

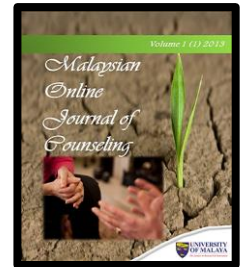
WORKPLACE BULLYING AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

Jolyn Hong Su Rong & Ida Hartina Ahmed Tharbe

ABSTRACT

The increasing number of reports on workplace bullying, shows the gravity of this issue. Workplace bullying is a behaviour perceived as intentionally negative, malicious, persistent and consistent with the desire to control. It has detrimental effects on an individual's psychological wellbeing and is related to issues of anxiety, low self-esteem, psychiatric damage and even suicide. This research aims to investigate the prevalence of workplace bullying among emerging adults as well as its correlation to self-esteem. Differences in exposure to workplace bullying among gender will also be looked into. Investigating workplace bullying in the local context will help mental health professionals to better understand the phenomenon and to support target's mental wellbeing. A total of 212 emerging adults working in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor participated in this study. The Negative-Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was distributed using simple random sampling. Findings showed workplace bullying is prevalent among emerging adults working in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Analysis shows that the most common type of bullying experienced by emerging adults are covert work-related bullying. Results from the t-test conducted of NAQ-R among gender shows no significant difference in exposure of workplace bullying among gender but showed significant negative correlation between NAQ-R and RSES. Higher exposure of workplace bullying is associated with lower self-esteem. Findings of this study promotes better understanding of trends of workplace bullying in Malaysia as well as the development of legislation to reduce workplace bullying. Implications of this study includes counsellors being able to better understand bullying issues and its effects on self-esteem allowing for better treatment and intervention for those facing bullying.

Keywords: *Workplace Bullying; Emerging Adults, NAQ-R, Self-Esteem*



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Corresponding Author:
Department of Educational
Psychology & Counselling,
Faculty of Education
jolyn_hong89@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying is an issue that has been receiving increasing attention in recent years. Many such incidents has been reported worldwide and can no longer be considered frivolous. These incidences is also found in Malaysia as exposed in a news article by Tan (2013) entitled *Bullying in the workplace*; it showed many cases where employees in Malaysia were subjected to workplace bullying. Exposure to workplace hostility causes detrimental effects not only to the individual's physical, social and mental health, but also the productivity of the organization (Merecz, Drabek & Moscicka, 2009). The International Labour Organization (Canada Safety Council, 2000), categorizes any incident where an employee of an organisation is abused, threatened or assaulted in work related circumstances as workplace violence; this embraces all forms of harassment, *bullying*, intimidation, physical threats and other intrusive behaviours.

While school bullying is commonly reported, workplace bullying has less coverage and not newsworthy due to its subtleness, less physical and more emotionally focused strategy. According to Arynne (2009), workplace bullying is about a personalized attack on one colleague by another using behaviours which are emotionally and psychologically punishing. American Psychological Association article in 2004, states bullying can lead to low self-esteem, lowered resiliency and anxiety even after the physical wounds have healed. Employees who experienced workplace bullying were more likely to quit their jobs, have lower well-being, be less satisfied with their jobs and have less satisfying work relationships (Hershcovis, 2008).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The aim of the present study is:

1. To understand the current occurrences of workplace bullying among emerging adults in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur
2. To examine the differences of exposure to workplace bullying among genders.
3. To understand the relationship of exposure to workplace bullying with the target's self-esteem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many definitions for workplace bullying. According to Namie and Namie (2003), workplace bullying is far too widespread because in order to understand bullying, a person must know the differences between harmless incivility, rudeness, teasing, and other forms of interpersonal torment. For this study, bullying is defined as (a) behaviour that is perceived as intentionally negative and malicious, whether physical or emotional, from one or more persons; (b) perceived negative behaviour that is persistent and consistent; (c) perceived behaviour driven by a bully's desire to control the target (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003).

