

**Workplace bullying: the employee health and wellness response
of a provincial department in the Limpopo Province**

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FOREWORD

This dissertation is presented in article format in accordance with the guidelines as set out in the Manual for Postgraduate studies 2010

INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

The *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* publishes articles, short communications, book reviews and commentary on articles already published from any field of Social Work. Contributions relevant to Social Work from other disciplines are also considered.

Standards for publication:

- Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans.
- All contributions will be critically reviewed by at least two referees on whose advice contributions will be accepted or rejected by the editorial committee.
- All refereeing is strictly confidential.
- Manuscripts may be returned to the authors if extensive revision is required or if the style or presentation does not conform to the Journal practice.
- Commentary on articles already published in the Journal must be submitted with appropriate captions, the name(s) and address (es) of the author(s) and preferably not exceed 5 pages.
- The whole manuscript plus one clear copy as well as a diskette with all the text, preferably in MS Windows (Word or WordPerfect) or ASCII must be submitted. Manuscripts must be typed double spaced on one side of A4 paper only.
- Use the Harvard system for references.
- Short references in the text: When word-for-word quotations, facts or arguments from other sources are cited, the surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "... (Berger, 1967:12).
- More details about sources referred to in the text should appear at the end of the manuscript under the caption "References".
- The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to the surnames of the authors.

ABSTRACT

Key terms: Workplace bullying, employee health and wellness, Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Limpopo province

Workplace bullying has become the most serious contemporary issue that negatively affects organisations socially and economically. Today organisations are faced with the financial burden associated with high staff turnover, absenteeism, low morale, high medical costs and poor performance resulting from bullying in the workplace. Therefore, organisations are focusing on ways and means to address this particular problem.

The aim of the study was to explore the subjective experiences of employees regarding workplace bullying and the response of the employee health and wellness section of the Limpopo provincial Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism. This research was also prompted by the challenges the researcher faced as social worker in the Employee Health and Wellness office of said department. The lack of South African research and literature studies on bullying and the response by the public sector also motivated the researcher to conduct the study.

The exploratory paradigm was utilised in this study, since limited information was available on the nature and extent of bullying as well as on the response of Employee Health and Wellness office at a provincial department in the Limpopo province. The qualitative research approach was utilised in this study, and questionnaires were used to collect data needed for the project. A purposive sampling method was used to select suitable respondents for the study. Utilising questionnaires, the researcher interviewed 19 employees who had experienced bullying in the department.

The research revealed that all of the respondents in the sample had experienced bullying and received support from the departmental Employee Health and Wellness section. Most respondents had a high regard for employee health and wellness services as means of support to cope during difficult times in their careers. The research findings, however, also indicated that some respondents sought help from outside. The study also revealed that more effort should be focused on implementing employee health and wellness programmes as preventative approach. It is further recommended that employee health and wellness programmes should be pro-actively applied to include educational workshops and awareness

programmes on the impact of workplace bullying and its associated economical and psychological implications on both the organisation and the individual in order to prevent it.

OPSOMMING

SLEUTELTERME: Werkplekafknouery, werknemersgesondheid- en welstand, Departement vir Ekonomiese Ontwikkeling, Omgewing en Toerisme, Limpopoprovinsie.

Werkplekafknouery het 'n ernstigste, kontemporêre kwessie geword wat organisasies maatskaplik en ekonomies beïnvloed. Organisasies staar hedendaags die finansiële las van hoë werknemersomset, afwesigheid, lae moraal, hoë mediese kostes en swak werksverrigting in die gesig vanweë afknouery in die werkplek. Gevolglik fokus organisasies op metodes en prosedures om hierdie probleme die hoof te bied.

Die doel van hierdie studie is om die subjektiewe ervarings van werknemers ten opsigte van werkplekafknouery, sowel as die reaksie van die werknemersgesondheid- en welstandafdeling van Limpopo se Departement vir Ekonomiese Ontwikkeling, Omgewing en Toerisme, te ondersoek. Die navorser was gemotiveerd om hierdie onderwerp te selekteer as gevolg van die uitdagings wat haar as maatskaplike werker in die kantoor van die Werknemersgesondheid- en Welstandafdeling van die genoemde departement in die gesig gestaar het. Hierbenewens het die gebrek aan navorsing en die leemtes in literatuur oor die onderwerp in Suid-Afrika en die reaksie van die openbare sektor ook bygedra tot verdere motivering vir die navorsing.

Die verkennende paradigma is in die ondersoek gebruik, aangesien min inligting beskikbaar was oor die aard van afknouery sowel as oor die reaksie van die werknemersgesondheid- en welstandafdeling van 'n provinsiale departement van die Limpopoprovinsie. Die kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering is in die ondersoek gebruik met vraelyste wat aangewend is om die nodige data vir die projek in te samel. 'n Doelgerigte steekproef is gebruik om geskikte respondente vir die studie te selekteer. Vraelyste is gebruik om semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met 19 deelnemers, wat afknouery in hulle departement beleef het, te voer.

Die navorsing het getoon dat al die respondente in die ondersoekgroep afknouery ondervind het en ondersteuning gekry het van die Werknemersgesondheid- en Welstandafdeling. Die meeste respondente het groot waardering vir die dienste wat die afdeling as 'n middel van ondersteuning aan hulle bied gedurende 'n moeilike tyd in hulle loopbane. Die navorsing het

ook getoon dat sommige respondente hulp van buite gesoek het. Die studie het ook aan die lig gebring dat meer pogings gefokus moet word op die implementering van werknemersgesondheid- en welstandprogramme as voorkomende maatreël. Dit word verder aanbeveel dat werknemersgesondheid- en welstandprogramme voorsiening moet maak vir opvoedkundige werksinkels en bewusmakingsprogramme ten opsigte van die impak van werkplekafknouery en die gepaardgaande ekonomiese en psigologiese implikasies op beide die organisasie en die individu in pogings om dit te voorkom.

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**SECTION A: AN INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE
NATURE OF THE RESEARCH**

AN INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE NATURE OF THE RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

The growing number of employees utilising the Employee Health and Wellness services as result of bullying has inspired the researcher to undertake a study in order to explore workplace bullying and the response by the department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism in Limpopo province. The aim of this article is to present the theoretical framework about bullying in the workplace. Furthermore, the research methodology and approaches utilised in the study will be presented. Thereafter, findings of this qualitative study shall be presented.

1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The researcher is an employee of the Limpopo provincial Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (hereafter referred to as LEDET). In December 2004, the Premier divided the then Department of Finance and Economic Development, which had a staff component of ±3 000, into two departments; one being the Provincial Treasury and the other Economic Development, Environment and Tourism. One third (about 33%) of the staff remained with the Department of Provincial Treasury and the other 67% were allocated to the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET).

The management of LEDET was taken over by the management from the Department of Public Works, which was where the political head was initially housed. Employees were transferred from the Department of Public Works to become managers of LEDET's employees in key positions. The employees from LEDET felt undermined and less significant because of these changes. This action impacted negatively on the lives, careers and general

job satisfaction of LEDET's employees. Consequently, employees suffered low morale, demotivation, work alienation, organisational commitments, poor delivery and poor work ethics. To a certain extent, absenteeism, abuse of sick leave, conflicts, grievances and presenteeism were reported as rife. This was experienced by many staff members as a form of organisational bullying.

According to a study conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1999, 78% of employees in South Africa confirmed that they had been bullied or victimised at least once in their careers. Workplace bullying is a field that is new and very little literature is available on the topic, especially relating to South Africa. However, bullying is not a new problem nor is it unique to South Africa.

Comparatively little has been known about the incidence of bullying, whether it is increasing or decreasing until recently when the subject received some public and academic attention. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, bullying received academic attention in other countries such as Japan, England, the Netherlands, Canada, the USA, and Australia.

According to Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith and Pereira (2002: 34) bullying in the workplace is a phenomenon that recently started to draw the attention of social scientists. The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) (2008) revealed that almost a third of all employees will experience some form of workplace bullying during their careers and 49% of Americans have been affected by workplace bullying. A similar pattern was identified in Canada and an International Labour Organisation began reporting on workplace violence in 1999 (Canada Safety Council, 2008: 123).

Steinman (2005:58) asserts that occurrences of workplace violence in the health sector (public and private) indicate that 61,6% of all health workers experienced at least one incident of violence in a twelve month period: bullying / mobbing was reported at 20,4%, while verbal abuse occurred 50% of the time, and racial harassment transpired almost 23% during the same period. A recent study at a South African university indicated that 36% of academic and non-academic staff experienced workplace bullying and that there was a high correlation between work overload and workplace violence of South African employees.

Bullying has now been identified as a serious issue in the workplace context. In many countries, trade unions, professional organisations, and human resource (HR) departments have become more aware over the last decade that behaviours such as intimidation, public

humiliation, offensive name-calling, social exclusion, and unwanted physical contact have the potential to undermine the integrity and confidence of employees and reduce efficiency. Furthermore, people who have been bullied report that it affects them physically and mentally, with stress, depression, and lowered self-esteem being the most common complaints. In extreme cases, bullied employees may require counselling or psychiatric treatment (Niedl, 1996:239)

The researcher is of the opinion that bullying is described as the umbrella concept which encompasses ill-treatment and hostile behaviour towards other people at work. Bullying threatens professional status, personal standing, as well as isolation, over-working and destabilisation – for example the removal of responsibility.

For the purpose of this study the following definitions of workplace bullying are adopted:

James Cook University (2011:16) defines workplace bullying as *“the repeated, less favourable treatment of a person by another or others in the workplace, which may be considered unreasonable and inappropriate workplace practice. It includes behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates a worker.”*

The abovementioned view is also confirmed by Pietersen (2007:44) as cited in the SA Journal of Industrial Psychology when he says that workplace bullying includes behaviour that intimidates, degrades, offends or humiliates an employee in front of other employees.

Olweus (1999:7) concurs with the above when stating that bullying is defined as a subset of aggressive behaviour, in which the aggression is repeated, and in which there is an imbalance of power such that it is difficult for the victim to defend him/herself.

Another dimension of bullying is referred to as supervisory bullying, petty tyranny or social undermining. This form of bullying is said to be demonstrated by organisational superiors or management. The impact of such bullying is felt negatively by employees and their organisations in areas of job and life satisfaction in terms of the perceptions of justice. Work alienation manifests when workers feel vulnerable because the organisation does not enforce procedures (Fox & Stallworth, 2003: 440).

It is evident from the discussion above that workplace bullying has negative consequences on both the psychological and physical well-being of the employees. Furthermore, the costs associated with bullying range from days lost due to absenteeism, abuse of sick leave and

poor productivity by the victim employee. In light of the effects bullying has on employees, this specific study is regarded as necessary. It is envisaged to shed light on the nature and extent of organisational bullying and the effects thereof, and to suggest intervention strategies to be implemented via the wellness programme of an organisation in order to address this issue.

