



**Business Policy & Strategy – Capstone report**

**Ulkar Huseynli**

**Aygun Asgarova**

**Are bullying behaviors tolerated in some cultures? Relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction among Azerbaijani employees**

## **Abstract**

Our study adopted the article “Are bullying behaviors tolerated in some cultures? Evidence for a curvilinear relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction among Italian workers” from the journal of Business Ethics Vol. 131, No. 1 (September 2015), for replication of the same or similar analysis for Azerbaijan. The aim of this study was to determine whether the same curvilinear effect can be observed in a sample of Azerbaijani employees. As this was the first study in this context in our country, we aimed to address different sectors for conducting the analysis. Supporting the replication study, our results demonstrated curvilinear relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. On the other hand, psychological well-being demonstrated linear relationship in contrast to curvilinear model between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. In particular, our purpose is to study whether victims of bullying try to determine the causes taking into consideration social and cultural norms. We aimed to explore if the workplace bullying is tolerated to some extent among Azerbaijani workers. Our results supported the view that, it is important to consider cultural and organizational factors in order to better understand and deal with workplace bullying.

## **Introduction**

Workplace bullying is a common type of mistreatment that employees can face, and it is either committed by someone who has the authority as well as by peers and subordinates. When the negative or abusive behaviors are consistent and purposeful, it means there is exposure to bullying (Westhues, 2008). Bullying at work is considered very serious issue, which can be found in many organizations all over the world. Victims of bullying face negative acts in workplace in many different ways. In nature, bullying acts should be repeated regularly against individual. The duration and frequency of bullying acts is very important to consider when looking at its consequences. Bullying contains lack of power balance leading to hostile organizational environment. Usually it may cause emotional or physical harm for the victim and he/she will be isolated in the workplace. Bullying can either be verbal or physical. Bullying in the workplace can be characterized by different types such as teasing, intimidating a person, even psychically abusing, withholding important information that can affect the performance of that person, criticizing persistently and etc. The challenge of workplace bullying is faced in both developing and developed countries, especially in countries with high power distance. Power distance countries refer to countries in which, individuals accept that the power is distributed unequally. In these countries, individuals or subordinates in workplace are less likely to contradict their superiors, even they accept their negative behaviors.

Workplace bullying is defined as a situation where an employee persistently and over a period of time perceives him-/herself to be on the receiving end of psychological mistreatment from superiors, coworkers, subordinates, and/or customers/clients while finding it difficult to defend oneself against the exposure. In addition, some people may be target of bullying without being aware of the fact that they are being bullied. They have less information what bullying can include, what kind of behaviors are considered abusive towards them. Usually, bullying in the workplace can be more powerful cause of stress compared to other stress creating factors such as heavy workloads, challenging job requirements and hard decisions about organizations.

Bullying in workplace can be noticed in situations where employee consistently receive both physical and psychological mistreatment from managers, co-workers, superiors and cannot find a way to defend himself/herself against such situation.

Employees are exposed to workplace bullying when they feel themselves under the criticism and pressure, find it difficult to deal with the situation and defend themselves (Einarsen, 1999). According to Namie (2003) workplace bullying is almost unseen in many situations, only the victim of bullying can notice it. Workplace bullying has detrimental impact for the health of employees and their psychological well-being (Bowling and Beehr 2006).

Workplace bullying is a social issue which can distort a safe work environment and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is the indicator of how individuals feel about their job, more specifically how happy they are about their work. According to Zapf and Gross (2011) the victims of systematic workplace bullying eventually tend to quit their job, and they are less likely to deal with this situation by staying. Many studies confirm that, workplace bullying is hard to be investigated without taking into consideration cultural factors and the differences in social perceptions among the countries and companies (Giorgi et al., 2013)

### **Literature review**

As a result of being target of subtle and consistent negative behaviors, individual may find himself/herself in a helpless situation, which is considered as bullying. This type of behavior has very negative consequences both on the organization as well as on individual (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2010). Several authors have stated workplace bullying as one of the main threats for safety of workers and health, as a result of its systematic prevalence (Einarsen et al., 2011).

The relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction has been studied by Ali Nasr Esfahani and Gholamreza Shahbazi under the name of “Workplace bullying in nursing: The case of Azerbaijan province, Iran”. However there is no such previous study applying to many sectors in Azerbaijan.

A lot of studies suggest that, we can distinguish person-related bullying from the bullying in workplace, as bullying in the work can include other unfair behaviors such as being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines, heavy workloads on employee. On the other hand, person related bullying is more likely to include psychical negative acts, spreading rumors about victim, excessive teasing and other abusive behaviors (Bano and Malik, 2013).