According to Harvey, Treadway, Heames and Duke (2008), the rapid rate of change and increased complexity of organizational environments have augmented opportunities for bullying. Statistic on workplace bullying from United States in 2014 revealed that 27% of Americans have suffered abusive conduct at work; 21% have witnessed it and 72% are aware that workplace bullying happens (Namie, Christensen, & Phillips, 2014). Workplace bullying also happens within Asia as there have been increasing reports involving bullying. In a recent survey Zoharah Omar, Mazlina Mokhtar and Siti Raba'ah Hamzah (2015) found that out of 112 public service employees' in Malaysia, 83.2% were exposed to workplace bullying. 43.7% of employees, exposed to occasional bullying, 21.8%

employees experienced regular bullying while 34.5% experienced severe bullying. Their findings have proven that workplace bullying is a fairly common phenomenon in Asia.

According to Mateju and Fischer (2009), young employees under the age of 29 experienced more negative acts than any other age group. An explanation for these findings seems to be the difference in hierarchical positions within the workforce. Young people may be more exposed to workplace bullying because bullies tend to pick on those perceived to be weaker or more compliant. Zabrodska and Kveton (2013) conducted a survey in a sample of 1,533 university employees using the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R) to study the prevalence of workplace bullying. The results showed that 13.6% of the respondents were classified as bullying targets based on an operational definition of bullying (weekly exposure to one negative act), while 7.9% were identified as targets based on self-reports. This shows the level of awareness about workplace bullying is low as some young adults are ignorant of such an act. Higher exposures to bullying were found among young employees who had spent less than 1 year in their present job.

The term “young adults” refers to anyone within the age of 18 to 35 years old. As it was determined that a 17 years age range is too wide, emerging adults were used as participants of this study. Arnett and colleagues (2014) states that emerging adulthood is the period between the end of adolescence (18 years) and the entry to a stable adulthood (29 years). Emerging adults are constituted by the transitions to adulthood such as getting their first jobs or starting a family. In essence, it is the age where an individual begins to break away from family ties transitioning to becoming their own separate entity. This period of time is critical to a person’s psychosocial development. Instability caused by lifestyle changes from leaving homes, development of new relationships and frequent job changes can be a very challenging time (Arnett et al., 2014). These life changes, if not managed well, can cause mental health issues. As counsellors, it is important to be aware of various factors that affect a person’s mental health. By understanding these factors, counsellors are able to promote counselling to lifestyle stresses.

Although the occurrence of workplace bullying is ubiquitous, the trend and effects might defer in accordance to cultural norms as the perception of “bullying” can be measured differently across cultures (Bozionelos, 2013). Physical bullying is deemed unacceptable across most societies but when it comes to covert workplace bullying actions - shouting, pressuring employees with workloads or consistently highlighting mistakes may be seen as boosting productivity or viewed as behaviours that are normal amongst superiors in some societies (Bozionelos, 2013). Workplace bullying in Malaysia is a grey area because the behaviour often gets overlooked (Tan, 2013), causing workplace bullying to escalate without prevention. The fear of being found out and the fact that most targets do not know how to seek reconciliation makes this issue worse. With increased awareness, proper management intervention can be planned which integrates proper staff conduct. Cultural differences in how workplace bullying is viewed make it a topic worthy of investigation in local context.

Another noteworthy factor to bullying is power. Power imbalance is one of the enabling factors for deviant behaviour. According to Hutchinson and colleagues (2010), workplace bullying is a form of abuse of formal power derived from an organizational position. Einarsen (2005) says the core in the definition of workplace bullying is the exposure to repeated, negative act and the imbalance in formal or informal power between the involved parties. Power is being closely associated with workplace bullying, as Ryner (1997), found that very large proportion of bullies are in management positions.

The relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem is important as it is a major aspect of a holistic individual. It defines how we behave and how we react towards certain situation, which can affect our mental wellbeing. According to Kling, Hyde, Showers, and Buswell (1999), global self-

esteem is defined as “the level of global regard that one has for the self of the person”. Studies have documented that the increase prevalence of bullying threatens the dignity and self-esteem of employees in the workplace (Yeung & Griffin, 2008). Harvey and Keashly (2003) who conducted a study on 115 undergraduate students with the mean age of 21.5 years who worked over the summer, indicated that self-esteem were significantly negatively related to workplace bullying. Though, explanation to which why this relationship exist is debatable. According to Harvey and Keashly (2003), low self-esteem is related to the increase of workplace bully, because targets with low self-esteem are seen as vulnerable and is easily targeted.