The following research question has been developed from the details above: What is the nature of workplace bullying in the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism?

2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Aims

The overarching aim of the research was to explore the effects of workplace bullying in the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism in an attempt to set guidelines for dealing with workplace bullying through wellness programmes. Therefore, this study was exploratory in nature. Exploratory research (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008:192) seems to be appropriate for this study since this approach aims to understand the extent to which bullying prevails and impacts on the wellbeing of the employees of LEDET.

2.2 Objectives

This aim resulted in the following, more specific objectives:

- To theoretically conceptualise workplace bullying
- To explore the nature and effect of workplace bullying on the LEDET employee
- To formulate (policy) guidelines for EAP services / wellness programmes with regard to workplace bullying for LEDET.

3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The central theoretical assumption of the study was that workplace bullying in LEDET needs to be investigated in order to suggest intervention guidelines for dealing with this problem.

4 METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000:118) there are two types of research approaches in social research, namely, qualitative and quantitative research. Schwandt (1997:130) defines qualitative research as the study of people in their natural environments as they go about their

daily lives without using artificial apparatus / settings. This kind of research is concerned with the exploration of feelings, opinions and attitudes of people.

Qualitative research uses strategies or enquiries such as narrative, phenomenologies and ethnographies, grounded theory studies or case studies. It is the basic aim of qualitative research to gain an understanding of the verbatim and non-verbatim feelings expressed by individuals in their daily life events (Creswell, 2003:18).

In contrast, the quantitative research is viewed as dealing with data that are absolutely numerical. This kind of research approach is concerned with quantifying data in terms of figures, definite amounts or numbers (Schwandt, 1997:130).

In this study, the researcher was of the opinion that the qualitative research approach was appropriate, since its primary objective was to gather information regarding participants in their natural work environment as well as information on the meaning of bullying in their workplace. A structured research questionnaire was developed and interviews with respondents were used to collect data from the respondents. A questionnaire, containing closed and open-ended questions was developed to conduct semi-structured interviews with selected respondents. The interviews were also utilised for those participants who were unable to read and write.

This study focused on personal trauma, and therefore involved some sensitive issues. It is for this reason that the researcher considered the use of one-to-one interviews, particularly semi-structured one-to-one interviews, as a method of gathering information that would allow participants an opportunity to express their subjective experiences, views, feelings and attitudes. One-to-one interviews assure participants of confidentiality regarding their shared personal information.

The researcher utilised audio tape recording equipment to record data during the interviews. However, permission was obtained from participants after explaining to them the reasons for recording the interviews, who would have access to such records and how the information would be utilised.

4.1 Literature analysis

Based on the literature studies the following aspects remained very relevant to the content: workplace violence, victimisation, organisational bullying, and harassment. Furthermore, aspects such as signs and symptoms of workplace bullying, the psychological and physical effects of bullying on an individual, and workplace strategies aimed at addressing bullying

were explored. Data bases like EBSCO Host, Web Feet, PsychLit and the Academic Search Premier were consulted to identify journal articles, books, research reports and academic theses on the topic (Cowie *et al.*, 2002:33-51).

4.2 Empirical investigation

4.2.1 The research design

Creswell (1998), as cited in De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont (2002:272), identifies five strategies or traditions of inquiry that could be used to design qualitative research , namely: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study.

It is not the intention of this study to define each strategy, but clarification will be given to the strategy of choice. In this study, the phenomenological approach (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008:89) was deemed appropriate since this approach aims to understand and interpret the meaning that subjects give to their everyday lives. These meanings were explored by investigating the experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of individuals about their life settings. The aforementioned strategy supports the aim of the study, namely, to explore the effects of organisational bullying on the individual as well as the response of the employee assistance programme. The researcher was essentially interested in the quality of information from the participant's perspective. As such, the study employed the phenomenological strategy to achieve this.

Stevens (1995:122) also maintains that phenomenological study is sensitive to the human situation and that it involves an empathic dialogue with the subjects under study. Thus, the starting point of the qualitative researcher in this study was the importance of the human experience. As such, the researcher agreed with Stevens (1995:28) in his contention that the phenomenological approach in social sciences is ethically more appropriate, as it takes into account the explanations of ordinary human beings without alienating their experiences from their social reality. The researcher must point out that this naturalistic endeavour to know how people understand their worlds and their lives is consonant with the phenomenological model in social sciences.

4.3 Research participants

Due to the nature of the study and the sensitivity of the topic, purposive sampling was employed (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006:211), since it was regarded the most suitable sampling method. Employees who reported bullying to the employee health and wellness section were

approached to voluntarily take part in the study. The assumption was that they were in the best position to provide the information necessary to achieve the purposes of the research.

4.4 Measuring instrument

According to Cresswell (cited in De Vos *et al*, (2002:273), the phenomenological strategy of interpretive enquiry requires the researcher to mainly utilise participant observation and long interviews (with up to ten people) as the method of data collection.

The researcher decided to choose interviews as data collection method because participant observation seemed to be practically impossible for this kind of study. Patton (1995:168) asserts that the chosen method will not only be critically influenced by the course of the research, but that it will also be determined by the aims of the research. In fact, the purpose of the research must guide the researcher to choose the most effective method.

Greeff (2002:302) continues to say that with semi-structured interviews, the researcher usually has a set of predetermined questions on an interview schedule, but that the interview should be guided by the schedule rather than dictated by it. It is very crucial to design open-ended questions in order to solicit broad perspectives.

A semi-structured schedule was developed, tested and used as an interview schedule during individual interviews in order to collect the necessary data.

4.5 Data analysis

Greeff (2002:304) contends that the researcher must sit down after an interview and jot down his/her impression of the interview. An important point to remember is to keep all the field notes of the interview, as it can assist the researcher in remembering and exploring the process of the interview. Field notes are a written account of the things the researcher hears, see, experiences and thinks about in the course of interviewing.

Greeff (2002:305) continues to mention that by employing qualitative analysis, an attempt is made to capture the richness of themes emerging from the participants' responses, rather than reducing the responses to qualitative categories.

In this study data was analysed according to the interview schedule, by making use of the Tesch approach (Poggenpoel, 1998:343) This assisted in identifying sub-themes and relationships between various aspects of the topic under discussion. Because of the nature of the semi-structured interviews, part of the data was presented in structured form.

4.6 Procedures

This specific section aims to consider critical aspects regarding the feasibility of the study. The researcher will follow these procedures in completing the research:

- The researcher obtained written permission to conduct the study in the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Limpopo. The written permission also served as “gate opening permission” into the entire workstations.
- Access to research participants was requested via the letter of permission mentioned above. All employees included in the sample were identified from the EAP case load/data base with the assistance of the Employee Assistance/Work Wellness section. However, participants’ permission to take part in the study was also requested individually through written consent forms prior to participation in the study.
- Babbie (1990:223) articulates that pilot testing involves the testing of the data collection method on a few people with the same characteristics as the respondents. The pre-testing of the data collection method would then give the researcher the latitude to check the relevancy of the questions, and to see if amendments have to be made.

Therefore, the researcher conducted a pilot study with at least five respondents of the same unit of analysis (employees who have experienced workplace bullying). The respondents involved in the pre-test were not included in the main study.

4.7 Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected from a total of nineteen (19) respondents through the use of interview schedule. Data was collected in the form of verbatim, and were written down as subjective responses of participants. However, each respondent’s views were recorded in a separate schedule which each marked with an identical number allocated for the specific respondent. In total, only nine (19) interviews were conducted, and only one (1) respondent decided to withdraw.

Data was analysed through categorisation of themes which were extracted from the respondents’ subjective experiences. Themes were grouped and categorised according to their similarity, commonality, and differences. The final report was written and bound in the form of a thesis.

4.8 Ethical aspects

According to Babbie (2001:470), ethics refer to a set of moral principles that are suggested by an individual or group, which are subsequently widely accepted, and offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students.

This study involved exploration into personal experiences and respondents were expected to recollect painful memories of their trauma. Furthermore, the study involved some more sensitive issues and potential risk. Therefore, the researcher strongly believed that the following ethical issues would remain important throughout the research study:

4.8.1 Avoidance of harm

Holloway (1997:21) states that ethical obligation rests with the researcher to protect subjects against any form of physical discomfort that may emerge within reasonable limits from the research project. Respondents should be thoroughly informed beforehand about the potential impact of the investigation. Such information offer respondents the opportunity to withdraw from the investigation if they so desire.

The researcher acknowledged the fact that this study posed a certain degree of potential risk of emotional harm to the subjects. This study evoked overwhelming memories of past events, since people were asked to recollect memories of their past experiences. Respondents were warned of this possible pain before they made a decision to participate. However, the researcher made special arrangements with the in-house Wellness Office for compulsory debriefing after every interview with each respondent in order to normalise their feelings. Furthermore, all research participants who needed debriefing or any kind of counselling as a result of their participation in the research were referred to the EAP office and their rights to confidentiality were guaranteed. The researcher was a staff member of the EAP office and made arrangements with colleagues for further assistance.

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the North-West University (Project number: NWU-00139-11-S1)

4.8.2 Informed consent

Obtaining informed consent implies that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation, the procedures that will be followed during the investigation, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which the respondents may be exposed to, and the

credibility of the researcher be made available to potential subjects or their legal representatives (De Vos *et al.*, 2002: 65).

The researcher requested all employees who participated in the study to give their written consent before getting themselves involved. This was achieved by getting every respondent to sign a consent form, which outlined the purpose and details of the study. Participants had a choice to participate in or withdraw from the study.

4.8.3 Deception of subjects / respondents

Babbie (2001:474) describes the deception of subjects as deliberately misrepresenting facts in order to make another person believe what is not true, violating the respect to which every person is entitled. According to Corey (cited in De Vos *et al.* 2002:66), deception involves withholding information or offering incorrect information in order to ensure participation of subjects when they would otherwise possibly have refused it.

The researcher verbally informed respondents of the following: what the purpose of the study was, the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the study, the role of the researcher and her identity. At the start of the interview the researcher introduced the purpose of the research, and supplied a bit of background on what processes were to be followed during the data collection and what the data would be used for. The role of the researcher was clarified to avoid confusion, and time boundaries were set at the beginning of the interview. Respondents were informed of the possible risk of painful past memories, and about the availability of debriefing services.

4.8.4 Violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality

According to Holloway (1997:22) two ethical principles are important, namely, the right to self-determination and confidentiality. Privacy implies the element of personal privacy, while confidentiality indicates the handling of information in a confidential manner.

During the study the researcher treated the respondents anonymously by avoiding the use of names, which concealed their identity, or any identifying information obtained during the semi-structured one-to-one interviews or questionnaires. When referring to respondents the researcher used numbers like participant number 1, 2, or 3, and so forth, instead of using their real names.

