SIG- Faculty Teaching Evaluation & Development

2019 AERA Conference Meeting/ Peer reviewed submission

April 6 2019

Analysis of Faculty Wellness and Workplace Bullying

Ontario Canada

Leah P. Hollis EdD

Morgan State University

Baltimore, MD 21251

Leah.hollis@morgan.edu

ABSTRACT

Perpetrators of workplace bullying in higher education hurt the academic work environment and demoralize the faculty and staff. While European researchers have documented the impact workplace bullying has on employee health, American researchers are just beginning to consider the health problems associated with workplace bullying. Further, as higher education has been confirmed as an American workplace that has a higher propensity for workplace bullying, the health of those working in higher education is the subject of this study. Specifically, this study examines RQ1: *What is the percentage of faculty who experience health problems because of workplace bullying?* Health problems for this study included insomnia, needing a counselor, increased alcohol intake, and suicidal ideation. The second research question is RQ2: *Are faculty who work at colleges and universities with anti- bullying policies less likely to endure health problems related to workplace bullying?* Using a conceptual framework of job stress theories, this study confirmed that there is a positive association between workplace bullying and the health issues for faculty who work at colleges and universities without an anti-bullying policy.

Keywords: faculty, wellness, workplace bullying, higher education

Introduction

Several international studies consider the frequency and impact of workplace bullying on a variety of work sectors (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015; Finne, Knardahl, & Lau, 2011; Rodríguez-Muñoz, Notelaers, & Moreno-Jiménez, 2011). Further analysis shows that American research on workplace bullying tends to have a litigious focus, while European studies consider workplace bullying a threat to employee health and wellness (Hollis 2017). In the absence of a volume of American literature that focuses on wellness for

academic faculty facing workplace bullying, this analysis considers the relationship between workplace bullying and the mental health and wellness issues for faculty who endure workplace bullying. Further, this analysis considers a mitigating element of institutional policy as a variable that might have a positive impact on the mental health and wellness of faculty members.

Objective

In the last decade, workplace bullying has received more attention from American researchers; as one part of this focus, educational researchers have begun to examine the impact of stressful workplace bullying on higher education faculty and staff. This specific analysis considers the impact of workplace bullying on faculty wellness, considering insomnia, the need for counseling, increased alcohol intake, and suicidal ideation. The study informs academic administration on the health risks created in a toxic work environment. The findings also should be of interest to faculty members working in a stressful academic environment.

Job Stress Theory

Researchers from multiple disciplines, such as management, law, psychology, and sociology have been studying job stress since the mid-1950s (Ganaster & Schaubroeck, 1991). Ganster and Schaubroeck (1991) reflected on what they deemed a classic study by Friedman, Rosenman, and Caroll (1958) on work stress that examined accountants' work stress and their physiological adaptation to stress during the busy tax season. Mechanic and Volkart (1961) also conducted a study that confirmed an association with work conditions and resulting stress for employees. Further, Mechanic and Volkart (1961) posit that stressful environments, which are mentally and psychologically harmful, motivate any employee to pursue relief or protection from harmful stimuli (work). Such relief initially leads to employee disengagement and absenteeism, and it later progresses to turnover. These early studies led to research examining work/job stress for employees.

Multiple studies on job and work stress have yielded a common understanding that a toxic work environment can contribute to mental and psychological injuries for employees. The Scandinavians have several early studies examining work stress (Frankenhaeuser, 1979; Johnansson, 1981; Karasek, 1979; Levi, 1972) that examine the

association between work stress and demands, working conditions, and the employees' locus of control. These aforementioned studies have led Scandinavian countries to embrace such findings in their public policy (Ganaster & Schaubroeck, 1991). Consequently, the Scandinavians have also led research on workplace bullying and how to mitigate such work stress (Einarsen, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003; Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 1999; Liefooghe & Mac Davey, 2001; Zapf, & Gross, 2001). These studies on workplace bullying and the ill-effects on employees have resulted in legislation in Scandinavia and Western Europe to curtail this type of workplace abuse.

