

Managing Workplace Bullying from Contextualised South African Perspective: A Narrative Approach

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Abstract – Workplace bullying remains a pervasive issue globally, affecting employee well-being and organisational performance. This study explores the phenomenon of workplace bullying from a contextualised South African perspective, employing a narrative approach to capture the nuanced experiences and perspectives of individuals within the workplace. Based on a qualitative design, purposive sampling was used, and 21 employees were interviewed. Thus, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and data was analysed using the content analysis method. Two themes and four subthemes were identified. Firstly, response to bullying Behaviour with two subthemes (passive response & active response). Secondly, managing bullying Behaviour with four subthemes (personal management, organisational management, responsibility for managing bullying & managing bullying Behaviour through prevention). Most participants managed workplace bullying by “doing nothing”. The data also showed that age and gender played a significant role in the African contexts, taking into consideration shared cultural beliefs and customs. The study further provided a practical model for managing workplace bullying from an African perspective. Furthermore, the study proposes a need for workplace bullying legislation to further increase the severity of bullying Behaviour. The study also highlights a need to incorporate indigenous knowledge when managing workplace bullying. Based on the results, this study also proposed model of managing workplace bullying from a South African perspective. The findings contribute to both theoretical understandings of workplace bullying, and practical interventions tailored to the South African context, ultimately fostering healthier and more supportive work environments.

Keywords – Bullying Model, Indigenous Knowledge, Semi-interviews, Passive Response, Active Response, Management.

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1 Introduction

Over the years, studies on workplace bullying have been conducted all over the world (Xu et al., 2019; McCaben & Garavan, 2020; Conway, Høgh, Balducci, & Ebbesen, 2021; Tuckey, et al., 2022). As state by Mabasa, Setati, Maluka and Nethavhani (2023), the phenomenon was first investigated in educational settings where students were victims of peer bullying. Currently, bullying Behaviour is studied in work settings (Badenhorst & Botha, 2022; Langeveldt, 2023).

However, to date, with rare exceptions (Conco et al., 2021; Badenhorst & Botha, 2022; Langeveldt, 2023), workplace bullying research is fairly western-centric. Very little information is available on what constitutes bullying beyond some Western and European countries. Thus, studies have been conducted in the West but workplace bullying was also documented in Africa (Adebayo & Juliet, 2014; Conco et al., 2021; Badenhorst & Botha, 2022; Langeveldt, 2023). The focus of these studies was not only on the prevalence and management of workplace bullying, but also on the effect on targets, bystanders and the organisation and they used western developed scale (Negative Act Questionnaire).

Nevertheless, studies on managing bullying Behaviour in the South African contexts is still limited. Thus, this means that very little information is known about how workplace bullying is managed in South Africa.

In addition, in the South African context, understanding of the concept of workplace bullying is not indigenous (South African perspective), like other phenomena. Meaning that most studies focused on bullying behaviour from Western perspective. Therefore, the organisation's workplace bullying policies and practices on managing it are more likely to be developed using western awareness and understanding of the phenomenon. As such, Western knowledge of bullying in the workplace may not be sufficient to generalize African understanding of bullying in the workplace because they have cultural differences.

South Africa, a nation marked by its diverse cultural tapestry and historical complexities, presents a particularly intriguing backdrop for studying workplace dynamics. The legacy of apartheid and ongoing socio-economic disparities contribute to a distinctive organizational environment where power differentials and cultural norms intersect with modern workplace dynamics (Vareta, 2022). Within this framework, exploring narratives of workplace bullying not only provides insight into individual experiences but also sheds light on broader organisational and societal implications.

Therefore, by adopting a narrative approach, this study seeks to move beyond traditional quantitative assessments and delve into the rich, personal accounts of individuals affected by workplace bullying. Narratives research offer a powerful means to capture the subjective realities of victims, bystanders, and even perpetrators, offering a holistic understanding that quantitative metrics alone may fail to provide. This approach not only humanizes the issue but also provides a platform for voices often marginalized in organisational discourse.

