	181			

*= $P < 0.05$, **= $P < 0.01$, [#] = $P > 0.05$

Table 3 shows that the participants differ significantly on job performance on the basis of workplace bullying, $F(1, 178) = 4.37$; $P < 0.05$ and job satisfaction, $F(1, 178) = 11.48$; $P < 0.01$. The effect size (eta squared) of these variables on job performance were negligible: 0.02 and 0.06 for workplace bullying and job satisfaction respectively. There was no significant interaction effect of workplace bullying and job satisfaction on job performance: $F(1, 178) = 2.61$; $P > 0.05$.

Discussion of Research Findings

The study found a negative relationship between workplace bullying and job performance though the relationship was insignificant ($r = -.01$; $P > .01$). We also found that employees who experienced low level of workplace bullying showed the highest job performance, thus confirming our first hypothesis which states that employees who perceive low level of workplace bullying will perform better on their job than those who experience high bullying in the workplace. This conforms to the finding of Einarsen et al. (2004) who indicated that as a form affective relationship conflict, bullying has a negative impact on job performance. Einarsen et al (2004) however cautioned that this impact is difficult to ascertain clearly due to other factors such as absenteeism, dissatisfaction, turnover, sickness, among others.

The study also found a significant and positive relationship between job satisfaction and job performance ($r = .16$; $P < .01$). This means our second hypothesis is confirmed. This finding conforms to those of Judge et al (2001) and Rashed (2001) who found a significant relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. It is however noteworthy that the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance has been a contentious one with some authors suggesting an insignificant relationship between the two variables (Christen et al., 2006).

Finally, we hypothesized that there will be an interaction effect job satisfaction and workplace bullying on job performance. Our findings indicate a significant positive relationship between job satisfaction and job performance, while we found a negative relationship between workplace bullying and job performance (though an insignificant one). Expectedly, we found a significant and negative relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction ($r = -.15$; $P < .05$). This is not surprising as most previous studies (eg Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Leymann, 1996; Quine, 2001; Vartia, 2003) have reported a negative relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. Contrary to our hypothesis, when job satisfaction and workplace bullying interacted, we found no significant interaction effect of the variables on job performance. Perhaps, one possible explanation for this is that job satisfaction was able to neutralize the negative effect of workplace bullying on job satisfaction since Quine (2001) indicated that support at work can protect employees from some of the damaging effects of workplace bullying.

Conclusion

Workplace bullying is common in most organizations today especially with the presence of a diverse workforce in many organizations. In developing countries like Nigeria, it is common for employees to experience bullying at work on a daily basis. Irrespective of the form or dimension, bullying negatively affects employee well-being and performance at work and must be discouraged in order to achieve organizational effectiveness. Employees remain the cornerstone of every organization that wants to succeed, hence the need to provide a conducive work environment for them. What is more, employees who experience low level of bullying at work are better performers than those who experience high workplace bullying. In the same vein, bullying negatively affects job satisfaction while satisfied employees are likely to be high performers at work. Organizations in Nigeria must therefore develop policies that depict zero tolerance to bullying at work by applying severe sanctions to perpetrators of bullying while providing adequate support to victims of workplace bullying. This will reduce the negative consequences of bullying on job satisfaction and performance.

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