Exploring Victims' Experiences of Workplace Bullying: A Grounded Theory Approach

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Executive Summary

Despite considerable research on workplace bullying, trying to identify causal relationships and measurements of specific constructs, there is a need to draw from the experiences and feelings of the targets of workplace bullying. The current study explores the victims' experiences from an interpretive perspective in the context of Information Technology organizations in India. The qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with the victims of workplace bullying. The analysis using grounded theory approach resulted in a conceptual model, which explains the antecedents, bullying behaviours, consequences, and self-coping methods of the victims.

Job demands, leadership and management styles of the supervisor, and interpersonal conflict emerged as the major antecedents of workplace bullying. The victims' inability to adapt to changes was found as a personality factor that stimulated workplace bullying in the presence of other antecedents. The study reveals that although the victims experienced negative bullying behaviours in their daily life, most of them were unaware of the phenomenon. Some of the new bullying behaviours identified from the current study are taking ownership of others' work without giving due credit, grabbing others' challenging assignments, and repeated borrowing of money without returning.

The victims experienced various negative emotions as the initial reaction to bullying behaviours. As the bullying behaviours prolonged, the participants experienced various personal and work-related consequences. The self-coping mechanisms identified in the study were sharing emotional experiences with friends and family, having an easy-going attitude, voicing the issues, and perceived organizational support (POS). POS was considered to be important for having an influence on employee turnover intention and organizational commitment. Based on the POS, three categories of victims were identified – Leavers, Survivors, and Loyals.

The paper contributes to the body of knowledge as it brings out the experiences and feelings of the targets of workplace bullying. The detailed knowledge of the phenomenon helps the organization to either intervene or prevent the relevant processes. The study suggests that the victims need to be empowered with awareness programmes and organizational support to reduce the effects of workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying is identified as a crucial problem in the work environment, causing more stress than all other kinds of work-related stress put together (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011). The widely accepted definition of workplace bullying describes it as harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work tasks (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). In order to label a particular activity as workplace bullying, interaction or process has to occur repeatedly and regularly over a period where the person confronted ends up in an inferior position, becoming the target of systematic negative social behaviours (Ibid). The key features that define and measure the phenomenon in the workplaces are frequency and duration of exposure to negative social behaviours (at least weekly once over a period of six months or more), the intention of the bully, and the perceived power imbalances between the targets and the perpetrator.

Over the past two decades, researchers have extensively focused on three main areas of workplace bullying: prevalence, antecedents, and effects of workplace bullying. Prevalence of workplace bullying has been quantitatively reported across various parts of the world – for example, 3.5 percent in Scandinavia (Leymann, 1996), 5-10 percent in other parts of Europe (Einarsen et al., 2011); 46.8 percent among the US workers (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007); and 42.3 percent among ITES-BPO sector employees in India (D'Cruz & Rayner, 2013).

The researchers focusing on the antecedents of bullying have predominantly explored the work environment factors, leadership features, and personality of the victims and the bully (Leymann, 1996; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Zapf, 1999; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001; Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007; Agervold, 2009; Hutchinson, Wilkes, Debra, & Vickers, 2010; Hoel, Glaso, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2010). Several researchers have studied the negative psychological, physical, and work-related consequences of workplace bullying (Quine, 1999; Cooper, Hoel, & Faragher, 2004; Hansen, Hogh, & Persson, 2011; Houshmand, O'Reilly, Robinson, & Wolff, 2012). However, most of the extant studies are survey-based, trying to identify and measure the causal relationship of specific constructs (Samnani, 2013). Still, there is a need to draw from the targets' experiences, perspectives, and feelings (Ibid).

The current study expands knowledge of workplace bullying by exploring the victims' experiences from an interpretive perspective. 'The interpretive paradigm places great importance on understanding and exploring the meanings that individuals (targets) attach to their experiences in the workplace'(Samnani, 2013, p.27). D'Cruz and Rayner's (2013) findings affirm a higher prevalence of workplace bullying in India than the Nordic and other European countries. The lack of workplace bullying studies in India further necessitates exploring the phenomenon in industries that are highly dynamic with intense work pressure, extended work hours, and high attrition rates. The following research questions were posed to understand the victims' experiences of workplace bullying in the context of Information Technology organizations in India:

RQ1. What are the negative bullying behaviours in the workplace?
RQ2. On victim's understanding, what factors initiated workplace bullying?
RQ3. What are the consequences of workplace bullying?
RQ4. How do the victims cope with the situations of bullying?

