

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Workplace bullying among employees of a public higher education institution

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Workplace bullying is defined as frequent, ongoing, and detrimental incidence of unreasonable acts/behaviors directed towards an individual. The consequences of bullying to individuals often lead to absenteeism, resignation, job dissatisfaction, and suicidal ideation making it a major public health concern. This organizational issue, when not addressed, will greatly affect the workflow in any organization. There is a paucity of literature on this problem in the Southeast Asian countries

**Objective:** This study aimed to describe the extent of workplace bullying among employees of a public higher education institution.

**Methodology:** The researchers used a descriptive, cross-sectional study design. Survey questionnaires in Google Form were emailed to all employees with a 35.96% participation rate. The survey instrument asked participants to indicate their awareness about any bullying behavior in their unit and to specify the typical profile of bullies and victims they know of. Responses to quantitative variables were summarized using the mean and standard deviation, while qualitative variables were reported as frequency and percentage distribution. The software used for analysis were Microsoft Excel and EpilInfo 7.

**Results:** At least one-third (36.94%) of survey respondents indicated that they witnessed a form of bullying in the workplace with more awareness seen among faculty members and permanent employees. The most common type of bullying observed in the workplace was criticism in public. Notably, this type of bullying was similar across employee categories. The predominant reactions of victims of bullying include feeling of fear and loss of trust, and confiding to a friend or co-worker.

**Conclusion:** The phenomenon of bullying has been witnessed by the employees and reported to have adverse effects on victims. Informational campaigns coupled with anti-bullying policy and programs are necessary to promote employee well-being.

**Keywords:** workplace bullying, universities, occupational stress, Philippines

## Introduction

Workplace bullying refers to the frequent, ongoing, and detrimental incidence of unreasonable acts/behaviors directed towards an individual [1-4]. It also refers to the persistent exposure to interpersonal aggression and abuse from supervisors, co-workers, or other individuals in the workplace, thus making it the most predominant form of

organizational violence that exposes the overall health of an individual and organization to danger [1,5]. Workplace bullying is seen as the result of inequalities, power imbalances, and conflicts within the organizational setting [6].

Workplace bullying is present in all organizations, involving same or different genders regardless of the position occupied

by the members [1]. Victims of bullying have experienced one or more acts of personal behaviors such as ignoring, excluding, spreading negative rumors, yelling, public humiliation, excessive teasing, persistent criticism, and insulting remarks [1,7,8]. In addition, work-related behaviors are in the form of giving unclear information and instructions, unreasonable deadlines, unmanageable workloads, threats of job insecurity, excessive monitoring, or withholding crucial information from the victim [1,7,9]. Men and women are equally targeted for workplace abuse [10]. Meanwhile, individuals with poor social behavior or with problematic profiles [11] as well as those in lower ranks and with less power are most likely the targets of bullying [4,7,12]. Academic institutions are not immune from workplace bullying. This has been primarily attributed to the chain of command and hierarchical organizational set-up such that newly hired faculty or junior faculty and staff are likely to be targets of bullying by those in higher or permanent positions. Due to this organizational structure, mistreatment or abuse of the rank and files can be severe or exacerbated [12]. Some researchers claimed that the faculty identified their colleagues as bullies, while the staff identified the supervisors as bullies [13]. In the academe, bullying is also more commonly associated with a masculine style of management [14].

Because bullying in the workplace produces a toxic and hostile environment, it is considered one of the most catastrophic issues within contemporary organizations [4,6]. The effects of workplace bullying are not only limited to the individual (victim) but also extend to the perpetrators (bullies), co-workers (audience), and the organization as a whole. The consequences of bullying to individuals include absenteeism, resignation, job dissatisfaction, and suicidal ideation [15]. On the other hand, the effects on the organization are rapid employee turnover, decreased employee productivity, reduced organizational performance, increased costs in hiring and retraining, and the possibility of legal suits [16].