From the Scandinavian baseline studies, American researchers have examined the impact of workplace bullying in American workplaces, and specifically in higher education. Vega and Comer (2005) note a legal angle that many Americans incorporate into the discussion about workplace bullying - the 1964 Civil Rights legislation. Taylor (2012) reflected how a faculty member's tenure status is a mitigating factor when it comes to a faculty member's experiences with workplace bullying on a university campus. Twale and De Luca (2008) wrote about the passive aggressive style of academic bullying, which includes changing organizational structures, last minute changes to budgets, and changes to class assignments and duties with no warning. Further, Hollis (2017) analyzed North American bullying, that is workplace bullying in Canadian universities versus American universities, readdressing the enormous personal and professional cost of these toxic behaviors. In a more general application, Tepper 's (2000) study on abusive supervision also confirmed the emotional and psychological harm that comes to the target. Likening workplace abuse to domestic or child abuse, Tepper (2000) also claimed that the abuse does not end until the behavior is modified, or one of the parties terminates the work relationship. As a result, "subordinates whose supervisors were more abusive reported higher turnover; less favorable attitudes toward job, life, and organization; greater conflict between work and family life; and greater psychological stress" (Tepper, 2000, p.186). While colleges and universities are aware of the problem, and of the increasing research on workplace bullying within American higher education, colleges and universities are still slow to implement policies to protect one of their most important resources, the human resource of the faculty.

Many states, such as Maryland, allow for a complainant to receive damages when intentional abusive speech leads to emotional distress (*Harris v. Jones,* 1977; Segrist,

2011). Segrist (2011) further noted that "a plaintiff may recover on a claim for intentional infliction of emotional distress by showing that the defendant intentionally or recklessly engaged in extreme and outrageous conduct that caused the plaintiff to suffer severe emotional distress" (p. 903). Further, the threshold for collecting damages includes "actual malice" (p. 913). As workplace bullying is intentional due to its progressive, escalating, and intentional verbal aggression, this behavior is undoubtedly purposely malicious.

Zharkowsky (2010) applied the concept of emotional distress to online communication. Unlike on-ground communications, which have limited exposure, aggressive, inappropriate, and humiliating speech online is distributed at an exponential rate compared to on-ground communication. Intentional harm online, which can also be considered as cyberbullying, takes the aggressive and humiliating speech to the cloud and can lead to the emotional distress that accompanies the mass distribution of deleterious speech and actions to the voluminous third-party bystanders.

Whether in a face-to-face setting or online modality, workplace bullying behaviors undoubtedly contribute to emotional distress. Consequently, not only do colleges and universities create and enforce anti-bullying policies to protect the faculty, such organizations protect themselves from targets emerging as complaints charging emotional distress due to workplace bullying. When organizations develop such policies, the personal, professional and institutions costs of harboring such behaviors are minimized.

Research Method

In late 2017, early 2018, I collected data from higher education professionals regarding to their experiences with workplace bullying, cyberbullying, and related health issues. In this analysis, the mental health and wellness issues addressed included insomnia, alcohol use, seeking a counselor, sedative use, and suicidal ideation. Two forms of communication were used to contact potential participants. The link to the survey was posted in higher education special interest forums online. Further, the survey was sent to higher education professionals whose contact information appeared in the Higher Education Publication (HEP), which is published in Reston, VA. The survey was hosted on SurveyMonkey™. The result of social media and direct email recruiting

resulted in 729 participants. The sample represents faculty, deans, provosts, directors, and vice presidents from both two-year and four-year colleges and universities. Of that sample, 180 participants were faculty, with faculty meaning assistant professor, associate professor, full professor, department chairperson, or academic dean. Table 1 shows the gender and position percentage for the respondents in this analysis.

Table 1

Demographics of respondents

67% Women	n= 121
32.78% Men	n= 59
Dean of College	n= 88
Assoc/Full professor	n = 40
Assistant professor	n= 29
Chairperson	n = 23

Findings

The instrument hosted 50 questions to allow for multiple analyses regarding workplace bullying and cyberbullying in higher education; therefore, this analysis is not based on secondary data. Ninety-seven percent of the faculty respondents (n= 174/180) answered that they had been affected by workplace bullying. Further, respondents were asked in a prompt that allowed for multiple replies, "How did the organization react to the bully?" Seventy-one percent reported that the university/college did nothing to address the bully. Another 28% reported that the organization actually supported the bullying.   When asked if they had left a previous position in higher education to escape workplace bullying, 38% acknowledged leaving a prior position due to workplace bullying.

