Articles

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Workplace Bullying and Employee Productivity: Industry Versus Academia

Abstract

Workplace Bullying is a negative interpersonal behaviour observed among employees. Studies show that it harms employees' health and wellness, which may affect how they perform for the organization. This study aims to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying and evaluate industry workers' perspectives with those of employees in academia. A cross-sectional study was conducted using the Negative Act Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R), a valid tool. Using SPSS, the data were processed, descriptive statistics were produced with graphs and Cronbach's alpha was created. The study's findings revealed that just 48 per cent of businesses reported workplace bullying, compared to 58 per cent of academic institutions. The reliability tests results showed they were extremely reliable. According to descriptive statistics, workplace bullying occurs more frequently in academia than in industry. When comparing the effects of different types of bullying on employee productivity across sectors, there is little difference between person-related and work-related bullying; however, findings suggest that most of the responses reported person-related bullying more than work-related bullying from both sectors. Hence, the results of this study show that bullying practices do occur in both academic and non-academic settings.

Keywords*:* Academia, Industry, Person related bullying, Work related bullying, Workplace bullying,

Introduction

Academic curiosity on the issue of workplace bullying was first sparked by research on child-to-child bullying in childhood studies (Rayner & Cooper, 2006). Researchers began to focus on workplace bullying of adults in the latter part of the 1980s (Leymann, 1990). Since then, workplace bullying has gained attention in a variety of disciplines internationally.

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Workplace bullying in simple terms is a mistreatment towards an employee. The victim suffers because of an employee's or employees' behaviour against other employee(s) with the purpose to damage their reputation, or low self-esteem, or to deny them authority. Three forms of bullying exist: 1. verbal; 2. nonverbal; and 3. performance-related (Oade, 2009). Making disparaging remarks in front of others, such as pointing out errors and engaging in conversation is considered verbal bullying. Speaking negative sign language in front of people or alone is referred to as nonverbal bullying. Bullying based on performance is typically perpetrated by superiors, as in the case of excessive workloads with short deadlines. One of the criteria to be fulfilled to measure workplace bullying is that it has to be repeated, prolonged and persistent behaviour for a minimum of 6 months to be labelled as bullying (Quine, 2003).

Workplace bullying is a phenomenon that has a significant detrimental effect on businesses, harming workers' health (Nielsen et al., 2012) and productivity (Anjum et al., 2018), costing money or even time and sometimes harming the organizational structure and reputation of the firm. Bullying can occur at any organizational level and bullies might be peers, superiors, subordinates or coworkers (Zapf et al., 2003). Djurkovic et al. (2008) found in their study that 58 per cent of bullies are superiors as bullying was from a higher level, 26 per cent of bullies were peers from the same level and 43 per cent of bullies were subordinates and the rest were unknown. This majorly states that bullying came from higher ranked to the lower ranked i.e., vertical and downwards. As stated earlier also that workplace bullying has been studied worldwide with a focus on adults working in organizations, there are not many studies which reflect on bullying in the academic field. . However, recently researchers are taking a key interest in finding the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying in academia.

The present study seeks to address this gap by surveying employees working in the academic sector as well as in the industry to compare both results.

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to determine the exposure to workplace bullying and to compare the bullying experiences of industry employees with those of employees in academia.

The researchers came across a few of the questions:

RQ 1. Is there any exposure to workplace bullying in academia versus industry in India?

RQ 2. Is there any difference in the exposure of workplace bullying between both sectors?

RQ 3. Is the data collected for the study reliable and normally distributed?

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RQ 4. Is there any difference in the type of bullying experience between both sectors?

Based on the questions, the study focuses on the following research objectives:

- To determine the exposure of workplace bullying in academia and corporate sector in India
- To know the differences in workplace bullying between both the sectors
- To test the reliability and normality of the collected data
- To compare the type of bullying experiences of both sectors

Literature Review

The bullying started to gain attention in the private and corporate sectors as a workplace issue in the late 1990s. Today, many of western countries have found the prevalence of workplace bullying in many sectors namely healthcare, manufacturing, banking, Information Technology Enables Services (ITES), aviation, etc.