According to one of the studies on workplace bullying, the main reason behind workplace bullying is the prevalence of the concept of individualism, as people value their individual achievements over their subordinates, peers which can result experiencing bullying in the workplace (Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007). Also, if the investigate the reasons of bullying in the workplace, we can see that the person can be bullied at work because she/he belongs to minority group or different culture (Archer, 1999).

### *Workplace bullying and job satisfaction*

Today, workplace bullying creates problems for many organizations, regardless of their sector and size. Bullying can lead to loss of self-respect and confidence, stress, anxiety and etc. which are likely to distort the performance of employees. Abusive behavior in the workplace negatively affects the overall performance of organization, by increasing dissatisfaction of job, decreasing productivity and higher employee turnover (Esfahani & Shahbazi, 2014).

Nowadays, workplace bullying is common type of mistreatment especially as a result of diverse workforce in many organizations. In developing countries like Azerbaijan, employees frequently face bullying acts in their organizations. Irrespective of gender, social status and position, bullying negatively affect the job satisfaction, as a result, their performance is likely to suffer. However, it can be noticed that, employees in developing countries have more tolerance to bullying, compared to employees of developed countries. Rules and policies should be designed to minimize intimidation behavior on employees.

However, it is important to know the distinction between bullying and conflict in the workplace. In the early stages, bullying is not easy to be noticed, as such acts are usually indirect. The underlying problem about bullying is that, indirect bullying behaviors are observed to be more prevalent (Vartia, 2003).

It is no doubt that, satisfied employees are more productive. Several studies reported that, there is inconsistent relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. However, workplace bullying have direct and significant impact on job satisfaction.

Therefore, our first hypothesis is that: Job satisfaction tends to be high under both low and high levels of exposure to bullying, and decrease under medium levels of exposure to bullying.

Employee turnover rate was found to be highly associated with job satisfaction. Intensity of bullying in workplace affects job satisfaction, as a result turnover rate is also influenced. High turnover rate is observed in organizations where intensive bullying and other negative acts can be observed.

### *Workplace bullying and psychological well-being*

Recent analysis have provided evidence that, employees who are victims of bullying usually suffer from psychological and health problems such as stress, anxiety and depression (Nielsen and Eirnarson, 2012). Bullying in the workplace have a direct impact on psychological well-being of individuals, it means, the greater the exposure, the lower psychological well-being. However, abusive acts in the workplace have not only have negative impact on psychological well-being of employees, but also individuals who are the witness of such acts have demonstrated more mental and psychical stress levels. According to Agervold and Mikkelsen (2004), individuals exposed to bullying suffer from increased levels of anxiety, lowered self-esteem and self-confidence in their professional experience. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between the exposure of bullying and psychological health of employees in the workplace. Consistent exposure to bullying may result severe psychological problems on target and it also poses danger on safety of

individuals. Workplace bullying can also lead to decrease in organizational commitment, as the individuals will perceive their organization has done very little to create safe work environment (Allfano & Fraccaroli, 2009). Many studies suggest that, the impact of bullying in the workplace shows its consequences firstly on psychological health of individuals, as a result the victim suffers from stress and anxiety. Therefore, job satisfaction also suffers and employee intends to leave the organization (Amy C. Francis, 2014). Researchers supported the fact that, negative health consequences of bullying takes a lot of time for individual to cure even though the bullying has stopped. Therefore, bullying is more than annoying behaviors and its health effects can be long-lasting.

Taking into consideration all these factors, our second hypothesis is that, the relationship between job satisfaction and psychological well-being is moderated by job satisfaction.

Stress creating factors such as changes in organizational structure and work overload lead to decrease in individuals ability to deal with negative behaviors in the workplace, as a result it creates more stress and less psychological well-being, as bullying is associated with organizational factors. Also it is important to note that, lower psychological health leads to change in perceptions of working conditions. Therefore, irrespective of the type and extent of bullying in workplace, there is a direct relationship between workplace bullying and psychological well-being.

## **Methodology**

### *Objective*

The main objective of this study is to determine the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction among Azerbaijani employees. It aims to examine the prevalence of workplace bullying in a sample of Azerbaijani employees, how its existence can impact employee's psychological well-being and job satisfaction. We explored the moderating role of workplace bullying on job satisfaction with the association of psychological well-being.