METHODOLOGY

Keeping in view the interpretive nature of the study, a grounded theory approach was considered the most appropriate method to explore the in-depth experiences of the victims. This approach allows the emergence of a theory from the information gathered, ensuring that the researcher does not begin the study with a pre-conceived theory in mind (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, the theory derived from the data is most likely to resemble the reality of the victims' experiences of workplace bullying. In grounded theory approach, "sampling begins as a 'commonsense' process of talking to those informants who are most likely to provide early information" (Goulding, 2005, p.296).

Procedure

The data were collected during February-April 2013 through a two-stage interview method. In the first stage, a telephonic interview was conducted to identify the victims of bullying behaviours in the workplace. Initially, the respondents with current or previous exposure to negative work behaviours in the workplaces were identified through personal contacts, and then the recruited victims nominated potential subjects for the study. Most

of the participants were unaware of the concept of workplace bullying. The researcher had to elicit their exposure to workplace bullying behaviours. Following Leymann (1996), the employees who had an exposure to negative social behaviours (verbal, non-verbal, and non-physical acts) at least weekly once over a period of six months were selected as the victims for the study. The second stage was an in-depth personal interview with the identified victims of workplace bullying. The researcher ensured confidentiality of the data and obtained verbal consent from the victims for voluntary participation. With a focus on the research questions, a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire facilitated the data collection. As the participants explained their experiences, researcher tried to understand more about the events with follow-up questions. The researcher took verbatim notes of the conversation with the permission of the participants. The interviews were conducted in English for an average duration of 60-90 min. The researcher gathered data, until no further information emerged from the data (Goulding, 2005).

Participants

Out of the 33 IT employees who went through telephonic interviews, 12 employees were selected as the victims/participants for the in-depth interviews. The participants included employees exposed to bullying behaviour for a period of six months to 1.5 years. Surpassing the selection criteria, one victim who had exposure to negative bullying behaviour for less than six months (five months),

was included in the study on researcher's discretion. The victim had a daily exposure to bullying behaviour and had experienced adverse negative effects on personal health and work. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 victims, eight men and four women, working in eight multinational IT organizations in Bengaluru in Karnataka and Trivandrum in Kerala, India (seeTable 1).

The respondents' age ranged from 25 to 35 years and out of the 12, eight participants were married. Out of the 12 participants, eight were Team leaders, two were Senior Software Engineers, and two of them were Software Engineers, with work experience ranging from 1.5 to 12 years. The Table indicates that most of the bullies were supervisors followed by peers.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis was performed using grounded theory approach, where three stages of data coding analysed the data – open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In open coding, the researcher read the data meticulously to understand the meaning and the context of the event. The participants' quotes and experiences were converted into codes embodying its meaning. These codes were clustered into meaningful concepts which were in turn grouped into well-defined themes. The themes with exhaustive properties and dimensions formed categories. In axial coding, the relationships between the different categories and subcategories were established based on their dimensions

Table 1: Socio-demographic Details of the Participants

Victim	Gender	Age in Years	Marital Status	Location	Experience in Years	Organizational Status of the Victims	Duration of Bullying in Months	Organizational Status of the Bully
1	Female	30	Married	Bengaluru	6.5	Sr. Engineer	12	TL (Supervisor)
2	Male	35	Married	Bengaluru	12	TL	12	PL (Supervisor)
3	Male	31	Married	Bengaluru	10	TL	6.5	PL (Supervisor)
4	Male	30	Married	Bengaluru	7.5	TL	6	PL (Supervisor)
5	Male	30	Married	Bengaluru	8	TL	8	PL (Supervisor)
6	Male	33	Married	Bengaluru	10	TL	6	PL (Supervisor)
7	Female	28	Married	Trivandrum	5	TL	7	TL (Peer)
8	Female	30	Married	Bengaluru	7	TL	6	PL (Supervisor)
9	Male	27	Single	Bengaluru	6.5	Sr. Engineer	12	TL (Supervisor)
10	Male	32	Single	Bengaluru	7.4	TL	18	TL (Peer)
11	Male	27	Single	Trivandrum	2.5	Engineer	5	TL (Supervisor)
12	Female	26	Single	Trivandrum	1.5	Engineer	12	TL (Supervisor)