In summary, workplace bullying is an issue of public health concern because of its pervasive negative effects on the health of individuals, the overall organizational climate, and workplace productivity. In addition, as academic institutions serve as the training ground for future leaders and workers in different industries, any untoward event or violence within the organizational setting may contribute to negative effects on society. Moreover, most workplace bullying studies were done in western countries such as Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, and the United States of America, and very few in Southeast Asian countries [17].

Thus, this research was conducted to 1) describe workplace bullying as witnessed by employees of a public higher education institution specifically in the Asian setting stratified according to employee category and employment type; 2) identify the most common forms of workplace bullying stratified according to employee category and employment type, and; 3) determine the most common reactions of the person being bullied. Results of this research will enable university administrators to develop programs, policies, and interventions that will address workplace bullying. Indirectly, the researchers also envisioned to raise awareness among employees that workplace bullying is a real concern and that any form of aggressive behavior from their supervisors or co-workers is unacceptable.

## Methodology

### *Study Design and Setting*

A descriptive, cross-sectional study design was utilized to assess workplace bullying among employees of a public higher education institution. The research was based on the conceptual framework by Samnani and Singh which supported the definition of workplace bullying given by Einarsen [18]. It focused on the antecedent factors (characteristics of the bully and victim) and the common workplace bullying behavior that was experienced by the victims.

The study was conducted in a state-funded higher education institution, considered a leader and pioneer in health education, research, and public service in the Philippines. The campus has an average of 1,800 employees which includes faculty (regular: professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, and research/extension; non-regular: visiting professor, affiliate professor, adjunct professor, lecturer), technical staff (researchers, librarians, guidance counselors, and extension specialists), and administrative staff.

### *Study Population*

Employees with at least six months of service in the University prior to the survey were invited to join the study. The period of employment was chosen since this is the minimum duration included in the commonly accepted definition of workplace bullying (i.e., a person has experienced bullying at least once weekly for at least six months). Employees who were on leave at the time of the study as well as staff classified as job order and project-based were excluded.

### *Sampling Design and Sample Size Calculation*

As of May 22, 2019, there were a total of 1,182 employees in the University consisting of faculty (51.95%), technical staff (7.95%), and administrative staff (40.10%). Nearly two-thirds (66.33%) of these employees are permanent or regular at the time of the study.

Total enumeration was conducted to cover all employees who will voluntarily participate in the study and to reduce the possibility of identifying and attributing responses to specific individuals.

### *Data Collection Instrument*

The questionnaire used in this study was adopted and modified from the 18-item questionnaire used by Raineri *et al.* [19]. This tool, initially used by the faculty in universities in the northeast and central United States, asked participants to indicate their awareness about any bullying behavior in their unit, and, in a series of questions and indicate the typical profile of bullies and victims that they know of. The specific changes made to the tool for purposes of the current research were: (a) inclusion of basic information about the respondent in the first part of the questionnaire, i.e., position (faculty, technical staff, or administrative staff), status of employment (permanent, temporary, or contractual), age, and sex; (b) change in nomenclature on position to reflect what is used in the university; (c) added questions if the faculty, technical staff, and admin staff were aware of bullying in their workplace; and (d) replication of questions for technical staff bullying since the original tool had nine questions for faculty bullying and another nine questions on admin bullying.

### *Data Collection Method*

The researchers requested a copy of the email addresses of the employees through the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Administration. Data collection was conducted from July to August 2020. Data collectors emailed the link to the Google Forms (no personal data were collected to maintain the anonymity of the respondents) detailing the questionnaire to all employees of the institution. The cover letter to the survey questionnaire included information on what employees can do should they feel any distress or anxiety from answering the survey. To increase the response rate to the survey, employees who were given the link were sent two reminder messages two and four weeks apart from the time the link to the survey was sent to them. The dataset that was automatically created from the responses in the Google Forms was downloaded and

stored in a password-protected laptop that only the research team has access to. All completed questionnaires were deleted after the data extraction. The completeness and accuracy of the responses were verified by the other co-investigators of the research team.

