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Workplace bullying and its impact on quality of work life

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Abstract

Introduction: Workplace bullying is an unpleasant experience that could have adverse consequences. It includes behavior aimed at attacking the lives of individuals related to work, and is usually characterized by giving unreasonable work deadlines, reducing or eliminating responsibilities, and excessive supervision of work. The organization also suffer from the destructive effects of bullying. Team members become uncomfortable, stressed, unfocused, and do not even have a good commitment. It affects the organization's performance, leads to mental and emotional damage, and reduces the quality of work life.
Objectives: This study aims to examine the consequences of workplace bullying and discover the determinants of the quality of work life in relation to bullying.
Methods: This study involved 178 public service employees at the local government in Medan, Indonesia. Data was collected using the QWL scale and Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R). A quantitative research design was implemented, and the derived data were analyzed using stepwise regression.
Results: Personal bullying negatively and significantly correlated with QWL (β = –0.245, p < 0.01). Work-related bullying significantly correlated with QWL (β = –0.210, p < 0.05), and physical intimidation significantly correlated with QWL (β = –0.285, p < 0.01).
Conclusions: The study showed that the employer is responsible for identifying and managing the risks of bullying at work. The employer should implement clear policies concerning bullying, raise awareness of related issues among the workforce, and set standards for workplace behavior.

Keywords: Bullying; Personal bullying; Physical intimidation; QWL; Work-related bullying

Introduction

The workplace is an integral aspect of an employee's life, and has an impact on his or her life and the community's well-being. The average adult spends much of their time working – and this can equate to up to a quarter or a third of their life. As much as a fifth to a quarter of the reasons for adult life satisfaction can be accredited to work satisfaction (Zulkarnain, 2013). A good workplace is intended to support employees' physical and psychological well-being (Kelloway and Day, 2005).

Nevertheless, the pressure arising from one's workplace, such as work-related stress, low levels of occupational safety and health, and the inadequacy of some other facilities can impact on the quality of the employee's work life (Kiriago and Bwisa, 2013). Jerome (2013) explained that the quality of work life is concerned with various aspects of the work environment that bring about the development of human resources efficiently. Environmental factors (such as physical, security and work conditions), relationship factors (such as relationships in the working group, and between workers and management), social change, technology, and labor markets are all integral to the quality of work life (Zulkarnain, 2013). In particular, public service sectors require their employees to

execute multiple functions in challenging work environments. This places the burden of work overload on employees and has adverse effects on their work life, as well as affecting their personal life, mental well-being, and health – both directly and indirectly (Ashwini and Anand, 2014).

Chinomona and Dhurup (2013) indicate that the quality of work life (QWL) can influence job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and determine the ability of employees to cope with their work. The quality of work life does not only influence the employees' job satisfaction, but also affects their life satisfaction, including their family life, social life, financial situation and general well-being (Zulkarnain, 2013). Another study found that the quality of work life of an organization can even contribute to the strength of its culture. The experiences of employees in the workplace are connected to the quality of work life (Moradi et al., 2014). The various changes which took place in the organization impacted employees' behavior. The influence of changes in working conditions makes the employees feel threatened, anxious, and uncomfortable (Zulkarnain, 2013).

Daly et al. (2003) indicate that workplace bullying is one of the factors that can affect the quality of work life. Workplace bullying is a repetitive behavior carried out on individual targets. It includes actions such as verbal abuse, threatening

directives, and humiliating, intimidating or sabotaging workers in relation to the job (Daniel, 2009). When employees are victims of inappropriate treatment such as workplace bullying, they might feel that their expectations of fair treatment are not being satisfied by the organization. As a result, they may behave negatively in a way that will be harmful to the organization. Bullying occurs when a leader, boss, or co-worker abuses their power (Donnellan, 2006) and this has a direct impact on employee health and wellbeing (Lehto and Pärnänen, 2007).

The objective of this study is to explore how workplace bullying influences the quality of work life among public service employees. Firstly, it examines the relationship between workplace bullying and the quality of work life. Secondly, it examines the relationship between work-related bullying, physical intimidation and personal bullying, and the quality of work life.

