POWER MISUSE: AN ANTECEDENT FOR WORKPLACE BULLYING

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Abstract: *Workplace bullying often involves an abuse or misuse of power. Bullying includes behavior that intimidates, degrades, offends or humiliates a worker, often in front of others. Bullying behavior creates feelings of defenselessness in the target and undermines an individual's right to dignity at work. Workplace bullying represents persistent behaviors that are both overt and covert. Indeed, as a phenomenon, workplace bullying is now better understood with reasonably consistent research findings in relation to its prevalence; its negative effects on targets, bystanders and organizational effectiveness; and some of its likely antecedents. Workplace bullying is a problem facing employees and employers in Africa, however little has been said about. This paper is aimed at shedding an insight into the contemporary concept and to discuss the role that power relations play in this type of unethical behavior at work. Drawing on well-established theories and findings of various researchers, the concept of workplace bullying is systematically linked with how it can evolve into mental health problems. Since this concept is relatively new in Nigeria, the paper aims at creating an awareness of a social problem at work. It is believed that this paper will stem up further interest in the area and future empirical research will be reported.*

Keywords: *Workplace bullying; power misuse; health issues; work stress; interpersonal conflict; aggression.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying represents persistent behaviors that are both overt and covert. There is an increasing need for understanding this construct for the reason that it is directly linked to bringing the victim to a state of long lasting emotional distress. Alarmingly, such aggression usually is invisible and difficult to identify. Workplace bullying has become a widespread issue and is believed to be three times more prevalent than sexual harassment. Bullying in the workplace is ranked on the top amongst all forms of stressors present at work (Wilson, 1991). According to Razzaghian and Shah (2011), the term bullying refers to different negative actions in totality that are frequently carried out and which are hostile and aggressive. The impact of bullying on victims can range from (but are not limited to) social isolation, social maladjustment, psychosomatic illness, depressions, helplessness, anger,

anxiety, despair (Leymann, 1996), melancholy, insomnia, psychological distress, etc (Einarsen, 1999; Razzaghian & Shah, 2011; Haq, Zai-ud-Din & Rajvi, 2018).

Generally, man-induced aggression causes more severe trauma than is caused naturally (Dahl, Eitinger, Malt & Retterstol, 1994; Escartin, Ullrich, Zapf, Schluter & Dick, 2013). Similarly, Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2000) puts forth that victimization caused by fellow human beings tends to trigger emotional problems (depression, helplessness, anxiety etc) among the victimized. For this reason, social researchers are deeply concerned to explore causes and effects of bullying in the workplace. These efforts have highlighted the deleterious effects of exposure to such negative acts on the health and well-being of victims (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003; Thirlwall, 2015). It is believed that such emotional problems reach heightened levels when the targets feel unable to escape those situations or when the source of aggression is more powerful (Einarsen, 1999). Therefore, the construct of workplace bullying is considered to be a source of social stress as well as occupational stressor (Einarsen et al., 2003; Agervold, 2007).