Therefore, this paper aims to explore how workplace bullying is managed from South African perspective through a narrative approach. Narrative research focuses on stories or events narrated or told by participants on particular situations and events. According to Ntinda (2020: 1), "Narrative research aims to unravel consequential stories of people's lives as told by them in their own words and worlds". In this current study, participants were asked to narrate a story how workplace bullying events that took place in their work environment were managed.

2 Literature review

This section of the paper will present both theoretical and empirical literature.

2.1 Theoretical Literature

Novak's (1998) Learning Theory Novak (1998)

Novak's (1998) Learning Theory Novak (1998)'s learning model may help to further understand workplace bullying. Altman (2010) stated that Novak's model provides an understanding of how actions of bullying and responses to bullying can be seen deriving from individualized understanding of workplace bullying by those involved. In other words, on the off chance that we apply the concept of workplace bullying from Novak's (1998) theory, we can comprehend the phenomenon through how a distinctive individual conceptualizes this phenomenon which may originates from earlier learning about bullying Behaviour, which itself derive from past encounters. This individual understanding of bullying Behaviour may affect decision of action on workplace bullying, which thus adds to personal encounters of bullying Behaviour and how it can be managed. Therefore, these new encounters or experiences inform knowledge and meaning (Altman, 2010). To take a straightforward illustration, maybe an individual employee's initial experiences of bullying Behaviour were through the bullying of a colleague, who was publicly humiliated by his manager during a meeting. Because of this experience, bullying in the workplace became a significant and real issue as the employee understood workplace bullying to be a concept that came to have meaning for the employee. As a result of this experience, an individual employee might come to understand bullying Behaviour as a phenomenon that might occur during meeting.

Mezirow's Transformational Theory

Another theory that underpins the phenomenon of workplace bullying is Mezirow's transformational theory. Transformational model happens when someone's perception has changed as a result of a life changing event or experience (Hadeed, 2014). Being a victim of bullying Behaviour within the workplace may be considered as a life changing experience because of the degree of damage which bullying may have on the person emotionally or psychologically. For example, after being bullied, someone might need psychological help from a psychologist. Thus, this can also be seen as a way of managing

bullying Behaviour. Based on the effect that bullying Behaviour might have on the victims, it is rational to comprehend the phenomenon from the transformational theory perspective. Some of the victims of workplace bullying may have significant low job performance; their attention span may be reduced; sometimes they might turn to drugs and alcohol; and some might have suicidal thoughts (Hadeed, 2014: 6). Hadeed (2014) further states that transformational theory for these victims occur because of a reaction to a stimulus. However, it is important to note that Mezirow's transformational theory only explain the effect of workplace bullying on only the targets or victims not the perpetrator.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Responses to Bullying Behaviour

The responses to bullying Behaviour can be characterized by responses of both targets of bullying Behaviour and the organisation, taking into consideration how workplace bullying incidences are managed. Targets of bullying in the workplace can respond to it passively or actively (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006, Munro & Phillips, 2020). Literature classified victims' responses into four clusters; assertive responses, seek help, avoidance and do nothing (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004; Salin, Tenhiälä, Roberge & Berdahl, 2014; Goh, Hosier & Zhang, 2022). As such, these can be orchestrated on a passive versus active dimension of managing workplace bullying events.

Organisational responses to bullying Behaviour can be inaction or action. Inaction is a passive coping style (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006; Hodgins, MacCurtain & Mannix-McNamara, 2020). For instance, supervisor or manager might decide not to take any action on bullying Behaviour reported by the victim. Therefore, the organisation appears not take bullying Behaviour as an important issue that should be handled effectively. On the other hand, supervisor or manager can actively respond to workplace bullying cases. Thus, this is an active style of coping (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006). Organisational policies on workplace bullying can also be regarded as active responses to bullying Behaviour.

Workplace Bullying Prevention

Wherever there are two or more people, working together there is a possibility of bullying in the workplace. According to Richards and Daley (2003), organisation management needs to at least try eliminating workplace bullying by providing each employee with awareness training on how to handle bullying in the workplace, by ensuring that there are policies available to handle bullying and grievance procedures.

They should provide support for all victims of bullying, commit to promptly investigating complaints and make sure that proper disciplinary procedures are taken against an employee who harasses and bullies another employee (Hoel & Einarsen, 2020).

