

## WORKPLACE BULLYING: CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC SECTOR UNIVERSITY

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### **ABSTRACT**

Workplace bullying is an amalgamation of negative behaviors of varying intensity that can severely damage one's ability to work effectively or efficiently. The study aims to examine the prevalence, forms and perceived perpetrator(s) of workplace bullying in a public sector university, ultimately highlighting the existing policies and procedures aiming to discourage the practice of workplace bullying at an organizational level. The study adopts a mixed method strategy. A two-step sampling approach is adopted for gathering quantitative data, where stratified sampling was followed by simple random sampling technique. For qualitative data, purposive sampling is used. The study identifies that workplace bullying prevails among university's faculty members where more than half of the respondents were exposed to it. The perceived perpetrators were mostly male employees targeting male employees on the same

hierarchical level. Also, faculty members belonging from the middle age and those who are at the middle of their career experienced highest exposure to bullying at work.

Keywords: NAQ-R, public sector university, workplace bullying.

## **Introduction**

The environment of the organization plays a major role in success or failure of the tasks performed by the employees, eventually influencing the overall performance of the organization. Workplace environment is described as the “social climate of an organization” where employees interact with one another (Shalley, Gilson, & Blum, 2000). This interaction has implications on the social relations among employees (Jain & Kaur, 2014; Misawa & Rowland, 2015). Therefore, great responsibility rests with the management to develop an ideal environment of the organization to ensure employees’ safety, relations and performance. An ideal work environment is characterized as rewarding, enjoyable and healthy for the organizational members and is examined to have a significant impact on the employees’ job satisfaction, performance and on the overall performance of the organization (Stouten, Baillien, Broeck, Camps, De Witte & Euwema, 2010; Chandrasekar, 2011; Noah & Steve, 2012, Jain & Kaur, 2014; Bushiri, 2014). However, workplaces where the employees are exposed to abusive behaviors not only make the environment hostile but also put their professional and personal life in turbulence. Therefore, the prevalence of negative behaviors at workplace has become an area of concern for many scholars and practitioners because of their constant rise and detrimental consequences. Various negative behaviors prevail widely at workplaces out of which bullying is the common and widespread (Nielsen, Skogstad, Matthiesen, Glasø, Aasland, Notelaers & Einarsen, 2009).

Workplace bullying involves aggressive behaviors of varying intensity, presented as a single phenomenon, occurring repetitively which results in reduced performance and creativity or even employee turnover (Einarsen, 1999; Mathisen, Einarsen, & Mykletun, 2008; Schat & Frone, 2011). The victims of workplace bullying suffer from both short and long term negative consequences of workplace bullying (Roscigno, Lopez & Hodson, 2009). Not only workplace bullying results in increased psychological distress, but the targets have also reported high level of emotional fatigue, burnout and negative emotions (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010).

Considering the consequences of workplace bullying, it is important to take measures to mitigate it. Therefore, researchers, practitioners and employers aim to develop measures to curb such behaviors and demand legally protected workplaces globally (Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers, 2009). But unfortunately in Pakistan the managers, legislators and government officials have failed to recognize the prevalence of bullying behaviors at workplaces because of which no measures for its alleviation are taken. Though, the development of Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010 proved to be a significant step towards the elimination of physical or sexual behaviors at workplace, but its effectiveness is still questionable considering its poor implementation. Therefore, the study aims to identify the prevalence of workplace bullying, the perceived perpetrator(s) and the form of bullying that the victims mostly experience. Moreover, the study also aims to identify the potential targets of bullying based on socio-demographic factors and examine the existence of organizational policies to help discourage such behaviors. In the light of the information collected and analyzed, this research

aims to put forth context specific measures that can be taken to curb bullying behaviors, specifically, in an academic setting and at other workplaces in general.

### **Significance**

The research previously conducted in the Pakistani organizations focused greatly on exploring and identifying the prevalence of bullying in the health sector with special focus on senior medical staff (doctors), junior staff (nurses) and medical students. This study, therefore, holds a significant position, as it fills the gap in an absence of information on the prevalence of bullying behaviors in an academic setting. The study examines the perceived exposure of faculty to bullying behaviors at work in a public sector university, as Salin (2001) suggests that even the educational and professional competencies does not protects an individual from experiencing bullying at work.