Literature review

Sirgi et al. (2008) found that quality of work life could improve the quality of life by providing resources and sufficient work following the expectations of employees and reducing conflicts within and outside work, while also increasing the value of the employee's identity (Zulkarnain, 2013). The idea of the quality of work life is related to a philosophy in an organization that tries to improve employees' status, change organizational culture, and improve the physical and spiritual welfare of employees. The quality of work life programs in some organizations make efforts to increase trust, involvement, and problem-solving abilities of workers – and as a result, improve organizational satisfaction (Lau and May, 1998). Emphasis on the objective and tangible factors of life in work environments strengthens the theory that an increase in these factors will lead to an increase in the performances and productivity of employees (Shahbazi, 2009).

Research has shown that an organization that offers a better quality of work life is more likely to have the upper hand in hiring and retaining its valuable workforce (May et al., 1999). Organizations have begun to realize the value of treating their workers properly, not just showing this through the monetary rewards offered to them, but rather by allowing them to grow, develop and be actively involved in the decision-making process within the organization (Tarmizi, 2008). Therefore, quality of work life can enhance organizational effectiveness and satisfy employees' personal needs (Saklani, 2004). Previous studies have indicated that organizations offering a better quality of work life are likely to have the upper hand in hiring and retaining a valuable workforce (May et al., 1999). Employees become attached to their organizations when their expectations are satisfied (Chang, 1999).

The concept of quality of work life promotes efforts to improve employees' well-being at their workplace (Ballou and Godwin, 2007). Employees are given a chance to learn, innovate, and develop their creative potential in harmony with the development of the organization (Hart et al., 2005). Improvement of employee quality of work life has been identified as one of the pivotal issues in guaranteeing the stability of the health system, because high work-life quality is essential to absorbing and preserving staff.

Previous researchers have declared that stressful and poorly organized work environments may promote conditions that can lead to workplace bullying (Agervold and Mikkelsen, 2004). Workplace bullying is not only about isolated incidents of conflict at work; it is more about acts of lengthy negative behavior towards one or more individuals, who think of themselves as inferiors in the situation. Most employees are likely to have experienced negative incidents in one form or another at work (Nielsen et al., 2012). According to Einarsen et al. (2009), workplace bullying is a dynamic escalated conflict involving exchanges between two parties (victim and perpetrator), in which the victim is not an ordinary passive recipient, but rather an active agent who can impact on the process by the way he/she responds to the bullying behavior.

Workplace bullying takes place in the context of an organizational environment that may incite or mollify the occurrence of workplace bullying. It also occurs in the context of a relationship, and both members contribute to that relationship (Hershcovis et al., 2015). Rodríguez-Muñoz et al. (2010) demonstrate that workplace bullying directly affects the health and well-being of employees. Victims of workplace bullying experience significant deterioration in their health and well-being. Cases of increased psychological distress, including anxiety and depression, are reported by these individuals (Hershcovis et al., 2015).

The concept of workplace bullying refers to negative and aggressive interpersonal behavior in the workplace that leads to psychological problems for the victim (Einarsen et al., 2009). According to Einarsen et al. (2009), there are three types of workplace bullying: work-related bullying, personal bullying, and physical intimidation. Work-related bullying refers to acts that make it hard for an employee to fulfill his or her tasks, or situations where the victim is deprived of some or all of their tasks. Person-related bullying refers to acts that are directed toward an individual as a person. Examples of these acts are spreading rumors, slander, neglecting the person's opinions, joking and teasing (Einarsen, 2000).

Meanwhile, physical intimidation is related to physical threats such as disrupting the personal areas of employees, finger-pointing, and all forms of physical violence. Violence is perpetrated by individuals rather than groups of co-workers and in various combinations (e.g., direct, verbal, and active aggression). Violence can also mean a failure to respect a person's privacy and confidentiality. Workplace aggression can easily intensify from nonverbal to physical assault (Farrell, 2001).

