# Basic Education Teachers Perspectives on the Presence of Factors Antecedent to Workplace Bullying in the Philippines

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**Abstract** Work place bullying when left unchecked would cost high both in terms of human and material capital. Teachers who are bullied exhibit certain behavioral patterns. The study tried to determine whether there is correlation between the respondents personal attributes and their perspectives on the existence of factors antecedent to workplace bullying. It also determined the existence of a formal organization structure to prevent bullying and if there is a need for training and seminar on workplace bullying. By using questionnaire survey to gather data, the study measured, through teachers "lens" four factors antecedent to workplace bullying. The study area is in Nueva Ecija, Philippines. **The study revealed** that there is a weak correlation between the respondents' personal attributes and descriptors of workplace bullying. Except on the presence of injustice in promotion where majority of elementary and secondary school teachers considered present in the workplace. The factor of injustice in promotion is embedded in Filipino culture. In general, factors leading to workplace bullying is not rampant in the respondents' workplaces. But the organization is not completely free from behaviors antecedent to workplace bullying. Majority of the respondents considered that formal organizational structure to prevent workplace bullying is established but they never attended school sponsored trainings and seminars on workplace bullying.

*Keywords:* workplace bullying, basic teacher education, factors to workplace bullying, public educational system, case study

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## 1. Introduction

The formal study of bullying began in the middle of 1970 when Brodsky written her pioneering study on the phenomenon. She treated and referred to bullying as "workplace harassment". In the early 1980 up to the year 2000, Scadinavian countries considered bullying as a "misused of power "by superior in the workplace. In the United States, the phenomenon is considered as a form of "workplace abuse". In 2005 German scholars treated "group mobbing" as bullying. According to Mathiesen and Einarsen [1] "bullying at work means harassing, offending and socially excluding a worker which negatively affecting his/her work tasks". The act of bullying is characterized by continuity and repetition. It is directed against a worker who perceived himself as incapable of depending himself by reason of power imbalance. It is also a process where the worker ends up in an inferior position, low self esteem and a target of systematic negative social acts [2]. Work place bullying is also defined as any negative behavior which may cause or

likely to cause humiliation, intimidation, and loss of self esteem on the part of a personnel bullied [3].

Many studies on the subject showed that the academe is one of the several institutions in the public sector having high risk of work place bullying [4]. But despite rampant bullying in the academe, specifically university, it received scant attention of scholars. In fact, according to Braxton & Bayer, it is" surprisingly, university based researchers have paid relatively little attention to bullying in their own backyards" [5].

Workplace bullying is a phenomenon caused by multi-causalities. Among which are:
a) perception of injustice;
b) social exclusion;
c) leadership style
d) prevailing cultural orientation;
e) organizational environments;
f) organizational dynamism.

The present study adheres to the theoretical framework of Salin [6] of Helsinki University, Finland; it argues that workplace bullying may be analyzed by looking into work environment factors such as: a) motivating factors; b) precipitating processes; and c) enabling structures and

processes. There are two reasons for adopting it as the theoretical framework. Firstly, it is preventive in nature. The framework analyzes bullying as it focuses on the antecedent factors rather than on the occurrence and results. Secondly, it is systemic in approach. The comprehensiveness of the factors subject to analysis tends to paint the true picture of organization as a social system thereby transcending geographical and cultural orientation of the study area. The framework is applicable regardless of political and social boundaries.

Prevention of workplace bullying is preventing the loss and wastage of both precious human and material resources in the organization. Based on literature, when bullying is left unnoticed it would cost high on the organization. It could result to : absenteeism, lack of productivity, encountering various health problems, early retirement and /or resignation; andin general, lack of motivation to perform tasks. According to Hoel and Salin; job insecurity and turn over are some of the common results arising from organizational competition and structural changes [7].

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To determine whether there is a correlation between the respondents' personal attributes and their perspectives on the existence of factors leading to bully environment;

2. To describe the presence of organizational climate antecedent to workplace bullying;

3. To determine whether a formal organization structure to prevent bullying is established in the respondents' respective workplaces; and

4. To determine if there is a need for training and seminar on workplace bullying as part of organizational effort to prevent its occurrence.

# 2. Methodology

## 2.1. The Study Design

The study applied the qualitative and quantitative research designs. Qualitative because it tried to describe the existing condition in the workplace. A qualitative design is best suited to the study because it attempts to describe and explain "what is"    and "why "of the existing subject of inquiry. The results of the survey were reinforced by interview and observation in the workplace.