### *Data Processing and Analysis*

The forms were encoded by research assistants using Microsoft Excel in a password-protected computer owned by the principal investigator. Double encoding was performed by the research assistants to ensure the correctness of the encoded data. Random checks of the encoded data were performed by co-investigators who were not affiliated with the Human Resource Development Office (HRDO) to ensure the consistency of the encoded data.

For the profile of participants, quantitative variables (e.g. age, length of service, etc.) were described using the mean and standard deviation, while qualitative variables (e.g. sex, employee category, etc.) were summarized using frequency and percentage distribution tables.

Although a total enumeration of all employees was desired in this study, some employees did not participate in the survey. Hence, point and 95% confidence interval estimates parameter of interest (e.g. proportion of participants who witnessed workplace bullying) were computed to get a better idea of its magnitude in the target population. Microsoft Excel was used to compute the descriptive statistics needed in this study, while Epi Info 7 was used to compute the inferential statistics necessary to answer the study objectives.

## **Results**

A total of 1,182 employees were invited to participate in the study via electronic mail; however, only 425 answered the questionnaire, which translated to a response rate of 35.96%. In efforts to increase the response rate, invitations were sent out to participants twice with two-week intervals during the data collection period.

### *Characteristic of Respondents*

The results of the online survey showed that most of the 425 respondents were faculty members (49%) of the tertiary educational institution, followed by administrative staff (34%), and technical staff (13%). Majority (57%) of the respondents were permanent employees while there was an even distribution in terms of the age of the respondents, there were more females who answered the survey (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of respondents (n = 425)

| Demographic              | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Employee Category</b> |           |            |
| Admin Staff              | 145       | 34.12      |
| Faculty                  | 209       | 49.18      |
| Technical staff          | 57        | 13.41      |
| Did not want to disclose | 14        | 3.29       |
| <b>Employee Type</b>     |           |            |
| Permanent                | 244       | 57.41      |
| Contractual              | 55        | 12.94      |
| Temporary                | 118       | 27.76      |
| Did not want to disclose | 8         | 1.88       |
| <b>Age</b>               |           |            |
| 20-30 years old          | 87        | 20.47      |
| 31-40 years old          | 99        | 23.29      |
| 41-50 years old          | 107       | 25.18      |
| 51-60 years old          | 95        | 22.35      |
| 61 and above             | 28        | 6.59       |
| Did not want to disclose | 9         | 2.12       |
| <b>Sex</b>               |           |            |
| Female                   | 288       | 67.76      |
| Male                     | 125       | 29.41      |
| Did not want to disclose | 11        | 2.59       |

### Bullying Behavior Witnessed in the Workplace

At least a third of survey respondents indicated that they witnessed a form of bullying in the workplace. Among the administrative staff, faculty members, and technical staff who answered the questionnaire, only 31.72% (95% CI 24.06%-39.39%), 42.58% (95% CI 35.36%-48.85%), and 31.58% (95% CI 17.58%-42.07%), respectively, reported that they were aware of bullying incidents happening in the institution (Table 2).

Specifically, administrative staff and faculty members were found to be more aware of incidents involving another individual of a similar employee category as either the perpetrator or the victim. The technical staff members, on the other hand, were more aware of incidents with administrative staff being the bully or the victim. Across the employee categories and types, faculty members and permanent employees were found to be more aware of bullying incidents in the institution.

Among the three employee categories, faculty members were identified as the most commonly involved in the bullying

incidents in the institution, either as the perpetrator or the victim. Mostly female employees (63%) with a permanent status (70%) belonging to the age group of 51-60 years old (35%) were identified as the perpetrators. These employees mostly bullied other faculty members as well (49%).

In contrast, victims of bullying among faculty members were mostly females (57%) of the younger age group holding temporary positions (42%). Most of them fell victim to bullying by other faculty members (73%).