Workplace bullying in the Industry

Ciby & Raya (2014) developed a conceptual model that has three phases known as the antecedent phase (job demands, leadership styles, interpersonal conflict), the bullying phase (negative work and personal related bullying behaviour, duration, frequency & intention of bullying behaviour, power distance) and outcome phase which consists of consequences (emotional reactions, personal and work-related) and self-coping mechanisms (easy-going attitude, sharing with family and friends, voicing the issues and perceived organizational support. Later on, Agarwal & Rai (2019), focusing on the Indian context, identified the characteristics of bullying such as unreasonable deadlines by superiors, inadequate information to complete the work, being forced to perform subpar tasks or being beneath their level of competence, insensitive behaviours from some seniors, being mocked for refusing to work after office hours or in the family time like on the weekends, withholding authorized leave, unjustified criticism, and other similar behaviours. They also witness some of the negative effects such as work disengagement, neglect, lower self-esteem, intention to quit, silence and neglect behaviours.

Research has proven that workplace bullying has a great amount of association with psychological distress and results in mental health problems (Anasori et al., 2020; Giorgi et al., 2016). Health issues also serve as a boost to indulge in exposure to bullying (Nielsen et al.,

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2012). Later on, it impacts the organization as employees' work engagement reduces due to dissatisfied needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Trépanier et al., 2013). On the contrary, workplace bullying benefits employers as it instils fear in employees, which increases productivity up to a certain extent (Beale & Hoel, 2011). Nevertheless, they also found a high degree of bullying is harmful to them as it costs them in terms of sick leave, intention to leave, lost productivity, etc. But, Eriksen et al., (2016) found that only bullied females consistently experience greater rates of long-term sickness absence and poor long-term health, compared to men.

D'Cruz & Rayner, (2013) found India's prevalence in workplace bullying, where they established that superiors are the most frequent source of task-focused bullying behaviour. Cross-level bullying is emphasized with a personal focus on bullying behaviour. Such bullying behaviour is caused by the competition for rewards among employees (Samnani & Singh, 2014). The same study further proved that such bullying increases the productivity of the perpetrators and decreases the productivity of the victims. In India, workplace bullying is more commonly thought of as psychological violence than as a kind of physical violence (Gupta et al., 2017; Rai & Agarwal, 2017) which comes out in themes such as leaving the workplace, moving inward, being perplexed and engaging organizational options. The impact of bullying is especially severe when one perceives oneself as a victim (Nielsen et al., 2012) and suffers the characteristics such as coldness, retaliation, and distrust (Glasø et al., 2009).

Workplace Bullying in Academia

Academia is receiving great attention these days for the study of workplace bullying. There are studies done in Western countries on the intention to leave and perceived organizational support among government and non-government school teachers (Djurkovic et al., 2008), productivity loss, job alienation and organizational support among secondary high school teachers (Nadi & Shojaee, 2019). Studies have also been done in the Indian context and showed a high prevalence rate in academia (Gupta, 2013).

Indian teachers perceived workplace bullying as an extended form of humiliation and excessive employee surveillance. It is also to exhibit power and establish dominance over the employees. The attitude and performance of the teachers vary by gender, with more violent tendencies displayed by male teachers compared to female teachers (Iqbal et al., 2021). It is evident from the study of Hollis (2019) that those who experience workplace bullying also suffer from health

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issues as both have evidence of a positive relationship. Victims complain about problems such as stress, anxiety and depression which further increases the intention to quit leading the organization to a problem (Sinha & Yadav, 2017). Bullying particularly affects directly employees' intention to leave the organization and is indirectly mediated by the working environment (Meriläinen et al., 2019).

Most of the bullying - 58 per cent, comes from the higher level, 26 per cent from the same level and 43 per cent from the lower level. Hence, most of the bullying travels from higher to lower, i.e. vertically and downwardly (Djurkovic et al., 2008). Nadi & Shojaee (2019) found similar results in their study that workplace bullying reduces job satisfaction and productivity, which ultimately increases the number of job vacancies by way of high attrition. On the contrary, they have also found that if an organization supports the victims, then it may have a chance to reduce the intention of quitting the organization. The ability of human resource practitioners to confront workplace bullying and support victims is hindered by paradoxical role expectations, a lack of decision-making authority, and their perception of policy and management's lack of support (Mokgolo & Barnard, 2019).