Furthermore, information gathered from the respondents were kept in the same manner as client files – in a restricted office in a lockable cupboard. It was treated as personal and not shared with supervisors and managers. The researcher used averages in the report rather than information which might identify the unit or section of the respondent. Confidentiality was observed as members of the EAP would assist in identifying the respondents in the departmental workstations.

4.8.5 Actions and competence of researchers

The researcher was ethically obligated to ensure that she was competent and adequately skilled to undertake the proposed investigation. The researcher conducted the study with professional therapists who only assisted in identifying respondents from their case loads. This particular study involved highly-sensitive investigations that required a highly-skilled researcher. The researcher completed a B-degree in Social Work, which involved some research, and also worked under direct supervision of Prof Pedro Rankin of the North-West University to ensure that professional ethics were adhered to at all times.

4.8.6 Cooperation with contributors

The researcher sought assistance from colleagues at the EAP unit to select and discuss relevant problems which could assist in designing the questionnaires or interview questions. The researcher also relied on consultation with external experts in the field from the Office of the Premier and other provincial government departments. All experts consulted were acknowledged in the study.

4.8.7 Release or publication of the findings

According to De Vos (2002:71) the findings of the study must be introduced to the reading public in written form. The findings of the study would be made available in the form of a research report once it had been finalised. The researcher would however, only release the findings with the permission of the respondents.

This report was compiled to accurately and objectively assist the Employee Assistance Programme division to understand the impact of bullying in the department. Plagiarism was avoided by always acknowledging the source of information. Respondents were informed of the findings (De Vos *et al.*, 2006: 61).

4.8.8 Debriefing of respondents

Mitchell (1997:227) defines debriefing as a brief, structured intervention technique to be used immediately or shortly after a traumatising event. If there are issues or concepts which respondents did not understand well, they were given an opportunity to relate their experience during the study and this would assist in minimising the harm that might occur as result of their participation in the study.

SECTION B
THE ARTICLES

ARTICLE 1: WORKPLACE BULLYING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

This article is part of a research project on organisational bullying and will describe the nature of workplace bullying, the characteristics of this problem, the cause of workplace bullying, and its effect on the individual employee and the organisation. Symptoms of workplace bullying will be described, as well as some intervention strategies of dealing with it, as well as the legal aspects. Given the prevalence of bullying and its potentially negative influence on employee and organisational well-being, it is not surprising that since the early 1990s, this workplace issue has increasingly been recognised as a serious problem worldwide. It has been reported that a whopping 78% of employees in South Africa confirmed that they had been bullied or victimized at least once in their careers (Saunders, 2006:341).

Duffy (2009:242), states that although the impact of bullying can be devastating to the health and wellbeing of individuals, organisations also experience its effects in terms of loss of productivity, absenteeism, turnover, legal costs and negative publicity.

According to the Washington Department of Labour and Industries (2008:1), workplace bullying contributes to high organisational costs in terms of worker's compensation claims.

1.2 SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

According to Steinman (2007:20) there is evidence all over the world that bullying, and particularly workplace bullying, is on the increase. Based on the study by the Watt Institute for the Prevention of Violence in the USA, as cited in Steinman (2007:22), only 37% of American workers have been bullied at work and women are targeted by bullies more frequently (in 57% of the cases) especially by other women (in 71% of cases). In South Africa where the study of Workplace Violence in the Health Sector (public and private) was

conducted it was found that 61, 6% of all health workers experience at least one incident of workplace bullying in a twelve-month period.

Yildiz (2007:113) further confirms that, statistically, health sector employees face the greatest risk of being exposed to workplace bullying. It was reported that victims of workplace bullying were above 20% in Turkey (Saunders ,2006:343), while 25% of the Swedish population experience bullying or mobbing at some point in their careers. However, similar analyses of workplace bullying has shown that more participants (33.7%) were exposed to bullying behaviour in Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Duffy (2009:242) shares a similar notion by stating that, although the impact of bullying can be devastating to the health and wellbeing of individuals, organisations also experience its effects in terms of loss of productivity, absenteeism, turnover, legal costs and negative publicity.

1.3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF BULLYING AT WORK

Bullying occurs in many settings like schools, old age homes and in families, but this study focuses on bullying in the workplace, where people spend a large part of their day. Several related terms are used in connection with work place bullying, but there are significant differences between them. They will be discussed below:

1.3.1 Defining Criteria for Workplace Bullying

Because workplace bullying can occur in a variety of contexts and forms, it is also useful to define this concept by the features of the behavioural manifestations. Workplace bullying is characterized by:

- **Repetition:** this particular behaviour occurs regularly (at least monthly)
- **Duration:** the bullying behaviour endures and may last for an extended time
- **Escalation:** bullying involves escalating aggression
- **Power disparity:** there is always a power imbalance and the target (victim) lacks the power to defend themselves
- **Attributed intent:** This is conscious behaviour with the intention to harm the target emotionally or psychologically (Saunders, 2006:341). Bullying behaviour is intended to make the target feel or look less important or competent and lower his/her self-esteem.

It is very important to note that the abovementioned aspects distinguish bullying behaviour from other forms of job stress. Therefore, any behaviour to be classified as bullying must meet the abovementioned criteria.

Martin, Lopez and LaVan (2010: 22) define workplace bullying as actions which involve intentional, intimidating, humiliating, and undermining behaviour that is persistently repeated over time and is meant to cause harm to a target who feels powerless to stop or prevent the abuse. Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts (2007: 837) add that the preceding actions create a hostile work environment for the victim.

Bullying is usually defined as a subset of aggressive behaviour in which the aggression is repeated, and in which there is an imbalance of power such that it is difficult for the victim to defend him/herself (Olweus, 1999:3). Similarly, Randall and Routledge (1996:4) define bullying as the aggressive behaviour arising from the deliberate intent to cause physical or psychological distress to others. Sharon, Stagg and Sheridan (2010:419) consistently define bullying as persistent demeaning and down-grading of individuals through vicious words and cruel acts that progressively undermine confidence and self-esteem.

The researcher is of the view that bullying is the tendency of individuals or groups to use persistent aggression or unreasonable behaviour against other person(s). This intentional behaviour is engaged in to cause severe physical or emotional pain to the victim. There is a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. The perpetrator is in control of the situation while the victim has no control over the situation; in fact, the victim is someone who is unable to defend him/herself.

According to a report by the Washington State Department of Labour and Industries (April 2008:1) workplace bullying refers to repeated, unreasonable actions of individuals (or a group) directed towards an employee (or a group of employees), which is intended to intimidate and create a risk to the health and safety of the employee(s).

Workplace bullying constitutes repeated offensive behaviour manifesting in vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or group of employees (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006: 20).

However, Pawlik-Kienlen (2007:3) defines workplace bullying as persistent unwelcome behaviour, mostly using unwarranted or invalid criticism, nit-picking, fault finding, also

exclusion, isolation, being singled out, shouted at, humiliated, excessively monitored, having verbal and written warnings imposed, and being treated differently from co-workers.

Furthermore, bullying in the workplace is defined as repeated inappropriate acts, direct or indirect, verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment, which could reasonably be regarded as undermining of the individual's right to dignity at work (ESRI Task Force Report, US Government Publications, 2001: 1-2).

Workplace bullying is a noteworthy and prevalent issue in organisations around the world (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper, 2003:27).

1.3.2 Workplace violence

It is very important to draw a clear distinction between workplace violence and bullying so as not to confuse the two concepts. The two terms are often used interchangeably but they are varied. The following description of workplace violence is found in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/workplace_bullying *“Incidents where people are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being or health”*. The description by OSHA is similar to the definition above in the sense that it does not necessarily happen in the workplace: *“Workplace violence is violence or the threat of violence against workers. It can occur at or outside the workplace and can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and homicide, one of the leading causes of job-related deaths”* (US Department of Labour, 2002.) This is confirmed by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (2008) who states that workplace violence *“... is not limited to incidents that occur within a traditional workplace. Work-related violence can occur at off-site business-related functions (conferences, trade shows), at social events related to work, in clients' homes or away from work but resulting from work (a threatening telephone call to your home from a client)”*.

Workplace violence has been used interchangeably with the term bullying, although the two are not the same. Workplace bullying as a concept deals with internal conflicts between employees, including managers and supervisors, and is located within an organisation. In contrast, workplace violence deals with a broad range of behaviours and circumstances that can be present both inside and outside the workplace. Unlike workplace bullying, workplace violence can be a single opportunistic incident and the violence can be from an internal or external source and an assailant or perpetrator may be known or unknown to the victim or

victims. This particular act may be committed against the employee by member of the public, disgruntled ex-employee, or service users (Job Watch Inc, 1998: 1-2)

1.3.3 Harassment

The last work-related threat to be defined to keep within the parameters of the topic is harassment. Harassment seems to be related to workplace bullying, but it is different in the sense that harassment is one form of illegal discrimination. Whereas harassment may involve a single act, bullying involves repeated attacks against the target, creating an on-going pattern of behaviour. Bullying is often directed at someone a bully feels threatened by and very often the target doesn't realise when they are being bullied because the behaviour is covert: trivial criticisms and isolating actions that occur behind closed doors. The most distinguishing aspects between the two terms are that harassment is illegal and bullying in the workplace is not (Department of Labour and Industries, Washington DC, 2008: 3).

Cade (2009:12) explains that workplace bullying and workplace harassment are ugly members of the same family. They are closely related, but they have the following striking differences:

- On the job harassment has a strong intrusive component including physical contact such as invading physical space, including personal possessions and damage to possessions.
- Workplace bullying is almost always psychological. Workplace harassment is usually linked to sex, race, prejudice or discrimination.
- Bullying is frequently linked to a staged attack on competent and popular individuals. Everyone can recognize workplace harassment because of its overt nature.
- Few can see workplace bullying because it is usually perpetrated behind closed doors. A target of workplace harassment knows he or she is being harassed immediately.
- A target of bullying may not realise it for weeks or months, until great damage has been done. Workplace harassment is usually accompanied by offensive, aggressive vocabulary. Workplace bullying shows its face through trivial, untrue accusations of under-performance.

Sandy Hershcovis of the University of Manitoba and Julian Barling of Queens University studied the relationship between one form of harassment, namely sexual harassment, and workplace bullying. They found that those bullied were more stressed, angry and anxious,

and were less committed and more likely to quit their jobs, than were victims of (sexual) harassment. Targets also had a lower overall sense of well-being.

Workplace bullying is repeated, deliberate, disrespectful behaviour with the intent of hurting someone else. Harassment is defined as "*unwanted conduct that violates people's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment*".

There does not seem to be much difference between workplace bullying and workplace harassment except that both are extremely unpleasant to the victim. There seems to be more of a relationship than a difference. It nevertheless remains a menace.

1.3.4 Types of workplace bullying

In this section the researcher will focus on the types of workplace bullying that are experienced by employees in the organisation. Tim Field (as cited in Saunders, 2006:341) suggests 15 types of workplace bullying, each of which is discussed below:

- **Serial Bullying**

Serial bullying is when the source of all dysfunction can be traced to one individual, who picks on one employee after another and destroys them before moving on. This is probably the most common type of bullying in the organisation today (Yildiz, 2007:119).