## 2.2. Respondents

The respondents to this study are public school teachers both in the secondary and elementary education levels. They are employed by the government in the two levels of educational systems commonly referred to as *basic educational system(elementary and secondary).* They are working in public schools situated in local government unit of Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, Philippines. A total of 40 public school teachers cooperated in the survey. They are all enrolled in Masters in Educational Management, and distributed as follows:

Elementary- 20 respondents;

Secondary- 20 respondents.

By using questionnaire survey as the tool to gather data, the study measured four variables to describe existence of behaviors antecedent to workplace bullying. The questionnaire consists of three major parts, to wit: the first part consists of the personal profile of the respondents. The second part aims at looking into the presence of workplace descriptors antecedent to workplace bullying, in the eyes (lens) of the respondents, namely; a) *injustice, b) destructive behaviors c) obstruction to goal achievement and d) academic freedom and work autonomy.* The last part measures the absence or presence of formal organization structures designed to prevent or contain workplace bullying. Through the" lens" of basic education teachers, existence of factors antecedent to bullying are assessed. The study is both timely and relevant in view of the government's resolve to implement the K-12 Program[8]wherein structures and processes of basic education shall undergo changes and challenges

## 2.3. Research Paradigm

The study argues that there are three factors present in workplace bullying [9] These are: a) motivating, b) precipitating and c) enabling structures. As the paradigm shows the convergence of motivation and precipitating factors arising from process and procedures observed in the workplace may create enabling environment towards workplace bullying in the basic education system in Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, consisting of elementary and secondary school teachers. The paradigm also considers the fast implementation of Republic Act 10533 and the readiness of the entire public educational system as a precipitating innovation that will require massive changes in the structures and processes of the department of education beginning from lesson planning to teacher evaluation and promotion system.

This is not to mention the complementary changes in curriculum and support services which logically require submission of documents and reports inputs to policy making and implementation of the K12 Program. The factors include, among others, the perception of workplace injustice, professional jealousy, perceived threat to political interest e.g. promotion, obstruction of goal achievement arising out of micro political behavior. The absence of organizational structures treating cases of bullying or inability to penalize acts of bullying ( micro-political inaction); provision of rewards and incentives; and the managerial factors which revolve around management style of leadership and their regard to academic freedom and work autonomy, honesty and fair play or lack of it, are contributory to workplace bullying, thus, the paradigm.

As the paradigm shows motivating factors include among others promotion system. It is considered as an upward movement in the organizational ladder coupled with increase in monetary benefits in the form of salary granted to employee who displayed meritorious performance during a particular evaluation period. The precipitating process is depicted on the structural changes that may bring about by the full implementation of K12 program in 2015 . This change will reasonably provides structural modification and procedural adjustment in office process. This scenario would likely encourage stiffer competition among teaching force aspiring for promotion. The internal organizational competition for promotion would likely create personal conflicts among teachers. This conflict may be aggravated by the organizational environment of "personalism" present in

the Philippine administrative system. Different from the western concept of "individualism" in the workplace where competition is part of the organizational culture and thus objectively perceived by competing workers within the organization. The divergence of organizational culture of "personalism" and the ideals of "individualism" anchored on promotion by merit system and work output would likely create enabling environment of dissatisfaction and frustration leading to workplace bullying. The figure below shows the research paradigm, to wit:
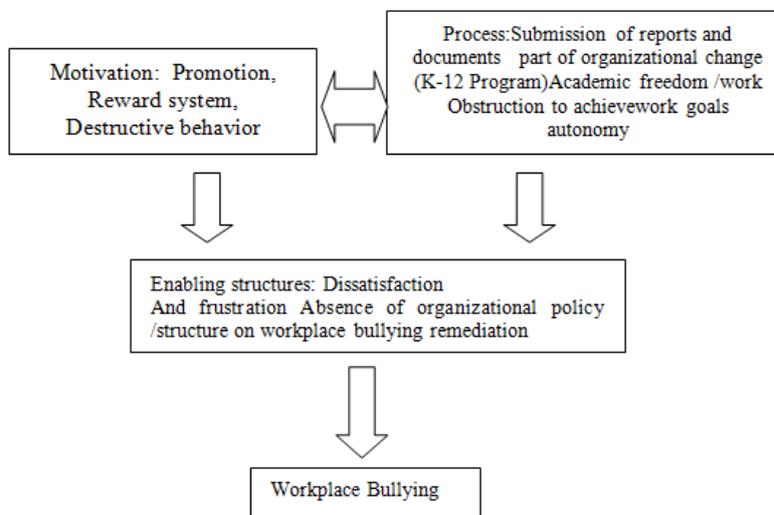


