

# WORKPLACE BULLYING AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OF TEACHERS WORKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To explore the relationship between workplace bullying and physical strains among teachers of higher education institutes.

**Methodology:** In this cross-sectional study, a sample of 400 teachers was collected using non-probability purposive sampling from seven public sector universities of Lahore. The assessment was completed using standardized tools; Workplace Bullying Scale and Physical Strains Scale with demographic information sheet. Researcher collected the data from February 2017 to August 2017. Analysis was performed using SPSS version 23.0.

**Results:** Out of 526 teachers, 200 male (50%) and 200 female (50%) teachers completed the survey. Mean age of sample was  $34 \pm 8.0$  years. Forty two percent of teachers reported experiences of workplace bullying. Workplace bullying (both person-related and work-related) was found to be a significant positive predictor and collectively account for 28% of the variance in physical strains. Females teachers had more exposure of bullying (66%) and significantly higher levels of physical strains as compared to male teachers ( $p = 0.000$ ).

**Conclusion:** Large numbers of teachers are facing workplace bullying problem that needs to be addressed to improve their psychological and physical health.

**Key Words:** Higher education institutes, Workplace bullying, Physical strains

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## INTRODUCTION

Bullying is defined as the systematic, repetitive and intended negative behavior of one individual or group directed towards another one<sup>1</sup>. It primarily comprises of prolonged and repeated exposure to psychological exploitation. Workplace bullying behaviors involve work-related bullying e.g. not giving them credit when due, prevent access to opportunities, remove areas of their responsibility without their consultation, assign them meaningless tasks; and person-related bullying like criticizing their habits and repeated reminders of their mistakes, insults and intimidation of employees<sup>2,3</sup>.

Studies have reported that education and health areas within service sector and public institutes are at greater risk<sup>2</sup>. The prevalence of workplace bullying in higher education settings is reported to be upto 47%<sup>4</sup>. During the past few decades, researchers observed increasing evidence of the harmful consequences of workplace bullying<sup>4,5</sup>. Workplace bullying is also associated with psychosomatic symptoms<sup>6</sup>. Another research found that employees who face bullying behaviors suffer sleep problems, weight gain, high blood pressure,

headache and angina<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, continuous experience of workplace bullying can lead to psychological problems like depression, anxiety and behavioral strains (e.g. aggressive behavior)<sup>8</sup>. Frequent negative acts in the form of bullying behaviors predisposes the victims to psychosomatic symptoms and mental fatigue that correlate with high number of days away from work under sick leave option.

Since teachers of higher education are considered at high risk of workplace bullying and physical strains, the present study was planned to find out physical strains among teachers and compare the frequency of bullying between male and female teachers.

## METHODOLOGY

In this cross sectional study, purposive sampling technique was used. Approval was taken from Institutional ethics committee. Participants were approached after the official permission of the university management. Written consent was taken from the participants individually with complete information regarding the research. Data were collected from February to August

2017. A sample of 400 teachers (male = 200, female=200) was collected from 7 public sector institutes (University of Education, Govt. College, Lahore College for Women, University of Engineering and Technology, Punjab University, University of Health Sciences and COMSATS University). Demographic information sheet was employed to collect information regarding demographic details of participants e.g. gender and age.

Workplace Bullying (WB) Scale was used to assess the prevalence of bullying behaviors<sup>9</sup>. This scale consisted of 21 questions. The scale was scored on a 5-point Likert rating scale where 'Daily' scored as 5 and 'Never' scored as 1. Internal consistency was measured by alpha coefficient as 0.93 for the total WB Scale and 0.88 to 0.90 for the two subscales of person-related bullying and work-related bullying respectively. Physical Strains Scale<sup>10</sup> was employed to measure the physical strains. This scale consisted of 6 questions. Alpha coefficient of physical strains scale was 0.93. Only those participants were included in this study who had 1 year of teaching experience and no history of physical or psychological illnesses.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20.0. Descriptive statistics; means, standard deviations and percentages of the demographic variables were described. To assess the internal consistency of scales, reliability anal-

yses were run. Results indicated that alpha coefficient of all scales and subscales used in this study are satisfactory indicating all measures are internally consistent. Stepwise regression was used to identify predictors of physical strains and t-test to assess gender differences in terms of bullying exposure and physical strains.