Grievances found to be irritating and distressing might make the accuser responsible for disciplinary action (WorkSafe Victoria, 2012). For an

organisation to develop workplace bullying policies and procedures as strategies for eliminating workplace bullying is a good starting point.

3 Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach to explore how bullying Behaviour can be managed. The purpose of the current study, the constructivist worldview formed the basis of the study. In constructivist perspective, the researcher relies on the participant's views of the situation or circumstances being studied as much as possible. Thus, the constructivist worldview is suitable to understand the experiences of bullying in the workplace as 'lived experiences' of respondents. Therefore, when using a narrative approach, subjective meaning and experiences of how workplace bullying can be managed was generated through narration of occurred event/s. Furthermore, both purposive and snowball sampling were used to obtain the sample. The sample consisted of individuals who have experienced bullying Behaviour in the workplace. Thus, what is important to note is that all participants had a story to tell about their lived experiences of how bullying in the workplace was managed. Participants were recruited in two different stages. In the first stage, participants were recruited through a different source, including WhatsApp status post, colleagues and friends in the second phase, flyers were used to attract more participants. Additionally, snowball approach was used by asking each interviewee at the end of each session to mention other people who have experienced bullying behaviour and willing to participate. Therefore, participants were deliberately selected based on the fact that they are employed black (African) people and they have the story to tell.

Upon obtaining ethical clearance certificate to collect data, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted to engage employees in telling a story on how bullying Behaviour was managed. Alshenqeeti (2014: 39) states that semi-structured interview "allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses. All the data sourced from the interviews was analysed qualitatively through Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel was used in the study to organise and analyse written responses from interviews. Interviews conducted were transcribed using Microsoft Excel, to develop themes. Data analyzed came from stories told by 21 participants, which consisted of 31,341 words of transcribed interviews and themes were generated.

4 Findings and Discussion

The primary objective of the study was to explore how bullying Behaviour is managed from contextualized South African perspective. This study further aimed to develop a model of managing workplace bullying from a South African perspective. Through thematic analysis, two themes and four subthemes were identified. These themes are discussed below.

4.1 Theme one: Response to Bullying Behaviour

When workplace bullying incident occurs, victim can make decisions on how to respond to it. Usually, the victim can respond to bullying behaviour by acting out certain behaviours (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006). Nevertheless, the responsibility does not only lie on the victim, but organisations and bystanders. All these role players may either respond passively or actively.

The results of the study shows that most organisations which participants worked for did not take any initiative to respond to bullying Behaviour. It is significant to note that most of the incidents were not reported meaning that the organisations had minimum knowledge on what was happening. Those who knew what was happening, mostly just “turned on a blind eye”. For example, participant 5 said: *“the organisation did not make any respond. I tried to report to the senior manager many times but it seems like he already knew what was happening because when I reported to him he told me that he knows that people from my section are always complaining. But then, nothing is being done to eradicate such behaviour. I think is because of my age and gender”*. Furthermore, participant 18 stated: *“nothing is being done. They chose not to do anything about it. Even if you can call the head office now telling them about what has been happening they won’t do anything. They will make sure they protect our manager. They don’t value the employees at all”*. Participants 1,4, 7, 19 and 21 shared the same sentiment.

In situations where the organisations responded to bullying Behaviour, participants were of an opinion that the initiative by organisation did not really yield adequate results. participant 8 said: *“counselling was conducted for the victims. For him (the perpetrator), we were informed that he will attend anger management classes. So we were supposed to give him time. Before we knew it, I was telling the administrator that “you annoy me”. He went to an extent of saying “one day when I own this company none of this will happen”*. Participant 12 mentioned that *“the senior manager called a meeting and we spoke about it and that is how it was handled*.

Furthermore, the theme response to bullying Behaviour include two sub-themes: passive response and active response.