There are multiple opinions on which gender suffer most from workplace bullying. The New York Times (as cited in Bullying Statistic, 2009), mentioned that workplace bullying happens equally among men and woman. However, Greer and Schmelzle (2009) administered a questionnaire to 168 members of the Institute of Management Accountants living in Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma and found that 32.5% of male as compared to the 57.5% of female are faced with bullying when working. This puts females at a slightly higher risk of being targeted. While many studies hypothesize that females may be more vulnerable to workplace bullying than males, a study by Yeung and Griffin (2008) found that males in Asia reported more incidences of incivility than females by analysing the trend bullying behaviour in the Asian workplace. This was said to be due to the differences in culture and socially defined sex stereotypes in many Asian countries. Asian countries are generally more conservative and sexual differences are still a vital part of lifestyle. Woman are seen as less superior, leading to females being treated more tactfully and gently. This study will try to determine if there is difference in levels of workplace bullying among gender in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

Very few studies regarding workplace bullying has been conducted in Malaysia. This indicates that researchers should start investigating workplace bullying phenomenon to see if it occurs in Malaysia and if it is in line with the other studies. There are only few articles in which workplace bullying was briefly investigated in the Malaysian context making this study vital to the gap in knowledge about workplace bullying.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey was used for gathering the primary data for this study. The survey focused on emerging adults (18-29 years old) working in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur for a minimum of six months. The sampling method chosen for this research is simple random sampling. The questionnaires were distributed via online survey to protect participant’s anonymity. Participants were required to respond to (1) demographic information (2) the NAQ-R and (3) the RSES and distributed via Google Forms to ensure easy access for the participants. Participants were told to spend 10 minutes approximately to complete the survey of 37 questions to be answered. Data was automatically saved into Google Doc’s and can be accessed conveniently for analysis.

Instrument

Negative Act Questionnaire (NAQ-R) was developed by Einarsen and Raknes to study frequency respondents has been subjected to a range of negative acts and potentially harassing behaviours in the workplace during the last six months (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009). Questionnaire consists of 22 items using 5-point Likert scale (from 1=never to 5 = Daily) and one question on general perception of workplace bullying. NAQ-R can be categorized as a single factor measure or be analysed with three underlying factors: personal bullying, work-related bullying and physically intimidation (Einarsen et al., 2009). For this research NAQ-R will be calculated as a single factor measure but an analysis of the three underlying factors will be studied in the descriptive examination. Scores of NAQ-R ranges from 23 to 110 points according to respondent's self-evaluation (Charilaos et al., 2015). The higher their score, the higher their exposure to workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009). Validity of the NAQ-R was analysed based on a heterogeneous sample of 5,288 UK employees which shows Cronbach's alpha of 0.90, indicating good internal consistency (Einarsen et al., 2009). This instrument is proven reliable in Asian context as Yahaya et al. (2012) found that the reliability test for workplace bullying was 0.92 through a study involving investigating the relationship among workplace bullying, employees' work performance. The use of NAQ-R was obtained by the Bergen Bullying Research Group, University of Bergen in Norway.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965 and is used to evaluate level of self-esteem of an individual. According to Malbi and Reasoner (as cited in Habibollah et al., 2009) self-esteem is an overall evaluation of oneself in either a positive or negative way. RSES is a 10 item scale where the items are answered on a Likert scale, presented with four response choices, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Table 1 illustrate the scoring system. Reverse scales are used to reduce bias respond by the respondent and to identify data entry which is unreliable. Table 2 shows the level of an individual's self-esteem according to the scores they obtained (Brooks & Van Noy, 2008).The RSES has high reliability and validity. According to a study by Shahani, Dipboye, and Phillips (1990), employees of a state agency were asked to participate in a study to investigate the reliability of the RSES, results shows that the alpha was 0.80. The study found that the internal reliabilities (Cronbach alphas) of the RSES scale within 53 nations have a mean reliability of 0.81 with Malaysia having an alpha of 0.79 (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). RSES was proven reliable to be used in local context as a research was conducted by Mohd Jamil (2006) to demonstrate the validity and reliability of the question among children in a Seremban School. The study concluded that RSES is a valid tool to be used in the Malaysian context as it recorded high validity and reliability with alpha values ranging from 0.81 to 0.88 (Mohd Jamil, 2006).