- **Corporate bullying**

This type of bullying involves a situation where the employer abuses the employees with impunity, knowing that the law is weak and jobs are scarce. This type of behaviour may range from coercing employees to work unusual hours on a regular basis and victimising or dismissing anyone who objects. Furthermore, employees are encouraged to give up full-time permanent positions in favour of short-term contracts; anyone who resists an offer faces unpleasant consequences.

- **Institutional bullying**

This type of workplace bullying is similar to corporate bullying and arises when bullying becomes entrenched and accepted as part of the culture. In this situation, people are moved, long existing contracts are replaced with new, short-term contracts on less favourable terms (with the accompanying threat of "agree to this or else"), workloads are increased, work

schedules are changed, roles are changed, career progression is blocked or terminated, and all of these occur without consultation.

- **Client bullying**

This kind of bullying involves a situation where employees are bullied by those they serve. For instance, teachers are bullied (and often assaulted) by pupils and their parents, whereas nurses are bullied by patients and their relatives, social workers are bullied by their clients, and shop/bank/building society staff are bullied by customers. Often the client is claiming their perceived right (e.g. to better services) in an abusive, derogatory and often physically violent manner.

- **Gang bullying**

Gang bullying is sometimes referred to as group bullying and often called mobbing which usually involves scapegoating and victimisation. This particular type of bullying is done by a serial bully with colleagues. Gangs can exist anywhere, but flourish in corporate bullying climates. Therefore, it is reported that half the people in the gang are happy for the opportunity to behave badly; they gain gratification from the feeling of power and control, and enjoy patronage, protection and reward from the serial bully. However, the other half of the gang is coerced into joining in, usually through fear of being the next target if they don't.

- **Cyber bullying**

This type of bullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. Cyber bullying is the misuse of email systems or internet forums for sending aggressive flame mails. Serial bullies have few communication skills (and often none), thus the impersonal nature of e-mail makes it an ideal tool for causing conflict. This is also sometimes called cyber stalking.

- **Regulation bullying**

This type of bullying involves a serial bully who forces their target to comply with rules, regulations, procedures or laws regardless of their appropriateness, applicability or necessity.

- **Vicarious bullying**

Vicarious bullying is actually where two parties are encouraged to engage in adversarial interaction or conflict. This type of bullying is similar to gang bullying, although the bully may or may not be directly connected with either of the two parties. In this situation one party becomes the bully's instrument of harassment and is deceived and manipulated into bullying the other party. A typical example of vicarious bullying is where the serial bully creates conflict between employer and employee, participating occasionally to stoke the conflict, but rarely taking an active part in the conflict themselves.

- **Pair bullying**

In this type, bullying takes place with two people, one is active and verbal while the other often watching and listening. It usually involves two people of opposite gender and frequently there is an affair going on.

- **Hierarchical bullying**

This is the most common type of bullying in the workplace and involves an individual being bullied by their managers. More cases of bullying reported involve subordinates being bullied by their superiors and very few cases of subordinates bullying their superiors are reported. In this particular situation bullies like to tap into their hierarchical power but also generate their own power by simply choosing to bully with impunity and justifying their behaviour with rationalisation, manipulation, deception or lying.

The analysis above sketches a picture of interpersonal bullying which is bullying between individuals, or a group of individuals and an individual. Interpersonal bullying largely takes place in an organisational context where the organisational setup and climate creates an atmosphere conducive to bullying.

1.3.5 Characteristics of bullying

Although bullying can take on different forms, the most commonly reported forms of workplace bullying manifest in the following ways:

- ***Verbal abuse and the violation of personal dignity***

This particular bullying behaviour involves the use of verbal threat, insults, offensive remarks, teasing or sarcasm intended to degrade the victim. It may also involve name calling, the use of a nickname, and labelling someone a “moron, idiot, or stupid” (Olweus, 1999:54).

- ***Character assassination***

It is well known that gossip and spreading ill-intended tales about someone can be very successful in tarnishing a person’s reputation. Therefore, spreading wrong information, the use of innuendos, and half-truths can easily be distorted and have the same effect as malicious gossip (Steinman, 2007:21).

- ***Instilling fear through the abuse of power***

According to Steinman (2007:21) some bullies need to instil fear by shouting, screaming, throwing tantrums, and swearing. It is common for these kinds of bullies to normally engage in threats such as “I will fire you if you...” coupled with aggressive gestures to put the fear of God into their subordinates.

- ***Conspiracies to eliminate a person through the following acts***

Steinman (2007:22) contends that bullying in the workplace can take the form of a conspiracy by two or more persons to get rid of a person by means of group pressure, such as socially isolating the victim, setting him/her up for failure, e.g. moving deadlines arbitrarily, refusing the victim the necessary equipment to do the work, and openly conspiring to get a person fired.

- ***Using technology as form of social control***

Romm and Pliskin, as cited by Steinman (2007:22), indicate the use of email as a means of social control by the “office tyrant”. This particular form of behaviour was clearly illustrated in a case study in which the department chair at a university used email to manipulate, control, and coerces employees. The email enabled him to establish a prison without walls and, as warden of that prison, to control the behaviour of his subordinates in ways that would be impossible without email.

The researcher asserts that verbal abuse includes the use of socially unacceptable words intended to humiliate or make other people feel unimportant.

According to the researcher character assassination is associated with spreading false information about a particular person or group of people with the intention to damage their reputation. This particular form of bullying is common in the workplace.

The researcher asserts that bullies abuse the power vested in the positions they hold or the status they occupy to instil fear in their victims. This is very common between supervisors and their subordinates where there is an imbalance of power.

The researcher agrees that the abovementioned form of bullying is more common today in the public service, but senior managers are more likely to be the targets of such conspiracies. Nevertheless, it is more common in the political environment to find politicians being redeployed to other positions or even fired due to allegations of poor performance instead of being corrected.

The researcher maintains that, with the advent of modern technology, it has become very simple for bullies to manipulate and control their victims through the use of cell phones (text messaging), tracking devices, cctv cameras, and many other technological innovations that are available today. Senior management or supervisors in position of power often abuse technology to excessively monitor the behaviour of those they feel threatened by.

1.4 ORGANISATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL RISK FACTORS OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

According to Saam (2009:58) it is very important to determine which factors are responsible for creating bullying in the workplace in order to make appropriate choices in terms of relevant interventions. In fact, determining risk factors involves in-depth reviewing of the conditions creating bullying behaviour. The rationale is not to determine who the guilty parties are, but rather to determine which conditions can be changed or modified to improve matters for the future.

There is quite a number of factors that contribute to workplace bullying. This particular section will devote itself to identifying factors that cause bullying in the workplace. Bullying is not a managerial phenomenon, although it is said that good managers manage and bad managers bully. The purpose of bullying is to hide inadequacy. Causal factors associated with bullying are discussed below (Anon, SA).

Personalities: Studies confirm that a small percentage of bullies are sociopaths (2-4%), while others are mildly antisocial and bully for various reasons, ranging from power play and

the obsession to control their environment to being threatened by competence, popularity or good looks. Some bullies, on the other hand, are just opportunistic and would bully anyone who is down on their luck or vulnerable in order to improve their own positions (Anon, SA).

In addition to the above, psychopathic bullies do not feel remorse, guilt or empathy; they lack insight into their own behaviour, and seem unwilling or unable to moderate it. In many cases bullies have deep-seated psychological problems, including feelings of inferiority or inadequacy and difficulty in relating to others (Sperry, 2009: 166). (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/workplace_bullying).

Corporate culture: Some corporate cultures permit hostile behaviour and some colleagues will follow the leadership style and managerial style mindlessly. Bullying is condoned because it takes place within the established values and norms of the organisation and is accepted as part of the workplace culture (Department of Labour and Industries Washington, April 2004:1).

Furthermore, Steinman (2007:16) argues that when corporate culture reflects that of a caring organisation, the employer will act to address and stop workplace bullying and other forms of workplace violence whenever it occurs. Therefore, an organisation characterized by a marked absence of staff development and retention policies is likely to be viewed as a company that does not value its staff members. Thus employees look upon the lack of training and development opportunities as structural violence.

Organisational changes: Changes like restructuring, looming retrenchments and mergers can spark off workplace wars in a normally peaceful environment. Research indicates that there is a notable increase in bullying and workplace violence when organisations are experiencing staff cuts and restructuring (Steinman, 2007:14), understandably, such rapid and traumatic interventions result in an entire change of the corporate culture. Therefore, structure always implies boundaries and discipline; yet restructuring as applied in the corporate world is perhaps the most undisciplined exercise. It represents a gamble rather than pre-planned action in consultation with the employees.

Poor Management: Some circumstances encourage hostile work environments. These are managerial factors such as ineffective job descriptions, inappropriate and/or inadequate communication, low moral standards, lack of stimulating and challenging tasks, and poor supervision. For instance, if a company appoints both a public relations manager and a

marketing manager with overlapping functions and poor job descriptions, this might be a recipe for disaster which can create conflict and poor performance (Steinman, 2007:17).

Researchers concur that organisational changes, such as restructuring, must be managed. Some organisations restructure more than five times a year and lose valuable employees because of lack of proper management. Serial restructuring points to a lack of creativity and managerial initiative. The problem of workplace bullying is almost endemic to organisations that perpetually restructure without a plan.

The researcher asserts that vague job descriptions can create conflict between the supervisor and the supervisee, consequently the likelihood for bullying. This is the most common form of bullying in the workplace today, where the job description is either not clear or not available. This situation is open for abuse of power because the supervisor can give any instruction knowing that there are no clear-cut guidelines in terms of what could be expected from the employee.

1.5 THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

According to Saunders (2007:342) the inducement of harm is an essential and necessary component in all definitions of bullying. Notwithstanding the type of behaviour that occurs and the degree of persistence of the behaviour, researchers and practitioners generally agree that a negative workplace experience can only be defined as bullying if the target of the behaviour experiences some form of psychological, emotional or physical harm. However, a substantial amount of research has focused on documenting the negative impact that bullying can have on the organisation and employees.

This specific section will focus on identifying the impact of workplace bullying on both the organisation and the individual employee(s).

1.5.1 The impact of bullying the individual

According to Farrell & Geist-Martin (2005:4) workplace bullying entails the deliberate intent of causing physical and psychological distress to others and can include behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates a worker, possibly in front of co-workers, clients or customers. Stress is the most predominant health impact associated with bullying in the workplace. Furthermore, workplace stress has significant negative effects that are linked to poor mental health and poor physical health, resulting in an increase in the use of sick days or time off from work.