Passive Response

This sub-theme explains the passive response to bullying behaviour which refers to a situation where the victim, organisation and bystander basically ‘do nothing’ about the incidents occurred, and it is justified by a lack of reaction of the role players involved. Half of the participants talked about how victims, organisations and bystanders passively responded to unwanted negative behaviour. Thus, participants stated that *“I did not do anything. Am still young. I tried to explain myself to her. To try and control the situation, every day when I walked to the office I would mind my own business and kept quiet trying to avoid my supervisor, she thought I had mood swings”* (P1, P5, P6, P15 & P19). The first participant also stated that she kept everything to herself, meaning that she did not even report or tell anyone about the bullying incidents because she knew that the internship was not going to last forever.

In reflecting on passive response to bullying behaviour, participant 3 talked about the reasons why he did not do anything. *“The problem is that the senior management knew because many people resigned before me and they did not do anything. Even those who are currently working there have opened grievance cases against the very same person. During my internship, if I recall very well, there was one person who resigned after opening a bullying case against the manager. Meaning that, senior management were well aware of such behaviour. They just ignored me due to my age”*. Thus, the organisational response did not exist. Such behaviour was a norm. Participant 4 also said nothing was done. However, participant 5 cited that *“I tried to report to the senior manager many times but it seems like he already knew what was happening because when I reported to him he told me that he knew that people from my section are always complaining. But then, nothing is being done to eradicate such behaviour. But I have realised that in this organisation they don’t like people who defend themselves and if you do you will be in trouble”*.

For participant 6, desperation of a job played a significant role, so nothing was done. Participant 6 also said: *“I have a sister who was working here and she told me about such incidents, when they occur I should be careful because they start at the top level management so when i report this i must be very careful, so that was the reason why I didn’t do anything. This is an organisational culture”*. Participant 9 did not do anything about what she was going through. She just took it as if it was just an old lady being over protective. In some instances, money served as great motivation for participants not to do anything. For example, participant 11 said: *“I did not do anything. I needed the money”*. Participants 16, 18 and 21 shared the same point of view.

One research participant (13) said that *“I did not do anything. This person was protected elsewhere, in higher offices. I endured the pain until she left”*. In other words, she waited patiently until the perpetrator left. Fear of the unknown also played a significant role when it comes to taking an active action against bullying Behaviour. For example, participant 15 said: *“I did not do anything. Even if I were to try, they were not going to listen to me”*. Furthermore, participant 16 mentioned: *“as a new employee, there was no way I would want to go head to head with him. Despite what he was putting me through, I still needed him as a referral to when I was seeking for employment elsewhere. Me going head to head with him by taking legal steps was not a good idea. I just left things on the hands of God”*. Thus, the perpetrator had too much power and control over the victim.

In other incidents where bystanders were involved they just turned a blind eye. For instance, participant 16 said: *“They would just observe and not do anything because they did not want to be victimised as well. Which I would understand, if we are all desperate for employment we were all beggars, I can’t say we were employees, we just wanted the slices of bread”*. In addition, participant 17 stated: *“What I have realised is that they are scared of him. This other time I tried to raise something and those who have been there for years warned me. They told me to mind my steps if I don’t want to lose my job”*. Furthermore, participant 19 said: *“It is because I do not try to involve myself in other people’s fights. I keep my distance. The thing is you will fight for someone who won’t do the same when you start experiencing*

the same thing. What I have realised is that everyone is scared". Therefore, fear was a controlling factor.

In one situation where the victim tried to take an action against bullying, things got worse. For example, participant 18 said: *"Mostly I kept quiet. Sometimes I got upset and I defended myself. I asked him why he was treating me that way. What is it that I had done to him? It became worse"*. In other situations, the participant does not take any internal measure but an external action. For example, participant 20 said: *"I just kept quiet and looked at her. It got to a point whereby I started hating her. I did think that was what pushed me to see a psychologist"*.

Active Response

This sub-theme explains active response to bullying behaviour which refers to immediate response to bullying behaviour by victim, organisation and bystander. Thus, this is illustrated by present action to bullying behaviour by role players. Few participants highlighted how active response was demonstrated. The second participant was a bystander. Participants 2, 6, and 9 cited that "I tried raising it during our general meetings, so that we could deliberate on it, but I failed because most people who were victimised did not say anything during the meeting. Very few talked about what they were going through. But I think that those who could not talk is because of the fact that their line manager was present and they may have been scared to talk about their problems". The second participant further concurred that the line manager responded by establishing a team to deal with such incidents. But this did not yield any results since nothing was done about the reported incidents (participant 2). In other words, the organisation's response was weak. "Even the senior managers, reporting to them is useless because they are also perpetrators, so many people are being bullied but they can't say anything" (P2, P5 & P13).