Workplace Bullying and Employee Productivity

Productivity is the capacity a person has to effectively and efficiently convert input resources into output. (Cocker et al., 2013). The majority of it has to do with how much time is spent on the actual task that the employee is expected to complete while working with limited resources. Along with performance ability, a person's degree of productivity is influenced by their social network and work environment. Enjoyable working environments increase employee engagement, productivity and health. Consequently, it makes sense to design a workplace that promotes employee well-being, and businesses should aim to provide employees with a better working environment so that they are comfortable and committed to their work to increase productivity (Anjum et al., 2018). Presenteeism, another measure of productivity used to describe employees who show up for work when taking a leave of absence, would have been a better choice as per behavioural approaches used in Europe and the US. It affects productivity (McKevitt et al., 1997; Johns, 2010) due to the sickness absence in the organization either with the cause of physical or mental sickness (Naseem & Ahmed, 2020).

Depression is one of the factors leading to sickness absence and presenteeism (McTernan et al., 2013). Workplace bullying has a very high prevalence among Jordanian nurses and due to

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their exposure to bullying events, they have reported a decrease in productivity (Al-Ghabeesh & Qattom, 2019). Exposure to workplace bullying regularly (daily or weekly) is linked to eight or more days of absenteeism due to illness. (Conway et al., 2016). Bullying at work drains employees emotionally, preventing them from working to their fullest capacity while being present (Naseem & Ahmed, 2020) and also affects employee productivity directly and through job burnout (Anjum et al., 2018).

An alternative explanation for productivity is a subjective view that considers workplace bullying. Subjective productivity is the perception of an employee's capacity to perform a responsibility, job, or task that supports organizational profitability and effectively produces output (Jackson & Fransman, 2018). Such productivity demonstrates how well a company's human resources are efficiently engaged in generating output. (Guthrie, 2001). As a potential managerial tool for productivity measurement, Sari & Antti (2003) offered a subjective productivity measurement. "Subjective productivity measurement appears to be a very prospective tool for assessing productivity in instances where the objective methods fail," they concluded. Subjective measures frequently try to define the outcome in qualitative terms or to identify performance issues (Singh, 2015), where mistreatment results in targets feeling frustrated and demoralized, which causes them to stop performing their work obligations or lose productivity (Hollis, 2015). According to Fisher-Blando's (2008) study, bullied workers feel job discontent, which affects productivity, recorded episodes of mistreatment and their effects on worker job satisfaction and productivity. In their research, Hutchinson & Jackson (2015) and (Le Mire & Owens, 2014) also came to the same conclusion.

Research Methodology

Procedure and Participants

To collect comparative data from academia and industry, this present study used a cross-sectional design and a snowball sampling method. India's academia and industry are the two sectors from which responses are obtained. The academic field includes faculty members, administrative staff, research associates and academic associates from all the branches, i.e., management, commerce, arts, science, engineering, designing, etc. Industry includes managerial, supervisory, and operative levels of manufacturing, ITES BPO, banking sectors and others. Data was collected through an online questionnaire with the help of Google Forms. Consent was taken from all participants. A total of 141 responses have been received, out of

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which 138 are taken into analysis, and three are discarded as they did not have a minimum of six months of experience in the current organisation which does not fit the criteria to measure the exposure of workplace bullying.

Measures

Table 1 summarizes the scales adopted for this study variable, i.e., workplace bullying and employee productivity.

Workplace bullying: Exposure to workplace bullying was measured with the help of the revised version of NAQ-R (Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised) validated for the Indian Context (Rai & Agarwal, 2017a) originally developed in the Western context (Einarsen et al., 2009). The scale is divided into two parts i.e., person-related bullying which has 7 items and work-related bullying has 15 items to measure the exposure to workplace bullying.