Note: TL- Team Leader, PL- Project Leader

and properties. In selective coding, a core category was selected and all the other categories were integrated to build a theory. During the entire coding process, there was a constant interplay between proposing and checking; this constant comparison verified the accuracy of the theory (Ibid).

Memos, the reflections of the researcher's thoughts and ideas, were written during data collection and data analysis. They were useful for the researcher in report writing.

THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The application of grounded theory has resulted in a conceptual model illustrating the phases of workplace bullying (Figure 1). The model explains workplace bullying as a multi-causal phenomenon. It explicates the interrelationships between various phases of workplace bullying such as antecedent phase, bullying phase, and outcome phase.

The antecedent phase explains the triggering factors which lead to the bullying phase. The bullying phase demonstrates the development of negative bullying be-

haviours into the phenomenon of workplace bullying. The outcome phase explains outcomes of workplace bullying, i.e. consequences of the victims and the self-coping mechanisms adopted by the victims. The three phases of workplace bullying represents the highest order categories, where seven main categories and eighteen sub-main categories represent the properties of the higher-order categories. Table 2 displays the complete list of categories in the conceptual model of workplace bullying.

Antecedent Phase

The antecedent phase explains the main factors that activate the incidence of workplace bullying. Job demands, leadership and management styles of the supervisor, and interpersonal conflict emerged as the major antecedents of workplace bullying. The victims' inability to adapt to changes was found as a personality factor that stimulated workplace bullying in the presence of other antecedents.

Job Demands

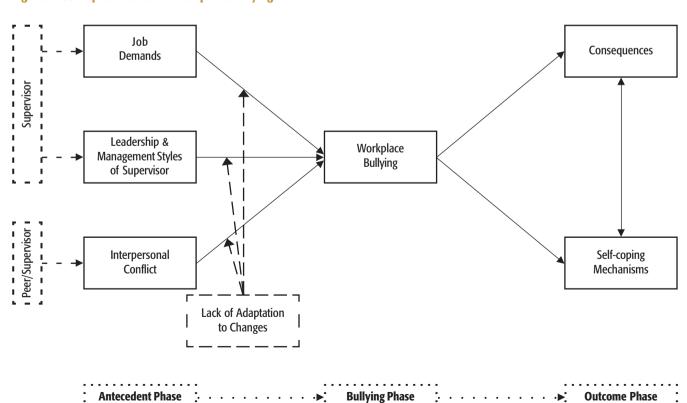In IT organizations, employees are assigned to various

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Workplace Bullying

EXPLORING VICTIMS' EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING: ...

Table 2: List of Categories in the Conceptual Model of Workplace Bullying

ANTECEDENT PHASE	OUTCOME PHASE
I. Job Demands	**VI. Consequences**

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ANTECEDENT PHASE

I. Job Demands
- A. Unrealistic goals
- B. Unmanageable workload

II. Leadership & Management Styles of Supervisor
- A. Autocratic supervisor
- B. Unsupportive supervisor
- C. Unprofessional supervisor

III. Interpersonal Conflict

IV. Lack of adaptation to Change

BULLYING PHASE

V. Workplace Bullying
- A. Negative work related bullying behaviours
- B. Negative personal bullying behaviours
- C. Duration of bullying
- D. Frequency of negative behaviours
- E. Power difference
- F. Intention of the behaviours

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OUTCOME PHASE

VI. Consequences
- A. Emotional Reactions
  - Frustration
  - Humiliation
  - Anger
  - Emotional Torture
  - Worried
  - Mood Changes
- B. Personal
  - Headache
  - Mental ill health
  - Concentration problems
  - Sleep disturbances
  - Change in eating habits
  - Physical health deterioration
  - Family-life affected
- C. Work-related
  - Job satisfaction
  - Commitment
  - Productivity
  - Turnover intention