Nielsen et al. (2012) found that workplace bullying is connected with extended psychological distress. Vartia (2001) said that in addition to experiencing stress, both the targets and observers of bullying would experience a decrease in confidence levels and will find it hard to execute tasks appropriately. At the extreme level, Simons and Mawn (2012) said that workplace bullying could make employees quit their jobs. When an employee feels like the boss is always criticizing his/her work, this is an instance of work-related bullying. An unlikeable boss causes employees to experience emotions, so they don't want to participate actively in organizational life (Zulkarnain et al., 2017). Workplace bullying is mainly brought about by factors connected to inadequacy in work organizations and the leadership behavior within it. Past research has proven that workplace bullying behaviors are a more significant source of workplace bullying than co-worker sources (Hegney et al., 2003).

Materials and methods

For the samples, 210 questionnaires were shared among public service employee at the local government. 178 questionnaires were submitted and answered entirely. The response rate was 85%. Participants received a written description of the study along with informed consent for the survey.

Measurement

Quality of work life (QWL) scales are developed according to adequate and fair compensations; safe and healthy working conditions; immediate opportunities to use and develop human capacities; opportunities for continued growth and security; social integration and constitutionalism in the work organization; work and total life space; and social relevance of work (Walton, 1975). This scale used the Likert model with five answer choices. Factor analysis of quality of work life scale showed that (1) the loading factor value for adequate and fair compensations ranges from 0.710 to 0.829. (2) The loading factor value for safe and healthy working conditions ranges from 0.662 to 0.833. (3) The loading factor value for immediate opportunities to use and develop human capacities ranges from 0.585 to 0.800. (4) The loading factor value for opportunities for continued growth and security ranges from 0.528 to 0.851. (5) The loading factor value for social integration in the work organization ranges from 0.646 to 0.806. (6) The loading factor value for constitutionalism in the work organization ranges from 0.735 to 0.780. (7) The loading factor value for work and total life space ranges from 0.661 to 0.811; (8) The loading factor value for social relevance of work ranges from 0.501 to 0.778; The Alpha Cronbach coefficient of quality work life scale was 0.934.

The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) consists of three factors of workplace bullying, namely: work-related bullying, personal bullying, and physical intimidation (Einarsen et al., 2009). Respondents were asked to respond using five-point scaled response options. The factor analysis of the Workplace bullying scale showed that (1) The loading factor value for work-related bullying ranges from 0.721 to 0.800; (2) The loading factor value for personal bullying ranges from 0.681 to 0.888; (3) The loading factor value for physical intimidation ranges from 0.687 to 0.846. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient of work-related bullying was 0.856, personal bullying was 0.915, and physical intimidation was 0.910.

Results and discussion

This study involved 178 public service employees. The data is illustrated in Table 1. Their ages ranged from 19–59 years and the average age was 33.47 years (SD = 9.42). Most participants (96.6%) were male. In terms of length of service, half of the participants had been in service for over 10 years (48.88%). More than half of the participants were married (78.8%). The data is illustrated in Table 1.

The result of the Pearson correlation analysis showed that workplace bullying, work-related bullying, personal bullying, and physical intimidation significantly correlated with the quality of work life. Detailed results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of participants

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Age		
17–30 years	5	2.8
31–44 years	128	71.9
45–59 years	45	25.3
Length of service		
Under 2 years	16	8.99
2–10 years	75	42.13
Over 10 years	87	48.88
Marital status		
Married	140	78.8
Unmarried	38	21.3
Gender		
Male	172	96.6
Female	6	3.4
Total	178	100.0

Table 2. Correlation among selected variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Quality of work life	106.19	17.40	1								
2. Workplace bullying	27.92	12.11	−0.327**	1							
3. Work-related bullying	8.42	4.00	−0.275**	0.898**	1						
4. Personal bullying	8.95	4.39	−0.245**	0.923**	0.755**	1					
5. Physical intimidation	9.06	4.38	−0.312**	0.939**	0.824**	0.800**	1				
6. Age	33.47	9.42	0.064	−0.104	−0.123	−0.020	−0.120	1			
7. Length of service	13.24	8.64	0.041	−0.099	−0.119	−0.021	−0.111	0.982**	1		
8. Marital status	1.21	0.41	0.012	0.121	0.062	0.070	0.115	−0.522**	−0.520**	1	
9. Gender	1.03	0.18	0.059	0.048	−0.059	0.017	0.074	−0.033	−0.034	−0.021	1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

The stepwise multiple regression analyses were summarized into three major steps. Step 1 showed personal bullying negatively and significantly correlated with QWL (β = −0.245, $p < 0.01$). The inclusion of this variable explained 6 percent of QWL. In Step 2, work-related bullying significantly correlated with QWL (β = −0.210, $p < 0.05$). Step 3 found that physical intimidation significantly correlated with QWL (β = −0.285, $p < 0.01$). This result proves that physical intimidation contributed to QWL. More comprehensive information is shown in Table 3.

