Perceived victimisation as a consequence of bullying among Romanian employees: gender differences

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Abstract: This present study aims to identify the percentages of perceived victimisation, as a consequence of bullying, among Romanian employees and to identify if there are any differences in the frequency of bullying exposure and in the way women and men are bullied. A number of 220 Romanian employees participated in this present study from whom 58 were male and 162 were female, 118 came from private small firms and 112 came from public institutions. All these participants received a bullying definition of bullying. The participants had to specify if according to this definition: (1) they were exposed to this phenomenon (i.e. perceived victimisation); (2) in case they were exposed, with what frequency they had encountered the bullying behaviors. After that, the participants answered the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009) in order to asses gender differences in the way women and men are bullied.

The results revealed that: (1) 15%-labeled themselves as bullying victims; (2) 37.9% of women encountered bullying behaviors with a frequency of "*now and then*" comparing to men's frequency of 29% and (3) there were no gender differences in the way people were bullied. The results of the present study are convergent to previous research which revealed that men and women are bullied in the same way.

Key words: bullying, perceived victimisation, gender differences, levels of exposure frequency, harassment

Introduction

Although the phenomenon of workplace bullying has been studied for over 30 years, to date there has been no study showing bullying incidence among Romanian employees.

In the lates 30 years bullying researchers have shown a high interest in studying the bullying phenomenon because of its observed consequences manifested not only at an individual level (i.e. negative health outcomes of the affected employees) but also at an organizational level (i.e. the affected employees had increased their absenteism rate from work, had increased their intention of leaving the organization, had changed their program because of their health problems or, in the worst case, they left the organization). This interest increased not only in the west-Europeean countries such as Denmark (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), Portugal and Great Britain (Cowie, Jennifer, Neto, Angula, Fereira, del

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Barrio & Anandiadou, 2000), Finland (Bjorkvist, Osterman & Hjelt-Back, 1994a) but also in other countries such as North-America (Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2002).

Niedl (1996) stated that the interest in bullying increased the past 20 years because of its important consequences in the individual and societal negative outcomes. According to the author, bullying has become one of the most important form of psychosocial stressor manifested in organizational settings.

The first studies conducted in the area of bullying focused on identifying perceived victimisation as a consequence of bullying using its definition and the direct question refering to a person's exposure in order to see if employees report victimisation. Using the definition of bullying followed by a direct question to assess bullying exposure, in Finland, Bjorkvist, Osterman and Hjelt-Back (1994a) found a percent of 0.9% of perceived victimisation on a number of 215 department store employees and a percent of 5% of perceived victimisation on a number of 338 university employees. One year later, in Hungary, Kaucseck and Simon (1995) were interested in assessing bullying exposure using the same method. Their results came up with a perceived victimisation of 5.6% obtained frim 323 of army employees, a perceived victimisation of 4.9% from 41 bank employees and a perceived victimisation of 2.5% from 43 bank inspectors.

Niedl (1996) conducted an exploratory study interested in identifying percentages of perceived victimisation based on the use of the definition of bullying followed by the direct question to assess the exposure from the bullied employee. In one of his studies on 368 hospital employees he obtained a perceived victimisation of 26.6% and in another study made on 63 employees from a research institute, the author obtained a perceived victimisation of 17.5%. Later, Cowie, Jennifer, Neto, Angula, Tereira, del Bario, and Anandiadou (2000) conducted two survey studies in an international company with brances from Portugal and Great Britain. In Portugal, the results of the study revealed a perceived victimisation of 33% based on 221 employees and in Great Britain, the results found a perceived victimisation of 15.4% on 386 employees.

Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) were interested too in identyfing levels of perceived victimisation as a consequence of bullying in organizations from Denmark. In their first study made on 236 employees they revealed a perceived victimisation of 3% and in the second study made on 224 employees from a manufacturing company, they had obtained a perceived victimisation of 4.1%.

To date, there is no Romanian study interested in investigating the percentages of perceived victimisation as a consequence of bullying acts using the bullying definition and the direct questioning as methods of assessing exposure to bullying.

A second aim of the study is to investigate if there are any differences between women and men in their exposure levels from bullying acts (i.e. with what frequency they experienced bullying).

A third aim of this present study is to investigate if there are any gender differences in the way women and men are bullied. For this third aim, a questionnaire method was used to assess bullying behaviors.

The most widly used questionnaire (i.e. Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised, Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009) in bullying literature was used also in the present study. This questionnaire consists of 22 items reflecting 22 negative behaviors measured on a five-point Likert scale in which 1-*never*, 2-*now and then*, 3-*monthly*, 4-*weekly* and 5-*daily*.