Research into workplace bullying has progressed from academic research on the phenomenon as a workplace problem into the realm of a micro-societal problem that government, employers, human resource practitioners, non-governmental bodies, voluntary or non-profit-making organizations all ought to be concerned. Thus, the social problem has moved beyond the organizational level to a societal level and should be of concern to employers and government at large. Whitney and Smith (1993) emphasize that bullying is a form of aggression which is perpetuated on the victim in a position of less authority and encompasses a problem that is social as well as interpersonal in nature. In the contemporary times, organizations are passing through an increasing number of paradigm shifts which requires more and more interaction on the part of employees working together. Hence, the chances for differences among employees have increased. Therefore, an understanding of the interpersonal conflicts at work has become importantly recognized due to the fact that such conflicts result in physical or psychological violence and further intensifies the health problems for the victims (Lewis, 2002; Tehrani, 2004; Nielson, Indregard & Overland, 2016). This paper aims at providing an insight into better understanding of power relationships and the use and misuse of power in relation to workplace bullying. Therefore, this paper reviews and synthesizes available literature in the domain of workplace bullying. It also explores the possible causes that trigger the onset of such behaviours along with the resultant negative effects on the bullied victims in terms of health. Based on the work of different researchers and related models of stress, this paper concludes how victimization due to bullying has devastating effects on the health and mental well-being of those exposed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Concept of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying often involves an abuse or misuse of power. Bullying includes behavior that intimidates, degrades, offends or humiliates a worker, often in front of others. Bullying behavior created feelings of defenselessness in the target and undermines an individual's right to dignity at work. Bullying has become a complex problem for managers nowadays to handle because its prevalence can affect an organization's productivity, financial bottom-line and employees morale. Yet, this phenomenon is often misunderstood or mismanaged. In organizations, it may take place between co-workers, or subordinates and unlike the school bullying, in workplace, it is either consciously or unconsciously done by an adult. An interesting fact is that unlike some countries, for example Norway and Sweden, bullying is not illegal in the U.S and some African countries including Nigeria and unfortunately, has not received the due importance (Vega & Comer, 2005; Owoyemi, 2007;

Adewumi, 2008). According to Owoyemi (2007; 2010) cited in Owoyemi and Seyi (2010), workplace bullying is
a form of anti-social behaviour in the workplace that occurs as a result of unequal power between two individuals, or a group of people and another individual and/or a group of people in workplace, which can cause distress, discomfort, physical and/or psychological harm.

Workplace bullying occurs as a result of the interaction of various factors that occur at three levels. First, the organizational level which comprises the contemporary cultural context of the work environment, the organizational structure and the job design (Sheeham & Jordan, 2000; Salin, 2003). These are some of the components that can augment the climate for workplace bullying. For instance, bullying may be prevalent in organizations where confrontation is part of the working culture or is encouraged, where perpetrators feel there will be no incriminations for the actions, or even where bullying is unlikely to be abated (Sheeham, 2006; Logan, & Malone, 2018). The need to survive in a competitive economy, have facilitated some organizations ability to develop cultures which are prone to poor working relationships and internal competition (Vartia, 2003; Owoyemi & Seyi, 2010). Second, the individual level comprises the characteristic of the bullies and the victims. That is, at the individual level, workplace bullying focuses on the personalities and characteristics of the targets and the perpetrators (Einarsen, 2003; Vartia, 2003). Characteristics in terms of demographic factors may help to explain why some individuals are more subjected to acts of bullying than others. Some of the identified demographic factors include gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and age (Lewis & Gunn, 2007). Third, the group level is where interactions occur among the targets, the perpetrators and the organization. At the group level, interactions between people may sometimes influence the type of bullying behaviour experienced within the organization (Owoyemi & Seyi, 2010). Being a sole target or sole perpetrator, according to Einarsen et al., (2003) may contribute to the bullying process. Since there is strength in numbers, being a member of a group in a work environment gives the group an identity and self-categorization, especially in a situation that is determined by social identification and consequent behaviour (Capozzo & Brown, 2000; Feijo, Graf, Pearce & Fassa, 2019). Thus, the interactions at these group levels are important for better understanding of the concept.

Also, these seems to be a mutual consent in the facts that bullying can be described in terms of: the intentionability of the behaviour; the frequency (for example, weekly) and the duration (for example, about six months) of such behaviours; the targets reaction(s) to that situation; a perceived imbalance and misuse of power between perpetrator and target; inadequate support; and inability of the target to defend himself or herself in that situation (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper,2011), where they have to face constant negative social interactions, badgering, insulting remarks (Einarsen et al., 2003) and intense pressure (Sandmark, 2009). This strengthens the aspect of power imbalance between the perpetrator and the targets as the perpetrator is believed to be in a position of strength as compared to the victim (Einarsen, 1996). Quite interestingly, this construct has been studied under different terms such as emotional abuse at work (Keashly, 1998; Tehrani, 2004), harassment at work (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), bullying at work (Einarsen et al., 2003), mistreatment (Spratlen, 1995), Mobbing (Leymann, 1996), workplace aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1996), workplace incivility (Anderson & Pearson, 1999) or victimization (Aquino & Thau, 2009).