**RESULTS**

Of the 526 potential participants, 400 respondents (men=200, women=200) completed the questionnaires (response rate of 76%). The mean age of sample was 34 ±8.0 years. Details are given in Table 1.

Forty two percent of employees had exposure of bullying. Female teachers had more exposure (66%) as compared to male teachers (Table 2).

Our findings showed that 20% of variance in physical strains is accounted for by person-related exposure of bullying alone while work-related and person-related bullying collectively account for 28% of the variance in physical strains; F =100.52, 78.24, p <.001, supported the model. So, both types of bullying were found as significant predictors of physical strains (Table 3).

Female teachers had more physical strains as compared to male teachers (Table 4).

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants (n=400)**

Variables	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	200 (50)
	Female	200 (50)
Age (Years)	24-30	160 (40)
	31-40	144 (36)
	41-50	176 (19)
	51-60	20 (5)
Qualification	M.A/M.SC	80 (20)
	M. Phil	260 (65)
	Ph. D	60 (15)
Job Rank	Lecturer	88 (22)
	Asstt. Prof.	232 (58)
	Assoc. Prof.	44 (11)
	Professor	36 (9)
Job Experience in Years	1-5	220 (55)
	>5	180 (45)

**Table 2: Percentage of higher education teachers regarding status of bullying (n=400)**

Bullying Status	Men (n=200)	Women (n=200)	Total
Bullied	36 (18%)	132 (66%)	168 (42)
Non-bullied	164 (82%)	68 (34%)	232 (58)

**Table 3: Step wise regression for predicting job-related strains from subscales of bullying (n=400)**

Predictor variables	Model			CI	
	B	SE	$\beta$	LL	UL
1.Constant	3.47	1.09		-5.51	-.11
Pers-b	.40	.04	.44***		
R <sup>2</sup>	.20				
F	100.52				
2. Constant	-2.69	1.38		.26	.36
Pers-b	.33	.04	.37***		
Work-b	.28	.04	.29***		
R <sup>2</sup>	.28				
F	78.24				

Note. \*\*\*p <.001; B = Unstandardized co efficient;  $\Delta F$ = F change;  $\Delta R^2$ = R Square change; CI=Confidence Interval

**Table 4: Gender difference in physical strains among teachers (n=400)**

Gender	N	M	SD	t (398)	P	LL (CI)	UL (CI)	Cohen's d
Male	200	11.46	5.09	-9.12	.000	-6.33	-4.08	1.10
Female	200	16.67	6.27					

## DISCUSSION

In Pakistan, the scarcity of researches on bullying in the educational institutes and its severe consequences, particularly on faculty of higher education provided motivation to conduct this study. Another strong impetus to conduct this study was to attract policy makers to make laws against bullying at workplace. In this study, 42% teachers reported bullying. The bullying rate significantly differs in various countries and is related to a host of factors. National culture, autocratic style of Heads/boss, increased demands for efficiency etc. are the main reasons in the occurrence of bullying in the education institutes.

Female teachers were more bullied as compared to male teachers. Women are supposed to be trained less self-assertive, less aggressive and less skilled to defend themselves as compared to men. So, women are more

bullied than men. Furthermore, men usually work at higher positions than women and they use their power to harass women<sup>8</sup>. Our findings were supported by the results of other studies that had similar findings<sup>11,12</sup>. However, some studies showed contradictory results to the findings of this study and described no gender difference in term of bullying exposure<sup>13</sup>. This difference may be due to culture differences.

The findings of this research showed that both types of bullying (work-related and person-related) significantly predict physical strains. These findings were in conformity with findings by other researchers<sup>14-17</sup>.

## LIMITATIONS

The participants for this study were collected only from higher education institutes of one city. To apply the results on all working population, it is essential to collect data from different sectors and multiple cities.

## CONCLUSION

The present study revealed high prevalence of workplace bullying in higher education institutes. Employees who had exposure of workplace bullying suffered physical strains. Female teachers had more physical strains as compared to male teachers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research is required in this area with larger samples, including multiple sectors. Future work should also explore contributing factors in the occurrence of workplace bullying and strategies to deal with this issue.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

AA conceived the idea, planned the study, performed statistical analysis and drafted the manuscript. AM edited analysis after going through the protocol, critically revised the manuscript and carried out corrections as per suggestions of reviewers. All authors contributed significantly to the submitted manuscript.