

# Workplace Bullying: A Comprehensive Overview of Its Causes, Effects, and Organizational Prevention Strategies

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**Abstract:** The paper provides an overview of the definition and explanatory framework of workplace bullying, explores the factors that contribute to it, and discusses the serious consequences that both individuals and organizations may face as a result. Additionally, the paper offers practical recommendations for organizations to mitigate and prevent workplace bullying. Through this study, the author aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding workplace bullying and assist organizations in creating a safe and supportive work environment for their employees.

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## 1. Introduction

Bullying, both physical and mental, is a form of mistreatment that has harmful consequences on individual well-being. Workplace Bullying is a significant issue that can negatively affect both the employee and the organization as a whole. [1] Despite its significance, workplace bullying has not received enough attention from researchers, although it has been increasingly studied in recent years. In a hierarchical power structure, workplace bullying occurs when one or more individuals are subjected to repeated and systematic mistreatment by perpetrators, causing physical, emotional, or psychological harm to the victim and contributing to the rapid spread of bullying. Studies show that a significant proportion of employees experience bullying, with prevalence rates ranging from 10% to as high as 50% depending on the operationalization and measurement of bullying. [2]

Although there are legal frameworks that can be utilized to address workplace bullying, enforcement remains limited despite the passage of specific laws by some states concerning workplace bullying. Workers may quit their jobs due to bullying, while others may feel compelled to endure it due to difficulties in finding alternative employment. The situation poses significant challenges with limited solutions. Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on workplace bullying by providing a comprehensive overview of its definition and explanatory framework. Additionally, it will explore the factors that contribute to workplace bullying and discuss the serious consequences both individuals and organizations may face as a result of this phenomenon. Finally, the paper will provide practical and effective recommendations for organizations to mitigate and prevent workplace bullying.

This study aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding workplace bullying and its impact on individuals and organizations. By shedding light on the complex nature of this phenomenon and providing actionable recommendations, the study aims to assist organizations in creating a safe and supportive work environment for their employees. By addressing workplace bullying, organizations can improve the well-being of their employees and enhance their overall performance, leading to long-term sustainability and success.

## 2. What Is Bullying?

Bullying is a pervasive problem in the workplace, which can cause significant harm to individuals and organizations. Although there are various definitions of workplace bullying, the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) defines it as the repeated mistreatment of an employee by one or more employees through acts of commission or omission, which can result in health-harming consequences. Such acts may include verbal abuse, physical or nonverbal behaviors that are threatening, intimidating, or humiliating, work sabotage, interference with production, or exploitation of vulnerabilities. Bullying behavior can be overt or covert and can have severe consequences, causing harm to the target's self-esteem and mental well-being.

Gary Namie, the director of WBI, has referred to workplace bullying as a "silent epidemic," while other researchers define it as including overwork assignments, offensive behavior, and public humiliation. [3] Notably, bullying can be both a cause and a consequence of discrimination in the workplace, with women being more likely to experience it and to engage in bullying behavior. Men are more likely to engage in certain forms of bullying, such as physical aggression, while women are more likely to engage in social exclusion.[4] As stated by Vega and Comer (2005) that "Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can break your spirit". No matter which way the bullies use, the undesirable status brings victims endless sorrows and hurts. [5]

Research has shown that bullying is more common among colleagues than between supervisors and employees or customers.[6] It can be influenced by various factors, including organizational culture, leadership style, and job demands. Addressing workplace bullying requires attention and action from organizations to ensure the well-being of employees and the success of the organization.

## 3. Causes of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying is a significant concern for many organizations, as it can have detrimental effects on the well-being of employees and the productivity of the organization. There are several reasons that account for the occurrence of workplace bullying, including job stress, job demands, and personality traits. To begin with, employees who experience

high levels of stress at work are more likely to behave in a hostile and abusive manner. [7] Additionally, high amounts of workload, time pressure, and noisy working conditions can lead to employee frustration and contribute to workplace bullying. [8] Staff who cannot appropriately release their stress may have difficulties in communicating with co-workers, friends, and family. Alternatively, personality traits such as laziness, introversion, instability, and eccentricity could also be causes of bullying behavior. It is demonstrated that stress triggers more severe workplace bullying, particularly when the offender has unpleasant personality traits simultaneously.