Employee productivity: This variable is measured with the help of the items of productivity dimension from the SmartWoW tool (Palvalin, 2017). The scale has 7 items that measure the qualitative/subjective productivity of the employees.

Table 1: Adapted Standardized Scale

Variables	Scale Name	Author & Year	No. of Items
Workplace bullying	Negative Act Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R)	Rai & Agarwal (2017)	22 items
Employee productivity	SmartWoW (Specific to employee productivity)	Palvalin (2017)	7 items

Source: Original (created by authors)

Results

Reliability test

There are several tests to evaluate reliability, the most popular of which is the internal consistency reliability test (Maiyaki & Mohd Mokhtar, 2010). In addition to detecting whether there is a correlation between the items, it represents the degree to which the items of a particular construct converge, yet each can assess the same construct. The internal consistency

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reliability test using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was carried out as suggested by Sekaran, U., and Bougie (2016). The findings are shown in Table 2. According to research experts, the average reliability coefficient is thought to be 0.60, while exceptional reliability is indicated by a reliability value of 0.70 or higher (Hair & Lukas, 2014). The construct of workplace bullying has the highest Cronbach's alpha score of 0.969 confirming that it is the most reliable construct of the scale. Further, the value of the dependent variable, i.e., employee productivity is 0.859 which again shows high reliability. Overall, Cronbach's alpha values are more than 0.70, shown in Table 2, therefore the scale is showing high reliability and satisfaction to proceed further (DeVellis, 2016).

Table 2: Summary of reliability test results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
Employee productivity	0.859	0.868	7
Workplace bullying	0.969	0.970	22

Source: Original (created by authors)

Normality test

Table 3 shows the normality test with the p-values 0.000 is not greater than 0.05, hence, the data are not normally distributed. The normality and homoscedasticity test do not meet the mathematical assumption to carry on with further parametric analysis such as correlation or regression for the study. However, researchers in statistics and methodology have looked at the effects of such assumption breaches on the results of several empirical and theoretical analyses. The robustness of the subsequent analysis, or the chance that the tests would produce accurate results even when their mathematical assumptions were violated, has been consistently demonstrated in this research (Baker et al., 1966; Carifio & Perla, 2007; Norman, 2010). Such

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violations are common in social science research where Likert scale data is used with a 5 points Likert scale as compared to a 6 to 11-point Likert scale (Leung, 2011). The reasoning is provided by Norman (2010) in his research is that the numerals assigned in the form of coding are mysterious in their origin. This implies that even if a Likert scale is conceptually ordinal, to the degree that we cannot theoretically ensure the real distance between those 5 points, this is inappropriate to the analysis as the software has no way of asserting or rejecting it. No independent observations exist to support or contradict the problem. The computer is limited to making inferences about the numbers themselves and not the actual Likert scale. Thus, the author suggests concluding the difference in the means and standard deviations, assuming the statistics are distributed.

Table 3: Summary of normality result

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Workplace bullying	.261	138	.000	.778	138	.000
Employee Productivity	.355	138	.000	.708	138	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Source: Original (created by authors)

Descriptive Statistics and Graphs

Sector-wise gender distribution is shown in Figure 1 and the descriptive statistics for the same are shown in Table 4. Out of the total 138 responses, 74 are from academia, of which 22.46 per cent are male and 31.16 per cent are female. 64 responses come from industry, of which 33.33 per cent are male and 13.04 per cent are female. When comparing the gender-specific means and standard deviations of academia and industry, it can be seen in Table 4 that while there aren't many distinctions among genders within each sector, there are more differences among genders between the two sectors when it comes to standard deviation.