Furthermore, the data regarding the prevalence of bullying collected under the study will help in not only establishing baseline information in the Pakistani context (anonymity maintained) to serve as an evidence for future researchers and policy makers, but also it will contribute in developing the globally established database for prevalence of bullying in various countries at the Bergen Bullying Research Group at the University of Bergen, Norway.

Finally, the information gathered under the current study highlights the prevailing mistreatments and bullying behaviors at workplace with an aim to draw attention of legislators, employers and decision makers to help them in developing context specific policies and measures or to amend the existing policies. The core contribution of the study is to ensure that necessary measures are adopted so that bullying practices are discouraged before they become embedded in day to day employees' interactions at work.

### **Literature Review**

Workplace bullying refers to inappropriate interpersonal behaviors, directed towards one or more individuals at work involving unfair allegations, continuous criticism, excessive supervision of work and social exclusion (Zapf & Gross, 2001; Einarsen, 2000). Many researchers have presented various definitions of workplace bullying, however, the definition provided by Einarsen et al. (2009) is deemed in compliance with the study where workplace bullying is defined as follows:

“A situation where one or several individuals persistently over a period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of bullying has difficulty in defending him or herself against these actions.”

Furthermore, Zapf & Einarsen (2011) examined empirical and theoretical studies on workplace bullying and developed different types of bullying. First type of bullying defined was person-related bullying, under this type, the perpetrator attacks personally, by gossiping or passing offensive comments on ones' private life. The second type was defined as work-related bullying, this includes increasing the workload that cannot be managed or demanding an

individual to work below his/her level of competence. Third form of bullying involves physical threat to the victim. Moreover, this behavior involves the most aggressive acts of violence.

Furthermore, literature suggests that bullying occurs both horizontally and vertically in the organizational hierarchy, however, in some cases the perpetrator can be an outsider (e.g. customer or client) (Dalton, 2007). Vertical bullying primarily consists of upward and downward bullying. When a subordinate experiences bullying behaviors by the supervisor or boss (immediate or otherwise), this type of bullying is known as downward bullying and is the most common form of bullying (Martin & LaVan, 2010). According to Einarsen (2000), the power difference is the major factor in this relationship that makes the subordinate vulnerable against boss. However, Branch, Ramsay, & Barker (2013) suggested that powerful alliances can also be formed to bully the supervisor or boss and is known as upward bullying. Also, when the employee becomes a target of bullying from their co-workers it is labeled as horizontal bullying. However, victims experience more psychological distress when they are bullied by their superior(s) as compared with bullying from co-workers (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). These incidents of bullying primarily represent the struggle for power, interpersonal conflicts and discrimination at workplace and calls for immediate action to be taken (Gouveia, 2007).

Therefore, to develop context specific policies and measures to curb bullying behaviors it is first important to identify the prevalence of such behaviors. A number of studies explored the prevalence of bullying and concluded that work related issues exist widely at workplaces (Ortega, Høgh, Pejtersen & Olsen, 2009; Thomas, 2015). Certain factors are believed to play a role in the variation of the prevalence of workplace bullying, for example, incidents may vary from organization to organization and also at gender dominated occupations (Ortega et al., 2009). Also, demographical factors like gender, ethnic background and organizational status of the individuals were the prominent factors considered to influence the prevalence (Okechukwu, Souza, Davis & Castro, 2014; Anjum, Muazzam, Manzoor, Visvizi, & Nawaz, 2019). Daniela, Visvizi, Gutierrez-Braojos & Lytras (2018) and Visvizi, Lytras & Daniela (2019) also suggested that demographic and various other factors like gender, work experience and level of education also plays a vital role in exposure to bullying in higher education institution. Eriksen & Einarsen (2004) & Dilmac (2009) reported that males experience bullying more often than female workforce. Furthermore, Anjum et al. (2019) reported that employees with less than five years of work experience are more exposed to bullying in an academic setting as compared with employees with more than five years of education. It was further stated that senior employees by virtue of their power protect themselves from experiencing bullying.