VII. Self-Coping Mechanisms
- A. Easy-going attitudes
- B. Sharing with family and friends
- C. Voicing the issues
- D. Perceived organisational support

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projects in which they work as teams based on the size of the project. The major source of workplace bullying reported was job demands of the team/project. Job demand is that aspect of the work context which taxes workers' personal capacities and wears out workers' energy (Van den Broeck, Baillien, & Witte, 2011). The job demands identified were unrealistic deadlines and unmanageable workloads in the project causing bullying behaviours such as forcing to work overtime, excessive monitoring, and assigning menial tasks. These behaviours were extremely stressful for the victims of workplace bullying.

I joined the organization six months back and since then, the entire team has been working overnight and we do not find time even to eat or sleep...

The supervisor was directly/indirectly responsible for the bullying behaviours associated with job demands. The victims did not believe that the supervisors had intentionally given such demanding tasks. However, some of the respondents mentioned that the team leaders and the project managers had a deciding role in changing the demanding nature of work in the project.

My team lead was only concerned about how long I worked. I was monitored nine hours a day, even during my lunch break. I could not work in such a stressful project...

Some of victims reported that the unmanageable workloads were due to lack of planning from the inception of the project and due to the improper scheduling of project submissions without considering the complexity of the work.

Leadership & Management Styles of Supervisor

The Team Leader (TL) or the Project Leader (PL) is considered the supervisor of the team or the project. Ineffective leadership and management styles of the supervisor were found to be the second causal factor of bullying in workplaces. Autocratic leadership, unsupportive actions, and unprofessional behaviour exhibited by the supervisor triggered work-related as well as personal bullying behaviours. The autocratic supervisors focused only on

the outputs providing low job autonomy.

> *My team leader did not like the attitude of asking questions about the tasks. He would suddenly give us a deadline for submission and we had to complete the work in a short span of time. It became a routine style of working. He decided everything, and we had to obey him...*

The supervisors neither supported the team members nor recognized their opinions and suggestions, thus instigating bullying behaviour at work. The participants complained that their supervisors did not support or motivate them in critical situations. Their unprofessional behaviour and acts, perceived as unethical and against the accepted norms and practices of the society, resulted in negative bullying behaviour in their workplaces.

> *My supervisor got money from me repeatedly and did not bother to return. He did this with many others in the project…… I sent him a mail and told him that I will not give him money any more… I had to suffer a lot after that...*

The bullying acts reported were persistently grabbing subordinate's on-site opportunities, repeatedly borrowing money without returning, presenting others' ideas and working papers as one's own, taking ownership in subordinates' tasks and achievements, assigning menial tasks, withholding information, verbal abuse and comments in the meetings, talking behind someone, and displaying bias/favouritism.

Interpersonal Conflict

The third source of workplace bullying was interpersonal conflict with supervisors or peers at intragroup/intergroup level. The interpersonal conflicts were either due to work-related issues or personal issues such as ego, jealousy, and internal competition. The strain on the working relationships with peers/supervisors indirectly stimulated negative work behaviours.

> *Initially, the manager was easy-going and reasonable. After I asked for a change from the project, the new manager started to manipulate things….. I was given heavy workload. My manager made my co-worker monitor my work throughout the day...*

In conflict situations, some of the victims were bold and were determined to talk directly to the bully to solve the issues. However, the escalation of conflicts led to negative bullying behaviours.

Lack of Adaptation to Change

The inability to adapt to changes reflects the personality characteristic of the victim. The victims were found to have either joined a new organization or a new project or had a new supervisor on the project. Their inability to adapt to the norms and behaviours of the new organization, new team or a new supervisor was found to contribute to the antecedents that led to the bullying phase. From the victims' explanations, it was observed that they had a different behavioural pattern as compared to the other team members.