Bullying incidents involving administrative staff accounted for the second most common bullying incident in the institution. Female employees (64%), those with permanent positions (74%), and aged 41-60 years old (34%-38%) were more commonly tagged as the bullies in this employee category. Administrative staff as victims of another administrative staff (54%) was more commonly observed.

Among the administrative staff, females (65%), holding permanent positions (50%), and aged between 31-50 years old (27-28%) were the most commonly identified victims of bullying. Bullying was mostly caused by bullies of the same employee category (79%).

In terms of technical staff being the perpetrators, the administrative staff were observed to be the most common victims of bullying (38%) followed by technical staff bullying another technical staff (27%). Female employees (59%), with permanent positions (67%), and those aged 41-50 years old (34%) were identified more to be the bullies in this group. Particularly, technical staff bullying an administrative staff (38%) was most commonly observed.

Likewise, victims of bullying among the technical staff in the institution were determined to be females (58%) with permanent positions (52%). Victims were mostly composed of those aged 31-40 years old (37%). Bullying by faculty members (29%) was most commonly observed in this group.

**Table 2.** Overall proportion of employees who are aware of bullying incidents in the institution.

| Employee category        | n          | Frequency  | Percentage   | 95% CI       | Estimate (%) |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Faculty                  | 209        | 89         | 42.58        | 35.36        | 48.85        |
| Admin staff              | 145        | 46         | 31.72        | 24.06        | 39.39        |
| Technical staff          | 57         | 18         | 31.58        | 17.58        | 42.07        |
| Did not want to disclose | 14         | 4          | 28.57        | 1.5          | 55.64        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>             | <b>425</b> | <b>157</b> | <b>36.94</b> | <b>32.33</b> | <b>41.55</b> |

**Table 3.** Most common types of bullying involving a faculty, technical staff, or administrative staff in the college, department or unit as bully\*

| Types of bullying involving a Faculty/Technical Staff/Admin Staff as bully                   | Count |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Criticizes in public                                                                         | 161   |
| Spreads rumors/misperceptions                                                                | 143   |
| Utilizes "Put downs" such as "I thought I asked you to..." or "What did I tell you about..." | 135   |
| Blocks career goals                                                                          | 130   |
| Blames victim for bully's mistakes                                                           | 126   |

\*multiple answers allowed

**Table 4.** Most common types of bullying involving a faculty, technical staff, or administrative staff in the college, department or unit as victim\*

| Types of bullying involving a Faculty/Technical Staff/Admin Staff as victim                  | Count |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Spreads rumors/misperceptions                                                                | 142   |
| Criticizes in public                                                                         | 135   |
| Blames victim for bully's mistakes                                                           | 128   |
| Utilizes "Put downs" such as "I thought I asked you to..." or "What did I tell you about..." | 125   |
| Discounts accomplishments                                                                    | 122   |

\*multiple answers allowed

**Table 5.** Most common types of bullying involving a faculty in the college, department or unit as bully\*

| Types of bullying involving a Faculty as bully                                               | Count |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Criticizes in public                                                                         | 85    |
| Blocks career goals                                                                          | 71    |
| Utilizes "Put downs" such as "I thought I asked you to..." or "What did I tell you about..." | 67    |
| Discounts accomplishments                                                                    | 61    |
| Spreads rumors/misperceptions                                                                | 58    |

\*multiple answers allowed

**Table 6.** Most common types of bullying involving a technical staff in the college, department or unit as bully\*

| Types of bullying involving a Faculty as bully                                               | Count |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Criticizes in public                                                                         | 20    |
| Utilizes "Put downs" such as "I thought I asked you to..." or "What did I tell you about..." | 29    |
| Spreads rumors/misperceptions                                                                | 19    |
| Attempts others to turn against the victim                                                   | 18    |
| Blames victim for bully's mistake                                                            | 18    |

\*multiple answers allowed

**Table 7.** Most common types of bullying involving an administrative staff in the college, department or unit as bully\*

| Types of bullying involving an Administrative Staff as bully                                 | Count |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Spreads rumors/misperceptions                                                                | 66    |
| Criticizes in public                                                                         | 56    |
| Blames victim for bully's mistake                                                            | 55    |
| Utilizes "Put downs" such as "I thought I asked you to..." or "What did I tell you about..." | 48    |
| Attempts others to turn against the victim                                                   | 44    |