Further, the instrument asked if faculty experienced health problems because of workplace bullying. Several faculty members reported issues with insomnia, changes in alcohol intake, seeking a counselor, and taking sedatives to cope with workplace bullying. See Table 2.

Table 2

Responses to: Have you been affected by bullying or cyberbullying at work N= 145

Trouble sleeping because of bullying or cyberbullying.	73.76% n=104
Take more sleep medication to sleep	24.11% n =34
Increased my alcohol intake to cope	36.17% n =51
Sought a counselor or coach to cope	33.33% n = 47
Taken sedatives (prescription or over the counter) to cope	19.86% n =28
Had suicidal ideation	8.51% n = 12

_____

Presumably, organizations have a duty of care to keep employees safe from physical and psychological harm (Bible, 2008; Boyle, 2008; Ivensky, 2015). In fact, Ford (2014) asserted that employment law creates a duty of care that should minimize hardship and discrimination for employees. While the United States has not banned workplace bullying like several Canadian provinces, Northern European countries, France, and Australia, a few states such as Minnesota, California, Tennessee, Maryland, and Utah have passed healthy workplace legislation that minimally address workplace bullying. None of these state level laws support workplace bullying as an actionable event. Nonetheless, organizations can recognize the high rates of workplace bullying in higher education at 58% (Hollis, 2018), which is 20 % higher than the general United States workforce (Namie & Namie, 2009), and devise their own organizational policies to prohibit workplace bullying.

Respondents were asked to consider the workplace bullying policies at their respective institutions. Only 12% or n = 17 (17 of 145) stated that their higher education organization implemented an anti-workplace bullying policy that was easy to find, and actually applied it to keep the peace. Eighty-seven percent reported no policies prohibiting workplace bullying or policies that were ignored or hard to find. The following table shows the respondents' reported health concerns from institutions with

effective policies in comparison with respondents' who reported health concerns from institutions without effective policies or no policies. See Table 3.

Table 3
Responses to: Have you been affected by bullying or cyberbullying at work N= 145

	With Policy	Without policy
Trouble sleeping because of bullying/cyberbullying	11/17 64%	97/128 75%
Take more sleep medication to sleep	3/17 18%	33/128 26%
Increased my alcohol intake to cope	4/17 24%	48/128 37.5%
Sought a counselor or coach to cope	5/17 29%	44/128 34.4%
Taken sedatives (prescription or over the counter) to cope	2/17 12%	26/128 20%
Had suicidal ideation	2/17 12%	10/128 8%

Table 3 thus considered six health issues. While the descriptive statistics show an increased frequency for health issues for faculty working without an anti-workplace bullying policy, the Chi-square analyses show a positive association, yet not a statistically significant difference. Only two of the variables (trouble sleeping and sought a counselor) had a count of five or higher to support a valid chi-square test. See table 4 and table 5

Table 4

Chi-Square Analysis of Faculty Respondents Seeking Counseling

		Yes	or No	Total
Counselor	Count	5	12	17
	Expected Count	5.7	11.3	17.0
CounselorNP	Count	44	84	128
	Expected Count	43.3	84.7	128.0
Total		Count	49	96	145

Expected Count   49.0   96.0   145.0

$X^2 = (1, N = 145) = .684, p < .05$

_____

Table 5

Chi Square Analysis of Faculty Respondents Seeking Counseling

			Yes	or No	Total
V1	Sleep	Count	11	6	17
		Expected Count	12.5	4.5	17.0
	SleepNP	Count	96	32	128
		Expected Count	94.5	33.5	128.0
Total		Count	107	38	145
		Expected Count	107	38	145.0

$X^2 = (1, N = 145) = .365, p < .05$

_____

The chi-square analyses in Table 4 and Table 5 confirmed a positive association between health issues and experiencing workplace bullying; if there was an institutional policy, faculty reported better health outcomes.