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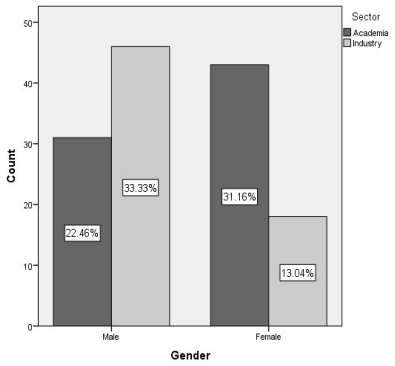
Table 4: Comparing Sector * Gender wise Workplace bullying

Sector	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academia	Male	31	1.10	1.165
	Female	43	.88	1.051
	Total	74	.97	1.098
Industry	Male	46	.76	.993
	Female	18	.61	.778
	Total	64	.72	.934

Source: Original (created by authors)

Figure 1 Sector Wise Gender Distribution

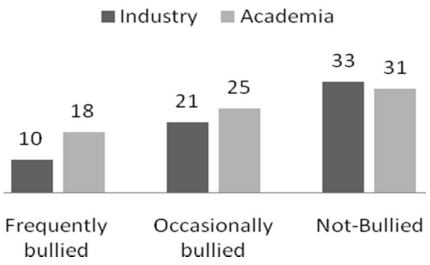


Source: Original (created by authors)

Table 5 states that out of the total data of 138, 53.62 per cent of employees have experienced certain types of bullying, of which the industry reported 48 per cent of workplace bullying and academia reported 58 per cent of workplace bullying. Bullying here is categorized as frequently bullied (daily to monthly) and occasional bullying (1-6 month frequency). These sectors have mostly reported occasional bullying, with 21 responses from industry and 25 from academia, as shown in Figure 2.

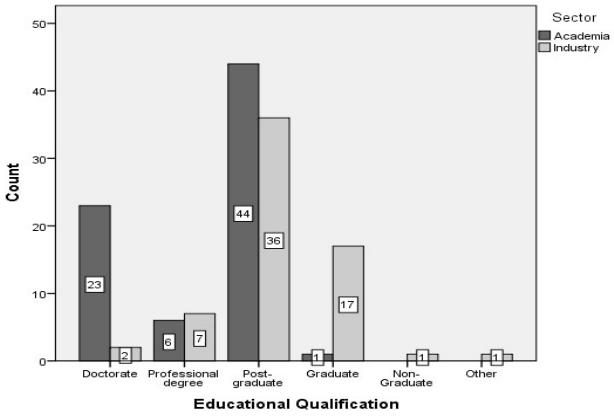
Fig 3: Educational Qualifications - Industry v/s Academia

Frequency of sector-wise bullying exposure



Source: Original (created by authors)

Fig 2: Bullying Exposure - Industry v/s Academia



Source: Original (created by authors)

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Table 5

	Bullied	Per cent	Not Bullied	Per cent
Industry	31	48	33	51.5625
Academic	43	58	31	41.89189

Source: Original (created by Authors)

Concerning educational qualifications, the majority of both the sectors' responses are post-graduate qualifications and from the academic sector, many of the respondents i.e. 23 have a doctorate.

When sectors are compared concerning the mean and standard deviation of workplace bullying experiences as per educational qualification, there is a major difference in workplace bullying within the sector and between the sectors, which is evident from Table 6. It is also seen that in academia, there is only one employee with a graduate degree, whereas in industry, people with a graduate degree are more prevalent vis-à-vis doctorates between the sectors, and hence the mean and standard deviation of employees facing workplace bullying have a major difference between the sectors. Employees with professional and post-graduate degrees are nearly all facing the same level of workplace bullying.

Table 6: Comparing Sector * Educational Qualification wise workplace bullying

Sector	Educational Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Academia	Doctorate	23	.91	.996	.992
	Professional Degree	6	.67	.816	.667
	Post-graduate	44	1.00	1.161	1.349
	Graduate	1	3.00	.	.
	Total	74	.97	1.098	1.205
*Industry	Doctorate	2	2.00	1.414	2.000
	Professional Degree	7	.43	.787	.619
	Post-graduate	36	.72	1.003	1.006
	Graduate	17	.65	.786	.618
	Non-Graduate	1	1.00	.	.
	Other	1	1.00	.	.
	Total	64	.72	.934	.872

Source: Original (created by authors)

While comparing the hierarchical positions between both sectors, it is surprising to know that both sectors' responses are opposite to each other. In industry (Figure 4), managerial level