The items refer to both direct and indirect behaviors but do not require the respondents to label themselves as victims of bullying.

The response scale reports the frequency with which an employee had encountered bullying behaviors in the past six months.

The NAQ-R is the revised form of NAQ which was developed based on a literature review and based on a series of case studies made by Einarsen and Raknes (1997). The NAQ has been administrated in several countries such as: Denmark (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), Norway (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001), Belgium (Notelaers, Einarsen, DeWitte & Vermunt, 2006) and Spain (Moreno, Rodriguez, Martinez, Galvez, 2007). Some modified versions of NAQ were administrated in Denmark (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). The latest version of the questionnaire (NAQ-R: Einarsen et al., 2009) consists of three dimensions: (1) *person-related bullying*; (2) *work-related bullying* and (3) *intimidation.*

Person-related bullying refers to actions such as: gossiping, being the target of spontaneous anger, hints that you should quit your job, facing hostile reaction when you tried to approach somenone, practical jokes carried out by people you don't get along with or being the target of excessive teasing and sarcasm.

Work-related bullying refers to actions such as: withholding important information for your job performance tasks, being ordered to do work under your level of competence, having your opinions ignored, being given unreasonable deadlines, being excessively monitored, being pressured not to claim your work rights.

Intimidation behaviors refers to actions such as: being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work, being excluded from social activities from work, having your private life insulted, repeated reminders of your mistakes, threats of violence or physical abuse, invasion of your personal space and being persistently criticized.

Bullying definitions characteristics

Bjorkvist, Osterman and Hjelt-Back (1994a) defined bullying using the expression of workplace harassment refering to repeated activities with the aim of bringing mental (but sometimes also physical) pain and directed towards one or more individuals who, for one reason or another are not able to defend themselves.

Niedl (1996) defined the bullying phenomenon using the term mobbing and defined it through its negative consequences reflected in the work environment,

Salin (2001) defined bullying as refering to repeated and persistent acts that are directed towards one or several individuals and which creates a hostile enviroment. In bullying, the targeted person has difficulties in defening him/herself; it is therefore not a conflict between parties of equal strengh.

Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) said that we talk about bullying when the phenomenon manifests repeatedly, over a long period of time and when the victim experiences difficulties in defending him/herself in this situation. It is not bullying whenever two persons of "equal" strengh are in conflict with one another or if the incident occurs only once.

All these definitions listed above highlighted five features of the bullying phenomenon: (1) it consisted of a number of negative acts which are produced in a (2) persistent and repeated manner, (3) acts made over a longer period of time, (4) acts which have negative consequences not only on an individual level (i.e. usually the targeted person feels helpless) but also on an organizational level- there is a poor work environment characterized by an imbalance of power between the employees.

Taking into account all of these five features of bullying definitions, for this present study, a personal definition was created: *Bullying is a situation in which the targeted person finds him/herself exposed in a persistent and repeated manner to one or more negative behaviors from the part of one or more other persons. The consequences of bullying are reflected not only in individuals (i.e. usually the targeted person feels helpless) but also in the organizational work enviroment (i.e. the dynamics of interpersonal relationship at work are affected). We are not refering to a situation as being a bullying situation based on an isolated case of bullying behavior.*

Various methods for bullying exposure assessment

European studies conducted between 1990-2010 identified some differences in bullying exposure assessment methodology. Niedhammer, David and Degioani (2006), Schat, Frone and Kelloway (2006), Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel and Vartia (2003) observed that studies about the prevalence of bullying have been using different bullying definitions which can make it somewhat impossible to compare the results of different studies because these definitions probabli refered to different aspects of the same phenomenon. More over, Hoel, Rayner and Cooper (1999), Schat et al. (2006) and Zapf et al. (2003) encounteredd another methodological problem. When it comes to comparing studies of the prevalence of bullying from different countries a new methodological problem appeared- the one refering to the variability of measurement methods and operationalization.

Generally, studies about bullying have used two types of methods in order to investigate bullying exposure (Einarse, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper, 2003): (1) the

perceived victimisation assessment as a consequence of bullying exposure and (2) the perceived exposure assessment to specific bullying acts.

The perceived victimisation was assessed by either a direct question: *Have you been exposed to bullying?*, or using the bullying definition follwed by the direct question refering to the fact of being or not being exposed and about the frequency of exposure (Einarsen, Skogstad, 1996; O'Moore, Lynch & Niamh, 2003).

Notelaers, Einarsen, De Witte and Vermont (2006) identified an operational approach of the bullying exposure assessment. This method refers to a criterion by which a person can be labeled as being or not being a bullying victim.