Participant 4 claimed that the incident was reported to the manager, but manager seemed not to care. Participant 4 also cited that "we did raise such matters. For talking about it has resulted into three staff members not being appointed. We were told that since you got mouth to speak then we shall see what is going to happen to you. That is how the organisation responded". The way other organisations respond to bullying behaviour does not provide any solution but make situation even worse.

Defensive mechanism plays an important role on active response to bullying behaviour for the organisation to take measures. For example, participant 7 said: *"I was vocal about what we were going through. I remember at some point, my line manager and the director had a meeting almost every month and the agenda was "me", that I am disrespectful, that I go to the director's office to throw tantrums, I tell the director what to do. Participant 7 further cited that "I remember one scenario that I will never forget; I complained so much to an extent that I escalated my issues all the way to the senior management. The Senior management sent an email to both the line manager and the director, informing them that what they are doing is exploitation and it is against the law"*. Nevertheless, in some instances, that is not the case. For example,

participant 8 tried to be defensive but that did not yield positive results. Participant 8 said *“he was called by the senior manager and he came back and apologised to us. The whole process was so informal. Nothing was signed though. But everyone who was involved at the launch of the grievance he used that against them. Nothing changed, things became worse. As for me, I wanted to resign because it is not nice to be told that you can be easily replaced.”*

Participants 10 and 12 defended themselves by being vocal. Participant 12 said: *“I did report it anonymously and the senior manager called a meeting and we spoke about it and that is how it was handled”*. With participant 14 reporting such incidents did not provide any solution. Relevant offices do not respond effectively. Participant 14 alluded:

“I tried to report it. I reported to the supervisor and nothing was done because she was friends with the people who I was working with. So she was afraid to stop them. I also reported it to the CEO and he said he will fix it and he did not do anything about it.”

4.2 Theme Two: Managing Bullying Behaviour

Catley, et al. (2013) postulate that a number of studies have sought to investigate the antecedents of workplace bullying. This is done to come up with strategies and mechanism to manage workplace bullying. Nevertheless, *“while many studies have described the extent of bullying Behaviour, relatively few have focused on the management of bullying in organisations”* (Catley, et al., 2013: 602). But managing bullying behaviour starts at the ground level. In other words, victims’ management strategies before the organisations can manage bullying behaviour. This theme describes how bullying Behaviour in the workplace was managed. Furthermore, the theme managing bullying behaviour include four sub-themes: personal management, organisational management, responsibility for managing bullying and managing bullying behaviour through prevention

Personal Management

This sub-theme relates actions which participants took to manage bullying Behaviour from a personal point of view without reporting the perpetrators, such as talking to other people about the bullying they experienced. Most participants cited that *“there were some people who I worked with, I used to talk to them about my problems who also understood my situation because keeping quiet does not help. So, it is better to talk to people who are experiencing the some behaviour in there are bystander. Talking to them made things easier. As much as they were my colleagues, they became friends. We have made jokes and laugh about it. It is easy to make a joke about it rather than taking it personal”* (P1, P13, P18 & P21).

Similarly, participant 16 cited that *“I managed it through talking with other colleagues. It was sort of a therapy when we share our experiences, like the AA meetings for people with alcohol addiction. For example, we would sit down with other colleagues and discuss “do you think this is fair? They would tell me previous incidents about my manager”*. In addition, participant 17 also managed bullying behaviour by talking to a fellow staff member out of trust.

Participant 20 was seeing a psychologist. Contrary, participant 4 reported that *"I just go home and talk to my husband and he calms me down. If I can talk to my fellow colleagues, I would know where this could end"*.