It is worth noting that workplace bullying is a critical issue that requires urgent attention. Despite this, a significant number of organizations may not have established formal policies and procedures to address this issue. This lack of action is often due to a combination of factors, such as a lack of understanding and training, limited resources, and a perception that bullying is not a critical issue. In addition, once complaints of workplace bullying are gathered by the manager, the organization may adopt formal or informal discussions or even legal methods to intervene. Nevertheless, bullies may pretend to cooperate harmoniously during the solving process. Afterward, they turn back on the bullied respondents in a more violent way for revenge. Thus, it is crucial to develop and implement bully prevention policies and strategies based on evidence that cater to the unique requirements of the organization and its employees.

For those organizations that place less emphasis on the issue of workplace abuse, the internal workforce may have vague notions of workplace bullying, leading to a lack of morals and organizational policies. Meanwhile, they are more likely to harm others without adequate morals and organizational policy. Researchers have investigated that some organizations do not have enough engagement in managing and preventing bullying or even have no bullying policies. On the other hand, the unfeasible policy may generate worse results when conducting interventions. Otherwise, bad policy or incorrect legal techniques could lead staff to have a hard time reintegrating into the original organization.

Moreover, it is important to note that workplace bullying often involves individuals who exhibit a low sense of morality or empathy. For example, to compete for a promotional opportunity, the perpetrators may view their victims as inferior, especially when they belong to minority groups such as women, and this may stem from a dominant male culture within the organization. In essence, power imbalance in a hierarchical organization can also contribute to workplace bullying. Minority status subordinates and women tend to be powerless and under the control of the majority and male-dominated culture. Workplace bullying can take various forms, including physical, verbal, and psychological abuse. It can also manifest in actions such as withholding important information, exclusion from work-related activities, and unreasonable work arrangements, which can evoke worker's anger and dissatisfaction.

#### **4. Possible Consequences of Workplace Bullying**

Workplace bullying is a serious problem that can have far-reaching consequences for both individuals and organizations. Numerous studies have highlighted that workplace bullying

can lead to severe consequences, including decreased job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, increased absenteeism, and long-term effects on an individual's mental and physical health. Workplace bullying has even been characterized as an act of violence, highlighting its serious impact on both individuals and the workplace as a whole.

One of the significant costs associated with workplace bullying is the expenditure on employees' investigation, implementation, and compensation, which can significantly increase in the event of a bullying incident. Employees are the most expensive asset of any company, and workplace bullying can lead to the loss of valuable personnel. Furthermore, bullying can suppress innovation and creativity in a violent workplace, as employees may become reluctant to take risks or make an active contribution.

Workplace bullying is an "organizational cancer" that can ultimately reduce employee engagement and job satisfaction, which in turn can lead to decreased customer satisfaction and reduced profitability. It can gradually kill the entire firm, leading to a decline in productivity and increased organizational costs. The impact of workplace bullying on individuals is equally significant. Pignata, Winefield, and Boyd (2016) have also emphasized the negative impact of workplace bullying on employee morale and productivity, as well as the potential for long-term effects on mental and physical health, including headaches, stomach ulcers, heart diseases, insomnia, nightmares, and painful memories. Bullying can also lead to high levels of anxiety and depression, causing employees to cry, become unwilling to attend work, or, in extreme cases, commit suicide or homicide. In some cases, bullying victims suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, which can lead to long-term or even permanent health problems.

The adverse effects of workplace bullying, revealing that high levels of anxiety and depression can cause employees to cry, be unwilling to attend work, or, in more extreme cases, commit suicide or homicide. The severity of workplace bullying is comparable to the trauma experienced by rape victims, causing inhuman torture that leaves traumatic flashbacks etched in their memories. Personality changes can also result from bullying experiences, causing victims to lack confidence, become timid, or even develop psychosis. Researchers have indicated that some individuals may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, leading to long-term or permanent health problems for those who experience bullying.

The impact of workplace bullying is not limited to the direct victim. The consequences of workplace bullying can also impact bystanders who witness the mistreatment. Bystanders who witness bullying can also be affected, as they may become the targets of bullying themselves. Those who support the victims may speak out against the aggressor, either directly or indirectly, and expose their reprehensible behavior, making themselves vulnerable to become targets of bullying. Unfortunately, few people speak out against bullying due to the fear of experiencing similar mistreatment, and this leads to the growing prevalence of bullying in the workplace.