Bullying can be manifested in different ways, such as negatively gesturing or glancing towards the target, ignoring the target, refusing to listen or talk to the target, slander, laughter,

scorn or belittling of the target (Vartia, 2001). In a study of 137 Norwegians, victims reported that the most common negative acts used by the perpetrators were social isolation and exclusion, unfair criticism of their work, insulting remarks etc (Einarson *et al.,* 2003). Verbal and passive forms of bullying were reported as common methods used by perpetrators in an American survey on 178 employees (Baron & Neuman, 1996). In another instance, bullying took place through rumour spreading and repeated insults, done in order to change the image of the victim, which resulted in a low self-esteem, feelings of guilt and shame among the victims (Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006). In a study by Thomas (2005), conducted on 100 support staff in higher education institutions, it was reported that undue pressure to produce work, undermining of one's work ability, shouting abuse and withholding of necessary information were perceived as the top four bullying tactics. As mentioned, bullying not only takes different forms but it can occur horizontally and/or vertically between co-workers, and can be carried out on both male and female workers (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007; Branch,2013). Therefore, workplace bullying is a situation in which one or more persons systematically and over a long period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative treatment on the part of one or more persons, in a situation in which the person(s) exposed in the treatment has difficulty in defending themselves against this treatment.

2.2. Power Relations: Use and Misuse

Power relations underpin many of the arguments pertaining to workplace bullying. The inability of targets to defend themselves from the bully or bullies may be related to a power imbalance (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Turney, 2003). Workplace bullying, according to Turney (2003) does not occur between parties of equal power, but rather arises when conflict occurs between people with different strengths. Power imbalance is demonstrated through a wide range of characteristics such as gender, physical size, age, position and grade within the organization, educational qualification, and intelligence (Owoyemi & Seyi, 2010). Other parameters such as the inability to defend oneself, silence and being non-confrontational are some of the traits associated with power relations (Branch*,* 2013). It is stressed that many different sources of power exist in an organization, but in the case of workplace bullying, it rarely comes as physical strength, but rather as 'legitimate power' possessed due to hierarchical positions occupied by members of the organizations (Salin, 2003; Turney, 2003; Razzaghian & Shah, 2011; Branch,2013). Although, power has been criticized as being dysfunctional and negative (Palmer & Hardy, 2002), nevertheless, organizations need some form of formal power structure that can provide checks and balances to ensure the proper conduct of the organizational members. Power in this situation is functional and will make organizations more efficient and effective (Palmer & Hardy, 2002). The most important issues concerning power relations, according to Turney (2003), are that the organization should ensure that power is not abused.

2.3. Antecedents of Workplace Bullying

Bullying in an organization can be caused by many factors. According to Rayner and Hoel (1997), lack of proper work control and increased levels of role conflicts are some of the causes that may trigger employees engaging in such behaviours. Vartia (1996) also believes that problems in communication and cooperation, low morale and unhealthy social climate are also some possible causes for bullying to occur in a workplace. Cultural differences and the fact that 'who' is involved in bullying at workplace also determine the environment as conducive for this act or otherwise. Cultural differences can be measured on five dimensions, namely: power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long or short term orientation (Hofsted, 1970). Out of these dimensions, power distance describes the possibility of bullying in any particular

work environment. Power distance determines how people with varying degrees of power relate to each other (Vega & Comer, 2005; Nel, 2019).