Leymann (1996) was the first researcher who established a first criterion by which a person is considered to be a victim of bullying acts (i.*e. the exposure to at least one negative behavior from the list of negative acts*). Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) considered Leymann's (1996) criterion as being inadequate so they established a new criterion (i.*e. the exposure to at least two negative acts during to a period of at least six months*).

The latest trend in bullying exposure assessment is the latent cluster modeling method (LCC; Magidson & Vermunt, 2002, 2004). This method involves the empirical testing of the existence of different groups of respondents based on their answers to various negative behaviors listed in the inventory (Notelaers et al., 2006; Einarsen et al., 2003).

Also recently in some literature a new method was proposed: the perpetrator and observers method for bullying exposure assessment. More over, Schat et al. (2006) and Zapf et al. (2003) stated that "there are few studies using representative samples" so they can not be generalized and their usefulness refering to reporting the actual percentage of people exposed to bullying are limited.

Gender differences in types of bullying behaviors experienced at work

The personality perspective explains bullying as a consequence of a person's own characteristics. According to this theory the fact of having some personal characteristics predisposes a person with a higher risk to bullying acts. More over, the studies in the field have evidenced that gender would be related to victimisation as a consequence of bullying. Einarsen and Skogstad (1996), Hoel and Cooper (2000), Vartia (1996) proved that there isn't a difference between men and women when it comes to the type of bullying encountered. On the contrary, other researchers have highlighted that more women than men encountered with a higher frequency bullying acts (Bjorkvist, Osterman & Lagerspetz, 1994b; Salin, 2003a) and Jimenez, Munoz, Hernandez, Benadero and Carvajal (2005) found that more women than men are exposed to social isolation and discrediting behaviors.

Based on these contradictory results in the present study the possible differences between men and women in the way they are bullied is exposed. To test if there are some differences between men and women are bullied in this present

study we used a Romanian version of the NAQ-R questionnaire to assess the frequency with which bullying behaviors were encountered.

The research questions

Bjorkvist et al. (1994a) obtained a percent of 0.9% of perceived victimisation (on 215 department store employees) as a consequence of bullying acts and a percent of 5% (on 383 university employees) of perceived victimisation.

Kaukseck and Simon (1995) obtained a percent of 5.6% (on 323 army employees), 4.9% (on 41 bank employees) and a percent of 2.5% (on 43 bank inspectors)- percentages of perceived victimisation as consequence of bullying acts.

Niedl (1996) revealed percentages from 17.5% (on 63 research institute employees) to 26.6% (on 368 hospital employees) of perceived victimisation as a consequence of bullying acts.

Cowie et al. (2000) showed percentages from 15.45% (on employees from an international company from Great Britain) to 33% (on 221 employees from the same international company but placed in Portugal) of perceived victimisation as a consequence of bullying acts.

Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) revealed percentages from 3% (on 236 hospital employees) to 4.1% (on 224 employees of a manufacturing company) of perceived victimisation as a consequence of bullying acts. From the results of the above research, in this present study the first research question is stated:

Research question number 1: *What are the perceived victimisation percentages reported by the Romanian employees as a consequence of bullying acts?*

Bjorkvist et al. (1994a) and Salin (2003a) showed that more women than men are exposed to bullying behaviors with a higher frequency. From this literature evidence has risen the research question number two:

Research question number 2: *Are there any differences between women and men in their frequency levels of exposure to bullying acts?*

Vartia (1996) and Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) stated that there isn't any difference between men and women and the type of bullying acts encountered by them. The author's said that men and women are bullied in the same way. On the contrary, Jimenez et al. (2005) revealed that men and women are bullied in different ways. More women than men are exposed to social isolation acts and discreditation. From this contradiction, the third research question states:

Research question number 3: *Are there any differences between women and men in the way they are bullied?*

Method

Participants and procedure

This study involved a total of 220 participants aged between 19 and 57 years (M=31.13; SD=9.17), (58 men and 162 women) employees of private firms (N=118) and of public institutions (N=112) from Iasi and Suceava, 66 of the participants had a high-school diploma, 91 had a bachelor's degree and 60 had a master's degree.

The participants were contacted with the aid of the personal social network, with the aid of personal acquitances.

This study was presented as being one interested in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships at work. In the consent, expressions, such as: harassment in the workplace, bullying, aggression, victim, victimization weren't used.

The definition of bullying was followed by two direct questions about the fact of being exposed and about the frequency of exposure and by the NAQ-R questionnaire. The material was sent to the participants in three ways: (1) a word-document containing the bullying definition, the two questions associated and the NAQ-R questionnaire as an attachment to each person's e-mail; (2) a link constructed in a google docs. program containing the definition, the two questions and the NAQ-R questionnaire and (3) the participants completed their responsed in a paper/pencil format containing the definition, the two questions and the NAQ-R questionnaire.