After summarizing various studies it was observed that the prevalence of bullying behaviors varies among different sectors within the same country where bullying was higher in public sector (Salin, 2001). Moreover, research reveals that employees of service sector experience greater bullying at workplace, especially in education, health or financial services (Lewis, Sheehan & Davies, 2008). Literature consistently highlights the over representation of bullying incidents in the education sector (Blase, Blase, & Du, 2008; Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). Studies have also been conducted considering the Pakistani organizations regarding harassment and bullying at various sectors where much of the studies are conducted at health sector. Høgh, Mikkelsen & Hansen (2011) examined that 52 percent of the medical students had being bullied by someone at a higher hierarchical level. Also, Gadit & Mugford (2008) examined the bullying

experiences of psychiatrists and trainee psychiatrists were considered by Ahmer, Yousafzai, Siddiqi, Faruqi, Khan & Zuberi (2009) in Pakistan. Both the studies reported high level of harassment and bullying experiences of psychiatrists and trainee psychiatrists. Another study by Hussain & Aslam (2015) examined workplace bullying and its impact on the performance of employees in the private banking sector. It was concluded that the employees experienced workplace bullying but it had no significant influence on their performance. Also, Hanif and Bashir (2011) explored the prevalence of bullying in the telecommunication sector and examined that gender does not play a significant role in bullying experiences. Moreover, Anjum et al. (2019), explored the prevalence of bullying in higher education institutions and suggested that these institutions are more vulnerable to bullying. Moreover, hierarchical structure, subjective measures of performance evaluation and competition among the faculty members was identified as a major reason for increased prevalence of bullying in academia than in other organization.

In an academic setting, the commitment of employees is greater with their personal achievements rather than the accomplishments of the organization for which establishing sound channels of communication within and outside the organization is essential. Since it is not possible for employees, to remain in isolation at work, therefore, this increased interaction may lead to the occurrence and escalation of unwanted behaviors and demands the development of environment conducive for effective learning (Espelage, Polanin, & Low, 2014).

It can therefore be concluded that workplace bullying consists of systematically recurring negative incidents, having adverse impact on the social, psychosomatic and psychological spheres of the victims. Moreover, considering its consequences there is a dire need to address this widely prevailing and deeply entrenched behavior at educational setting that not only harms the mental health of the employee but if not discouraged, the perpetrator may physically harm the target.

With all of the above stated information, the following hypotheses have been developed considering the factors that are quantifiable, whereas other aspects that the research aims to gather are obtained through qualitative techniques.

### **Hypotheses**

**H<sub>1</sub>** The faculty members at the university are exposed to bullying at their workplace

**H<sub>2</sub>** Male faculty members are exposed to bullying, more often than the female faculty members

**H<sub>3</sub>** The Faculty members, with greater work experience in the university perceived more frequent exposure to bullying than employees with lesser work experience.

**H<sub>4</sub>** The faculty members belonging from different age groups perceived different exposure to bullying at work.

### **Research Questions**

**Q1.** Are the public sector employees being bullied in an academic setting?

**Q2.** On the basis of gender and hierarchical position, who are mostly the perpetrators of workplace bullying considering the context of public sector organization?

**Q3.** What measures are taken at an organizational level to cope with and discourage such behaviors?

## **Methodology**

The study employs mixed method strategy, where both the qualitative and quantitative strategies are used (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Also the study opts for a convergent, cross-sectional research design, as the data is gathered once and simultaneously for both the strategies that are then analyzed separately to look for any consistencies or discrepancies in the findings (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Bell & Bryman, 2007; Saunders, 2011).

Mixed method strategy, also known as triangulation, when employed, helps in exploring multiple facets regarding workplace bullying, as the information that one method fails to gather is collected by employing the other method (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). Under the study, the data gathered quantitatively is triangulated through qualitative data sources to increase accuracy and credibility of the findings (Hussein, 2009; Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012).

The philosophical stance of pragmatism is generally viewed as the most popular paradigm for mixed method research as it facilitates collaboration and cooperation between the two strategies and is therefore deemed suitable for the study (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010; Wilson, 2010).