Jex (2002) and Bowling and Beehr (2006) have separately examined two models of stress to explain the phenomenon of an occupational stressor. Basically, an occupational stressor is defined as an antecedent condition which requires adjustment to that situation (Razzaghian & Shah, 2011). Failure on the part of an individual to do so would result in strain for him or her. Moreover, if the individual lacks the resources required to meet the expected demand, it would also result in strain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Jex (2002) refers to the stressor-strain model to explain the occurrence of bullying in a workplace. If stressors in a workplace exceed the resources to cope with them, the resulting stress leads to negative physical, psychological and/or behavioural changes. On the other hand, Bowling and Beehr (2006) review the strain-stressor relationship in light of the bullying incidence. According to them, specific personal characteristics such as impaired health, etc. may pose as vulnerability factor. This predisposes the individual to be more prone to be bullied at work (Coyne, Seigne & Randall,2000). Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman and Bongers(2005) further explained that strain-stressor model in light of gloomy perception mechanism which more or less states the same principle, that is, unhealthy or depressed employees may perceive the work environment as hostile and report higher levels of bullying episodes. It is worth mentioning that both these models have been used in studies done on workplace bullying.

Jehn (1995) highlights two major types of conflict events in any organization: relationship and task conflict. The former signifies disagreements due to frustration and personal clashes which limit group cohesion and efficiency while the latter type of conflict signifies conflict in the actual task that is being performed. Besides, some conflicts are of short duration and can be easily resolved and vice versa. The concept of conflict intensity was also highlighted by Jehn (1995). Conflict intensity refers to the number of people involved in any conflict. The larger the number of people involved, and the more number of events, the more serious the conflict is. Bullying behaviorus arise from long duration conflicts (Razzaghian & Shah, 2011). Such a scenario is also expected to produce emotional responses as well as counter-productive behaviours in the group. Though, counterproductive behaviours can be of different forms. For example, when people face hindrance in the achievement of their set tasks or goals, frustration may result and this can prove to be an antecedent for organizational aggression. Thus, employees react to situations by engaging in different counterproductive behaviours including hostility, interpersonal aggression, etc (Fox & Spector, 1999). On the other hand, when the employees are subjected to organizational aggression, they respond to them through different means which includes stress, anxiety, anger, etc. They may even respond with aggressive actions that are aimed at the organization (Spector, 1978). As already discussed, a victim of bullying undergoes distress and frustration, therefore, he or she may choose to engage in counterproductive behaviours. Ayoko, Callan and Hartel(2003) proposed that intra-group conflict intensify bullying behaviour which in turn results in counterproductive behaviours in the workplace.

In another study conducted in the public service sector by Strandmark and Hallberg (2006), it was reported that lack of proper leadership, in addition to the aforementioned reasons was a possible antecedent instigating such behaviour. Consequently, bullying can be promoted by work related factors which include role conflicts, work control poor flow of information and haste at work (Vartia, 2001). Katrinli, Atabay, Cangarli, and Gunay(2010) elucidated another interesting facet of engaging in bullying behaviours. According to them, bullying is believed to be a form of organizational politics with the aim of achieving or influencing some important organizational decisions, not to mention the bully's own vested

interest. This is especially true in cases where organizations do not have clear promotion policies and instead, the employees are pressurized for more work.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The increasing concerns about the used and misuse of power in organizations have raised important epistemological and methodological debates (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003) which are now found in much of the management literature, such as in reports by Buchanan and Huczynski (2001), French and Raven (1959), Foucault (1977) and Thompson and McHugh (2002). The structural, technological and cultural changes reported in the workplace suggest some concern about workplace control, especially with respect to management and how they acquire and exercise control (Thompson & McHugh, 2002). One form of control evidence in some contemporary organizations is what human resource consultants referred to as 'knowledge intensive' (Palmers & Hardy, 2003). This concept is related to the conception of discipline given by Foucault (1977), which focuses on the way management sustains its dominance by reducing the ability of subordinates to dissent by creating reality and managing meanings for them. That is, individuals or groups become socially inscribed and normalized through the routine aspects of organization (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2001; Pfeffer, 1992) which according to Foucalt, are set rules of the game which management establishes and with which they manage their employees. Foucault further defined such rules as being either normal or abnormal, that is, bio-power, and targeted at society as a whole. Such an argument leads us to consider what is normal at the organizational level. When these rules are considered, it is argued that employees become self-disciplined and require no more managerial effort to keep them under control (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2001). The major importance of Foucault's theory lies in the notion of power, which he referred to as a semi-stable network of alliances where subjects are constructed by power but they do not have power (Foucault, 1977; Owoyemi & Seyi, 2010).