### *Procedure*

In order to determine the extent of exposure to bullying, shorter version of "Validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised" was used. This instrument is designed as a measure to determine the level of exposure to bullying and employees' perceptions of bullying in the workplace. It is widely used by researchers as a measure to assess this phenomenon. Items used in this questionnaire included being target of excessive anger, teasing, being excluded and other negative acts toward employee. For determining the frequency of exposure to bullying within the last six month, several bullying acts were listed and 5-point Likert scale was used and the criterias were: 1 Never; 2 Now and then; 3 Monthly; 4 Weekly; 5 Daily.

Questions measuring job satisfaction (Hartline and Ferrel) were also used from different aspects of work such as salary, job security, supervision and etc. The scale used in these questions ranging from 1-very satisfied to 5-very dissatisfied.

Additionally, in order to determine the severity of mental problems that employees experience at work, items from Goldberg’s General Health questionnaire were used. The 12-item Goldberg’s General Health is commonly used screening tool for measuring psychological health and mental disorders of employees. This questionnaire is helpful tool for providing general measure of mental well-being of individuals. The items were rated on four point scale: less than usual, no more than usual, rather more than usual and much more than usual. Higher scores in this questionnaire mean lower psychological well-being. Participation in our survey was voluntary and respondents are informed that their answers will be kept confidential.

Our paper adopted a cross-sectional research design that covers number of employees across different organizations in Azerbaijan. Several organizations from different industries were chosen as a sample and online questionnaire was distributed to employees representing these organizations. Most of the participants were male (59.2%) and the rest were female which covered 40.8% out of 102 participants. The tests were administered by using questionnaires consisting set of questions measuring exposure to bullying, job satisfaction and psychological well-being of employees and online questionnaire was distributed to employees working in different sectors and positions. Only 24% of the employees reported job tenure more than 7 years.

In our study, 102 employees participated in survey, representing different industries such as manufacturing, construction, agriculture, finance, consulting, public sector, retail and etc. Most of them were small and medium sized organizations. Most of the participants (89.2%) represented private sectors, while public sector respondents represented 10.8% of the respondents.

**Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and correlations among the variables of the study, N=102**

	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender	0.4020	0.49272	-	1.000	-	0.002	0.053
2. Psychological well-being	1.9148	0.49847	0.142	-	0.108	-	0.270
3. Industry	2.5588	1.65052	0.080	0.142	1.000	0.254	-
4. Job satisfaction	2.6936	0.75772	-	0.108	-	0.048	0.077
5. Workplace bullying	3.9251	0.58343	0.254	0.002	0.048	1.000	-
			0.270	0.053	-	-	1.000
					0.077	0.310	

### *Measures*

In order to test the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction, psychological well-being we used hierarchical regression analysis using SPSS software. Hierarchical regression analysis is used as a framework for comparing models. At each step, new variables are added to

previous model, in order to determine the effect and significance of newly added variables. Hierarchical regression allows for better exploratory analysis.

We needed to conduct two different hierarchical multiple regression because we needed to measure the effect of workplace bullying on both job satisfaction and psychological well-being among our sample. Hierarchical regression was done for the purpose of determining if our variables of interest, here workplace bullying can explain significant variance in our dependent variables: job satisfaction and psychological well-being, after the effect of all other variables. In this model, we need to pay attention whether new variables lead to significant improvement in  $R^2$ .

In our first regression, job satisfaction was introduced as a dependent variable. For the first step, we entered control variables (demographical variables) such as gender and industry in first block, then in the second block we entered workplace bullying as the variable we mostly interested in.

As it can be observed from Table 2, control variables represented slight proportion of variance ( $R^2=0.048$ ,  $F$  changes=0.114) in job satisfaction results. It can also be seen from significance  $F$  change in model 1, that these measures are not statistically significant measure of job satisfaction. Then, in model 2, we added workplace bullying, and it resulted increase in  $R^2$  ( $R$  square change=0.099), which can be explained by almost 10% variance in job satisfaction and it can be considered significant amount of variance. It means, we can assume that workplace bullying is significantly related to job satisfaction among a sample of Azerbaijani employees. In model two if we look at the significance  $F$  change value, it is equal to 0.001 which is statistically significant (Table 2).