The results proved a correlation between workplace bullying and the quality of work life, indicating that workplace bullying negatively impacts the quality of work life. This research also supports the opinion of Daly et al. (2003) that bullying in the workplace is one of the factors that influence the quality of working life. Nazir et al. (2011) found that bullying and other negative behaviors in the workplace correlate to the quality of work life. That is, the higher the level of negative behavior in the workplace, the lower the quality of work life. Workplace bullying may cause extensive health problems for employees

Table 3. Results for stepwise regression analysis

Variables	B	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F
Quality of work life						
Step 1						
Constant	115.57	3.07		0.060	0.060	11.210**
Personal bullying	−1.048	0.313	−0.245**			
Step 2						
Constant	117.18	3.169		0.019	0.079	7.488**
Personal bullying	−0.368	0.474	−0.086			
Work-related bullying	−0.913	0.481	−0.210*			
Step 3						
Constant	117.56	3.149		020	0.099	6.369**
Personal bullying	−0.137	0.536	−0.032			
Work-related bullying	−0.280	0.576	−0.064			
Physical intimidation	−1.131	0.574	−0.285**			

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

exposed to this hazard, including physical and psychological illnesses and injuries. It can affect co-workers, clients, customers, business associates, family members, and friends.

Alazab (2011) also demonstrated that bullying or exhibiting negative behaviors in the workplace has an impact on the quality of work life, specifically in lowering the opinions and thoughts of a person, shouting, rejecting a reasonable request, and criticizing them in front of other workers. Opportunities to receive and give opinions, ideas or evaluations in the workplace are correlated to aspects of quality of work life in workers' capacity building (Walton, 1975). It improves the quality of work life in line with the quality of communication through the involvement and participation of workers in realizing the vision and mission of organizations.

There are two explanations for workplace bullying influencing the quality of working life. Firstly, bullying is correlated to leadership within an agency. The division of positions within an agency usually consists of levels that describe authority. Abuse of authority is one of the most common deviations (Barker and Carter, 1994). A person may use their position of power or their physical dominance to intimidate those who are perceived to be weaker. The bullying usually relies upon the perceived superiority of the bullies over their targets. This condition influences the quality of work life because the leadership style is perceived as positive, and communication that is considered well-established between superiors and subordinates will support the attainment of a good quality of work life in every worker (Yeo and Li, 2011). Einarsen et al. (2009) found that bullying in the workplace is connected to an autocratic leadership style, a leader who does not permit the workers to participate in decision-making and Laissez-Faire leadership, and a leader who is uninterested in the roles performed by workers who become his subordinates. The anti-bullying work environment can be attained through leaders who are ready to motivate and give social support to their employees. Social support is one of the paramount and essential elements in life capable of eliminating the adverse effects of a change in environment (Zulkarnain et al., 2019a). This will help employees to effectively settle into the organization and enjoy a good work life (McShane and Von Glinow, 2005).

Second, bullying is associated with violent conduct in the workplace. Violence can come in the forms of physical or verbal abuse (Daniel, 2009). The violence exhibited by public service employees in performing their tasks may include physical violence, psychological violence, and even legal violence. These

working conditions are predicted to threaten the quality of the employee's work life (Ellis and Pompili, 2002). Stressful work environments seem to nurture situations that increase the chances of the occurrence of workplace bullying. Bullying seems to thrive in workplaces where there are high demands, low resources, and ineffectual leaders (Hershcovis et al., 2015).