The response rates couldn't have been estimated as a consequence of the three different methods of collecting data.

Firstly, the participants received the bullying definition and were told to carefully read it and then answer a series of questions such as:

(1) *According to the definition above, have you ever been exposed to such behaviors in the last six months?*
(2) *If you were exposed to such behaviors, how frequently have you been exposed?*

For the first question, the answer was given in a dihotomic manner: *Yes/No*. For the second

question, the answer was given from a five-point Likert scale: *1-now and then, 2-once or twice, 3-once a week, 4-several times a week and 5-almost daily.*

Secondly, the participants received the NAQ-R and were told to carefully read each item and give their responses from a five-point Likert scale: *1-never, 2-now and then, 3-monthly, 4-weekly and 5-daily.*

To assess the third aim of this present study we used the data colected with the NAQ-R questionnaire and computed the statistical procedure entitled: t-test for independent samples.

Instruments

For this present study the bullying definition was used: *Bullying is a situation in which the targeted person finds him/herself exposed in a persistent and repeated manner to one or more negative behaviors from the part of one or more other persons. The consequences of bullying are reflected not only in individuals (i.e. usually the targeted person feels helpless) but also in the organizational work enviroment (i.e. the dynamics of interpersonal relationship at work are affected). We are not refering to a situation as being a bullying situation based on an isolated case of bullying behavior.*

To assess gender differences in the way women and men are bullied, the Romanian form of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al., 2009) was used. This instrument was obtained from the Finland Institute and was translated using the back-method translation (two Ph.D. students from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Faculty of Psychology, translated the questionnaire from English into Romanian and another two Ph.D. students from the same faculty, translated it back into English). After this stage, the instrument was pre-tested with another bullying questionnaire, more recently developed in Spain by Escartin, Rodriguez-Carballeira, Gomez-Benito and Zapf (2010).

The results of the exploratory and of the confirmatory factor analyses showed a more valid structure for the NAQ-R questionnaire from the Romanian sample then for the Escartin's et al. (2010) questionnaire. The exploratory factor analysis showed three dimensions of the NAQ-R (1) *person-related bullying (items 5,8,10,12,15,17,20*); (2) *context-related bullying (items 1,3,14,16,18,19,21*) and *intimidation (items 2,4,6,7,9,13,22*). After the confirmatory factor analysis was computed, the indicators showed good values of the indicators of: $\chi 2$=78.019(209), p<.001, RMSEA=.113, 90%CI[.105-.122], NFI=.598, IFI=.668, CFI=.588, PCFI=.545. The Alpha Cronbach's coefficients were also high: (1) person-related bullying- α=.76; (2) context-related bullying-α=.75 and (3) intimidation-α=.88.

NAQ-R items were measured on a five-point Likert frequency scale: *1-never, 2-now and then, 3-monthly, 4-weekly and 5-daily.*

Results

The bullying definition was provided in this study: *Bullying is a situation in which the targeted person finds him/herself exposed in a persistent and repeated manner to one or more negative behaviors from the part of one or more other persons. The consequences of bullying are reflected not only in individuals (i.e. usually the targeted person feels helpless) but also in the organizational work enviroment (i.e. the dynamics of interpersonal relationship at work are affected). We are not refering to a situation as being a bullying situation based on an isolated case of bullying behavior.*

For this present study a behavior is considered a bullying behavior if he/she has a negative valence and is made weekly and over a period of at least six months.

Research question number 1: *What are the perceived victimisation percentages reported by the Romanian employees as a consequence of bullying acts?*

Table 1: *The participant's perceived victimisation as a consequence of bullying acts*

According to this definition	Yes	No
have you been exposed to bullying	15%	15%
during the past six months? (N=204)	(31)	(31)

Using the direct question a percent of 15% of perceived victimisation was obtained on a number of 204 Romanian employees and 45.9% of them said they have been a witness to bullying acts in their workplaces.

Research question number 2: *Are there any differences between women and men in their frequency levels of exposure to bullying acts?*

Table 2: *Bullying percentages-gender differences*

	Men		Women			
In case of being exposed, with what frequency have you encountered the bullying acts?	*Now and then*	*Once or twice*	*Now and then*	*Once or twice*	*Several times per week*	*Almost daily*
	29% (17)	5.3% (3)	37.9% (61)	2.5% (4)	1.2% (2)	6% (1)

As can be noticed, more women than men stated they have been subjected to bullying acts with a higher frequency of "*now and then*".