The tragic case of Caroline Flack, a British television presenter who took her own life, serves as a stark reminder of the damaging consequences of workplace bullying and the importance of taking action to prevent it. [9] Given the far-reaching impacts of workplace bullying, it is crucial for organizations to prioritize the prevention and intervention of workplace bullying to ensure the mental health and well-

being of their employees. Effective measures for organizations to eradicate this negative phenomenon must be implemented to create safe and healthy work environments for all employees.

It is important for employers to recognize the negative impact of workplace bullying and take proactive measures to prevent and address this issue. By promoting a healthy and inclusive work environment, organizations can foster employee well-being, engagement, and productivity, ultimately contributing to their own success and profitability. Research has shown that individuals who have experienced workplace bullying are at an increased risk for a range of physical and mental health problems, including chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular disease, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[10]

In addition to the negative effects on employee well-being and organizational performance, workplace bullying can also hamper employee creativity and innovation. Employees who experience workplace bullying are less likely to engage in proactive behaviors, such as suggesting new ideas and taking initiative. As a result, subordinates may become less willing to take risks or contribute actively to the organization.

To address workplace bullying, organizations can establish clear policies and procedures for addressing workplace bullying, provide training to employees and supervisors on the topic, and create a culture of respect and inclusivity within the organization. By doing so, companies can promote a positive and healthy work environment that fosters employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity. In addition, organizations should take steps to ensure that employees feel comfortable reporting incidents of workplace bullying and that appropriate measures are taken to address these incidents.

In conclusion, workplace bullying has significant negative impacts on both employees and organizations. It is a complex issue that requires proactive measures to prevent and address. Addressing workplace bullying is critical to creating a safe and productive workplace culture, where employees can thrive and organizations can succeed.

## **5. Recommendations for Organizations**

From an organizational standpoint, interventions and support can mitigate the negative outcomes of workplace bullying to some extent. To prevent and remedy workplace bullying effectively while promoting employee well-being and justice, this can be achieved by establishing policies and procedures for dealing with workplace bullying, providing training and support to employees and managers, and creating a culture of fairness and respect. There are several tools that organizations can utilize.

Firstly, creating a moral and ethical working environment is crucial. To prevent workplace bullying, it is essential for all employees to recognize that bullying is intolerable in the workplace, and the organization should strive to build a harmonious climate that fosters positive relationships among employees. Organizations should prioritize the establishment of a healthy and safe work environment. This can be achieved by creating a positive organizational culture that values respect, inclusion, and open communication. Organizations can also encourage healthy lifestyles and establish special staff forums where employees can express their opinions in a public network. Leadership plays a crucial role in preventing and addressing workplace bullying, and it is important for organizations to establish clear policies and procedures for dealing with this issue.

Additionally, counseling services staffed by experts and assistants can be made available to help employees reduce daily stress and promote psychological health and safety. Employees should also be educated on their rights and how to report incidents of bullying. This approach will not only benefit employees but also contribute to the long-term success of the organization. By prioritizing the mental and emotional well-being of employees, organizations can create a culture that values respect and collaboration, leading to a positive work environment that is free from bullying. This approach can ultimately lead to increased productivity, employee satisfaction, and reduced turnover rates.

Thus, organizations must take a proactive stance against workplace bullying and employ effective measures to prevent it. By establishing a healthy and safe work environment, creating a culture of fairness and respect, and providing training and support to employees and managers, organizations can prevent workplace bullying and promote employee well-being. Additionally, promoting healthy lifestyles and providing counseling services can further contribute to a positive work environment.

Secondly, it is recommended that organizations take a more proactive approach to developing and regularly revising an effective anti-bullying policy. This can be achieved through the development and regular revision of a comprehensive anti-bullying policy that is communicated effectively to all employees. One of the key elements of an effective anti-bullying policy is to ensure that targets of bullying have options available to preserve their rights. This can include the option to choose whom they would like to speak with and the preferred mode of discussion. It is essential to consider that individuals who have been bullied may experience involuntary recollection of their traumatic experiences, leading them to avoid face-to-face interviews. Therefore, organizations must take prompt and careful action to provide comfort to the sufferer as they may be skeptical and sensitive about the confidentiality and effectiveness of the organization's response.

It is equally important to establish a culture that encourages employees to report bullying incidents without fear of retaliation. Reporting procedures must be clearly communicated, and disciplinary actions for offenders should be defined. Regular training and awareness programs can help employees identify and prevent bullying in the workplace. These measures can enable the organization to address the issue before it escalates, promote employee well-being, and contribute to a healthy and productive work environment. By establishing a culture that encourages employees to report bullying incidents and providing them with options to preserve their rights, organizations can create a healthy and productive work environment that promotes employee well-being and organizational success.