> *When I moved to the new project….. it was very stressful ... I have never worked with such workload; I wanted a project which was less stressful…… Some of my colleagues continued in the project regardless of the stress… because they feared about their performance appraisals and ratings...*

Bullying Phase

The antecedent phase triggers victims' transition into the bullying phase, the second phase of the conceptual model of workplace bullying. The participants having work experiences with 1.5-12 years were found to have been exposed to workplace bullying. Exposure to prolonged and repeated negative behaviour, the perpetrators' intention of the acts, and the perceived power difference between the victim and the perpetrator were the features responsible for the presence of the phenomenon.

Most of the victims were unaware of the phenomenon of workplace bullying. They considered negative bullying behaviour as part of their normal work culture. Based on Bartlett & Bartlett's (2011) classification, the reported negative behaviours were classified into work-related and personal bullying behaviours. Work-related negative behaviours were: causing work overload, forcing to work overtime, excessive monitoring/micro management, overruling decisions, removing responsibility, assigning menial tasks, setting unrealistic goals, professional status attack, withholding information, judging work wrongly, indulging in unfair criticism, and blocking promotions. Personal bullying behaviours found were belittling remarks, persistent criticism, intimidation, staring, manipulation, threats, isolation, gossips, undermining, and false accusations.

Some of the new bullying behaviours identified from the current study were:

- Taking ownership of someone else's work
- Presenting ideas and working papers without giving due credit
- Grabbing others' challenging assignments (e.g. on-site assignments)
- Repeated borrowing of money without returning

The frequency of bullying behaviour was at least weekly once, but the majority of the participants felt a daily exposure. Taking into account the antecedents, the intention behind the bullying behaviour was reported to be relevant only in the case of interpersonal conflicts and leadership styles of the supervisors. It was found that the victim could not defend the situations of bullying because the bully was more powerful in a formal/informal manner due to organizational status or social relationships. The major source of bullying was identified to be the supervisors.

Outcome Phase

The persistence of the bullying behaviour resulted in the outcome phase of the conceptual model – in which the victims faced the negative consequences of bullying and adopted self-coping mechanisms, consciously or unconsciously, to survive the situation or escape from it. The victims experienced various negative emotions as the initial reactions to bullying behaviours. As the bullying behaviours prolonged, they experienced various personal and work-related consequences. A victim described bullying as 'something one can never forget in their entire life.'

Emotional Reactions

The participants' described negative emotions such as anger and frustration as their initial and immediate reaction to negative bullying behaviours. Most of the participants mentioned that they were frustrated, humiliated, worried, emotionally tortured, and were subjected to variations in the moods.

I was very worried because of the unnecessary issues with my supervisor; in fact, my enthusiasm to work has come down...

Personal Consequences

The workplace bullying behaviours affected participants'

physical health and psychological well-being. Bullying has shown effects on the victims' mental and physical health, resulting in concentration problem, headache, sleep disturbance, and altered eating habits and timings. Most of the married participants complained that bullying behaviours affected their family peace and happiness.

When the same behaviour was repeated, I did not react. But, I used to get up in the morning thinking…. How it will be in the office today. I was mentally disturbed. Even my sleep was disturbed...

Another respondent said:

I was nervous and worried about what was happening and often got agitated. Due to stress, I even had a headache at times...

Work-related Consequences

The victims of workplace bullying reported to have devastating work-related consequences. All the participants recounted that their job satisfaction and commitment levels towards work had reduced due to workplace bullying.

I did the job only to complete the task I was assigned to….. But I had no satisfaction in doing it…… My dedication to work also came down...

While a few participants mentioned that they tried to maintain their output levels at par, as otherwise it might affect the team, most of them admitted that the quality of their output levels suffered due to workplace bullying. In situations where the supervisor is the bully, the performance appraisals and ratings were found to be affected.

I was under tremendous pressure; I was not able to concentrate on work – was in a dilemma about the issues with my supervisor and I was not able to decide how to handle the situation; my productivity came down gradually...

Workplace bullying also resulted in indirect negative effects on the organization. Most of the participants decided to move out of the organization due to prolonged and persistent negative bullying behaviours. The turnover intention of the participants was reported to be extremely high. The victims tried to exit the organization in the hope that they might not face such situations elsewhere. On asked whether they had other reasons to exit

the organization, the victims retorted that workplace bullying was the sole reason for their sudden exit from the organization.

> I did not want to continue with the organization, even if I got a change of project; I was fed up...