The theory of power is complex and cuts across both historical and philosophical knowledge (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003). Defining power is quite difficult because it has evolved around different conceptualizations and interpretations, different guiding questions such as 'where is it located?', 'how is it distributed?', and 'what is the unit of analysis and the outcome of interest?' are the focus of some of the ongoing debates on power (Keltner et al., 2003). Power according to Moskowitz (1994; 2004), is a basic force in social relationships and it focuses on the actor's intentions or actions, such as the treatment of power as dominance (Winter, 1988), influence (Keltner & Robinson, 1997), social reasoning (Gruenfeld, 1995), social behaviour (Clark, 1995; Kemper, 1991), moral judgment (Fiske, 1993), non-verbal behaviour (Hall & Halberstadt, 1994), emotional display (Clark, 1995), behavioural confirmation (Copeland, 1994), aggression (Bugental Blue & Cruzcosa, 1989) and teasing (Keltner et al., 2003; Owoyemi & Seyi, 2010; Razzaghian & Shah, 2011).

Keltner et al., (2003) defined power in the workplace as an individual's relative capacity to modify others by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments. The resources and punishments can come in different forms such as material punishment (food, money, economic opportunity, physical harm, or job termination) and social punishment (knowledge, affection, friendship, decision-making opportunities, verbal abuse and isolation). All these aspects reflect the dependence of certain individuals on others with the perceived notion that individuals can hold and deliver power, which according to Keltner et al., (2003) has affected the way power is used. The beliefs about the exercise of power are embedded in the cultural or moral values and attitudes of people within personal and social relationships (Howard, Blumstein & Schwartz, 1989). That is, for those who

possess the power, status is the outcome of the evaluation, and that status determines both the allocation of resources within groups and individual's power (Kemper, 1991).

However, Keltner *et al.,* (2003) argued that it is possible to have power without status or status without power, but only when a distinction can be made between formal and informal power. Formal power or authority is derived from institutionalized roles or arrangements, while informal power can exist in the absence of formal roles (Werber, 1947). Given the formal and informal possession of power,   the management of the organization and the people within it play a vital part in ensuring that power is used correctly and not abused. The application and effectiveness of power, according to French and Raven (1959), are based on the inter-personal use of power, which are as follows: legitimate, reward, coercive, expert and referent power. These sources according to Thompson and McHugh (2002) and Owoyemi and Seyi (2010), reflect genuine and broader problems in measuring power, especially when the 'formal' and 'non-formal' and the 'legitimate' and 'non-legitimate' uses of it are separated. These sources mentioned above are commonly seen as the traditional form of power held by the manager(s) in an organization which comes directly from the position that the manager is occupying in the organization.

The legitimate power is sourced from the position or the role a person performs in the organization (Mechanic, 2003). This source of power can be linked with the authority bestowed as a result of cultural value, the social value and the authority awarded to a person by a legitimate source (French & Raven, 1959). Authority awarded in this situation is dependent on what Bacharach and Lawler (1980) referred to as the perception of the subordinates to the right of power of the manager. Hence, it follows that only the managers that are perceived to be powerful as a result of the authority awarded to his or her position can bully a subordinate without being challenged (Owoyemi & Seyi, 2010).

The reward power is an interpersonal source of power that controls the resources available (French & Raven, 1959). The level of control of the resources can be determined by the position held by an individual, the authority awarded to the individual and the legitimate power bestowed on the individual (Yaki, 1989). Reward power or power to control resources in the organization can be influenced by the management of the organization, who can limit the amount of resources or reduce the reward power based on the position of the individual within the organization (Keltner *et al.,* 2003). Reward power or allocation of resources can be abused by a manager if used negatively. For instance, the denial or withdrawal of reward and resource can be tactics used by a manager to bully others in the organization, especially those who do not possess legitimate power (Branch, 2013).