Thirdly, education and awareness training are indispensable in preventing workplace bullying, as having a good policy in place is insufficient. This will help to cultivate a sense of morality and sensitivity to the issue. All staff members should possess an understanding of what constitutes bullying, its causes, and its consequences, to cultivate sensitivity to the issue and a sense of morality. Such training can equip employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to defend themselves when faced with bullying. For instance, employees can benefit from learning how to defend themselves when they encounter bullying, such as by recording instances of bullying and access channels to contact

relevant departments if necessary.

To further develop their comprehension of bullying, organizations can incorporate role-playing exercises into their training programs. This approach can reinforce appropriate behaviors while discouraging inappropriate ones, promoting the development of a positive and respectful workplace culture. Moreover, role-playing exercises can provide employees with an opportunity to practice responding to bullying incidents and develop their conflict resolution skills. By providing education and awareness training, organizations can foster a safe and respectful work environment that promotes employee well-being and productivity. Such training can also help prevent bullying incidents from occurring and ensure that employees are equipped to respond appropriately when they do occur. Therefore, it is essential for organizations to prioritize education and awareness training as part of their overall strategy to prevent workplace bullying. By doing so, organizations can cultivate a respectful and safe work environment that promotes employee well-being and productivity.

Finally, it is recommended that organizations establish a comprehensive performance appraisal system that includes an evaluation of employees' behavior. This will incentivize employees to be mindful of their actions and their impact on others in the workplace. This system can encourage employees to act carefully in their daily work and treat others with respect. In line with this, a peer evaluation system could be implemented to control destructive behaviors and encourage bystanders to speak out against bullying among colleagues. Peer evaluations can provide valuable insights into an employee's behavior, which can help identify potential bullying incidents and promote a culture of respect in the workplace. Such an approach can promote a culture of respect and encourage bystanders to speak out against workplace bullying. By encouraging employees to hold each other accountable, organizations can create a safe and supportive work environment that discourages bullying behavior.

Moreover, to raise awareness about the urgency of addressing workplace bullying, HR departments are encouraged to present a business case that highlights the costs associated with this issue. This will help top managers understand the negative impact that workplace bullying can have on the organization, such as decreased employee morale, increased absenteeism, and decreased productivity. By emphasizing the importance of taking action, organizations can ensure that the issue of workplace bullying is given the attention it deserves.

Therefore, it is imperative for organizations to take a proactive approach to addressing workplace bullying. By implementing comprehensive anti-bullying policies, providing education and awareness training, establishing a performance appraisal system that evaluates behavior, and implementing a peer evaluation system, organizations can create a positive and productive work environment while promoting employee well-being. These efforts can have a positive impact on organizational success and sustainability in the long term.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explored the pervasive issue of workplace bullying, which can have significant negative impacts on both employees and organizational performance. Multiple factors contribute to the occurrence of workplace bullying, including a stressful work environment, unethical

employee behavior, inadequate bullying policies, and power imbalances. It is essential that organizations take proactive measures to prevent workplace bullying and foster a healthy and respectful corporate culture.

Effective anti-bullying policies must be in place, communicated to all employees, and regularly revised. These policies should provide targets of bullying with options to preserve their rights and confidentiality while facilitating prompt and careful action by the organization. Furthermore, a comprehensive education and awareness training program can equip employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and respond to bullying incidents effectively. Role-playing exercises can help reinforce appropriate behavior and discourage destructive behavior, fostering a positive and respectful workplace culture.

In addition to these measures, organizations can establish a comprehensive performance appraisal system that includes an evaluation of employees' behavior to promote mindfulness and accountability. A peer evaluation system can also be implemented to discourage destructive behaviors among colleagues and encourage bystanders to speak out against workplace bullying. HR departments can raise awareness among top managers by presenting a business case that highlights the costs associated with workplace bullying, emphasizing the importance of taking action.

By prioritizing the issue of workplace bullying and taking proactive steps to prevent it, organizations can promote a positive and productive work environment that enhances employee well-being and organizational success. It is critical for organizational leaders and HR professionals to understand the urgency of addressing this issue and to work towards creating a healthy corporate culture that values respect and inclusivity. While workplace bullying remains a complex issue, concerted efforts can prevent it, enhance employee well-being, and promote organizational success.

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