Table 1
Scoring keys of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

| Likert Scale | Description | Scoring for positive item (Items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7) | Scoring for negative item (Item 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10) |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Strongly Agree | 4 | 1 |
| 2 | Agree | 3 | 2 |
| 3 | Disagree | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | Strongly Disagree | 1 | 4 |

***Maximum score: 40, Minimum score: 10

Table 2

Level of Self-Esteem according to Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

| Score | Description |
|---------|--------------------|
| 26 - 40 | High self-esteem |
| 15 - 25 | Medium self-esteem |
| 0 - 14 | Low self-esteem |

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

A total number of 318 responses were received for this study, 106 were eliminated due to age limit or not working in Kuala Lumpur or Selangor. After eliminating responses that falls outside the parameters, only 212 responses were used for this study. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistical as well as the *t*-test to examine if there were any gender differences in exposure of workplace bullying. The Pearson-Correlation test was used to determine if there is a significant relationship between workplace bullying and the level of self-esteem.

Descriptive Data of Respondent's Profile

Based on the demographic questionnaire, the participants' mode age is 29 years old (23.11%) with 58 (27.4 %) male, and 154 (72.6 %) female. In terms of work location, 132 (62.3 %) respondent works in Kuala Lumpur while 80 (37.7%) works in Selangor. 147 respondents (69.3 %) worked for more than 12 months, while only 65 respondents (30.7 %) worked from 6 months to 12 months.

Prevalence of workplace bullying among Emerging adults

A descriptive analysis of the NAQ-R was conducted to investigate if emerging adults are exposed to workplace bullying. Table 3 shows that the mean value of experienced negative acts among emerging adults are $M = 45.55$ with an $SD = 18.37$. This shows that participants reported that they experience moderate frequency of bullying at their workplace. The distribution shape of NAQ-R was examined to determine the extent to which the assumption of normality was met. Skewness (.281, $SE=.17$), kurtosis (-.02, $SE=.33$) this suggest that there is normality in the distribution of scores.

Table 3

Descriptive statistic for NAQ-R score

| | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness | | Kurtosis | |
|-------|-----|-----|-------|-------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | | | | Statistic | Std. Error | Statistic | Std. Error |
| NAQ-R | 22 | 108 | 45.55 | 18.37 | .81 | .17 | -.02 | .33 |

Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondent's self-evaluation (item 23 on the NAQ-R) towards their exposure to workplace bullying. Despite the fact that descriptive score shows that respondents has experience moderate exposure to workplace bullying ($M=45.55$), 50.0% of the respondent said that they were never bullied at work. This shows that respondent's perception towards their exposure to workplace bullying is inconsistent with the operational definition of workplace bullying.