Coercive power, in contrast to the reward power, can be used to sanction negatively or punish others within the organization (French & Raven, 1959). This source of power is determined by the position of the power holder, and it is usually an authoritative power not possessed by most of the employees (Porter *et al.,* 2003). Such coercive power can be used to punish, bully and even harass colleagues or subordinates and even superiors at work (Owoyemi & Seyi, 2010).

Expert power is a source of power available to every member of the organization (French & Raven, 1959). This source of power is knowledge based and is determined by the individual's possession of knowledge or expertise (Mechanic, 2003). Employees that have expert power are usually depended on by others within the organization, for information, problem solving and decision making (French & Raven, 1959). The overdependence of

others on the experts can lead to a situation whereby the power holder misuses such power. However, expert power can be limited by referent power (French & Raven, 1959). Referent power on the other hand can be obtained through the personality of an individual (Yuki, 1989) which can assists an individual to occupy a strategic position within the organization (French & Raven, 1959). This source of power is not limited to the leaders within the organization, but rather it offers those that possess it, to have access to other positions within the organization (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980). The more access an individual gets within the network of the organization, the more information such an individual could obtain, resulting in more expert power which can be used positively or negatively.

2.5. Bullying and Negative Consequences on the Well-being

Bullying impacts targeted employees by causing a host of stress-related health problem. Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll(2001) explains that although job related strain arises due to many sources present within the workplace, for example workload or role demands, nevertheless, the most important source could also be due to individual or interpersonal interactions at work. According to Einarsen *et al.,* (2003), negative behaviours such as bullying are often encountered by organizational members but when they become persistent, they are likely to affect the target's health negatively. Individuals exposed to bullying behaviours tend to lose control at work and are usually unable to cope with the stressors (Leymann, 1990; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). The more the individuals are exposed to long lasting and frequent aggression, the more they are likely to feel stressed out (Branch, 2013). According to Hackman and Oldham (1980) and Spector (1986), it has been established that job control is linked with an increase in job satisfaction and a decrease in job stress. It may be said that individuals exposed to such frequent negative acts and aggression are more likely to feel dissatisfied with their work (Razzaghian & Shah, 2011). Thus, high levels of stressful environment are likely to persist in the organization where bullying prevails (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004).

The WBTI (2003) survey polled self-described targets. Stress effects range from severe anxiety (76 percent prevalence), disrupted sleep (71 percent), loss of concentration (71 percent), PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder, 47 percent), clinical depression (39 percent) and panic attacks (32 percent). Left untreated, and with prolonged exposure, cardiovascular stress-related diseases can result from pathophysiological changes to the body that transform social factors into damaging biological consequences (Namie, 2003). PTSD is a psychological injury. Few blame victims for having it when causes are natural. Yet the experience is just as strong when trauma is induced by intentional human design. Leymann (1996) documented work trauma as problematic in Sweden, the result of psychosocial workplace stressors. He also estimated that 10 percent of his country's suicides were related to workplace traumatization.

Einarsen (1996) posits that bullying in the workplace has the capacity to impair the health and well-being of the employees. For a bullied target, health impairment and coupled with economic setbacks begin when the bully appears in his or her life. Bullied targets have a 70 percent chance that they will lose their jobs, either voluntarily or through constructive discharge, after being targeted. If the bullying has stopped, it is because 17 percent of targets transferred. In only 13 percent of cases are perpetrators punished or terminated. Destructive aggression carries few risks for perpetrators (Namie, 2003). Einarsen (1996) also believed that victimization due to bullying in the workplace can cause high level of anxiety, depression, psychosomatic complaints and musculoskeletal problems. Vega and Comer (2005) reported that bullying increase the level of burnout and physical health complaints. According to Jonaff-Bulman (1992), when individuals are exposed to too much bullying, they

may begin to take life and the surrounding environment as more of an insecure place where dangers and threats prevail (Razzaghian & Shah, 2011). Such thoughts in turn lead to emotional psychosomatic and psychiatric ailments (Leymann, 1990). Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002) still argued that victims of persistent bullying behaviour have exhibited symptoms similar to that of PTSD and general anxiety disorders. Leymann and Gustafsson (1996) have also shown that victims of bullying show similar signs as found in victims of rape. PTSD can manifest itself within the victim through re-experiencing, avoidance and hyper-arousal. Victims struggle with intense psychological distress, feelings of detachment from others, difficulty falling or staying asleep etc. They may also face recruitment and disturbing thoughts or may have continuous dreams of the situations when they were bullied.