The effects of workplace bullying can include severe psychological distress, sleep disturbances and general feelings of anxiety or even posttraumatic stress, whereas the physical effects of bullying may include symptoms such as stomach-aches, headaches and general ill-health. The emotional effects of workplace bullying may include symptoms such as loss of confidence, self-esteem, and sometimes even suicidal behaviour. Other effects of workplace bullying on an individual includes incapacity to work, reduced output and diminished performance (Olender-Russo, 2009:77; Yildirim, 2009:509).

The different categories of workplace bullying and the impact of each on the individual are tabulated below:

Table 1: Categorisations of the impact of workplace bullying on an individual

PSYCHOLOGICAL	PHYSIOLOGICAL	BEHAVIOURAL	PRODUCTIVITY
Severe stress symptoms	Raised blood pressure and heart disease	Becoming aggressive	High absenteeism
Panic attacks	Reduced resistance to infection	Irritability	Abuse of sick leave
Sleep disturbance	Stomach and bowel problems	Vengeful	Transfers
Concentration difficulties	Skin problems	Withdrawn	Quitting job
Shock	Severe headaches	Obsessive dwelling on the aggressor	Reduced output
Excessive drinking and overeating	Loss of appetite	Hypersensitive to criticism	Low morale
Fear or anxiety especially of going to work	Inability to sleep	Emotionally drained	Mistakes and accidents at work

Source ESRI Task Force Report, US Government Publications, April 2001: 1-2.

It is important to note that workplace bullying can have a devastating effect on the co-workers who witness the bullying. This was also confirmed by a study conducted by Dr. Rayner of the United Kingdom (Rayner and Keashly, 2004:65), which concluded that 20% of co-workers who witness workplace bullying decide to look for another job elsewhere. Therefore, co-workers sadly do not support the victim because they fear that the bully might turn on them, should they show any compassion.

1.5.2 The impact of bullying on the organisation

Workplace bullying can be costly to an organisation if not managed and dealt with seriously. More research has shown that organisations suffer large financial losses by not efficiently managing conflict and bullying behaviour. In addition, employers need to be more attentive when managing various discordant behaviours in the workplace, such as bullying. These activities do not only create financial cost to the organisation, but also erodes the companies' human resources assets (Yildirim, 2009:509).

The impact bullying has on the organisation can include high staff turnover with resultant increase in recruitment and induction costs, as well as down time as replacement workers are trained in their new jobs. Furthermore, workplace bullying is also associated with high rates of absenteeism and over-utilization of sick leave. Employees stay away from work because they fear the bullies. In an attempt to quantify the financial costs, Rayner and Keashly (2004:53) estimated that, for an organisation of 1000 people, the cost would be \$1.2 million US. This estimate did not include the cost of litigation should the victims bring a suit against the organisation.

In addition to the above, workplace bullying is also associated with the indirect costs related to dealing with complaints of bullying such as the cost of investigation of ill treatment and potential legal actions, counselling the effected worker and/or disciplinary inquiry. Workplace bullying is further associated with high claims for medical benefits due to stress-related costs via workers compensation system with resultant increase in insurance premiums and/or rehabilitation costs (Querry and Hanley, 2010: 4-5).

The bottom line costs associated with workplace bullying are lower workplace productivity and efficiency because of work effort being displaced, as staff attempt to cope with bullying incidents, for instance effort being directed away from work productivity and towards coping. The estimated cost of bullying was 1.88 billion pounds associated with loss in productivity (Querry and Hanley, 2010: 4-5; Ellis and College, 2009: 6-7).

1.6 INTERVENTIONS

Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper (2003:148-149) confirm that the impact of workplace bullying on the victims can be devastating and thus leave the victim unable to cope with their lives. In addition, individuals cope differently with workplace trauma due to their individual

personality differences. Furthermore, men and women also possess different coping mechanisms with which to process workplace trauma.

It is also noted by Einarsen and Raknes (1997:12) that some responses to bullying are also gender specific, with a stronger association between bullying and absenteeism in women than men. These particular findings correspond with the general findings that women have the tendency to report health complaints and absenteeism, reflecting a stronger effect of certain illnesses on women than men. An alternative explanation is that women use absence as a coping mechanism more than men do, possibly due to different social norms regarding absenteeism. It has been found that some women leave the organisation as a positive coping strategy because it removes them permanently from the source of the problem altogether.

Unfortunately, the symptoms of bullying tend to persist over long periods. Individuals who are bullied may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and/or prolonged duress stress disorder (PDSD). It has been found that, when witnesses of bullying support the victim, the negative emotional and physical effects of workplace trauma are reduced considerably. Victims receiving support from colleagues are also more resilient and able to move on with their lives afterwards.

1.6.1 Employee assistance programmes

According to the Standards on Employee Assistance Professional Assistance of South Africa (EAPA-SA, 2010:1) employee assistance is an organisation's resource designed to assist in the early identification and resolution of personal and work-related issues such as but not limited to stress, substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, harassment, financial problems, and HIV and AIDS, which all have the potential to affect job performance.

Bullying can result in trauma and stress for the person who is a target of inappropriate behaviour. Therefore, such an incident has a major impact on an employee's emotional wellbeing, resulting in the need for the EAP to intervene. It is important that employees who have fallen victim to workplace bullying take advantage of the programme and consult with professionals who are qualified in various fields such as psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, occupational therapists or nurses. However, note should be taken that such consultation shall be conducted in a professional and confidential manner.

The following EAP services might be of value to the victim of bullying:

- **Counselling;** face-to-face or telephonic consultation with a professional to alleviate the impact of bullying and prevent further emotional harm.
- **Mediation:** all parties involved in bullying work out options to solve their conflict with the help of a mediator/neutral person.
- **Psychotherapy:** for deep-seated fear, anxiety and trauma as a result of bullying
- **Trauma debriefing:** to diffuse or normalize the situation and help the victim cope by accepting what happened.
- **Legal advice:** provides assistance to victims who require legal representation and psychological support during a hearing or disciplinary inquiry. The victim should be ensured of legal protection against further victimization (Steinman, 2003: 45-49).

The researcher strongly believes from experience that the success of the programme is very dependant on the managers and supervisors. Hence, managers and supervisors must support and encourage the use of the programme by providing awareness and referring employees.

1.6.2 Workplace interventions

1.6.2.1 Legislation

According to Duffy (2009:242) organisations have a legal obligation to ensure that workplaces are free of any harassing, discriminatory or bullying behaviour. Therefore, organisations spend time drafting effective organisational policies to prevent and address workplace bullying during this period when a healthy workplace is being propagated but is not yet enacted. However, carefully crafted policies will help prevent bullying and provide mechanisms for addressing it when it does occur.

Notwithstanding any efforts made by employees themselves, several acts on the law books create safe and healthy work environments. Examples of these are the Occupational Health and Safety Act 106 of 1985, the Employment Equity Act, and the Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (Public Service Regulation, as amended 16 July 2004: 22).

In South Africa, the public service employees are expected to observe the provisions of public service regulations and the Labour Relations Act, which also prohibit any form of harassment, unfair labour practice, and workplace bullying. Therefore, any contravention of these legislations is regarded as a serious breach of the ethical code of conduct and may

eventually result in a formal investigation which, if proven, may result in disciplinary action being taken against the perpetrator, who may even be dismissed. Suffice it to mention that any incident of workplace bullying in the organisation shall be formalized and dealt with internally before it is referred to the Labour Court or police. The head of department in the case of the public sector, or managing director of the company in the private sector, shall determine appropriate actions as a result of the investigation. If someone has a complaint made against them and is found to have bullied the complainant, disciplinary action will follow (Public Service Regulation, as amended 16 July 2004: 22).

If nothing is done to prevent further mistreatment, despite all the efforts by an employee, employees are advised to contact the Human Rights Commissioner or Labour Court. Human Rights Commissioners are independent adjudicators who investigate disputes referred to them under specific legislation.

If you are leaving your job due to bullying as you feel that to remain would damage your health and/or wellbeing, you can consider appealing for constructive dismissal in which case you should contact the Employment Appeal Tribunal.

1.6.2.2 Organisation Policies and Procedures

Organisation management shall be responsible for developing workplace policies and procedures to prevent and manage bullying or any form of unacceptable behaviour. The workplace anti-bullying policies shall be consistent and aligned to the aforementioned legislative framework.

In the public service there are a number of workplace policies that have been developed to prevent bullying and other forms of deviant behaviour. These policies address the prevention of sexual harassment, prevention of unfair labour practice, and prevention of unfair discrimination. All these policies are measures to ensure the prevention of abuse and bullying in the workplace, and therefore any contravention with any of the above policies shall be viewed as a serious offence and may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the perpetrator (Steinman, 2003:3-5).

- **Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy**

This particular policy aims to prevent any form of unwelcomed sexual behaviour directed at the innocent or unsuspecting victim. Very often this sexual offence is committed by a male

worker against a female worker. It is very important to have a sexual harassment policy in the workplace because it can assist in preventing bullying related to sexual behaviour, particularly pair bullying. Sexual offences can take different forms such as physical (touching), verbal (uttering words), and email communication (cyber stalking) (Steinman, 2003: 3-5).

- **Prevention of unfair labour practice**

The prevention of unfair labour practice policy aims to prevent and manage any form of unfair labour practice in the organisation. Therefore, this particular policy seems relevant to prevent corporate/ organisational bullying wherein employers introduces changes without consulting with the employees, for instance , replacing old working hours with new hours, and cutting salary without prior notice given to the employees (Steinman, 2003: 3-5).

- **Prevention of unfair discrimination**

The Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Policy is a workplace tool designed to assist the organisation to prevent and manage any form of discrimination on the basis of worker demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, parental status, apprentice or trainee. It is this particular policy that may assist the organisation to prevent workplace bullying which is not based on the job but on the physical characteristics or appearance of the individual (Steinman, 2003: 3-5).

1.7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it has been discussed in detail what workplace bullying entails, the effects and symptoms, the different types of bullying, workplace preventative strategies and legislative framework, and the role of the EAP in supporting victims. It is apparent from the discussion that workplace bullying is becoming a very serious social and organisational issue because of the associated negative impact on productivity and employees' wellbeing.

Therefore, organisations should spend more time and effort on developing an organisational culture that discourages any form of bullying. This can be achieved by developing anti-workplace bullying policies for the organisation and ensuring that such policies are implemented and popularised to the entire work force.

ARTICLE 2: EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING BY EMPLOYEES OF A PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENT

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying is increasingly being recognised as a serious problem in the organisation today. In general it is also a problem that can be difficult to define and evaluate accurately. However, in this study bullying will be studied within the context of workplace. The concept of workplace bullying will be defined as the aggressive behaviour arising from the deliberate intent to cause physical or psychological distress to others. This behaviour is persistent and has the potential to cause physical or psychological harm to the victim, such as low-self esteem and confidence (Sharon, Stagg and Sheridan, 2010:419).

This is a report on research done on the experiences of employees of workplace bullying in a provincial department of the Limpopo province. The researcher, working as a social worker in the Employee Health and Wellness section, became aware of a problem of workplace or organisational bullying, and decided to do research on the topic.