Among the 12 victims, seven victims had left the organization and three of them had the intention to leave. Though employee turnover/turnover intention of the victims is a critical consequence of workplace bullying, the decision to exit was the last resort for the victims to escape from workplace bullying and its negative effects. This could also be a self-coping mechanism as this method brings an end to the bullying situation.

Self-Coping Mechanisms

In the current study, self-coping mechanism refers to the methods used by the victims to avoid or reduce the stress and effects of workplace bullying. The self-coping mechanisms were observed to have a subsequent effect on the consequences of the victims. The most frequent self-coping method used by the victims was *sharing their emotional experiences* with their friends and family members. One victim, who was reluctant to share his experiences with friends and family, had reported intense negative effects such as sleep disturbance.

In the events of bullying, *easy-going attitude* shown by the victims worked as a self-coping strategy. It was observed that the victims with easy-going attitudes had taken the situations lightly and had thus survived the consequences of bullying. Another important self-coping mechanism was *voicing the issues* with higher officials such as supervisors or skip-level managers or HR managers. Out of the twelve victims, nine of them voiced their concerns to higher officials. Most of the victims reported that they had reservations in approaching Human Resource (HR) professionals, because the complaints would directly be reported to the supervisors. This would only worsen the relationship with the supervisor where the supervisor himself is the bully. In most cases, the victims were not satisfied with how the HR personnel dealt with the issue. For most of the victims, voicing was found ineffective as it did not help in getting any assistance to solve the issue. Some of the targets were stamped as troublemakers and reasons behind the bullying issues. The victims perceived such responses as unfair and unsupportive.

Perceived organizational support (POS) was found to be one of the important self-coping mechanisms that had implications for the victims and the organization. POS refers to the belief that the organization values the employees and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). The current study did not consider peer support because the victims were concerned more about the support from higher officials and they felt that peer support would always be low due to their perceived fear of having issues with the bully. The perception of organizational support was found to influence the sense of belongingness, commitment, and faith in the organization.

> I dedicated five years of my life in the organization and was throughout a top performer. But the last six months were dreadful; I was thinking why it was happening to me…. I wanted someone to help me. When the company did not support me, I was hurt… shattered……… Later I understood... I did not want to be attached with any organization...
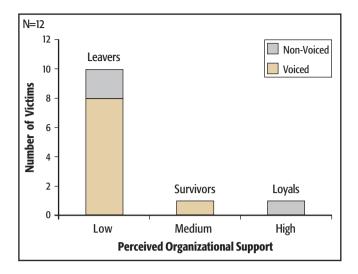
The employees dedicated their lives and worked hard for the success of the projects. But when they realized that the organization did not value their contribution, the commitment levels of the victims went down and this might have contributed to their high turnover intentions.

Perceived Organizational Support- Exit Behaviour Relationship

Based on the POS, the study has classified the exit behaviours of the victims. The exit behaviours of the victims can also be a measure of their turnover intention as the victims who had left the organization were found to have high turnover intentions. The moderating role of POS in the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention is studied empirically by researchers (Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2008; Van Schalkwyk, Els, & Rothmann, 2011). The bar graph (Figure 2) displays the three exit categories of victims based on their POS — Leavers, Survivors, and Loyals.

Leavers - This group of victims had already left the organization or had a high propensity to leave the organization due to low POS. Organizational commitment was found to be low for the employees who had low POS. This would have led to the decision to exit the organization. Out of the 10 participants, who were identified as leavers, eight of them had voiced their issues with higher offi-

Figure 2: Exit Categories of the Victims based on POS

cials. But due to the lack of perceived support, participants decided to leave the organization. At the time of data collection, seven had already left the organization and three were waiting for the right opportunity to leave.

Survivors - This group had received moderately high support from the organization, and had therefore decided not to leave. Out of 12 victims, one represented this group. The issue was voiced by the participant to the higher officials, who had extended support to reduce bullying by moving the target away from the bully, i.e. by changing her from the project, where she was bullied. The turnover intention of this group was found low as this group had survived the situation with a change from the bullied situation.