The negative health effects, due to being exposed to bullying, can also be seen among those who are a witness to bullying situations. Study by Vartia (2001) has shown that observers of bullying report more general and mental stress than the non-witnessed group. However, the level of general and mental stress experienced by the observers was weaker as compared to the victims (Vartia, 2001). On the whole, employees perceive aggression in the form of bullying as unfair (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002) and unwanted (Einarsen, 1996) and may include a negative and cynical picture of their workplace atmosphere (Maslach *et al.,* 2001). In addition to this, bullied victims lose their sense of being a worthy and competent person (Leymann, 1990). And increased levels of tolerance for aggression in the form of bullying would mean more demoralization for the victim and a decreasing capacity to defend him/herself in that situation, thus giving more room for the bully to continue doing so (Vega & Comer, 2005).

2.6. Characteristics of the Bullying-prone Workplace
1. 'Making the numbers', an obsession with outcomes is uncritically adopted.
2. Recruitment, promotion and reward systems focus on individual's 'strength of personality' or interpersonal aggressiveness while ignoring emotional intelligence.
3. Short-term planning, e.g., to meet quarterly investor projections, governs operations.
4. Internal conduct codes limit prohibitions to narrowly defined illegal incidents.
5. Executives give higher priority to personal friendships than to legitimate business interests.
6. Fear is a dominant, desired workplace emotion, whether deliberately engineered or inadvertently created.
7. Misuse of performance appraisal processes occur with impunity.

2.7. Power Misuse and Workplace Bullying
The concept of power is important to the study of workplace bullying because it is one of the areas of convergence in the definition of workplace bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel, 2006; Vartia, 2003). Most of the definitions of workplace bullying identify that the inability to defend one is an element of perceived power imbalance and a form of control (Salin, 2003). The use of power as a means of control can be explained using different approaches.

First, is the managerial approach to power that sees power as negative in the hands of management (Palmer & Hardy, 2003), especially when it is associated with the formal structures of the work environment. This form of power, according to Salin (2003) is an enabling structure that has a double significance. That is, power structures can act as a foundation or as a filter that can either enable bullying by making the work environment

conducive to its acceptance or when such conditions do not exist, will not allow workplace bullying to occur (Salin, 2003). Perceived imbalances of power, such as formal power, constitute an enabling process or structure that can establish fertile ground for bullying to develop. For instance, job design, work organization and employee relations are all components that can enhance the use or misuse of power and thus facilitate a culture in which bullying might occur (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2001; Thompson & McHugh, 2002; Salin, 2003). Furthermore, workplace bullying can be used as a micro-political behaviour and when an organization is characterized by a politicized climate and a political perspective that rationalizes high internal competition and reward systems that makes it appropriate to use whatever means it takes to outshine other employees at work, bullying among employees might occur (Salin, 2003). For instance, the introduction of teamwork and employee involvement has been successful, but they have now created and imposed increasing psychological pressures on workers (Rose, 1988). The psychological pressure however can reduce the threshold of tolerance, which can lead to employees acting or reacting in bullying behaviors towards one another.