2.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a predominantly qualitative research approach (Rubin & Babbie, 2011:435) which has an exploratory design. In view of the nature of the research, a purposive sampling method was used to select the employees to be included as research participants. Twenty employees who reported that they had been bullied in the workplace were asked to take part in the research project. They were fully informed about the nature and purposes of the research project and were given the choice to refuse to take part in the project. One of the respondents withdrew. Ethical approval for the project was given by the

Ethics Committee of the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University (project number: NWU-00139-11-S1).

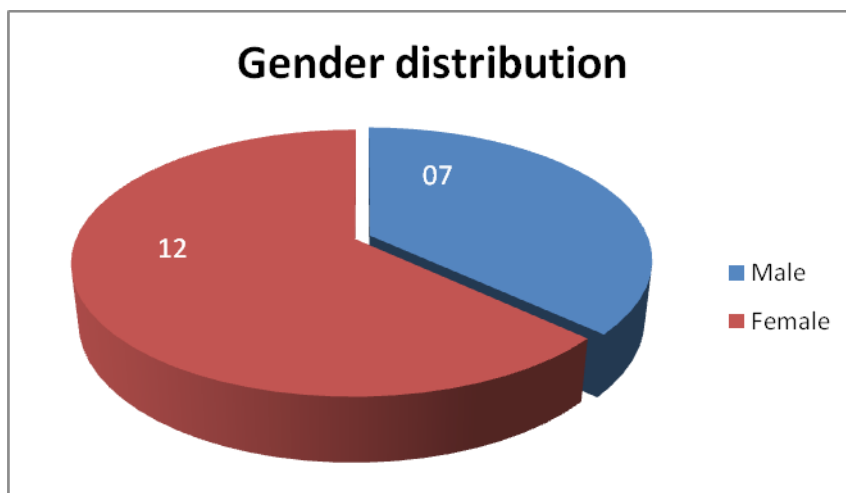
The data was collected by means of an interview guide designed for the purpose of a semi-structured interview. Apart from the structured sections of the questionnaire, it also had unstructured sections to provide for the expressions of opinions and perceptions of the employees that were part of the research, constituting the qualitative part of the data collection.

In this study data was analysed according to the interview schedule. This assisted in identifying sub-themes and relationships between various aspects of the topic under discussion. Because of the nature of the semi-structured interviews, part of the data was presented in structured form.

Data was analysed using the Tesch approach (through categorisation of themes which were extracted from the respondents' subjective experiences. Themes were grouped and categorised according to their similarity, commonality, and differences. The researcher was able to sit down and interpret the emerging themes from the respondents' subjective views and compile a report thereof.

2.3 DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Figure 2.1: Gender distribution of respondents



The sample was small, comprising of all participants who utilised the Employee Health and Wellness services due to bullying, and no reliable conclusions could be made. However, it was interesting to note that the sample consisted of more women than men. Women might be easier victims of bullying because of the perception that they are the weaker sex. It is also

possible to note that women will be more easily to report bullying than men because men have been socialised in certain cultures to hide their emotions. Therefore, men are regarded as much stronger than women in a traditional culture. Furthermore, women easily show their emotions compared to their male counterpart. This view is affirmed by Yildiz (2007:126) that societies in general have contributed greatly in terms perpetuating bully behaviour and gender stereotypes, whereby boys are taught to be aggressive towards others as compared to girls who should be warm and friendly to others. “Boys don’t cry, and if they do is a sign of weakness”.

Figure 2.2: Age distribution of respondents

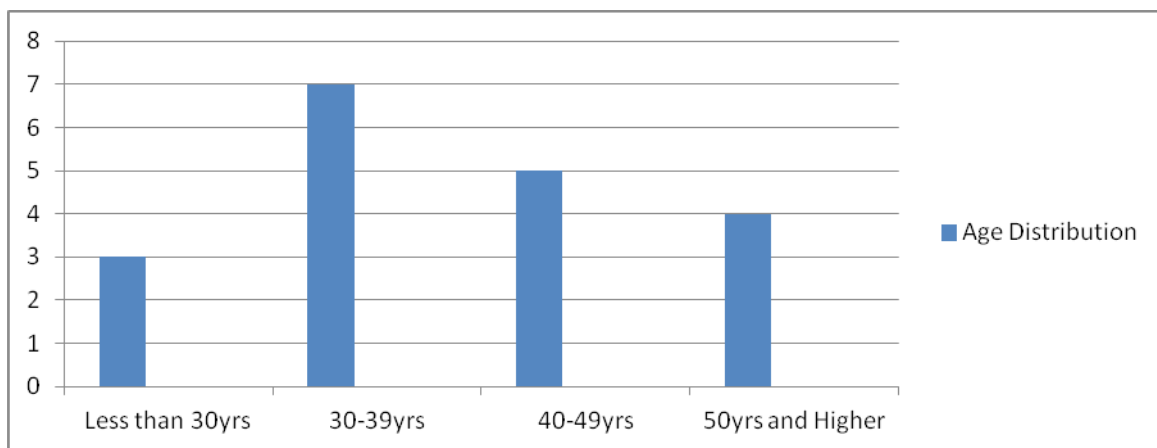


Figure 1 shows the age distribution of 19 respondents. Only 16% of the respondents were younger than 30 years of age. The majority of respondents were in the age group 30-39 years (37%) followed by the respondents in the age group 40-49 years (26%). However, 21% of the population were 50 years and older. This table shows that the majority of respondents who experienced workplace bullying fall within the economically active and working group. These are people who are doing the actual field work or implementing decisions from the higher echelons. However, conclusions can be drawn with caution because of the size of the sample and the nature of the research. It was also not the intention of the study to develop a profile of victims of workplace bullying.

Figure 2.3: Occupational distribution of respondents

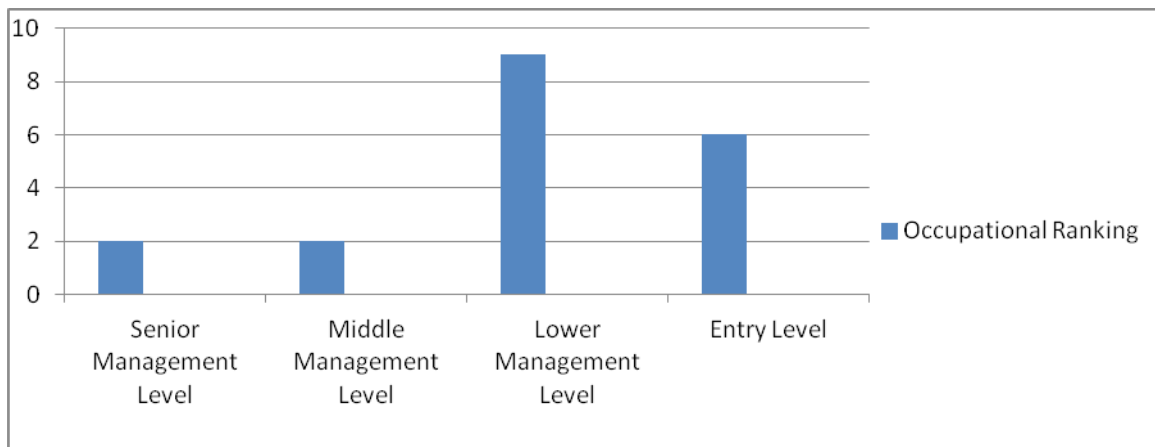


Figure 2 shows the occupational distribution of 19 respondents in terms of ranks. Only 11% of the respondents were at senior management level followed equally by 11% at middle management level. The majority of the respondents fell within the lower management ranking in terms of employment in the organisation (47%) followed by the entry level (31%). This table clearly indicates that people who are bullied in the organisation are ranked lower in terms of the organisational hierarchy; these are the people who implement decisions from the top hierarchy. Considering that power plays a role in workplace bullying, it is to be expected that victims will come from the lower levels of the organisation. Another reason might be that more senior staff will be more reluctant to report that they have been bullied.

2.4. THE QUALITATIVE DATA

2.4.1 Profile of the Respondents

This specific section aims to present an overview of the respondents' profiles:

Respondent 1: was a 46-year-old female manager in the department who has 26 years of service in the public service. The respondent was on middle management level.

Respondent 2: was a female senior manager, 56 years of age and has served in the public service for 22 years.

Respondent 3: was a 39-year-old African female with seven years of service in the public service. She was on occupational entry level.

Respondent 4: was an administrative officer with four years of service in the public service. At the time of the research she was 25 years old.

Respondent 5: was an African female with 10 years of service in the public service. At the time of the research she was at occupational entry level.

Respondent 6: was an African female with 12 years of service in the public service. She was also at entry occupational level.

Respondent 7: was a 45-year-old African female who had been in the public service for 21 years. She was an administrative officer at entry occupational level.

Respondent 8: was a 38-year-old African female with four years of service in the public service. She served at middle management level of the department.

Respondent 9: was a 38-year-old African male with 16 years of service in the public service. He was serving at lower management level of the department.

Respondent 10: was a 34-year-old African female with eight years of service in the public service. She was serving at the lower management level of the department.

Respondent 11: was serving at lower management level and was 27 years old. The respondent had 10 years of service in the public service.

Respondent 12: was a 34-year-old white male with three years of service in the public service. He was serving at entry occupational level as personal assistant.

Respondent 13: was a 27-year-old human resource practitioner serving the department.

Respondent 14: was serving at lower management level and was a 31-year-old African with 11 years of service in the public service.

Respondent 15: was serving at senior management level in the department and was 52 years old. He had 28 years of service in the public service.

Respondent 16: was serving at lower management level in the department and was 42 years old. He had 18' years service in the public service.

Respondent 17: was a 56-year-old African male who had served 34 years in the public service at lower management level.

Respondent 18: was a 47-year-old African female who had served 23 years in the public service at the lower management level.

Respondent 19: was a 51-year-old African female who had been in the public service for 25 years as senior administrative officer.

2.4.2 Themes identified from the questionnaires

The themes identified from the interviews with the respondents are discussed below:

- **Theme 1: Verbal abuse and violation of personal dignity**

It emerged from the research that the majority of the respondents had experienced workplace bullying in the recent past. Almost all 19 participants confirmed that they had been a victim of bullying by their supervisor or co-worker. The most common form of bullying that was reported was verbal, such as shouting in front of everybody, name calling and use of derogatory words. This was confirmed by respondents nr. 2, 3, 6, 8, 18 and 19. One respondent remarked that he/she had been *“shouted at, told I cannot think, I’m incompetent and disciplinary sanction should be taken against me”*, and *“get out of my office”*. Respondent nr. 6 confirmed that she was called by names; *“my supervisor calls me Mushangana or Lekwapa”*

Furthermore, the research also revealed that bullying happens between two people, one with authority over the other. Under usual circumstances the supervisor is the one who bullies the subordinates. This finding is also confirmed by Olweus (1999:3) when he states that bullying is usually defined as a subset of aggressive behaviour, in which the aggression is repeated, and in which there is an imbalance of power such that it is difficult for the victims to defend themselves. The ESRI Task Force Report (US Government Publications, April 2001:1-2) also concurs that bullying in the workplace is defined as repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others at the place of work and/or in the course of employment, which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual’s right to dignity at work.