Other participants managed bullying Behaviour differently. For instance, participant 5 cited that *"I tried to be strong. I think it came to a point were by everyone for himself". I just said to myself that I am waiting for my things to be in shape so that I can leave this place. I just sit back and live everything to God. God will deal with those people"*. Participant 9 said: *"I just brushed it off and did not take it personal. Because other people (colleagues) would say she is used to doing such things, don't mind her"*. Furthermore, participant 18 stated: *"I just told myself that it was OK. While I was still looking for employment I will just be strong for the time being"*. Furthermore, participant 21 concurred: *"I tried by all means to look at the bigger picture. In this case money. I had bills to pay so I was willing to do whatever they want me to do"*. Participant 7 alluded that *"I managed it by trying to defend myself. Like I said I was too vocal"*.

Thus, from the above findings, victims of bullying behaviour can manage bullying behaviour in several ways. One of such is to talk to trusted people who may be facing the same situation or who may have dealt with such situations before. Fapohunda (2013) claims that *"another strategy may be to confront the bully in a professional manner without threatening one's physical safety"*. Contrary, participant 8 stated that *"I believe that the only way it can be managed is through violence. A person like that needed to be beaten. What is the point of telling him one thing over and over again"?*

Organisational Management

This sub-theme explains how organisations managed workplace bullying. According to Catley et al. (2013), several studies have described the extent of the workplace bullying; relatively few have focused on the management of bullying in organisations, particularly in a South African context. The participants detailed out how the organisations managed bullying Behaviour. Participant 3 stated that *"the problem is that the senior management knew because many people resigned before me and they did not do anything"*. Thus, bullying behaviour was not taken as a serious phenomenon. Furthermore, participant 4 mentioned that *"We did raise such matters. Talking about it has resulted into three staff members not being appointed. We were told that since you got mouth to speak then we shall see what is going to happen to you. Nothing was done"*.

In situations where bullying Behaviour is reported, the management of bullying behaviour is not adequate. For instance, participant 5 said that *"I tried to report to the senior manager many times but it seems like he already knew what was happening because when I reported to him he told me that he knows that people from my section are always complaining. But then, nothing is being done to eradicate such behaviour. But I have realized that in this organisation they don't like people who defend themselves and if you do, you will be in trouble"*. Similarly, participant 14 cited that *"I report to the supervisor and nothing was done because she was friends with the people who I was working with. So she was afraid to stop them. I also reported it to the CEO and he said he will fix it and he did not do anything about it"*.

Fear also appears as a standing force against the management of bullying behaviour since it is not reported. For example, participant 11 mentioned that *“senior management always ask about our wellbeing when they are around. But we hide our feelings, thoughts and what we are going through. Even now, there is a survey that we need to complete about our work and submit it to our manager so that she can take it to senior management. I am sure that she will go through the documents before submitting”*. Similarly, participant 15 said: *“nothing was done about it. I remember the other 2 bosses were also afraid of the other one because he bullied them as well”*. Most research participant stated that workplace bullying is not managed. Thus, other participants (7 & 18) accused the organisation of not caring about their employees.

Responsibility for Managing Bullying

This sub-theme explains who should be held responsible for bullying Behaviour at work. Managing of bullying Behaviour involves deferent stakeholders such as employees (victims & bystanders) and employer (including managers and perpetrators). But who should be responsible for managing workplace bullying? When asked who should be held responsible for bullying behaviour at work, participant 1 said *“I think everyone in the organisations should be responsible for managing bullying. Employees should report such incidents and employers should deal with them effectively”*. Participant 5 share the same view and further reported that *“employees should be free to report and employers should take full responsibility to take serious actions against the perpetrators”*. Participants 2 and 3 also believe that both employees and employers should take responsibility. But participant 3 also maintained that *“employees have the responsibility of reporting this unwelcomed behaviour in order for the employer to deal with it”*. Similarly, participant 4 stated that *“the employers should be more responsible by forming a committee where we report such matters”*. Beside, participant 5 emphasised that *“employees should be free to report and employers should take full responsibility to take serious actions against the perpetrators”*. Participant 5 also mentioned that *“it can be managed if only the senior manager can be able to control the situation because we are reporting and nothing is happening. If at the higher management take such behaviour seriously, therefore I don't see such behaviour occurring”*.

Participant 7 stated that *“this responsibility belongs to every role player. When we are vocal about such behaviours as employees, the organisations should take respective and significant decision against the perpetrators”*. Participant 8 said that *“I think both employers and employees should be responsible, because in many situations, employees are the ones who are victims. There need to be a balance. But the employer should ensure that there is fairness in the workplace”*.