## **Population & sampling**

The University of the Punjab forms the case for the study therefore the faculty members form the population and the faculty members at the Lahore campuses form the sample as the faculty from all the campuses could not be approached due to certain resource constrains.

The study follows a two-step sampling approach where in the first step a census was conducted where the departments of the university formed the unit of analysis. In the second step, convenience sampling technique was followed, where the data was gathered from respondents upon their availability at the campus, forming the unit of analysis for the study. For interviews, study opts for purposive sampling, as the heads of the departments/institution were selected for interviews as they are not only the representative of their respective departments but also prove to be a great source of information to verify the prevalence of bullying and to gain insights into the organizational policies and procedures for dealing with bullying behaviors (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015).

## **Data Collection and Tools**

For quantitative data collection questionnaires were floated by the researcher herself to gather the responses from the teaching staff. The questionnaire used (Appendix-1) to determine the bullying experiences of the respondents was the Negative Acts Questionnaire's Revised version (NAQ-R) consisting of 23 items as developed by Einarsen et al. (2009). The respondents were asked to specify how often they have been exposed to workplace bullying on 22 negative acts, based on behavioral experience method, on a five point Likert's scale with an additional 23<sup>rd</sup> item which is based on the self-labeling method. Einarsen et al. (2009, p.27) suggest that the

NAQ-R can be “construed as work-related bullying, person-related bullying and physical intimidation”. The current study also employs NAQ-R as a three dimension or factor scale of bullying at workplace.

Qualitative data was gathered using semi-structured interviews with open ended questions that helped in triangulating the data gather using the questionnaire and also to collect information related to anti-bullying organizational policies (see Appendix-2).

## Results and Analysis

The statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS for quantitative data analysis. Multiple response analysis was used to determine if the faculty members at the university are being bullied at their workplace. Independent sample t-tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were used to determine the association of perceived bullying experiences among the respondents and the socio-demographic variables.

Under the current study the 22 items on the instrument had a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 reflecting high internal consistency of the scale. Cronbach’s alpha was also calculated considering the 23<sup>rd</sup> item and the value stayed the same, implying that the scale used had high internal consistency either way.

Einarsen et al. (2009) suggests that the tool had a pre-established content validity. However, the study evaluated the criterion validity where the correlations between the three dimensions or factors was high positive and statistically significant. Also, person and work related bullying dimensions had the highest positive significant correlation, indicating that those who are exposed to work-related bullying also experienced person-related bullying at work (Table 1)

**Table 1**  
*Criterion Validity of the Dimensions of NAQ-R*

		Work	Person	Physical
Work	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	205		
Person	Pearson Correlation	.712	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	205	205	
Physical	Pearson Correlation	.443	.681	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	205	205	205

**Table 2**  
**Respondents' Profile**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender of the respondent	Male	117	57.1	57.1	57.1
	Female	88	42.9	42.9	100.0
	Total	205	100.0	100.0	
Age of the respondent	20-29	74	36.1	36.1	36.1
	30-39	84	41.0	41.0	77.1
	40-49	32	15.6	15.6	92.7
	50 and above	15	7.3	7.3	100.0
	Total	205	100.0	100.0	
Professional experience of the respondent	less than 5	56	27.3	27.3	27.3
	6-9	67	32.7	32.7	60.0
	10-14	54	26.3	26.3	86.3
	15-19	8	3.9	3.9	90.2
	20 and Above	20	9.8	9.8	
	Total	205	100.0	100.0	

According to the latest Fact Book issued by the University, the total number of faculty at both the campuses in Lahore is 1102. A total of 205 complete responses were received out of which 57 % were male and 42% were female respondents, an exact representation of the gender based segregation of the faculty. Majority of the respondents, 41%, belonged from the age group of 30-39 years, where majority of the respondents had a professional experience of 6-9 years at their current workplace (33%) (Table 2).

The prevalence of bullying was determined by adopting the criteria as developed by Leymann (1996) that helps in identifying the targets of workplace bullying. According to this criterion, which is based on behavioral approach method, an individual must experience at least one negative act per week in order to be labeled as a target of bullying. Based on this criterion, out of 205 respondents, 117 or 56 percent of the respondents reported being bullied at least once per week and are thus classified as targets of bullying at workplace.