**Figure 1.** Research paradigm

# 3. Results and Discussion

## 3.1. Basic Education Teachers Responses on the Existence of Factors Antecedent to Workplace Bullying

Table 1 shows the correlation between the respondents' personal profile and their responses. Among the personal attributes of the respondent- public school teachers of basic education, item number 13 exhibits positive correlation. This means that in the eyes of elementary school teachers the atmosphere of injustice exist in the workplace as shown by a correlation value of 0.497 The table also shows that out of twenty items with Likert scaling of 5, only item thirteen (13) which refers to the provision of *support system to accomplish the tasks* has strong positive correlation with the level of school the respondents are teaching. It is important to note that bullying involves obstruction of goal realization. In the event that teachers are given goal targets and support systems are not provided, the realization of such goal becomes difficult. Another factor in workplace bullying is the threats of removal from office. The table shows that the item on threat of removal is 0.367 which implies that the correlation between level of school and perception of threat of removal is slightly significant although generally considered as unimportant. The same is true in the case of *"left by co -worker"* where 0.318 signifies that there is insignificant relationship between year level and item 11. In the case of number of years in service and factors antecedent to workplace bullying, all the items are rated low and are not significantly correlated. The factor of *least supervision and level of school* yields a weighted mean score of *0.358* although near to significant level but still insufficient to established correlation.

**Table 1. Correlation Between Personal Attributes and Perceive Factors Antecedent to Workplace Bullying**

| Items | Years in Teaching | Gender | Level of School |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Promotion is based on merit | 0.195 | -0.083 | -0.203 |
| 2 Assigns unreasonable work load | 0.323 | 0.116 | 0.248 |
| 3. My co-worker uses abusive language | 0.277 | -0.062 | 0.107 |
| 4. My superior excluded me from receiving benefits | 0.326 | -0.181 | 0.141 |
| 5. My co-worker treated with intimidation | -0.019 | -0.078 | 0.129 |
| 6. The target of superior's ire | -0.123 | -0.330 | -0.119 |
| 7. My superior repeatedly shouted on me | 0.123 | -0.070 | -0.107 |
| 8. My co-worker harassed me for unknown reason | 0.038 | -0.318 | 0.088 |
| 9. Experience humiliation for slight mistake committed | 0.090 | 0.006 | 0.142 |
| 10. My superior threatens me to remove from work | -0.150 | -0.032 | -0.367 |
| 11. My co-worker leaves me to do the assigned tasks | -0.144 | 0.049 | -0.318 |
| 12. My superior demands work output in too little time | 0.114 | 0.024 | 0.026 |
| 13. Support system is provided to accomplish tasks | 0.225 | -0.076 | 0.497 |
| 14. Vital information regarding work output is not disclosed by my co- worker | 0.020 | 0.173 | 0.025 |
| 15. Teaching assignment is based on my field of specialization | -0.092 | 0.131 | -0.157 |
| 16. Perform job with least supervision | 0.183 | -0.137 | 0.358 |
| 17. There is freedom to determine work performance | -0.092 | -0.031 | 0.084 |
| 18. I choose the time for rest and break | -0.133 | -0.093 | 0.179 |
| 19. My co worker prevents me from taking a rest during work hours | -0.048 | -0.117 | 0.182 |
| 20. My superior considers result more important than the process itself | -0.012 | -0.157 | 0.179 |

## 3.2. On Perceived Injustice (Promotion Reward System)

Ninety percent (90%) of the respondents teaching in the secondary school believe that promotion is based on merits while only 10% is willing to share that promotion is based on other factors other than merit. Some of the factors considered for promotion are: *Pakikisama or* the ability of the teacher to give in to the request of his /her cohorts especially of the superior. Recommendation of a political leader is also a factor defeating merit as basis for promotion. Table 2 presents the responses of teachers, to wit;

**Table 2. Presence of Injustice**

| | Yes | | No | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Elem | HS | Elem | HS | Elem | HS |
| 1. Promotion is based on merit | 12 | 18 | 9 | 2 | 20 | 20 |
| 2. Given unreasonable work load | 12 | 16 | 8 | 4 | 20 | 20 |
| 3 Abusive language | 12 | 6 | 8 | 14 | 20 | 20 |
| 4. Excluded from receiving benefits | 10 | 15 | 10 | 5 | 20 | 20 |
| 5. Treated with intimidation | 10 | 14 | 10 | 6 | 20 | 20 |
| Average | 11.1 | 13.8 | 9 | 6.2 | 20 | 20 |

The respondents are divided on their perception with regards to merit- based promotion. The existence of injustice in the workplace is shown by almost the same number of respondents both from elementary and secondary public school teachers. Majority or 55% of the respondents or 11 perceived that there is injustice in the workplace.