Participant 12 believes that *“it can be managed through proper communication and respect. Furthermore, people should first understand what is bullying. And we need to acknowledge that people are different”*. Participant 20 highlighted that employees should form a group where they can be able to talk about their experiences. The employers should take into consideration employee's concerns whenever employees report such issues. Organisations should conduct workshops educating people about the effect of workplace bullying. They should come up with policies that can guard against bullying.

Most participants believe that such responsibility belongs to the employer alone. Participants 2, 6, 16 and 21 are of an understanding that managers should be responsible for managing bullying behaviour through the use of anti-bullying policies. Participants 9 and 11 also support this motion. But participant 11 believes that that every month there should be external bodies like the department of labour to investigate bullying incidents privately because one is able to express himself/herself privately. Because of the power the managers have, participants 14, 15 and 17 believe that they should be responsible for managing bullying. Participants 18 and 19 are of an opinion that the management should be responsible for managing bullying through the use of HR office. Participant 19 further cited that *“I think the HR personnel, with the advice of the top management. There should be a proper relationship between staff and top management”*.

Managing Bullying Behaviour Through Prevention

This sub-theme explains how bullying can be managed through prevention. Like any other negative Behaviour, workplace bullying should be prevented in the workplace. Majority of the participants believe that bullying Behaviour can be managed through prevention in the workplace. For instance, participant 5 said: *“it can be prevented if only the senior manager can be able to control the situation because we are reporting and nothing is happening. If the higher management take such behaviour serious therefore, I don't see such behaviour occurring”*. Participant 12 mentioned that it can be prevented through proper communication and respect and people should first understand what is bullying. And we need to acknowledge that people are different.

Participant 7 cited that *“if we want to prevent bullying we should start with the higher management because as a senior management, if you can't address what is happening below you then there is no way that bullying can be prevented. Therefore, senior management should take initiatives to handle workplace bullying”*. Participant 14 also agree with participant 7 and conclude that preventing bullying behaviour starts at the management level. Participant 11 believes that the management should involve Department of Labour as well as the CCMA when they want prevent bullying behaviour.

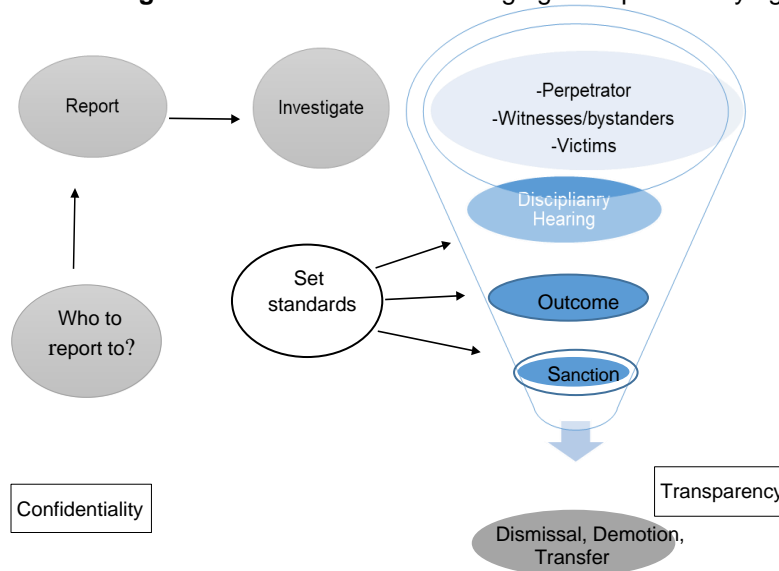
Other research participants believe that nothing can be done to prevent workplace bullying. Participant 4 said: *“I really doubt that it can be prevented because bullying in my observation is due to personal reasons for instance someone bullies you because they are in power and they want to show that they are in charge and control of everything that you do and not ask any questions. If you report them, you are more likely to lose your job. So it is their personal reasons which we do not know. So preventing bullying, I really do not know what could be done”*. But participant 6 stated that *“I think if this can be resolved from the top level management then it can be prevented but if it is still a problem there, nothing can be done”*.