The comparison of mean scores helped in determining the dominant form of bullying, which is person-related bullying ( $M=29.292$ ,  $SD=9.129$ ). And the subservient form is physical bullying ( $M=3.268$ ,  $SD=91.587$ ). These results revealed that the respondents are exposed to bullying behaviors that are mostly personal in nature and majorly consists of verbal abuse and threats. As mentioned before, in an academic setting one's personal achievements and competencies play significant role in his or her progression, therefore, the perpetrator mostly goes for bullying the target personally to damage their reputation or create hurdles in their way to success.

**Table 3**  
*Statistics For Dominant Form of Bullying*

	Work	Person	Physical
Mean	17.1659	29.2927	3.2683
Std. Deviation	5.30093	9.12936	1.58770

Among person related bullying, the most commonly experienced behaviors involved the “spreading of gossips and rumors about you” (M=2.63, SD=1.294), followed by “being ignore or excluded” at work (M=2.55, SD=1.242) and “persistent criticism of your work and effort” (M=2.41, SD=1.084)

An independent t-test was performed to find out if the male faculty members are exposed to bullying, more often than the female faculty members. The most significant assumption of homogeneity of variance was determined through Levene’s test that is performed simultaneously with the t-test. The assumption was satisfied as the significance level was greater than 0.05 (p= 0.122).

The result of t-test depicted a significant difference among the mean scores for male (M=51.55, SD=15.267) and female teachers (M=47.31, SD=13.092);  $t(205) = 2.090$ ,  $p = 0.038$ , two-tailed. These results suggest that the gender of faculty members at the university plays a part in their exposure to bullying at work and also identifies that the male faculty members experience bullying more frequently than the female faculty member at work. However, another reason for the greater means score of male faculty might be due to the sampling procedure adopted where the ratio of males is greater than the females, done with an aim to exactly represent the population.

**Table 4**  
*Group Statistics of T-test*

Gender of the Respondent	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	117	51.55	15.267	1.411
Female	88	47.31	13.092	1.396

Pallant (2010) suggests that ANOVA is useful when the researcher intends to compare the mean scores of variable with more than two groups. So, one-way ANOVA was used to test third and fourth hypotheses.

The assumption of homogeneity of variance was first tested but not satisfied therefore, the robust test of equality of means is considered and the significance level as suggested by Welch test was used (Zimmerman, 2004).

The third hypothesis was tested to determine whether the faculty members with greater work experience in the university perceived more frequent exposure to bullying than the employees with lesser work experience. The results of one way ANOVA revealed that a significant difference exists among the respondents based on their professional experience

( $p=.000$ ) (Table 5). The respondents were divided into five groups based on their experience and it was identified that the faculty members with 10-14 years of experience had the highest mean score ( $M= 57.72$ ,  $SD= 15.053$ ), followed by faculty members of 6-9 years of experience ( $M= 48.81$ ,  $SD= 16.7$ ). Also, those with highest experience (20 and above years) had minimum mean score ( $M=42.2$ ,  $SD= 7.53$ ) (see Table 6). Implying, faculty members at university with the highest work experience perceive minimum exposure to bullying when at work.

**Table 5*****Robust Tests of Equality of Means***

	Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	8.692	4	39.963	.000
Brown-Forsythe	7.496	4	47.166	.000

**Table 6*****Professional Experience of The Respondents***

No. of Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
less than 5	56	46.23	8.403
6-9	67	48.81	16.784
10-14	54	57.72	15.049
15-19	8	46.75	16.482
20 and above	20	42.20	7.530
Total	205	49.73	14.494

The fourth hypothesis was also supported as the faculty members from different age groups did perceived varying exposure to bullying ( $p=.001$ ). As the respondents within 40-49 years of age perceived the highest frequent exposure to bullying ( $M=54.28$ ,  $SD=16.581$ ) followed by those from 30-39 years of age ( $M=51.71$ ,  $SD=15.328$ ). However, faculty members with age 50 years and above had the least frequent exposure to bullying at work ( $M=41$ ,  $SD=8.367$ ) (Table 7).