The most profound experiences cited by respondents nr. 4, 9 and 11 were that their dignity was severely compromised in front of everybody in the office. The respondents expressed their written statements as follows:

- *“I feel that I have been treated in a very disrespectful manner and belittled”* (Respondent 4)
- *“I was humiliated when my supervisor shouted at me in hostile manner for a mistake that was not my fault but an oversight of a co-worker”* (Respondent 11).

➤ *“It is unprofessional and insulting, I felt belittled and unwanted”* (Respondent 9).

The statements above clearly show that respondents experienced the actions of their supervisors as abusive and harmful to their personal dignity. The most common form of bullying is from supervisor to subordinate, and rarely by co-workers. In support of what the respondent’s experiences were, literature clearly articulates that the inducement of harm to personal dignity is an essential and necessary component in all definitions of bullying (Saunders, 2006:342). Olweus (1999:54) shares similar sentiments when maintaining that this particular bullying behaviour involves the use of verbal threats, insults, offensive remarks, teasing, or sarcasm intended to degrade the victim. It may also involve name calling, use of a nickname, and labelling someone as “moron, idiot, or stupid”.

• **Theme 2: Character assassination**

In this section respondents were asked to indicate whether incorrect information was ever spread about their abilities/competency and whether they were ever subjected to silent treatment. Some excerpts from the testimonies of respondents 1, 5, 7, 11, and 16 confirmed that negative criticism had been levelled against them regarding their performance. The respondents strongly attested that their performance was singled out and used against them to score points. The responses varied as is reflected in the statements below:

- *“She made negative comments about my work; the negative information was also relayed to senior management of the department”*
- *“I was discussed at the executive level and given numerous letters of threatening demotion and disciplinary hearings”*
- *“Sometimes I feel as if my supervisor’s job is to humiliate me by singling out my performance at meetings and making me seem incompetent to handle my duties at work”*
- *“They aim to prove to everyone that I am not knowledgeable and they know better and want everyone to see it”*

There was a general consensus among respondents that negative information about their character was spread maliciously in order to destroy their character. This was illustrated by respondent 6: *“I was made to be a bad person always when there were meetings in our section, and she would set me as an example of being a bad person in the whole section”*. Respondents 9 and 13 also shared similar experiences respectively: *“I was labelled a backstabber and embarrassed in front of colleagues and subordinates”*, and *“people were talking about me at work about how I was unfriendly and that I couldn’t work with other people”*.

Literature supports what is quoted above: it is well known that gossip and spreading ill-intended tales about someone can be very successful in tarnishing a person's reputation. Therefore, spreading wrong information, use of innuendos and half-truths can easily be distorted and have the same effect as malicious gossip (Steinman, 2007:21).

Furthermore, some excerpts from testimonies of respondents 1, 4, 6, 7, 11, 15 and 19 confirm that their supervisors deliberately isolated and excluded them from important staff meetings in order to set them up for failure. The following themes were extracted from respondents' written expressions:

- *"I was excluded from important meetings and was surprised when important trips were taken with sub-ordinates from other units affecting my unit"* (Respondent 15).
- *"Being excluded from departmental meetings, getting excluded from performance report meetings, there were countless occasion where I was excluded from team-building meetings"* (Respondent 4).
- *"I was told to stop attending public participation programme committee meetings"* (Respondents 19).

The Job Watch Inc. (1998:2) confirms that studies have measured various forms of oppressive behaviour such as criticism of work performance, and unfair treatment in relation to the allocation of work entitlements such as the refusal of a reasonable application for annual leave. Therefore, other experiences include the denial of access to information which is essential for effective work performance, increased or pervasive scrutiny of work performance, and unfair complaints to management.

- **Theme 3: Instilling fear through abuse of power**

In this section respondents were asked to indicate whether they had been subjected to some form of intimidation, provocation or even frightened by the actions of someone they worked with. This also implied the misuse of power or authority to instil fear in the victim. Some excerpts from the testimonies of respondents 1, 2 and 11 confirmed that their supervisor would allocate huge amounts of responsibilities and set unrealistic time frames. Cowie *et al.* (2002:35) also contend that workplace bullying may take the form of overworking a person and subjecting him/her to undue pressure, impossible deadlines and unnecessary disruptions. This deliberate action is intended to set the victim up for failure, which would be followed by sanctions, warnings and discipline and threats of firing. To a certain extent supervisors may

even abuse power to restructure or change responsibilities in order to frustrate the victim and gain control. These phenomena were captured in respondent statements below:

- *“On a regular basis my supervisor will give me huge amount of work to complete and an unethical time frame, and if the work is not complete they threaten me with warnings and being fired”* (Respondent 11).
- *“My supervisor threatens to restructure the directorate and change the nature of my duties. She interviewed me afresh to determine if I can still be retained in the new structure. She ended up abolishing my post and threaten that if I go on vacation leave I should not be surprised to find that I am in excess and no longer on her structure”* (Respondent 1)
- *“Threatened to be subjected to disciplinary action, work load given within short period and to be submitted by end of business today”* (Respondent 2).

In support of what the respondents’ experiences were, literature clearly articulates that some bullies need to instil fear through shouting, screaming, tantrums and swearing. It is common for these kinds of bullies to normally engage in threats such as “I will fire you if you...” coupled with aggressive gestures to put the fear of God in their subordinates (Steinman 2007: 21).

- **Theme 4: Use of conspiracies to eliminate a person**

In this section respondents were asked to indicate whether they had been isolated/ excluded from their section or even denied access to working tools. Approximately eight respondents confirmed that they were isolated and excluded from their section meetings. To a greater extent some respondents were denied access to working equipment such as data projectors, colour printers, scanners and network access. This deliberate action was intended to have the victim fail to complete assigned projects so they would face punishment. Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 13 and 15 shared their experiences:

- *“When there were meetings I was excluded and I was not informed about them, when I complain they just ignored me and carried on without me”*(Respondent 13)
- *“I was isolated and excluded from duties that were in my line of duty”* (Respondent 9)
- *“Being isolated in terms of not being notified about meetings and development in the workplace”* (Respondent 4)

- *“My supervisor would have meetings with my co-workers and subordinates without involving me, she would delegate them duties that were supposed to be done by me and also cancelled my work plans and prevented me from doing my work and even stopped my subordinates from carrying out duties that I assigned them”* (Respondent 1)
- *“Subordinates given assignments without my knowledge, overseas trips organised for subordinates without my knowledge and discovered this information by default”* (Respondent 2).
- *“My supervisor ganged with my subordinates at district office and influenced them to resist my instruction in order for me to be proved incompetent”* (Respondent 17).

According to Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith and Pereira (2002:132) workplace bullying behaviours can be characterized by isolation such as preventing access to opportunities, physical or social isolation, and withholding of information. Steinman (2007:22) also affirms that bullying in the workplace can take the form of a conspiracy by two or more persons to get rid of a colleague by means of group pressure, such as socially isolating the victim, and setting him/her up for failure (by moving deadlines arbitrarily, refusing the victim the necessary equipment to do the work, and openly conspiring to get a person fired).

Apart from being isolated and excluded from the meeting of the section, other respondents confirmed being denied access to basic requirements or essential tools to fulfil their roles and responsibilities:

- *“I was refused to have a projector and a scanner and a colour printer and 3-G”* (Respondent 15)
- *“My manager told me that my cell phone will be cut off”* (Respondent 3)

It is obvious from above that respondents shared common frustrations of being denied access to essential tools necessary for them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. The withholding of essential tools is a deliberate and malicious action by the perpetrator to disempower the victim from completing assignments in order to receive punishment. The working tools may include computers, laptops, printers, scanners, 3-G and many more which were very critical for the type of work assigned to the respondents.

- **Theme 5: Use of technology as form of social control**

In this section respondents were asked to indicate whether they had been subjected to an investigation through hacking into their systems. This may also include reprimands/directives being circulated to all in the line of command through the use of information technology. Some respondents reported having their cellphones being hacked into and some received instructions or commands via email. The following respondents confirmed this by expressing the following sentiments:

- *“Cell phone hacking seems to be a major problem for me, my commands are received through the internet e-mails”* (Respondent 11)
- *“My supervisor would give me instructions via e-mail and circulate my responses to senior managers in the department”* (Respondent 1)
- *“Letters written to me and copied to overseer and asked to respond in writing within stipulated period”* (Respondent 2)
- *“With regards to hacking my phone has been hacked into and phone calls screened by my supervisor and reprimand and command are circulated in the internet and phone calls”* (Respondent 4)
- *“The supervisor hacks into our phone records (including sms), e-mails accounts, laptops and desktops to see what they can find to use against you”* (Respondent 16).

Romm & Pliskin, as cited in Steinman (2007:22), are in concurrence with these incidents of emails being used as means of social control by the “office tyrant”. This particular form of behaviour was clearly illustrated in a case study in which the department chair at a university used e-mail to manipulate, control, and coerces employees. Emailing enabled him to establish a prison without walls and, as warden of that prison, to control the behaviour of his subordinates in ways that would be impossible without email.

Furthermore, Romm & Pliskin (cited in Steinman, 2007:22) agree that this type of bullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. Cyber bullying is the misuse of e-mail systems or internet forums for sending aggressive flame mails. Serial bullies have few communication skills (and often none), thus the impersonal nature of e-mail makes it an ideal tool for causing conflict. This is sometimes called cyber stalking.

- **Theme 6: Identification of signs and symptoms of bullying**

In this section the respondents were asked to share if they had suffered any physical, psychological or social disabilities as result of bullying and to what extent workplace bullying negatively influenced their wellbeing. Some respondents shared their most profound experiences of bullying as follows:

- *“My self-esteem has been lowered, I tend to blame myself a lot even for those things beyond my control”* (Respondent 15)
- *“My wellbeing was negatively affected. I could not sleep at night and my supervisor was constantly on my mind, I dreaded coming to work and was afraid of what next she would do to me. I felt insecure in my work and my family life was also affected as I was stressed most of the time”* (Respondent 1)
- *“It undermines integrity, adversely affects relationships and create animosity which impact service delivery”* (Respondent 2)
- *“The bullying is partly responsible for my high blood pressure illness and my eventual exit from the public service”* (Respondent 15)
- *“Bullying is a cause to my tension headache”* (Respondent 11)
- *“The bullying influenced my wellbeing as I was very stressed and could not think straight”* (Respondent 7)
- *“I was almost diagnosed with clinical depression; I had memory loss, insomnia and low blood pressure. I’m now under chronic medication for some of these things that started in 2007 till now”* (Respondent 10)
- *“I was admitted in hospital after I had a stroke due to depression”* (Respondent 13)
- *“It causes me stress which has led me into depression which is causing ill-health, doctors are my refuge”* (Respondent 18)
- *“I’m being treated for high blood”* (Respondent 19).