Those faculty members working at institutions that have the policy prohibiting workplace bullying report better health and wellness. As Swarbrick, D'Antonio, and Nemec (2011) stated, a "well" staff is more productive and experiences less absenteeism. Both the faculty employee and the higher education employer should engage in a "conscious and deliberate" process, one which is internally motivated to encourage the individual to engage better wellness practices (Swarbrick et al 2011). Therefore, this analysis does not just support a recommendation for higher education to craft anti-workplace bullying policies to support faculty wellness, but it also call for individual faculty to reflect on stressors and engage wellness practices to counteract stressful academic environments. In conclusion, while institutional policies that prohibit workplace bullying do have a positive impact on faculty wellness, faculty still need to cultivate strategies to maintain good health in stressful and even abusive academic environments.

Significance

These findings point to the need to cultivate healthy work environments for faculty. When administration remains apathetic to organizational abuse by not creating and enforcing policy, they give the tacit approval for the abuse to continue. The result is poor morale, turnover, and health issues for faculty. Workplace incivility and hostility do not cultivate a productive academic environment. To the contrary, employees will disengage and seek to find relief from workplace bullying emanating from more powerful colleagues abusing the power differential. These findings confirm that workplace bullying hurts faculty. In comparison, anti-bullying policies that were easy to find, and enforced, contributed to a healthy academic work environment.

Recommendations for Practice

Though assistant professors may be the more powerless faculty in their respective departments, they are the future of the department and their respective fields. Demoralizing junior faculty not only hurts the faculty, but also hurts the profession, and the students seeking degrees. Faculty who face workplace bullying can resort to employee disengagement (Bryne, 2014; Goodboy et al, 2017) and turnover to escape a toxic environment and find peace (Coetzee & van Dyk, 2018; Hollis, 2015; Hollis, 2017a; Nabe-Nielsen, 2017). Therefore, these are the recommendations for practice:

- Train department chairs and deans on best practices for mentoring junior faculty;
- Create access for junior faculty to upper administration, before there is trouble; an engaged and ethical Academic Vice President, Provost or Dean can curtail workplace bullying;
- Develop cross college mentoring programs to allow junior faculty to create supportive networks at the college or university.

Recommendation for Future Research

As workplace bullying is about a power differential, the untenured assistant professor presumably sits in the most vulnerable position. Further, this data analysis shows that faculty members experience stress-related health issues emerging from workplace bullying. Therefore, the following are recommendations for future research:

- Study the health and wellness specifically of assistant professors.
- Study how the department chair might be a mitigating or contributing factor in health and wellness for assistant professors and faculty in general.
- Study the health and wellness of adjunct faculty who have less power than the assistant professors.

References

Boyle, M. (2008). Employers' Liability at Common Law: Two Competing Paradigms. *Edinburgh Law Review, 12*(2), 231-258. Doi:10.3366/E1364980908000322

Bible, J. (2008). Sexual harassment of teens in the workplace: Two 7th circuit decisions that sound alarms for employers. *Labor Law Journal, 59*(2), 190-200.

Byrne, Z.S. (2014). Understanding employee engagement: Theory, research, and practice. New York, NY. Routledge. Abington, United Kingdom.

Coetzee, M., & van Dyk, J. (2018). Workplace bullying and turnover intention: Exploring work engagement as a potential mediator. *Psychological reports*, *121*(2), 375-392.

Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Cooper, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Bullying and emotional abuse in the workplace: International perspectives in research and practice*. CRC Press. Boca Raton, Florida.

Einarsen, S., & Nielsen, M. B. (2015). Workplace bullying as an antecedent of mental health problems: a five-year prospective and representative study. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, *88*(2), 131-142.

Finne, L. B., Knardahl, S., & Lau, B. (2011). Workplace bullying and mental distress—a prospective study of Norwegian employees. *Scandinavian journal of work, environment & health*, 276-287.

Ford, R. T. (2014). Bias in the air: Rethinking employment discrimination law. *Stanford Law Review, 66*(6), 1381-1421.