Various studies have proven that violence – which is a form of bullying behavior in the workplace – directly influences the health and wellbeing of employees. It clearly shows that there is a correlation between exposure to bullying and signs of reduced well-being and psychological and somatic health problems. Moreover, the victims themselves generally believe that their health problems are correlated with their exposure to bullying (Einersan et al., 2009). Djurkovic et al. (2004) discovered a negative impact that causes health problems because of bullying behavior in the workplace. Then, Golpalvar and Rafizadeh's (2014) study found a connection between bullying in the workplace and the psychological and spiritual wellness of workers. Physical and mental health is an integral part of employment, family life and employees' quality of life in general. This description indicates that negative behavior in the workplace affects the quality of work life because of the non-fulfillment of the employees' expectations in terms of health and wellbeing of an employee. People with low levels of wellbeing tend to be unable to accept kindness both in the present and in the past (Zulkarnain et al., 2020). The discussed effects of workplace bullying have obvious consequences for organizations, as employees undergoing emotional and physiological impairments are likelier to be absent because of sickness (Hershcovis et al., 2015). It is clear that bullying can cause an individual to feel anxious and humiliated, and the inability to cope with it may cause frustration (Zulkarnain et al., 2019b).

Conclusions

The quality of work life can improve the quality of life by providing adequate resources and jobs in line with employee expectations. It can also decrease the occurrence of conflicts – both in and outside work. This result implies that workplace bullying is a workplace risk factor and has unfavourable impacts; thus preventing it should be on the managers' agenda. More specifically, our analysis proved that bullying has serious implications and can influence the decision of individuals to

engage in unethical behaviours. Bullying is unacceptable in the workplace and should not be tolerated in any form. Workplace bullying is also connected to health and safety at work; thus it should be proactively handled to guarantee the safety and security of employees. Bullying can have adverse effects on the health and safety of employees; therefore organizations should develop bullying prevention policies that will make it known to employees that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Social support at work can change employee per-

ception of stressors into something that can be dealt with and resolved. Employees are encouraged to engage in developing safe work procedures to deal with bullying and, provided it is safe to do so, should report cases of bullying to an appropriate person at the workplace.

Ethical aspects and conflict of interests
The authors have no conflict of interests to declare in relation to the research, authorship, and/or its publication.

Šikana na pracovišti a její dopad na kvalitu pracovního života

Souhrn
Úvod: Šikana na pracovišti je nepříjemnou zkušeností, která může mít nepříznivé důsledky. Zahrnuje chování zaměřené na útok na život jednotlivců související s prací a obvykle se vyznačuje udílením nepřiměřených pracovních termínů, odebíráním pracovních aktivit a nadměrným dohledem nad prací. Destruktivními účinky šikany trpí také organizace. Členové týmu se stávají nepříjemnými, stresovanými, nesoustředěnými a nemají ani dobré pracovní nasazení. To ovlivňuje výkonnost organizace, vede k psychickému a emocionálnímu poškození a snižuje kvalitu pracovního života.
Cíl: Cílem této studie je prozkoumat důsledky šikany na pracovišti a zjistit determinanty kvality pracovního života ve vztahu k šikaně.
Metody: Této studie se zúčastnilo 178 zaměstnanců ve veřejných službách v místní samosprávě v Medanu v Indonésii. Údaje byly shromážděny pomocí škály QWL a revidovaného dotazníku negativních činů (NAQ-R). Byl použit kvantitativní výzkumný design a získaná data byla analyzována pomocí postupné regrese.
Výsledek: Osobní šikana negativně a významně korelovala s QWL ($\beta = -0,245$, $p < 0,01$). Šikana na pracovišti významně korelovala s QWL ($\beta = -0,210$, $p < 0,05$) a fyzické zastrašování významně korelovalo s QWL ($\beta = -0,285$, $p < 0,01$).
Závěr: Studie ukázala, že zaměstnavatel je zodpovědný za identifikaci a řízení rizik šikany na pracovišti. Zaměstnavatel by měl zavést jasná pravidla týkající se šikany, zvýšit povědomí zaměstnanců o souvisejících otázkách a stanovit normy chování na pracovišti.

Klíčová slova: fyzické zastrašování; osobní šikana; QWL; šikana; šikana na pracovišti

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