On the other hand, fourteen or 70% of the respondent secondary school teachers asserted that there is destructive behavior in the workplace. The Philippine organizational culture is characterized by *personalism.* Organizational culture gives importance to harmony and cooperation more than to impersonal implementation and observance of office policies. Organizational harmony is achieved through setting aside personal interests This behavior is obviously a contribution from the East ( Asia) culture as diametrically opposed to the cultural orientation of the West, at least to some extent, prioritizing organizational goals and promoting selfish individualism rather than the group social behavior. In the same manner that when the interest of co -worker or superior conflicts with the worker (victim of bullying) the organization tends (most of the time) to uphold that of the superior and his group. This stimulates frustration and discontentment on the part of an employee bullied.

## 3.3. On Perceived Destructive Behavior

The presence of destructive behavior is shown by the averages of 5 and 7. While there are 15 and 13 of the respondents from elementary and secondary public schools respectively claimed that the presence of harassment of co –worker comes in different forms. However, the most common is the work harassment in terms of workload. The co-worker with personal ties with the supervisor tends to leave the co-teacher alone in finishing the work assignment. According to them, the factor of *pakikisama* at *palakasan* (*closeness to the supervisor*) are some of the reasons why their co worker may leave another at work without being reprimanded or warned for the act unbecoming. The concept of "*bata-bata*") or my trusted guy in the Philippine organizational culture apparently supports the existence of workplace bullying. The "big guy " who protects (supervisor) and the "small guy " ( the co worker) the one protected. It is a symbiotic relationship that thrives in the Philippine workplace. *Palakasan system (spoil system)* is a sensitive issue in organization. Thus, they cannot easily verbalized their feeling of injustice and perception of *palakasan* for it may affect their work status.Nevertheless, harassment of co- worker and threat of removal from work are at present based on the 40% of the respondents'perception, both from the secondary and elementary school teachers. The table that follows show the responses of teachers on the presence of perceived destructive behaviour. On the otherhand, fourteen or 70% of the respondent secondary school teachers asserteddestructive behavior in the workplace. Table 2 parents the breakdown of responses of the teachers on the perceived destructive behaviour they think present in the work station. The respondents generally entertained positive perspective in so far as presence of destructive behaviour is concerned. Both secondary and elementary teachers claimed that some of the cited possible scenarios are not present in both primary and secondary schools where they belong.

**Table 3. Presence of Destructive Behavior Antecedent to Workplace Bullying**

| | Yes | | No | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Elem | HS | Elem | HS | Elem | HS |
| 6. Repeatedly the target of superior's ire | 6 | 7 | 14 | 13 | 20 | 20 |
| 7. Repeatedly shouted upon by my boss | 4 | 7 | 16 | 13 | 20 | 20 |
| 8. Harassed for unknown reason | 5 | 8 | 15 | 12 | 20 | 20 |
| 9. Humiliation for slight mistake committed | 5 | 6 | 15 | 15 | 20 | 20 |
| 10. Threatened to remove from work | 6 | 8 | 14 | 12 | 20 | 20 |
| Average | 5.2 | 7.2 | 14.8 | 13 | 20 | 20 |

## 3.4. On Perceived Obstruction to Achieve Work Target

The pattern of responses of elementary school teachers is observable as there is a 50%-50% distribution in so far as availability of information and assignment of teaching load within one's field of specialization. Interview results show that some of them are reluctant to answer considering that revealing the truth would be an insult to their superior. The table below shows the responses of teachers on academic freedom and obstruction of goal target as factors to work place bullying, to wit;

Be that as it may, the distribution of answers is not too reasonable considering that among "cleansed" organization, information should be free flowing. However, field of specialization is not always the basis for giving teaching assignment because of the financial incapability of the school to hire teachers with diverse fields of specialization. The school is supported by the Local Government Unit through the Local School Board where the funds are derived only from 5% of the proceeds

of real property tax collection. Based on 2008 Good Governance Index, the municipality is investing53.03 PHPper capita equivalent to approximately 1 US dollar [10]. The assignment of teachers is a temporary stop gap to solve the problem on recruitment of teachers to cater to the needs of the students.

On the average, 13 or 65% of elementary school teachers believe that *destructive behavior* is not present in the workplace.