It seems that the majority of respondents have experienced serious psychological, behavioural, physiological and social reactions due to workplace bullying. These reactions are found to be common in workplace bullying. According to Farrell and Geist-Martin (2005:4) stress is the most predominant health impact associated with bullying in the workplace. Furthermore, workplace stress has significant negative effects that are linked to poor mental health and poor physical health, resulting in an increase in the use of sick days or time off from work.

The effects of workplace bullying can include severe psychological distress, sleep disturbances and general feelings of anxiety or even posttraumatic stress, whereas the physical effects of bullying may include symptoms such as stomach-aches, headaches and general ill-health. The emotional effects of workplace bullying may include symptoms such as loss of confidence, poor self-esteem, and sometimes even suicidal behaviour. Other effects of workplace bullying on an individual includes incapacity to work and reduced output and performance (Olender-Russo, 2009:77, and Yildirim, 2009:509).

However, other respondents confirmed that they developed general lack of motivation to work and some felt like quitting the job. This suggests that bullying can indeed lower productivity and create high turnover rates in the organisation. This was confirmed by respondent 15 who left the public service due to persistent bullying by a supervisor. Respondent 4 also confirmed that bullying negatively influenced his/her motivation to go to work every day. This situation has the potential to create absenteeism in the organisation because of associated fear of recurrent bullying.

The impact of bullying on the organisation can include high staff turnover with resultant increase in recruitment and induction costs, as well as down time as replacement workers are trained in their new jobs. Furthermore, workplace bullying is also associated with high levels of absenteeism and over-utilization of sick leave due to fear of bullies. In an attempt to quantify the financial losses, Rayner and Keashly (2004:53) estimated that for an organisation of 1000 people the loss would be \$1.2 million US. This estimate did not include the cost of litigation should the victims decide to sue the organisation.

- **Theme 7: Coping Strategy**

In this section the respondents were required to indicate how they had managed to deal with their experience of bullying.

Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper (2003:148-149) purport that the impact of workplace bullying on the victims can be devastating, thus leaving the victim unable to cope with their lives. In addition, individuals cope differently with workplace trauma due to their individual personality differences. Furthermore, men and women also possess different coping mechanism to any workplace trauma.

The study revealed that bullying can have devastating effects on employees' wellbeing and that people cope differently with difficult situations. In this study the majority of the

respondents, particularly females, indicated that they shared their situation with other people such as co-worker, friends and family members. These findings confirm that women reveal their emotions more readily than their male counterparts. In most instances men will hide their feelings as they were socialised to believe that men do not cry because it is weak.

However, other respondents indicated that they sought professional help in order to cope with their situation. Various forms of professional help were sought by respondents nr. 4, 11, 13, and 16:

- *“I consulted the doctor who booked me off sick”* (Respondent 4)
- *“I had to visit my doctor and he put me off”*
- *“I went to speak to psychologist and went to CCMA”* (Respondent 13)
- *“I am seeing a specialist to help reduce stress”* (Respondent 16).

- **Theme 8: Support**

This specific section aims to discuss the types of support received by respondents to deal with their situation. It is significant to mention that a considerable number of respondents used the Employee Health and Wellness Programme in the department. Respondents nr. 1, 4, 7, 13, and 14 utilised the internal Employee Assistance Programme for support to cope with their situation. The internal Employee Health and Wellness Programme is a resource available for employees who encounter situations which have the potential to impact their well being.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The researcher can conclude that, based on the statements extracted from the respondents' views, most of the respondents have gone through life's difficult challenges such as bullying in their career. Most respondents indicated different reactions to bullying ranging from stress, a sense of powerless and frustration, confusion and a sense of isolation. The study further confirmed that respondents have indeed gone through difficult life time in their career. The study further confirmed that respondents expressed positive remarks regarding their involvement in Employee Wellness Programme, and found it as very supportive during their difficult time after being bullied.

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SECTION C

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a discussion of the results of the study by looking at the objectives and purpose of the research. Conclusions drawn from the data analysis in the preceding chapter will be highlighted. The chapter will close with recommendations and a concluding statement.

3.1 SUMMARY REGARDING THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore and discuss the nature and extent of workplace bullying in the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism and the response by their Employee Health and Wellness Programme. Therefore, this study was exploratory in nature. Selection of this study was motivated by the researcher's practical and professional experience in the field of Employee Health and Wellness. In addition, the lack of literature studies concerning the response of Employee Health and Wellness to workplace bullying in Limpopo provincial administration also encouraged the researcher to research this subject, in order to be able to determine the nature and extent of workplace bullying in the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism and the response by their Employee Health and Wellness Programme.

An extensive literature review was conducted on the nature and extent of workplace bullying and organisational response with the view of integrating the data with the experiences shared by the respondents during the study.

The following were the objectives of the study and they were achieved through literature study and empirical study:

- To theoretically conceptualise workplace bullying
- To conduct interviews with research participants who were exposed to bullying in Limpopo Provincial Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, and who consulted their Employee Health and Wellness Programme as a result of workplace bullying.

- To formulate recommendations regarding workplace bullying in terms of the response of the Employee Health and Wellness Programme in a provincial department in the Limpopo Province.

A literature study was conducted on bullying in the workplace, in-depth conceptualisation of bullying and the different types of bullying, as well as strategies for preventing it and helping the victim cope with bullying in the workplace. The empirical study was conducted by making use of questionnaires applied to 19 respondents.

3.2 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the research:

- This study revealed that workplace bullying is an important organisational issue which negatively affects people, particularly those who are powerless against those in position of power. The occurrence of bullying in the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, was reported on. The study correlated positively with literature by Saunders (2006:341), stating that power disparity exists; a definition of workplace bullying prerequisites a power imbalance where the target (victim) lacks the power to defend themselves.
- Exposure to bullying in the workplace can be associated with a negative impact on both the organisation and the individual. The findings of this study reveal that an individual may develop severe chronic psychological, emotional, physiological and behavioural disturbances as result of exposure to workplace bullying. Respondents have shared personal experiences such as lack of sleep (insomnia), low motivation, irritability, high blood pressure, isolation, headache, rejection, stress, depression, guilt, memory loss and low self-esteem.
- The findings above are confirmed by Farrell and Geist-Martin (2005:4) who maintain that workplace bullying presupposes the deliberate intent to cause physical and psychological distress to others and can include behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates a worker, possibly in front of co-worker, clients or customers. Stress is the most predominant health issue associated with bullying in the workplace. Furthermore, workplace stress has significant negative effects that are correlated to poor mental health and poor physical health, resulting in an increase in the use of sick days or time off from work.

- The findings of the study also revealed that bullying could negatively impact on organisational level. Respondents nr. 1, 2, 4 and 15 indicated how bullying impacted on their motivation to do the work, which had a negative impact on service delivery. Furthermore, respondent nr.15 also indicated that bullying has negatively influenced him to exit the public service.
- Duffy (2009:242) supports the abovementioned findings that although the impact of bullying can be devastating to the health and wellbeing of individuals, organisations also experience its effects in terms of loss of productivity, absenteeism, turnover, legal costs and negative publicity. The impact of bullying on the organisation can include high staff turnover with resultant increase in recruitment and induction costs, high medical costs, as well as down time as replacement workers are trained in their new jobs.
- Furthermore, workplace bullying is also associated with high incidences of absenteeism and over-utilization of sick leave due to employees staying away from work because of fear of bullies. In an attempt to quantify the financial costs Rayner and Keashly (2004: 53) estimated that for an organisation of 1000 people, the cost would be \$1.2 million US. This estimate did not include the cost of litigation should the victims file a suit against the organisation.
- The literature review indicated that bullying intervention strategies originated as result of the organisational response to prevent and also to address the impact of bullying on the employees.
- The most contemporary bullying intervention strategies were developed to match the specific needs of different organisations. The most common preventative strategies include legislations such as anti-bullying workplace policies, harassment policies, and labour law. This specific set of legislation aimed at prohibiting bullying in the workplace was covered in detail in Article 1.
- The reactive bullying intervention strategies were developed with the aim of helping the victim cope with the impact of bullying. The widely covered reactive bullying strategies in article 1 will include counselling and psychotherapy.
- The findings of the study revealed that the EAP of the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism is support programme for employees exposed to workplace bullying. The majority of respondents indicated that they have utilised the

Employee Assistance Programme as support to deal with their situation. The Employee Assistance Programme is being viewed positively as support buffer by many respondents.

- However, the findings of the study further revealed that some respondents consulted doctors and psychologists outside the working environment as a way to cope with the impact of bullying.
- Different theoretical frameworks on workplace bullying were presented in Article 1. Despite their differences they all share common aspect: , that bullying infringes on the rights and dignity of the individual and humiliates him/her.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in the light of the abovementioned conclusions:

- Although a qualitative approach to describing and analysing the subjective experiences and perceptions of employees regarding workplace bullying and the response of Employee Health and Wellness at the Limpopo Provincial Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism produced a wealth of data, it is unclear to what extent the findings of this study may be generalised to other contexts.
- In addition, more efforts are needed to quantify the experiences and perceptions of employees on workplace bullying and the response of Employee Health and Wellness of the Provincial Department in the Limpopo Province. Therefore, confirmatory studies – ideally with larger sample sizes, both qualitatively and quantitatively are suggested to confirm, refine or disprove the tentative findings posited in this study.
- Given the result of the study within the Limpopo Provincial Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism it seems more people are exposed to bullying in the workplace. Therefore, more efforts should concentrate on the implementation of Employee Health and Wellness both as preventative and reactive intervention strategies. The relevant staff should be trained to deal with this problem.
- Organisations, particularly in the public sector, should focus their attention on implementing employee health and wellness programmes as support mechanisms for employees experiencing difficulties like bullying.

- It is further recommended that employee health and wellness programmes should be pro-activate to include educational workshops and awareness on the impact of workplace bullying and its associated economical and psychological implications on both the organisation and the individual in order to prevent it.

3.4 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This study has confirmed workplace bullying as a serious organisational issue within the Limpopo Provincial Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism. Although the costs associated with workplace bullying cannot be quantified, this topic has become a phenomenon and has received a lot of serious attention because of its associated negative impact on both the organisation and the individual. The department has introduced the Employee Health and Wellness Programme as intervention strategy to assist employees in coping with different situations, including bullying. The majority of participants in the study viewed employee health and wellness programmes as support offered by the employer.

This study has made some contribution towards describing the subjective experiences and perceptions of victims of workplace bullying and the response of the Employee Health and Wellness Programme of the Limpopo Provincial Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism. Despite the limitations of this study, it has provided a basis for more extensive studies in the field of workplace bullying and the organisational response.

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