**Table 7*****Descriptive For Age of The Respondents***

Age Range	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
20-29	74	47.27	12.423	1.444
30-39	84	51.71	15.328	1.672
40-49	32	54.28	16.581	2.931
50 and above	15	41.00	8.367	2.160
Total	205	49.73	14.494	1.012

These results of hypothesis three and four signifies that faculty members belonging in the middle-age and experience category had the highest exposure to bullying at work. This might be probably due to their need to be employed at their current organization and fear or risk associated with finding another job which makes them more vulnerable to the bullying behaviors at work. Also, senior most faculty members (on the basis of age and professional experience) reported

lowest frequency of exposure to workplace bullying and a valid reason for this might be their seniority status because of which they are respected by both their colleagues and students and acknowledges the valuable knowledge, skills and experience that they are capable of sharing.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> item based on a self labeling method, more than half of the respondents (52.2%) labeled themselves as victims of bullying at workplace. Based on the frequency, 28.8% of the respondents picked for being rarely bullied, followed by 14.6% of respondents who picked “now and then” and 6.3% who labeled themselves as victim who face bullying “almost daily”. However, only 2.4% of the respondents picked being the victim of bullying “several times per week”.

**Table 8**

***Bullying Experiences At Work Over The Last Six Months***

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	98	47.8	47.8	47.8
Yes, but only rarely	59	28.8	28.8	76.6
Yes, now and then	30	14.6	14.6	91.2
Yes, several times per week	5	2.4	2.4	93.7
Yes, almost daily	13	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	205	100.0	100.0	

Furthermore, majority of the respondents (27.2%) reported their colleagues as the perceived perpetrators at workplace (Table 9). Professional jealousy and lack of respect among the staff members can be a prominent reason for horizontal bullying (Shaw, 2017). Also, considering the gender, males were perceived as mostly the perpetrators (51.7%) at the university (Table 10)

**Table 9**

***Perceived Perpetrator(s) of Bullying Behaviors At Workplace***

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Immediate Superior	33	16.0	23.6	23.6
Organizational Manager/Superior	28	13.6	20.0	43.6
Colleagues	56	27.2	40.0	83.6
Subordinates	7	3.4	5.0	88.6
Students	6	2.9	4.3	92.9
Others	10	4.9	7.1	100.0

**Table 10**

***Gender of the perpetrator(s)***

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male perpetrators	106	51.7	63.1	63.1
Female perpetrators	62	30.2	36.9	100.0
Total	168	82.0	100.0	

**Discussion**

The study identified that the problem of workplace bullying prevails among the university’s faculty members by following the criteria of identifying targets of bullying as developed by Leymann (1996) and was also used by Einarsen et al. (2009) and Nielsen et al. (2009). According to this method employed by the study, 56% of the respondents were identified as targets of bullying, whereas, under the self-labeling method 52% of the respondents labeled themselves as being exposed to bullying at workplace. The results are almost the same under both the methods, with a minor difference of 4%, representing that more than half of the respondents perceived being exposed to bullying and thus can be labeled as victims of workplace bullying in an academic setting. One reason for the difference of percentage of prevalence observed under the two methods is suggested by Nielsen et al. (2009), that the percentage of victims identified under the self-labeling method may be under estimated when a definition of bullying is provided. However, these results are similar with the findings of Hanif & Bashir (2011) where half of the respondents reported being bullied at their workplace in the telecommunication sector of Pakistan. Also, Rutherford & Rissel, (2004) examined that half of the respondents perceived being bullied at work, which is near to the findings of the current study.

The dominant form of bullying identified by the study was person-related bullying, which consists of low to medium intensity bullying behaviors, and is in compliance with findings of Hussain & Aslam (2015). Since an individual’s skills and achievements are a major contributing factor to progress in an academic setting, therefore, the perpetrator tries to deprive the target of necessary information and resources or may spread false rumors regarding the target with a basic aim to isolate or humiliate him/her. Person related bullying adversely impacts the target’s mental health and work performance (Hussain & Aslam, 2015). Also, bullying behaviors that involved physical aggression were not absolutely absent but occurred rarely. These findings are also consistent with Charilaos, Michael, Chryssa, Panagiota, George & Christina’s (2015) findings where physical abuse was experienced by respondents but occurred very rarely. It is important to mention that the studies considered for analyzing and comparing the findings above have used similar scale, NAQ-R, to measure workplace bullying by Einarsen et al. (2009).