## 3.5. On Perceived Autonomy and Academic Freedom

Table 4, presents on the existence of factors antecedent to work place bullying In terms of academic freedom and work autonomy, 13 of the elementary school teachers argue that there is academic freedom and work autonomy. On the part of secondary school teachers, the respondents are divided in terms of their perspective on academic freedom. On the eyes of secondary school teachers, there is a 50%-50% ratio in so far as *academic and work autonomy* is concerned. In terms of supervision, the respondents secondary school teachers believe that there is *work freedom* arising from the least supervision to achieve teaching targets.

**Table 4. Obstruction to achieve work target and academic freedom**

| | Yes | | No | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Elem | HS | Elem | HS | Total | Total |
| 11. Reasonable work load is given. | 16 | 9 | 4 | 11 | 20 | 20 |
| 12. Enough time is given to submit documents | 14 | 10 | 6 | 10 | 20 | 20 |
| 13. Support system is provided to accomplish tasks | 15 | 12 | 5 | 8 | 20 | 20 |
| 14. Vital information regarding work output is available | 10 | 12 | 10 | 8 | 20 | 20 |
| 15.Teaching assignment is based on field of specialization | 10 | 13 | 10 | 7 | 20 | 20 |
| Average | 13 | 11.2 | 7 | 8.8 | 20 | 20 |
| Academic freedom/work autonomy | | | | | | |
| 16. Perform job with least supervision | 10 | 13 | 10 | 13 | 20 | 20 |
| 17. There is freedom to determine work performance | 11 | 6 | 9 | 14 | 20 | 20 |
| 18. There is freedom to choose how and when teaching assignment is to be done. | 12 | 6 | 8 | 14 | 20 | 20 |
| 19. I determine what to teach to my students | 14 | 12 | 6 | 8 | 20 | 20 |
| 20. To my superior is output oriented rather than procedure oriented. | 15 | 14 | 5 | 6 | 20 | 20 |
| Average | 12 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 20 | 20 |

## Presence of Organization Formal Structure to Prevent Workplace Bullying

12 out of 21 or 57 % elementary school teachers believed that formal organizational structure to prevent bullying was in place while 8 out of 18 or 44% of secondary school teachers- respondents believed that formal organizational structure was present to prevent and contain workplace bullying.

## 4. School Sponsored Seminars or Training on Workplace Bullying

Fifteen 15 out 21 or 71% of elementary school teachers mentioned that the school has not sponsored workplace bullying, training, or seminar while 11 out of 18 or 61% or secondary school teachers' claimed that there was no formal structure in the organization dealing on workplace bullying except the one established for student bullying which as of this writing is the only legislation on bullying pass upon by the Philippine Congress. There was no training and seminar on workplace bullying sponsored by the school.

## 5. Conclusion

There is a weak correlation between the respondents' personal attributes and descriptors of workplace bullying. Other than on *provision of support system* to accomplish task, the personal attributes of respondents and workplace bullying descriptors shows weak correlation. In general,

workplace bullying is not rampant in the respondent's respective workplaces. But is not completely free from behaviors antecedent to workplace bullying. The *presence of injustice* as a factor antecedent to workplace bullying is perceived by the respondents as present. However such presence is more of an influence of organizational culture rather than of bullying environment. The other three factors in bullying name: prevalence of destructive behavior; obstruction to achieve work target and lack of autonomy at workplace are perceived to be not prevalent in the organization. Majority of the respondents considered that formal organizational structure to prevent workplace bullying is not in placed. Majority claimed that they have not experienced attending a school sponsored training and seminar on workplace bullying.

The study showed that among the factors antecedent to workplace bullying, it is injustice that appears to be rampant in the eyes of the respondents. But the result is very important for both analytical and practical purposes. If there is injustice, especially in the area of promotion, there is a greater tendency that other factors of workplace bullying may set in. Employee demoralization arising from promotion or unequal access to opportunity to promotion may breed other factors leading to workplace bullying. Though the setting of the study is a different culture where cooperation and organizational harmony precede the need to implement policies, mobility of workforce applicants from the city and urban centers may infuse different cultural orientation. Graduates from different universities in the city centers may bring with them western values at work using merit and fitness as basis for promotion. The infusion of double standard of evaluation for promotion (one is based on merits and the

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other is based on political connections) may create demoralization and eventually workplace bullying. Under the Philippine legal system, bullying applies only to basic education students in school. The government is strict in its implementation. However, absurdity sets in when the basic education teachers who are in-charge of implementing the law on bullying are themselves bullied by their co- workers or supervisor. Therefore, it is about time for the Congress of the Philippines to legislate and pass upon law on bullying that can be applied in the workplace and must also cover teachers not only students in public schools..

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