\*multiple answers allowed

**Table 8.** Most common reactions of the victims of bullying\*

| Reactions of the victims of bullying | Frequency | %     |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Fear, Loss of trust                  | 169       | 16.52 |
| Talked to a friend/co-workers        | 166       | 16.23 |
| Ignored it or did nothing            | 137       | 13.39 |
| Lowered morale and productivity      | 125       | 12.22 |
| Stayed calm                          | 93        | 9.09  |

\*multiple answers allowed



### *Types of bullying in the workplace*

The five most common types of bullying observed in the workplace are quite similar for the three employee categories who were involved as bullies and victims (Tables 3 and 4). Only one spot in the five leading types of bullying differed between those observed among the bullies and the victims. Respondents reported that blocking of career goals was commonly done by bullies whereas downgrading their accomplishments was more common among the victims. Criticizing in public, spreading rumors or misperceptions, utilization of “put downs” such as “I thought I asked you to...” or “What did I tell you about...” and blaming the victim for the bully's mistakes were the other common types of bullying in the study site.

The most frequently observed bullying tactics involving faculty members as the bully could be seen in Table 5. On the contrary, the least often observed included trying to hide the victim's talent from others, utilizing resources needed by the victim, setting up targets for failure, and scheduling meetings at the victim's inconvenience.

On the other hand, the five most commonly observed bullying behaviors among technical staff (Table 6) and administrative staff (Table 7) were found to be similar. However, criticizing the victim in public was more frequently observed from the technical staff while rumor spreading was more commonly seen from administrative staff.

### *Common reactions of the victims to bullying*

It was reported that many victims of bullying were fearful and have experienced loss of trust (16.52%) and talked to a friend or co-worker (16.23%) as their common reactions to bullying. The next most common reaction to bullying was ignoring it or doing nothing (13.39%) (Table 8).

## **Discussion**

### *Summary of Main Findings*

Faculty members reported having strong awareness of bullying incidents in the institution. They were also identified as the most commonly involved employee in such incidents. Similar to administrative staff, faculty members were more aware of bullying incidents involving individuals of similar employee category while technical staff were more aware of bullying involving administrative staff. With regard to employment status, those with permanent

positions were most likely tagged as bullies among the different employment categories. The most common types of bullying reported were found to be detrimental to the victims' self-esteem and success in the workplace. These results are consistent with the most common reactions of the victims which showed a decrease in confidence and fear.

### *Bullying Behavior*

Across all employee categories, young female employees were more likely to be victims of bullying in the academic institution. While this observed trend is similar to previous studies, age and gender as risk factors have not been fully established due to conflicting results in the current literature [20]. This predilection for young female employees may be due to the over representation of this demographic in the study population [21]. The perpetrators in the institution were identified as mostly female aged 41-60 years for all three employee categories. This could be attributed to the fact that the academe in health is considered a female-dominant occupation as shown in the study of Ortega (2009) [22]. This is in contrast to the findings of another study showing male employees of the older age group to be the more likely bullies in the workplace [19].

Job hierarchy and security have consistently shown to affect workplace bullying. In this study, employees holding permanent positions were found to be the most involved in bullying incidents, both as bullies and victims. This is in contrast to previous studies which showed that those who held permanent positions were more likely to be the perpetrators while those who held precarious employment (e.g. temporary work and contractual employment) were more likely to be the victims of workplace bullying [23]. Negative consequences such as sense of powerlessness, among others, were seen among victims of supervisory bullying [24]. Moreover, those holding permanent positions were more likely to report bullying than those with precarious employment [25]. This may account for the higher numbers of permanent employees found to be involved in bullying incidents.