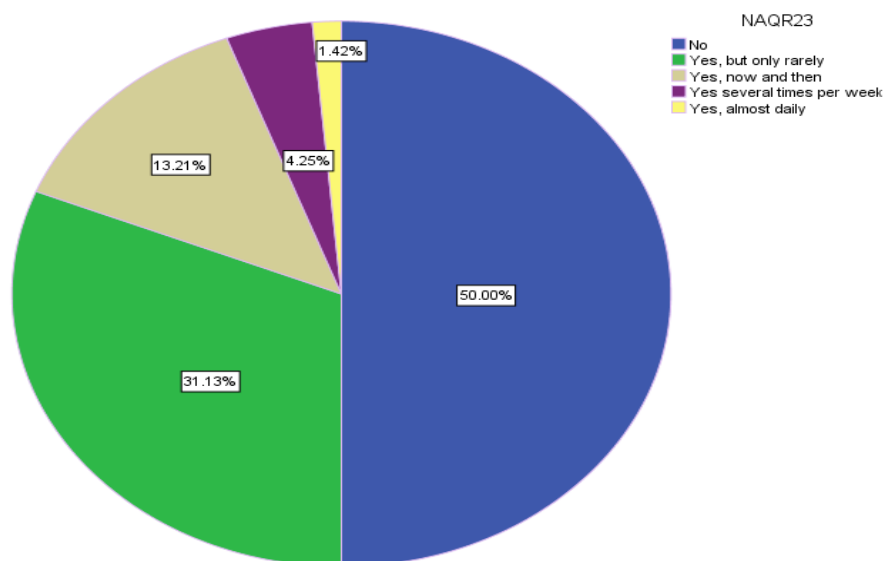


Figure 1: respondent's perception of being exposed to workplace bullying

Table 4 shows the type of negative acts that is most frequently experienced by emerging adults based on the three underlying factors: personal bullying, work-related bullying and physical intimidation. Analysis of mean score for each item shows that most emerging adult are faced with work-related bullying such as being ordered to do work below their level of competence ($M = 2.58$), being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines ($M = 2.35$) and having opinions and views ignored ($M = 2.30$). On the other hand, physical intimidation is not commonly experienced. Negative acts like intimidating behaviour ($M = 1.75$) and threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse ($M = 1.42$) are rarely experienced. One way of analysing this differences is that workplace bullying usually takes a more covert form of behaviour which is why behaviours like threats is not publicly shown by those who bullies.

Table 4

Overall NAQ-R mean, rank and type of bullying (ordered by rank)

| Item no. | Statement | Mean | Rank | Type of bullying |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------------------|
| 3 | Being ordered to do work below your level of competence | 2.58 | 1 | Work |
| 16 | Being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines | 2.35 | 2 | Work |
| 14 | Having your opinions and views ignored | 2.30 | 3 | Work |
| 5 | Spreading of gossip and rumors about you | 2.28 | 4 | Personal |
| 1 | Someone withholding information which affects your performance | 2.27 | 5 | Work |
| 4 | Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks | 2.26 | 6 | Personal |
| 11 | Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes | 2.23 | 7 | Personal |
| 21 | Being exposed to an unmanageable workload | 2.23 | 8 | Work |
| 2 | Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work | 2.2 | 9 | Personal |

| | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----|----------|
| 18 | Excessive monitoring of your work | 2.18 | 10 | Work |
| 13 | Persistent criticism of your work and effort | 2.11 | 11 | Personal |
| 6 | Being ignored, excluded or being 'sent to Coventry' | 2.10 | 12 | Personal |
| 19 | Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses) | 2.09 | 13 | Work |
| 7 | Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person (i.e. habits and background), your attitudes or your private life | 2.06 | 14 | Personal |
| 12 | Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach | 2.03 | 15 | Personal |
| 15 | Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get on with | 1.93 | 16 | Personal |
| 17 | Having allegations made against you | 1.85 | 17 | Personal |
| 10 | Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job | 1.83 | 18 | Personal |
| 8 | Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger (or rage) | 1.79 | 19 | Physical |
| 9 | Intimidating behaviour such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way | 1.75 | 20 | Physical |
| 20 | Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm | 1.71 | 21 | Personal |
| 22 | Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse | 1.42 | 22 | Physical |

Differences in Workplace Bullying among Gender

The *t*-test shows no significant gender differences in exposure of workplace bullying. Table 5 shows that the mean score for female's ($M=44.36$) are slightly lower compared to males ($M=48.72$). Males are exposed to higher workplace bullying compared to female. The standard deviation of scores for female's ($SD=18.43$) are slightly higher compared to males ($SD=17.97$). This shows that the range of scores spread wider in females compared to males. However, the difference is low between the two groups and it may be due to the fact that there are more female respondents compared to males. Although there is some mean differences between gender, *t*-test reveals that there is no significant differences in the exposure of workplace bullying among for male $t(210)= 1.55, p> .005$. Therefore, gender does not play a role in exposure to workplace bullying.

Table 5
Differences in exposure in workplace bullying among gender

| Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | df | <i>p</i> | <i>t</i> |
|--------|-----|-------|----------------|-----|----------|----------|
| Male | 58 | 48.72 | 17.976 | 210 | 0.938 | 1.548 |
| Female | 154 | 44.36 | 18.431 | | | |

Correlation of workplace bullying and level of self-esteem

The Pearson Correlation was used to investigate the relationship between workplace bullying and level of self-esteem. The test showed a significant result ($r = -0.218$, $n = 212$, $p < .05$) as indicated in table 6, hence there is a negative correlation between workplace bullying and self-esteem. The higher exposure to workplace bullying, the lower one's self-esteem. Although this is a significant result, it is considered as a very weak correlation strength as its coefficient size is small ($r = -0.218$). There is a significant relationship between workplace bullying and the level of self-esteem among emerging adults in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

Table 6
Correlation of workplace bullying and self-esteem

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | RSES | NAQ-R |
|-------|-------|-------------------|---------|---------|
| NAQ-R | 45.55 | 18.37 | 1 | -.218** |
| RSES | 19.94 | 5.50 | -.218** | 1 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Findings from this research found that (1) workplace bullying does occur among emerging adults working in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, (2) there are no gender differences in exposure of workplace bullying and (3) there is a significant negative correlation between workplace bullying and the level of self-esteem.