Second is the critical approach to power, that sees power as a means of ensuring the compliance of employees with the values and goals of the organization by suppressing any form of conflict that might occur and through the strategic subordination of the activities of the workers (Palmers & Hardy, 2002). Compliance may occur when employees actively subordinate themselves to obtain job security, money, meaning or identity (Deetz, 1992), which are all aimed at self-gain. When employees subordinate themselves for self-gain, they surrender whatever power they have to change their conditions and have to cooperate with the organization in order to fulfill their needs (Keltner *et al.,* 2003; Palmers & Hardy, 2002). This consent to domination occurs since the process of production of the self remains unproblematic and conflicts which could produce contention have been suppressed (McKinley & Starkey, 1998). The individual will therefore assume the particular subjectively since they are considered natural and unproblematic.

When employees subject themselves to control, there is the probability that they will not resist or oppose negative behaviour such as bullying in the workplace (Branch, 2006; Salin, 2003). For instance fear will not make them oppose action construed as bullying. Rather, employees will accept bullying as a norm or way of doing things in the organization. In this case, negative behaviour such as bullying can be accepted as part of the culture of the organization. However, resistance to any subordination, oppression or even negative behavior perpetrated by the dominant group can be affected by what researchers such as Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001) and Zapf and Einarsen (2003) referred to as personality characteristics or traits. That is, certain personality traits, such as low self-esteem, submissiveness and the lack of assertiveness, are associated with victims of bullying (Salin, 2003) and with these traits are less likely to defend themselves. The perpetrator(s) are protected in the sense that they are the dominant group and are therefore not resisted or challenged.

Even though power is felt everywhere, it is important to demarcate the boundaries of power with some level of control (Keltner *et al.,* 2003). Power in the hand of management can be expressed through the control of activities in the organization (McKinley & Starkey, 1998). The misuse of power by management could lead to resistance by employees, which could have a counterproductive effect on the organization, resulting in, for example, low commitment, absenteeism and sabotage (Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Kivimaki *et al.,* 2003; Rayner *et al.,* 2002; Sheehan, 2006). The inadequate use of power could lead to loss of control, discipline and orderliness which is not a desired outcome (Thompson & McHugh, 2002).

Power should be productive (Owen & Powell, 2006). The process of power and control therefore are both independent and interrelated with respect to workplace bullying (Branch, 2006). The more power possessed, the higher the likelihood of it being abused and used negatively (Salin, 2003; Vartia, 2003). The inequality within the networks of power relations, can lead to a situation whereby a group within the organization is more powerful than the other, the convergence of the weaker group can lead to a situation where inter-determinism can later lead to resistance, although currently, most employer - employee relations are still based on unequal power relations.

3. CONCLUSION

Workplace bullying has become a serious and growing problem that affects a significant proportion of professions. The serious detriments that workplace bullying causes on health, social and personal stability of employees, and the general performance of organizations have drawn attention to the comprehension of its appearance and progression. Therefore, individuals subjected to such behaviours are likely to show increased levels of anxiety, depression and a negative overall mental health. we concludes in the light of the literature reviewed that workplace bullying commonly happens in organizations where dominant subordinate hierarchical relationships exist, and that most of the tactics used by the perpetrators are initially subtle and covert, but intensify over time into overt behaviours.

The power possessed by individuals at work has created an avenue for bullying to manifest. The culture of masculinity, organizational division, and roll call all of which encourage group identification, have resulted in most organization being prone to poor working relationships, and if not well managed, these relationships can lead to unethical behaviours such as bullying. If power is not used properly, it could result in lack of trust by the employees in the management of the organization. This study has conceptualized workplace bullying as a factor of power relationships. That is, the more power possessed, the higher the likelihood of it being abused and used negatively. Organizations should ensure that all the policies and procedures aimed at ensuring that people work in a safe environment are implemented fairly and consistently, irrespective of the position or level of the parties involved. Acknowledging the occurrence of workplace bullying in Nigeria workplaces would enable employers and employees to take positive steps towards addressing the problem. Ongoing awareness and publicity should be increased so that other organizations that are yet to deal with such problems would be left with no choice but to address the situation because the persistence of such negative behaviour builds a constant distress within the individual leaving that person helpless and unable to cope with it. Probably, the bully's intention is to suppress the target to such an extent that he or she is under constant mental pressure and ultimately becomes dysfunctional in the workplace.

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