The presence of a tenure track for qualified faculty members is an important consideration for academic institutions given that this exempts the employee from periodic evaluation. While the tenure system is set in place to ensure “academic freedom and economic stability [26],” previous studies have shown that it has been found to encourage workplace bullying [23,27,28]. Tenured employees were found to be more involved in bullying

incidents both as perpetrators and victims. While tenured positions ensure job security, some studies have also found that bullying was used as a means to drive out tenured employees [23]. Though the category of tenure was not included in this study, it is still an important factor to consider given that some suggestions received from study participants involved this group of employees.

### *Types of Bullying*

The most frequently observed act of bullying involving faculty as the bully was criticizing the victim in public, followed by blocking career goals, utilizing “put downs,” discounting a person's accomplishments, and spreading rumors and misconceptions about another person. The types of bullying commonly observed among technical staff as the perpetrator included criticizing a person in public, using “put downs,” spreading rumors and misconceptions about the victim, attempting to turn others against the victim, and blaming the victim for the bully's mistake. The five most common bullying tactics from administrative staff were similar to those observed among technical staff; however, the most frequent bullying behavior was the spreading of rumors and misconceptions about the victim.

Across the three employee categories in the academe, person-focused belittlement and professional undermining were the recurring nature of the bullying behaviors observed. These dimensions of bullying are similar to a study conducted in an academic institution in Germany, although it only focused on faculty personnel as victims [29] whereas this study explored other employee categories as perpetrators or victims of workplace bullying. Other literature also identified the overarching themes of workplace bullying behaviors as work-related (e.g. setting up to fail, controlling resources, constant scrutinization, and blocking career goals) and personal. The latter is further divided into direct personal bullying behaviors in which the bullies have direct contact with the victims (e.g. criticizing in public/humiliation), and indirect personal bullying behaviors which can lead to the victim's isolation and exclusion (e.g. spreading of rumors and misconceptions and blaming the victim for bully's mistake/false accusations) [8]. Some of the predetermined types of bullying behaviors in this study have not yet been classified in the previous literature. Setting up meetings that cannot be attended by the victim, trying to hide the victim's talent from others, discounting a person's accomplishments, and cross-examination of the victim either directly or by soliciting evidence from others are tactics that can affect an individual's career advancement. Thus, these can be

classified under work-related. Erosion of physical or mental health of the victim and utilization of “put downs” involve direct interaction with the bully, hence, can be classified under direct personal. On the other hand, attempting others to turn against the victim promotes isolation and exclusion, placing it under indirect personal control.

In this study, results indicate that the commonly observed bullying acts among faculty personnel are a mixture of work-related and personal bullying behaviors. On the other hand, personal bullying incidents were more prevalent among technical staff and administrative staff. This is in contrast to the study of Zabrodska and Kvetonin (2012) [30] in which bullying incidents among university employees are more commonly work-related. Administrators in the higher education institution were also found to target the professional status of their victims [19]. Bullying behaviors that are directed on career advancement (“blocking of career goals” and “discounting one's accomplishments”) are more prominent among faculty personnel as “one's accomplishments, intellectual rigor, and reputation” are deemed to be of critical importance to these individuals [13]. These bullying incidents, especially those work-related, are made possible due to the imbalance of power between the bully and the victim [8,24], making it difficult for the victims to defend themselves, thus, becoming more vulnerable to the said acts.

### *Reactions to Bullying*

Four clusters can be recognized from the list of victim's reactions to bullying. These can be divided into assertive response (i.e. confronting the bully and feeling of anger), seeking help (i.e. reporting physical symptoms/manifestations, talking to a friend/co-worker, talking to the supervisor, and making a formal complaint), avoidance (i.e. asking for transfer, resigning, avoiding the bully, lowered morale and productivity, and sense of fear and loss of trust), and doing nothing (i.e. ignoring or doing nothing, staying calm, and going along with the behavior) [31].