Workplace bullying is prevalent among emerging adults working in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, analysis shows that the most common type of bullying experienced are covert work-related. This indicates that most emerging adults are not given enough opportunity or sufficient confidence to show their ability at their workplace. This is in line with the theory that workplace bullying occurs among emerging adults is more frequently about power, controlling and manipulating targets (Hutchinson et al., 2010). As emerging adults typically hold entry-level positions, they have less official power in the organization. This is consistent with the work by Einarsen et al, (2003) also showed that the most frequently experienced negative acts were social isolation, exposure to teasing, devaluation of work and depiction to insults.

The average scores for NAQ-R for all respondents is 45.55 which is of moderate level - shows that emerging adults in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor do experience workplace bullying but the self-reporting question in the NAQ-R, 50% of the participant mentioned never being bullied at work. Sidle (2010) said that the western and eastern cultures have clear differences in areas of acceptance of formal, hierarchical power differences. High power distance cultures such as China and Singapore accepts status differences between bosses and subordinates causing them to be more tolerant of bullying supervisors and colleagues (Sidle, 2010). Thus, cultures with high power distance would perceive bullying as normal occurrences. Findings of this study agree with other research done in Malaysia. According to Ahmed Talib and Arif Hassan (2014), bullying in the workplace is serious and in extreme cases due to their social and cultural background such employees will accept and bear with such bullying treatments

The result of this study shows that there are no significant differences in exposure to workplace bullying between genders. This finding is supported by Hoel and colleagues (2001) who stated that workplace bullying with regards to targets gender has so far been inconclusive. Although there is no significant gender differences for exposure to workplace bullying, there is a mean differences (male: $M = 48.72$, female: $M = 44.36$) where males exposure is higher. This supports the finding by Yeung and Griffin (2008) who established that in Asian culture, male employees in management tend to experience higher levels of incivility. In Malaysia, not many females are in the higher organizational hierarchy due to what is commonly referred to as “the glass ceiling”, where an invisible hierarchical barrier that many women find difficult to reach or breach the level of middle management (Ahmed Talib & Arif Hassan, 2014). This explains the difference in exposure to workplace bullying among gender. It can be concluded that gender differences in workplace bullying is still an issue as there are other variables that have to be considered- example cultural orientation and cultural/social norms. Future research would benefit from doing a more comprehensive study on this issue by getting equal sample size of participants for this survey, participants of similar background in terms of race, experience, position in the company as well as age to have any strong (conclusive) result for gender differences in workplace bullying.

Through the Pearson-Correlation test, the relationship between workplace bullying and the level of self-esteem among working emerging adults shows a weak significant negative correlation. This may be due to the limitation of the study such as small sample size. Exposure to bullying in the workplace threatens the self-esteem of the employee. Studies have documented the increased occurrence of bullying threatening the dignity and self-esteem of employees in the workplace (Yeung & Griffin, 2008). Negative correlation of the two variables is due the feeling of stress and helplessness experienced by the target. When stress occurs, a person’s daily activity will be affected, lowering their self-esteem. According to Lazarus and Folkman (as cited in Mimura, Murrells & Griffiths, 2009), stress is a process in which external stressors effect the individual’s ability to cope. Workplace bullying is a severe form of stress which gives negative effects on the individual because it distorts a person’s perception on themselves. This causes them to have lower self-esteem whenever they are exposed to prolonged workplace bullying. When targets have low control over the situation, they will experience negative emotion (frustration and dissatisfaction) leading to destructive behaviour like lower self-esteem and lowered productivity.