Under the study, horizontal bullying was also identified where colleagues are the perceived perpetrators, however, multiple studies found immediate supervisor or manager as bully (Hanif & Bashir, 2011; Nielsen et al., 2009; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). However, Hanif & Bashir (2011) found colleagues as second highest perceived perpetrators of bullying at workplace. The qualitative data also revealed that mostly such incidents occur among employees on same hierarchical level. Furthermore, Keashly (2012, p.53) explains such behaviors occur among employees in an academic setting when they want to damage one’s professional

reputation or to deprive them of the resources needed to work effectively, resulting in targets' poor performance.

The effect of certain socio-demographic factors was also considered, where gender came out as a significant factor. The study identified that the male employees are mostly the perpetrator targeting their male colleagues. However, the exposure of female employees to bullying was very rare and the incidents where females were the targets of bullying, the perpetrator was also a female. These findings are exactly the same as the results of Matthiesen (2006). Erturk (2013) also found that men experienced bullying more often than women at workplace. However, most of the studies concerned with exploring exposure to bullying at workplace on the basis of gender also found no significant difference (Koval, 2014; Hanif, & Bashir, 2011; Hussain & Aslam, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to mention here that the context plays a vital role in which the study is performed and the findings may therefore vary.

Furthermore, socio demographic factors like age, and professional experience of the respondents also showed significant difference in their exposure to bullying, where middle aged respondents in the middle of their career experienced higher exposure to workplace bullying which was consistent with findings of Zabrodska & Kveton (2013). A study conducted in the Pakistani context mentions that even middle aged employee with a considerable experience has to put up with workplace bullying due to poor job opportunities and risk associated with losing the current job (Hussain & Aslam, 2015). On the other hand, the interviews revealed that the young employees at the beginning of their career are more vulnerable to bullying at workplace. However, both the methods suggested that senior faculty members (on the basis of age and professional experience) experience least exposure to bullying and these findings are consistent with the findings of Moreno-Jiménez, Rodríguez-Muñoz, Salin & Morante (2008) that employees with most professional experience faced less bullying than their younger colleagues with less experience.

Furthermore, the study also describes the policies and procedures that exist at an organizational level for holding the perpetrators accountable for their behaviors and actions. Various departments either formed or already had disciplinary committees to take action against the perpetrator, once when the accused has been proved guilty. The decisions and actions are taken collectively by the committee members in the light of the policies existing. However, the policies do not specifically talk about behaviors that fall under the category of bullying to ensure the accuracy of decision taken. Another reason for high prevalence rates of bullying identified was no or poor implementation of already existing policies and under reporting of incidents. As sharing or reporting the incident to those in authority is the first step to penalize the perpetrator and without which the efforts of the organization to curb such behavior would not be of any benefit. Moreover, penalizing the perpetrator is not the only solution to discourage bullying behaviors but the adoption of soft approach was primarily preferred by the organizations. The decisions of the disciplinary committees ranged from counseling the perpetrator to cancellation of their job contract. Number of factors played a role in influencing the decision of the committee, which primarily involved the existing evidence against the perpetrator and the type or form of bullying behavior of the perpetrator.

## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

It is the basic right of the employees to be able to work in an environment that offers safety and enables them to work to the best of their abilities. Therefore, organizations are responsible to develop policies, allowing people to report incidents as they occur. The policies must be very clear in terms of what constitutes bullying and what steps the target needs to follow to report. Also policies must not only be aimed at punishing the perpetrator but they can be used to promote positive social interactions among the employees, developing a cohesive organizational culture based on respect.

The adoption of context specific and practical approaches may prove to be of great significance in curbing the occurrences of such behaviors. It is therefore suggested that the organizations should develop and implement extensive training sessions to inculcate the feeling of harmony by imparting conflict and stress management trainings can prove to be of great benefit. Also, the development of emotional intelligence among the employees can help significantly to address this problem (Michael, 1999).