Research question number 3: *Are there any differences between women and men in the way they are bullied?*

Table 3: *Descriptive statistics*

Variables	Gender	M	SD
Intimidation	Masculin	1.73	.66
Acts	Feminin	1.62	.65
Work-related	Masculin	2.06	.75
Bullying	Feminin	1.97	.61
Person-related	Masculin	1.63	.55
Bullying	Feminin	1.56	.48
NAQ-R	Masculin	1.80	.52
total	Feminin	1.73	.50

Table 4: *T-student test*

Variables	t-test for Equality of Means				
	t	df	sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Intimidation acts	.99	206	.31	.10	.10
Work-related bullying	.83	200	.37	.09	.10
Person-related bullying	.97	200	.33	.07	.07
NAQ-R total	.90	187	.36	.07	.08

When computing for the t-student test the results showed no significant differences between women and men in their perceived exposure to bullying acts as they were presented in the NAQ-R questionnaire. These differences weren't significant for the three dimensions of the questionnaire. There weren't differences between women and men in types of perceived bullying behaviors toward them.

Discussion

Research question number 1: *What are the perceived victimisation percentages reported by the Romanian employees as a consequence of bullying acts?*

The percentage of perceived victimisation as consequence of bullying acts obtained in this present study is 15.1% (obtained from 220 Romanian employees). This percentage is similar to those revealed by Niedl (1996), a percentage of 17.5% (obtained on 63 employees from a research institute) and by Cowie et al. (2000)- 15.4% (obtained on 386 employees from an international company from Great Britain). Eventhough the present study's percentage is similar to those obtained from the above listed authors, we should take into consideration the possibility that, the definitions used in the three studies could have measured different aspects of the same phenomenon.

The present study's percentage is lower than that evidenced by Nidl (1996), a percentage of 26.6% obtained from a number of hospital employees from an international company from Portugal.

Previous research has shown that health occupational fields are the fields with a higher risk of bullying rates of incidences. The differences between this present study's percentage of perceived victimisation may be explained by the differences in the work fields.

The percentage of perceived victimisation obtained in this present study is superior to those obtained by Bjorkvist et al. (1994a)-.9% (obtained from 215 of department store employees) and of 5% (obtained from 386 university employees). Eventhough, previous research has been evidenced that universities are the places with the most highest rates of bullying prevalences, the perceived victimisation as a consequence fo bullying acts is low (only a percent of 4.1%). This is probabli due to the fact that either the participants knew about the phenomenon and didn't want to recognize that in their institution bullying acts are prevalent or the participants didn't consider the signs of bullying acts as actually being bullying acts; the present study's percent is superior to those obtained by Kaucseck and Simon (1995)- a percentage of 5.6% (on 323 army employees). The percentage obtained from this present study is lower than those obtained by Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001)-3% (on 326 of hospital employees) and 4.1% (on 224 employees from a manufacturing company). Despite the fact that previous research has shown that health care occupations present a higher risk of bullying prevalences, the percentage of perceived victimisation as a consequence of bullying behaviors is smaller than the one obtained in the present study. This fact may be due to a better recognition of bullying acts among Mikkelsen and Einarsen's (2001) health care employees, who reported less victimisation as a consequence of better knowledge about how to efficiently face the bullying acts.

Research question number 2: *Are there any differences between women and men in their frequency levels of exposure to bullying acts?*

The results of the present study have revealed thate there are differences between women and men when it comes to their perceived victimisation in the way that more women than men have been exposed to bullying behaviors. The results of the present research supports the previous research (Bjorkvist et al., 1994a; Salin, 2003a) which stated that more women than men are exposed to a higher frequency of bullying behaviors.

Research question number 3: *Are there any differences between women and men in the way they are bullied?*

The results of this present study didn't support Jimenez's et al., (2005) results which stated that more women than men are exposed to social isolation and discreditation actions. In general, the results of the present study didn't show any differences between men and women from any of the three dimension of the NAQ-R questionnaire (i.e. person-related bullying, work-related bullying and intimidation). The results of this present study support the previous research (Vartia, 1996; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996) results which stated that there aren't any differences women and men and the type of bullying acts experienced. Thre

present results support the previous results which gave evidence that women and men are bullied in the same way.

Limits of the present study and future research directions:

This present study had a series of limits. Firstly, one of the limits is that refering to the number of employees who participated in this present study- a number of 220 participants is not enough to explore bullying prevalences among Romanian employees. Secondly, there was an imbalanced number between the number of women and men who participated in this present study. These results may have affected the results refering to gender differences in the way women and men are bullied.

Future research is encouraged to investigate gender differences on a larger number of participants.

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