Loyals - This group perceived high organizational support, and remained loyal to the organization. Out of 12, one participant represented this group; who did not voice the issue and waited patiently to achieve a favourable situation. The high perceived organizational support motivated the participant to stay with the organization and expect a change in the bullying situation with support from higher officials. The exit behaviour or the turnover intention was extremely low for this group. The self-reported organizational commitment was also found very high for the victim.

From the Figure, it is clear that POS and exit behaviours (turnover intention) have an inverse relationship. As the POS increases, the turnover intention of the participants comes down and vice versa.

DISCUSSION

This exploratory study breaks new grounds in developing a conceptual model of workplace bullying based on the victims' perspective in the context of IT industry. The multi-staged model of workplace bullying was first proposed by Leymann (1996), explaining the phenomenon in four stages such as critical incidents (triggering situation) - stigmatization and mobbing behaviours - personnel management - expulsion. The current conceptual model suggests that the victims might encounter the three identified phases of workplace bullying gradually with time – the antecedent phase, the bullying phase, and the outcome phase.

Antecedent Phase

Researchers have identified job demands such as role conflicts, excessive workload, and low job autonomy as the critical antecedents of workplace bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hauge et al., 2007; Agervold, 2009; Van den Broeck et al., 2011). The current study affirms that job demands such as unmanageable workload and unrealistic deadlines are perceived as the strongest triggering factor of workplace bullying. It has identified three unhealthy behaviour styles of the supervisors – autocratic, unsupportive, and unprofessional — that might trigger bullying behaviours in the workplaces. In these styles of leadership, the employees were neither involved in decision-making nor were they given autonomy in executing the work tasks. The participative styles of leadership may reduce bullying and increase involvement and dedication to the organization. Researchers suggest that autocratic styles of leadership may be perceived as bullying by the subordinates (Agervold, 2009; Hoel et al., 2010). Interpersonal conflict is reported to be one of the major antecedents of workplace bullying in the current study. As the conflict escalates, the supervisor or the peer with more power becomes the bully and tends to perform all sorts of behaviours to demean the victim. The victims even tried to talk directly with the bully to resolve the conflicting issues, but the ineffective conflict management strategies might have resulted in repeated bullying behaviours. Even the previous researchers had identified interpersonal conflict as an important antecedent of workplace bullying (Leymann, 1996; Hauge et al., 2007; Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2009). The current study highlights that the victims' inability to adapt to the changes stimulates the antecedent phase to move on to the bully-

ing phase. A few previous studies had suggested that a new organization, a change of leadership or a change in composition of the workforce could be a major contributing factor in workplace bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Salin, 2003).

Bullying Phase

The present study indicates that even though IT industry has a global work environment, the employees were unaware and unfamiliar about the phenomenon. Even though the phenomenon and its effects existed, most of the victims considered the negative bullying behaviour as part of their work culture. The researcher had to unearth the victims' exposure to workplace bullying by analysing the various features of bullying such as exposure to negative bullying behaviour, its frequency and duration, perceived power difference, and the intention of the bully. In line with previous research, work-related bullying behaviours were found to be more prevalent than personal bullying behaviours (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Bashir & Hanif, 2011).

The victim with an exposure to bullying behaviours for less than six months experienced more negative consequences as compared to victims exposed to bullying for six months or more. This raises a question of the established operational criteria of victimization – Is an exposure of six months or more required to classify negative behaviours as workplace bullying? The study pinpoints that the employees who are exposed to negative bullying behaviour daily/almost daily for even less than six months could be considered as victims of bullying. The victims perceived that they were being bullied even if the bully did not have an intention to do so. The power difference was perceived to be higher between the bully and the victim, either due to organizational status or due to informal social relationships. Downward bullying was found to be more prevalent in Indian IT organizations.