Implication for Mental Health Practitioners

The findings obtained in this study can be used for the improvement of social and organizational behaviour, example - better understanding of the mental health of employees. As counsellors it is important to know what triggers this mental health issues so that treatment and interventions can be carried out during counselling session. Azizi Ahmad (2016) mentioned that bullying among staff is also closely linked to an “unhappy” environment, although it’s not clear whether the bullying is the cause of disaffection or the result of it. Understanding the relationship of workplace bullying, counsellors is able to conceptualize clients issue better. Findings will provide a platform to better help employee’s self-esteem in relation to bullying with employee’s self-esteem. It can be a stepping stone for organizations to come up with interventions and strategies to prevent or minimize workplace bullying.

Organizational counsellors and career counsellors function in combating bullying comes in three tiers of intervention which is: prevention, coping and development of program to reduce negative consequences (Hershcovis, Reich, & Niven, 2015).

The first tier of intervention focuses on prevention methods, counsellors are able to come up with programs that will help emerging adults better integrate with their jobs and colleagues - through understanding the workplace bullying, how it occurs and how it affects in a person. Counsellors can formulate orientation talk explaining the dynamics of work culture in the organization, effective communication and negative behaviour awareness training. Employee has to understand their rights if exposed to workplace bullying. By understanding the phenomenon, potential targets can better manage/stop the situation if needed.

The second tier of this intervention program can include providing employees with the necessary skills and/or coping resources to deal with bullying. Counsellors are essential in the coping intervention program as they assist clients to draw up plans and strategy to cope and manage bullying. Counselling also help client cope with any side-effects from bullying by developing and personalizing counselling techniques for the individual. Transactional analysis is a good way to help client alter ways of looking at other people's behaviour. Teaching assertive techniques to client is also a way to manage the situation, if a target is assertive, bullying may reduce as target is confident. Cognitive behavioural therapy is another way of altering thought patterns to impact behaviour in a positive way.

The last tier of this intervention program focuses on reducing negative consequences after bullying has occurred. As many organizations are still vague on the subject of workplace bullying, findings in this research project can be used as an additional guide for further research regarding the phenomenon. It is especially useful for the research to be in Asian context, as there is still limited research being carried out. It is crucial for organizations to respond appropriately once bullying has been reported as reports about bullying can lead to negative consequences for the targets ("you're just too sensitive"). The objective of reducing negative consequences of workplace bullying is to provide targets with a safe and effective way to address their concerns. This can be done by generating policies to ensure fair and just treatments are meted out for their grievances.

In Malaysia there is no specific legislation that directly addresses the issue of bullying but legal action can still be taken (Azizi Ahmad, 2016). Malaysian Trade Union Congress general secretary Halim Mansur said that workplace bullying is when workers basic rights are being violated as per the Malaysian Employment Act (Tan, 2013).

Limitations of Study

As with all research, there are limitations to this study. The data collected for this study was through a survey and does not allow for qualitative interaction. The results can show the trends and patterns of workplace bullying but not why and how bullying occurs. Second is that targets of workplace bullying may be unwilling to discuss their experiences for fear of ridicule. As a result, some participants may not have been completely honest on the survey. Next is the sample size of this study - only 212 participants were used which is a small sample size for a social psychology research. Participants were obtained through simple random sampling and do not represent the entire Malaysian population. Lastly is the limitation in research of past studies - there is little research done on the phenomenon of workplace bullying. In fact, the first research done on bullying was 50 years ago. Literature materials that is used for this project is therefore very recent, limited and many of them is still inconclusive.

CONCLUSION

From this study, it is concluded that workplace bullying is a phenomenon that is occurring locally. Workplace bullying is a pattern of persistent, malicious, insulting, or exclusionary intentional or non-

intentional behaviours that a target perceives as intentional efforts to harm, control or drive them from the workplace (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005). Growing interest among researches regarding this phenomenon has led to many findings on this. This study shows that there is a negative correlation between exposure to workplace bullying and the level of self-esteem. There are no gender differences in the exposure of workplace bullying. The results of this study can be used to create a better understanding of workplace bullying in the society and organizations. What makes bullying in the workplace so prevalent is that it is not seen as illegal and consequently, bullies easily get away with their behaviour (Ahmed Talib& Arif Hassan, 2014). To curb this issue, society and organizations has to build a culture of respect, increased job satisfaction, with the resultant increased productivity benefitting employees, organizations and society as a whole. A more comprehensive research on workplace bullying is necessary for the development of legislation to eliminate such behaviour in the working environment. Eliminating workplace bullying is critical for both small and large organizations to remain competitive in an increasingly global market.

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