**Table 2. Regression analysis for measuring the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction**

Model summary									
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the estimates	Change statistics				
					R square change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	,048 <sup>a</sup>	0.002	-0.018	0.76446	0.002	0.114	2	99	0.892
2	,318 <sup>b</sup>	0.101	0.074	0.72931	0.099	10.773	1	98	0.001

a. Predictors: (constant), industry, gender

b. Predictors: (constant), industry, gender, workplace bullying

In the second step, in order to determine the effect of bullying in workplace on mental health of individuals, in SPSS software, we assumed psychological well-being as dependent variable, and

after accounting for other demographic variables, we entered workplace bullying in the second step to determine whether it has additional variance on mental health. Looking at the Table 3, it can be observed that in Model 1 our  $R^2$  is equal to 0.296, it can explain significant amount of variance in psychological well-being of individuals. Adding workplace bullying in Model 2 resulted additional 4.6% increase in variance in psychological well-being, which is again, statistically significant (Table 3)

**Table 3. Regression analysis for measuring the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological well-being**

Model summary									
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the estimates	Change statistics				
					R square change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	,296 <sub>a</sub>	0.088	0.060	0.48335	0.088	3.139	3	98	0.029
2	,366 <sub>b</sub>	0.134	0.098	0.47340	0.046	5.167	1	97	0.005

a. Predictors: (constant, job satisfaction, gender, industry)

b. Predictors: (constant, job satisfaction, gender, industry, workplace bullying)

In case of the relationship between psychological well-being and workplace bullying, results represented linear relationship as increasing negative acts at work lead to low levels of mental health. The results supported the view that, employee's level of bullying exposure can be considered as a significant predictor of their psychological well-being, depression and levels of stress or anxiety.

Overall, increasing levels of workplace bullying to moderate levels, lead to lower job satisfaction, whereas we can see that when the exposure increases to high levels, increase can be observed in job satisfaction levels, supporting our first hypothesis. However, this assumption is not the same for the case of psychological well-being. Mental health is negatively affected by abusive behaviors in workplace, decrease can be experienced in mental health in relatively high exposure levels to bullying in workplace. Psychological well-being is also found to be affected by job satisfaction, where satisfied employees experienced better mental health. In our sample, prevalence of bullying is relatively high, meaning that Azerbaijani employees may tolerate and accept negative acts.

The chart constructed based on the regression equation which gives predicted results for job satisfaction:  $y=ax^2+bx+c$ , where the intercept is equal to 4.27.



**Chart 1. Workplace bullying and predicted job satisfaction**



## **Discussion**

Although many workers experience bullying, there is no such prevalent laws or policies dealing with bullying in workplace in Azerbaijan. In order to prevent bullying in organizations, more in-depth cultural and social factors should be analyzed for determining the factors that drive negative acts in workplace. Employees should properly trained in a way that they know how to deal with it when they confront such abusive acts, rather than tolerating bullying. Each organization should develop code of conduct and make employees adhere to such rules, raise awareness of consequences of bullying in the workplace.

In low human-oriented countries such as Turkey (more than 40% according to Bilgel et al. 2006), negative acts in the workplace are more tolerated and accepted. If we consider the case of Azerbaijani employees, we can see that bullying is tolerated to some extent, as our cultures are alike to those of Turkey, Italy, Iran and etc. Our results also supported that, high levels of bullying exposure in the workplace does not always negatively affects job satisfaction. Many employees considers bullying as part of their job, therefore they accept such behaviors as ethical. They assume that these behaviors are important for preventing deviant behaviors of some employees. According to the results, most of the workers in Azerbaijani complain about being given tasks with tight and

unreasonable deadlines, which is considered subtle sign of bullying, whereas others can work comfortably with deadlines.

Supporting many studies, it is assumed that the exposure to bullying is higher in low human oriented countries compared to countries with high levels of human orientation. Therefore, after long-lasting exposure to negative acts in workplace, individuals find bullying less dissatisfying than before. Acceptance of bullying is also related to economic well-being of individuals, therefore, in countries with high unemployment rate, individuals tend to accept bullying because of their inability to find another job. Moreover, some employees consider that being exposed to bullying acts are necessary for developing in their career and it makes their character stronger. In some organizations, bullying is considered normal managerial practice, therefore some negative acts are accepted.

It is important to determine whether the victims of bullying react passively to such negative acts or they try to prevent this behaviors by seeking assistance, as tolerating bullying can lead to negative consequences on both physical and mental health of individuals. Cultural factors that can impact the tolerance of bullying needs to be better understood, which is fundamental for developing procedures and training programs in order to perceive bullying in workplace more clearly and minimize such abusive acts.

Individuals employed in public sectors are more likely to experience bullying compared to employees in private sectors in Azerbaijan, which can be derived from the results of our questionnaire. Leaders in public sectors in our country are more likely to engage in coercive power which can include bullying and individuals perceive these acts as acceptable type of behavior.