Outcome Phase

The current study underlines negative emotions such as anger and frustration as the immediate reaction of bullying behaviour, which later leads to other adverse negative consequences such as reduced job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, reduced self-reported productivity, and high turnover intention. The person-related consequences highlighted in this study are headache, mental ill health, concentration problems,

sleep disturbances, and physical health deterioration. Some other consequences identified are changes in eating habits and effect on family-life. Even previous research had supported the presence of emotional reactions for the victims of workplace bullying (Ayoko, Callan, & Härtel, 2003; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik & Alberts, 2006; Brotheridge & Lee, 2010) and had identified the effects on work and certain personal health consequences such as sleep disturbances and effects on physical and mental health (Quine, 1999; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Cooper et al., 2004; S´a & Fleming, 2008; Niedhammer, David, Degioanni, Drummond, & Philip, 2009; Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010; Laschinger et al., 2010; Hansen et al., 2011; Houshmand et al., 2012).

Self-coping mechanisms of the victim is a less researched area in the workplace bullying literature. Initially, sharing with friends and family and having an easy-going attitude helped the victims to cope with bullying. As these methods became less effective, the victims voiced the issues directly with the bully, supervisors, skip-level managers, or HR personnel. Withey & Cooper's (1989) study (as cited in Baillien et al., 2009) explains exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect as methods of self-coping. In line with the above findings, the current study agrees that voicing and exit (turnover intention) are important methods of self-coping. Even though the current study explains turnover intention as a consequence, it is ultimately a method to cope with situations of bullying (escaping from bullying) POS is a measure which shows the perception of the employees on how much the organization values and cares about their well-being. When the victims voiced the issues, they did not get much support from the organization. This lack of support reduced the victims' commitment towards the organization and forced most of them to leave. This highlights the importance of perceived organizational support (POS) as a coping mechanism to reduce the effects of bullying at work. The three categories of victims – Leavers, Survivors, and Loyals – display the influence of POS on exit behaviours. This conveys that POS has the power to provide more Loyals and Survivors and is thus beneficial for the organizations.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The conceptual framework provides a concrete understanding of the phenomenon of workplace bullying in IT organizations in India. The detailed knowledge of the antecedents, bullying behaviours, consequences, and self-

coping strategies of the victims helps the organization to either intervene or prevent the obstructive processes. It was clear from the study that even though the employees were not aware of the concept of bullying, they experienced workplace bullying irrespective of their organizational status. Organizations should organize awareness programmes on workplace bullying, its effects, and coping methods to enable the employees to effectively manage such situations. They have to take prudent measures to control the organizational antecedents such as heavy workload, unrealistic deadlines, and supervisor's leadership styles. The participative styles of leadership can reduce bullying and encourage employee involvement and dedication. Managers and HR professionals have to be vigilant about the integration of the new recruits in the organization.

Job performance and productivity, reflected in performance ratings, can be a measurement indicator of workplace bullying. The HR professionals have to be proactive in monitoring the variations in performance ratings of the employees to find out the victims of workplace bullying. The importance of self-coping mechanisms such as voicing and POS is evident from the current study. The HR professionals and the team leaders/project managers have to encourage the employees to voice the issues and lodge complaints of bullying. At the least, they could separate the bully and the victim to reduce the exposure to bullying behaviours.

As discussed in the findings, POS influences organizational commitment and turnover intentions of the victims and can act as an important mechanism to reduce the negative effects of workplace bullying. Organizations could communicate that they value and support their employees' well-being by implementing effective human resource practices and programmes against bullying and good assistance procedures to support and manage the victims. Increase in POS could influence organizational commitment positively and turnover intentions and exit behaviours negatively, thereby increasing the number of Loyals and Survivors in the organization. The organizations have to take efforts to curb bullying and create a safe working environment.

CONCLUSION

The current study expands the workplace bullying literature with four important contributions. First, it voices the victims' perspective of workplace bullying and has developed a conceptual model based on their experiences. Second, it identifies the antecedents, bullying behaviours, consequences, and self-coping methods adopted by the victims. Third, it identifies new bullying behaviours specific to the IT industry which would be worthwhile for further quantitative studies. Fourth, the current study identifies the relationship between POS, organizational commitment, and turnover intention of the victims of workplace bullying and has tried to classify exit behaviours of the victims based on their POS.

Further studies can validate the conceptual model with more data from other victims in the IT industry or from other sectors. They can also explore personality characteristics as a causal factor of workplace bullying. Further, qualitative research can capture the perpetrators' and witnesses' perspective in response to the victims' experiences of workplace bullying. ⌄

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