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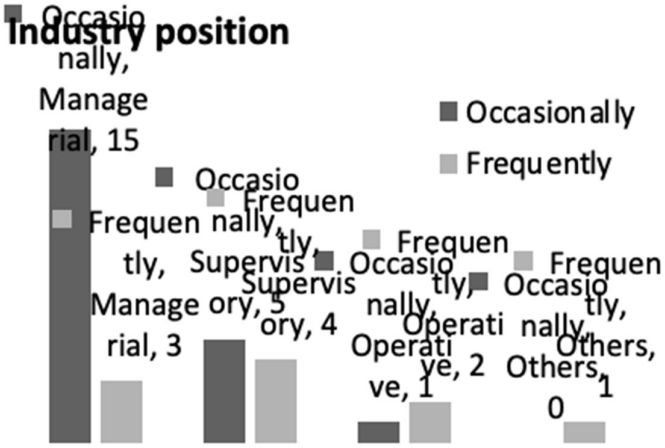
employees are bullied more as compared to the operative/supervisory level, which is the entry level for any candidate to join this field. In contrast, Figure 5 shows that lower-level employees with titles such as teaching associates and assistant professors in the academic sector experience greater bullying than higher-level workers with titles such as professor or associate professor. Hence, level-wise or designation-wise there is a difference in the bullying exposure between academia and industry, which very well serves the main objective of this research.

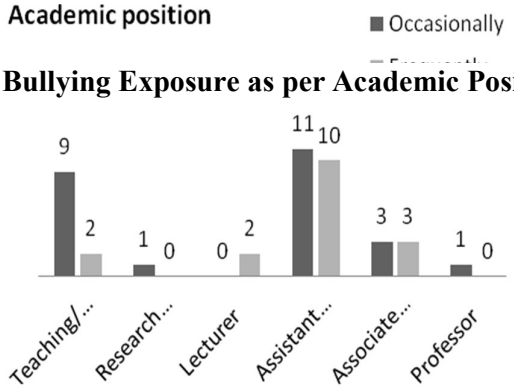
Fig 4: Bullying Exposure as per Hierarchical Level



Source: Original (created by authors)

Further, the types of bullying, i.e., person-related bullying and work-related bullying, are compared concerning sectors. Results shown in Table 7 say there is a very minor difference in the mean and standard deviation between sectors. However, when comparing the types of bullying within sectors, the mean of person-related bullying is high compared to work-related bullying.

Fig 5: Bullying Exposure as per Academic Position



Source: Original (created by authors)

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Table 7: Comparing Sector wise Person related bullying and work-related bullying

Sector		Person related bullying	Work-related bullying
Academia	Mean	1.34	.73
	N	74	74
	Std. Deviation	1.150	1.089
Industry	Mean	1.11	.42
	N	64	64
	Std. Deviation	1.025	.922
Total	Mean	1.23	.59
	N	138	138
	Std. Deviation	1.096	1.023

Source: Original (created by authors)

Table 8 compares the sector-wise bullying and its effect on employee productivity. While comparing sectors, there is not much difference in the total mean and standard deviation of person-related bullying and work-related bullying, but looking at the values of the standard deviation of frequently bullied for both sectors data relatively differs (Academia – 0.76 & 0.756, Industry – 0.451 & 0.58). When comparing both types of bullying, it shows high person-related bullying with a total of 55 employees from academia and 44 from the industry being bullied as compared to work-related bullying where only 30 employees from academia and 14 from industry are being bullied. The same has also been shown graphically in Figure 6. Further, the analysis suggests that the majority of the responses reported person-related bullying more than work-related bullying from both sectors.