## **Conclusion**

Our findings confirmed that, higher levels of exposure to bullying lead to lower levels of psychological health. Also, the results of General Health questionnaire reported higher scores for women than men, meaning lower levels of mental health. It means, women in Azerbaijan, reported lower levels of psychological health compared to their male colleagues, which is because of perception of traditional gender differences in our culture. Gender plays an important role on how workplace bullying is perceived. On the other hand, when comparing the results, it is revealed that employees in lower level positions seem to have lower levels of mental health rather than managerial position workers. It indicates that, job position have important effect on being bullied at work, since blue-collar employees are more likely to be exposed to such negative acts. As a result, the relationship between job position and job satisfaction remains negative throughout the analysis.

Looking at the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction, our results supported the view that when there is moderate levels of exposure to bullying, job satisfaction decreases, whereas in low and relatively high levels of workplace bullying, job satisfaction tend to increase. This can be explained by cultural factors, as some negative acts in workplace are accepted to some extent rather than not tolerated. Taking into consideration socio-economic factors such as

unemployment rate, in some countries bullying behaviors are more likely to be tolerated. In particular, tolerance of abusive behaviors in workplace is higher in Azerbaijan if we compare it with northern Europe countries. Interesting fact is that, job satisfaction can mediate the relationship between bullying in workplace and mental health, as this indirect impact can change from country to country.

Non-linear relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction supported the view that negative acts in workplace are still tolerated despite its negative health and psychological affect. The importance of having the understanding of bullying in workplace and its implications can help organizations deal with this issue in more effective way.

## References

1. Giorgi, G., Leon-Perez, J. M., & Arenas, A. (2014). Are Bullying Behaviors Tolerated in Some Cultures? Evidence for a Curvilinear Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Job Satisfaction among Italian Workers. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 131(1), 227–237. doi: 10.1007/s10551-014-2266-9
2. Bernstein, C., & Trimm, L. (2016). The impact of workplace bullying on individual wellbeing: The moderating role of coping. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15. doi:10.4102/sajhrm.v14i1.792
3. Giorgi, G., Ando, M., Arenas, A., Krisher, M., and Leon-Perez, J. M. (2013). Exploring personal and organizational determinants of workplace bullying and its prevalence in a Japanese sample. *Psychol. Violence* 3, 185–197. doi: 10.1037/a0028049
4. Lewis, S. E. (2006). Recognition of workplace bullying: a qualitative study of women targets in the public sector. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 16(2), 119–135. doi: 10.1002/casp.850
5. Alicia, Giorgi, Gabriele, Montani, Francesco, Mancuso, ... Giulio. (2015, November 26). Workplace Bullying in a Sample of Italian and Spanish Employees and Its Relationship with Job Satisfaction, and Psychological Well-Being. Retrieved from
6. Lewis, S. E. (2006). Recognition of workplace bullying: a qualitative study of women targets in the public sector. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 16(2), 119–135. doi: 10.1002/casp.850
7. Charilaos, K., Michael, G., Chryssa, B.-T., Panagiota, D., George, C. P., & Christina, D. (2015). Validation of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) in a Sample of Greek Teachers. *Psychology*, 06(01), 63–74. doi: 10.4236/psych.2015.61007
8. MCGough, G. (2011). Preventing Workplace Bullying – An Evidence-Based Guide for Managers and Employees. *Nursing Standard*, 26(3), 31–31. doi: 10.7748/ns2011.09.26.3.31.b1263
9. The Impact of Stress and Depression upon Work and Well-Being. *Depression Care across the Lifespan*, 56–73. doi: 10.1002/9780470749739.ch4

10. Salahieh, Z. The Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Support on the Relationship between Bullying and Work Behaviors. doi: 10.31979/etd.23ec-m7sg
11. Wright, T. A., & Bonett, D. G. (2007). Job Satisfaction and Psychological Well-Being as Nonadditive Predictors of Workplace Turnover. *Journal of Management*, 33(2), 141–160. doi: 10.1177/0149206306297582
12. Vartia, M. A.-L. (2001). Consequences of workplace bullying with respect to the well-being of its targets and the observers of bullying. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 27(1), 63–69. doi: 10.5271/sjweh.588
13. Multiple Regression. *Statistical Methods for Practice and Research: A Guide to Data Analysis Using SPSS*, 108–120. doi: 10.4135/9788132108306.n8
14. Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Notelaers, G. (2009). Measuring Exposure to Bullying and Harassment at Work: Validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised. *Work & Stress*, 23, 24-44