4.3 Model of Managing Workplace Bullying from a South African Perspective.

The study also proposes a formal model of managing workplace bullying which should serve as strategies or guidelines of managing bullying behavior

in the South African world of work. In the world of work, bullying Behaviour is becoming an important problem that should be managed wisely using formal processes. This will also boost employees' confidence to report workplace bullying incidents. This may form as organisational mechanism to manage workplace bullying effectively. Therefore, bullying Behaviour will not be taken very lightly within borders of the organisation. To manage workplace bullying, there should be a clear and formal procedure communicated to all respective role players. Therefore, the study proposes the following formal model of managing workplace bullying.

Figure 1: Formal Model of Managing Workplace bullying



The figure above demonstrates formal processes to manage workplace bullying while maintaining confidentiality and transparency. The first step of the proposed model of managing workplace bullying focuses on the relevant office which the victims can report bullying incidents before they could report. Relevant offices to report bullying depends on victims and perpetrator's position. For instance, in a situation where a victim is bullied by co-workers, supervisor or managers should be a responsible person to report to. However, when the supervisor or manager is a perpetrator, executive manager should be the relevant office to report. When reported, investigations should take place. Investigations should clearly involve perpetrator(s), witnesses/bystanders and victims. The perpetrator should be notified in writing of the date, time and place of the hearing make preparations. Both victim and perpetrator should have their own witnesses to support their cases. Disciplinary hearing should be measured against set standards that clearly state what constitute bullying Behaviour. This is followed by the outcomes of the hearing. That should be justified by set standards. When a perpetrator is found guilty, sanctions should be applied (dismissal, demotion or transfer).

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Like any other study, the current study also had limitations. Firstly, the study excluded organisational representatives (managers) to discuss and highlight strategies they have in place to handle workplace bullying including anti-bullying policies. Another limitation of the study stems from the fact that all participants had some formal education which means that they probably understood workplace bullying.

Furthermore, indigenous knowledge, once a niche concept, has gained recognition in recent literature. This study builds on this trend by examining workplace bullying through the lens of South African indigenous perspectives. It highlights that while much research on workplace bullying has focused on Western contexts, indigenous groups also experience bullying, which manifests differently depending on individual circumstances. Effective management and prevention of workplace bullying require active involvement from employees, employers, and the government, with robust anti-bullying policies and legal measures needed to address the issue. The study also notes that cultural norms may influence perceptions and reactions to bullying, further complicating the phenomenon.

This study suggests several key practices to address workplace bullying. It advocates for an integrated, transparent system within organisations to protect victims and bystanders, enabling them to report bullying and ensuring that responsive measures are taken. Notably, many perpetrators in the study were supervisors or managers, indicating a need for management to actively discourage and address bullying behaviours. The study also calls for understanding workplace bullying from a South African indigenous perspective, considering cultural influences on power dynamics related to age and gender. It recommends that workplace bullying be explicitly regulated by South African law, similar to harassment, to ensure it is treated seriously. Additionally, it proposes promoting awareness campaigns and providing anonymous reporting mechanisms to better address and manage workplace bullying.

In conclusion, this study has illuminated the complex and multifaceted nature of workplace bullying within the South African context, employing a narrative approach to capture the diverse experiences of individuals affected by this pervasive phenomenon. Through the narratives shared in this study, it gained insights into the unique manifestations of workplace bullying, influenced by cultural dynamics, historical legacies, and organisational structures specific to South Africa.

Moreover, this research has emphasized the importance of narratives in understanding workplace bullying beyond statistical metrics. This approach not only humanizes the issue but also lays the groundwork for more inclusive and effective strategies for prevention and intervention. Looking forward, the insights gleaned from this study advocate for a holistic approach to managing workplace bullying in South Africa and beyond. Recommendations include fostering open communication channels, promoting a culture of respect and

diversity, and implementing comprehensive policies that reflect the unique socio-cultural landscape of South African workplaces. Such measures are essential not only for mitigating the immediate impacts of workplace bullying but also for cultivating healthier, more productive organisational environments.

6 Author

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