Moreover, the policies and procedures developed would prove to be effective when employees are aware of the currently existing rules or laws of the organization or country. The employees must have an understanding of what are their rights and obligations. Despite various steps taken by organizations, high prevalence rates are experienced demanding the development of a formal support system majorly involving access to free counseling sessions.

The current laws existing to discourage the negative behaviors at work cater behaviors either of low intensity, like anti discriminatory policies, or of very severe intensity, for example protection against harassment at workplace act 2010. It is therefore recommended that the development of policies specifically aimed at curbing bullying behaviors at workplace can significantly help in decreasing such incidents as it involves behaviors of medium to high intensity that adversely impacts target's mental and physical health.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1 Questionnaire**

#### Demographic information

1. Gender:

Male  Female

2. Age :

20 - 29

30 – 39

40 - 49

50 & above

3. Basic Pay Scale :

17

18

19

20

21

4. Professional experience (years) :

Less than 5

5 – 9

10-14

- 15-19
- 20 & above

The following behaviors are often seen as examples of negative behavior in the workplace. How often have you been subjected to the following negative acts at work?

Please circle the number that best corresponds with your experience over the last six months:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	Now and then	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
1) Someone withholding information which affects your performance	1	2	3	4	5
2) Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	1	2	3	4	5
3) Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	1	2	3	4	5
4) Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	1	2	3	4	5
5) Spreading of gossip and rumors about you	1	2	3	4	5
6) Being ignored or excluded (being 'sent to Coventry')	1	2	3	4	5
7) Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person (i.e. habits and background), your attitudes or your private life	1	2	3	4	5
8) Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger (or rage)	1	2	3	4	5
9) Intimidating behaviour such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way	1	2	3	4	5
10) Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job	1	2	3	4	5
11) Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
12) Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach	1	2	3	4	5
13) Persistent criticism of your work and effort	1	2	3	4	5
14) Having your opinions and views ignored	1	2	3	4	5
15) Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get on with	1	2	3	4	5
16) Being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines	1	2	3	4	5
17) Having allegations made against you	1	2	3	4	5

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18) Excessive monitoring of your work	1	2	3	4	5
19) Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)	1	2	3	4	5
20) Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm	1	2	3	4	5
21) Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	1	2	3	4	5
22) Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse	1	2	3	4	5

23. Have you been bullied at work? We define bullying as a situation where one or several individuals persistently over a period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of bullying has difficulty in defending him or herself against these actions. We will not refer to a one-off incident as bullying.

Using the above definition, please state whether you have been bullied at work over the last six months?

No

Yes, but only rarely

Yes, now and then

Yes several times per week

Yes, almost daily

24. If your answer to the previous question was «Yes», please tick the appropriate box(es) below to state who you were bullied by:

My immediate superior

Other superiors/managers in the organization

Colleagues

Subordinates

Customers/patients/students, etc.

Others

25. Please state the gender, who is mostly the perpetrator(s):

Male perpetrators

Female perpetrators

**NAQ-R – Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised**

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**Appendix 2**  
**Interview Guide**

Q. What policies and procedures are adopted by the various public sector departments to discourage the practice of any verbal or physical aggression or abuse?

Q. Has there been any incident of negative behavior or aggressive acts (comprising of verbal or non-verbal) reported to you, during the last six months?

If yes then,

- a) What had the perpetrator done?
- b) What were the consequences faced by the perpetrator?
- c) Has any other incident occurred since then?

If no then,

- a) Are there any proper channels/procedures developed to report such incidents?
- b) What factors in your view had contributed in developing employee-friendly environment?
- c) However, it is quite possible any incident might have occurred but the target must have failed to report any, why such incidents often go unreported?

Q. Is there any specific person employed, who is responsible to deal/handle with such issues?  
(To whom the victim can report to)

Q. Does the organization provide support to the victim after the incidence in the form of stress or conflict management or any psychological support to help them recover from the issue encountered?

Q. Who in your opinion are more exposed negative behaviors at workplace on the basis of gender?

Q. Who in your opinion is the source of negative acts or behaviors at workplace, male or female employees?

Q. In your opinion, what steps do you think can be taken by the organization to curb such behaviors at the workplace?