Victim responses to bullying incidents in the institution are found to be more on avoidance and doing nothing. Among the five most common reactions to bullying, only one (“talking to a friend/co-worker”) was identified as a way of seeking help. These typical responses of bullying victims are similar to those observed in higher education institutions wherein talking to colleagues, family, or friends, staying calm, and avoiding the bully are the primary responses [32]. Talking to friends, family, and colleagues was also the frequent choice of victim response in another

study [23]. This help-seeking response is more inclined towards emotional or cognitive support rather than a more direct and assertive way of tackling the issue such as reporting to the supervisor or Human Resource (HR) personnel [31]. Only 6.16% and 3.52% of the respondents sought help from their supervisor and filed a formal complaint, respectively. This may partly be due to the perceived lack of clear reporting mechanism of such incidents in the institution, as expressed by the respondents when asked for suggestions in addressing workplace bullying. In another article, incidents are less reported to the higher authorities within the organization due to the belief that there would be no change in the situation and the fear of retaliation [33].

### *Implications of the Study*

Workplace bullying is known to have individual and organizational impacts ranging from decreased productivity, increased employee turnover, and negative effects on employees' physical and/or emotional health. In order to provide a safe working environment, strategies focusing on prevention of bullying in the academic institution must be employed.

It is recommended for primary stakeholders to work with individuals and the organization as a whole. First, it is essential to identify the risk factors for bullying as well as the specific types of bullying occurring in the unit, department, and college. Anti-bullying procedures of other institutions provided clear definitions and responsibilities of the employees before going into detail about the grievance mechanism.

Moreover, developing anti-bullying policies and strategies such as formal training and education on acts of bullying, having a clear mechanism on grievance reporting, a just process for the investigation and imposition of corrective actions, and providing appropriate support to the victims are recommended. Constant monitoring of bullying incidents in the workplace is also crucial in ensuring a continuous bully-free environment.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The study focused on the characteristics of the bully and victim, as well as the most common workplace bullying behavior that manifests within the institution. This study did not cover cyberbullying, physical assault, and sexual harassment or abuse in the workplace as part of bullying

incidents. Moreover, it was beyond the scope of the study to examine the causal relationship between the exposure and outcome and its consequences both to the victims themselves and the organization that they belong to.

Due to the restrictions set by the current situation, the study utilized an electronic-based survey for data collection. Hence, there was a possibility for potential participants to have not opened the invitations sent via email. Efforts were done to gather more participants included resending invitations twice within a two-week period. The possibility of receiving duplicate answers was eliminated by restricting each institutional email address to only one submission within the system.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Workplace bullying is a concern for occupational health and safety affecting not only individual employees but also the organization as a whole. In this study, young female employees holding permanent positions were more likely to be victims of bullying while older female employees holding permanent positions were the most commonly identified perpetrators. Faculty members were the employees most commonly involved in workplace bullying, either as victims or bullies, followed by administrative staff and technical staff. The most commonly reported incidents among technical staff and administrative staff were personal bullying behaviors while those among faculty personnel were a mixture of work-related and personal bullying behaviors.

In order to eliminate workplace bullying and ensure a continuous bully-free environment, it is suggested that all contributory factors to workplace bullying in the institution, including system-level issues, are addressed by setting specific and comprehensive policies in place. This includes formal training on workplace anti-bullying programs, developing a comprehensive information drive using all platforms, a clear mechanism on reporting, imposition of corrective action, and constant monitoring in each unit.

## **Acknowledgments**

The implementation of this research is supported by the National Institutes of Health – University of the Philippines Manila (NIH-UPM) Research Grant 2020. The authors would also like to thank Mr. Alfred Dalmacio and Ms. Sheila May Relado-Ayran, UP Manila librarians, for their assistance in searching related literature.



## Ethical Clearance

This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Philippines Manila Review Ethics Board (UPMREB 2019-534-01).

## Publisher's Note

This paper was initially handled through the peer review and editorial process by the former Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Arnold V. Hallare. After his untimely passing, responsibility for handling the manuscript, including the decision on acceptance, was transferred to another senior Editorial Board member to avoid conflict of interest.

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