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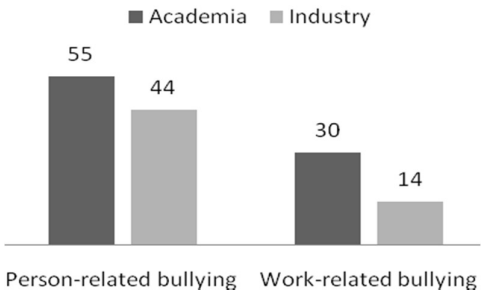
Table 8: Comparing sector-wise mean and standard deviation of person and work-related bullying on Employee Productivity

Sector		Person related bullying			Work-related bullying		
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Academia	Never	4.74	19	0.452	4.61	44	0.493
	Occasionally bullied	4.44	27	0.577	4.27	15	0.704
	Frequently bullied	4.33	28	0.76	4.22	15	0.756
	Total	4.50	74	0.60	4.37	74	0.65
Industry	Never	4.7	20	0.47	4.6	50	0.571
	Occasionally bullied	4.52	25	0.586	4.33	6	0.816
	Frequently bullied	4.65	19	0.451	4.72	8	0.577
	Total	4.62	64	0.50	4.55	64	0.65

Source: Original (created by authors)

Fig 6: Types of Bullying in Industry v/s Academia



Source: Created by Authors

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Discussion

The overall reliability score for both variables shows more than 0.70 Cronbach's alpha, which is said to have a high reliability, as mentioned by Hair & Lukas (2014). In contrast, the normality test does not meet the basic assumption, but as per Leung (2011), such violations are very common in social science research where data is collected through the Likert scale and hence the tests would produce accurate results even when their mathematical assumptions are violated (Baker et al., 1966; Carifio & Perla, 2007; Norman, 2010).

Since the main objective of this research is to compare industry versus academia, it has tried to cover both sectors equally for its comparability. Considering gender-wise descriptive statistics between both sectors, females have more differences in workplace bullying experiences than males. This is contrary to the study of Rai & Agarwal (2017b), where the nature of bullying is explored but there is no view on sector-wise gender-wise bullying experiences.

Based on this study, it is seen that industry reported 48 per cent of workplace bullying, whereas academia reported 58 per cent of workplace bullying and both the sectors mostly majorly reported occasional bullying. Considering the hierarchical position of the employees, there is a difference in bullying experiences between both sectors. Employees at the management level in the industry are bullied more frequently than those at the operative or supervisory level, which serves as the entry-level for newcomers to the industry. Academic institutions, however, demonstrated the opposite pattern, with higher-level professionals (professors or associate professors) experiencing less bullying than lower-level academic professionals (teaching associates and assistant professors), who face more bullying. Therefore, there is a difference in the exposure to bullying by level or designation between academia and industry, which greatly advances the main goal of this research.

Further, when two types of bullying, i.e., person-related and work-related are compared concerning sectors; descriptive statistics show a minor difference between sectors. However, an overall comparison between types of bullying showed that person related bullying is higher as compared to work-related bullying. When comparing workplace bullying exposure effects on productivity, descriptive statistics do not show much difference between the sectors. However, the frequency of bullying differs, with high levels of person-related bullying as compared to work-related bullying. Lastly, while comparing sector-wise effects of type of bullying on employee productivity, there is not much difference between person-related

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bullying and work-related bullying, but descriptive statistics show a difference in the frequently bullied people between sectors, with academia being more frequently bullied than industry.

Limitations & Future Research

Since the study is a pilot study, it is based on the limited sample gathered, and a large-scale study is needed to be carried out in the future covering a large sample size. Based on the current study, there are more differences among genders between the two sectors, hence, it indicates that the study requires attention to gender-wise bullying and its effects and determines why such differences exist. Owing to the sensitivity of the topic, the data is collected with the help of the personal connections of the researchers, which has its limitations. Therefore, future studies can focus on equal distribution or stratified sampling methods where data representation is equal from both sectors.

Conclusion

To prepare for the real large-scale investigation, this effort mostly concentrated on performing a pilot study to assess the validity and reliability of the adopted instrument. The findings of this study were based on a statistical analysis of the reliability test results, which showed both the constructs and their items have reliability coefficients over 0.70 which is highly reliable. Further, the study performed a normality test, which showed that the data did not have a fair degree of normality. Researchers (Carifio & Perla, 2007) contend that even if some of the assumptions are incorrect, further investigation would still produce reliable results. In this regard, it is anticipated that the management implications of the variables under investigation would be discovered after the study itself. Finally, some of the graphical analysis and descriptive statistics of comparing means and standard deviation between both the sectors have been done and inferences are made.

Notes

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