Frankenhaueuser, M. (1979). Pyschoneuroedocrine approaches to the study of emotion as related to stress and coping. In H.E. Howe, Jr & R.A. Dienstbeird (EDs) Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1978: Human Emotion: 123-161. Lincoln University of Nebraska Press.

Friedman, M.D., Rosenman, R.D. & Carroll, V. (1958). Changes in serum Cholesterol and blood clot time in men subjected to cyclic variation of occupational stress. *Circulation. 17.* 852-861.

Ganster, D. C., & Schaubroeck, J. (1991). Work stress and employee health. *Journal of management, 17*(2), 235-271.

Goodboy, A. K., Martin, M. M., & Bolkan, S. (2017). Workplace bullying and work engagement: a self-determination model. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 0886260517717492.

Harris v. Jones, 380 A.2d 611, 281 Md. 560, 281 Md. App. 560 (1977).

Hoel, H., Rayner, C., & Cooper, C. L. (1999). *Workplace bullying*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd. Hoboken, New Jersey.

Hollis, L. P. (2017a). Evasive Actions: The gendered cycle of stress and coping for those enduring workplace bullying in American higher education. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal, 4*(7) 59-68.

Hollis, L. P. (2015). Bully university? The cost of workplace bullying and employee disengagement in American higher education. *Sage Open*, *5*(2), 2158244015589997.

Hollis, L. P. (2017). Workplace Bullying II: A Civilizational Shortcoming Examined in a Comparative Content Analysis. *Comparative Civilizations Review*, (77), 90-104.

Hollis, L.P. (2018) Bullied Out of Position: Black Women's Complex Intersectionality, Workplace Bullying and Resulting Career Disruption. *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships*. *4*(3), 73-89.

Johansson, G. (1981). Individual control in a monotonous task: Effects on performance, effort, and physiological arousal. Report from the Department of Psychology, University of Stockholm.

Karasek, R. (1979) Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. *24*. 285-306.

Levi, L. (1972). *Stress and distress in response to psychosocial stimuli*. Pergamon Press. Oxford, England.

Liefooghe, A. P., & Mac Davey, K. (2001). Accounts of workplace bullying: The role of the organization. *European Journal of work and organizational psychology*, *10*(4), 375-392.

Mechanic, D., & Volkart, E. H. (1961). Stress, illness behavior, and the sick role. *American Sociological Review*, 51-58.

Nabe-Nielsen, K., Grynderup, M. B., Conway, P. M., Clausen, T., Bonde, J. P., Garde, A. H., ... & Hansen, Å. M. (2017). The role of psychological stress reactions in the longitudinal relation between workplace bullying and turnover. *Journal of occupational and environmental medicine*, *59*(7), 665-672.

Namie, G., & Namie, R. (2009). *Bully at work: What you can do to stop the hurt and reclaim your dignity on the job*. Sourcebooks, Inc. Napersville, IL.

Rodríguez-Muñoz, A., Notelaers, G., & Moreno-Jiménez, B. (2011). Workplace bullying and sleep quality: The mediating role of worry and need for recovery. *Psicologia Conductual*, *19*(2), 453.

Segrist, P. J. (2011). The Gradual, Constitutional Destruction of Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress, and Why the Supreme Court Made the Right Call in Snyder v. Phelps. *Loy. L. Rev.*, *57*, 899.

Swarbrick, M., D'Antonio, D., & Nemec, P. B. (2011). Promoting staff wellness. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 34*(4), 334-336.

Taylor, S. K. (2012). Workplace bullying in higher education: Faculty experiences and responses (Order No. 3505900). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1013441391).

Tepper, B. (2000). Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of Management. Journal,.43*(2), 178T190

Twale, D. J., & De Luca, B. M. (2008). *Faculty incivility: The rise of the academic bully culture and what to do about it* (Vol. 128). John Wiley & Sons. Hoboken, New Jersey.

Vega, G., & Comer, D. R. (2005). Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can break your spirit: Bullying in the workplace. *Journal of Business Ethics, 58*(1/3), 101-109.

Zapf, D., & Gross, C. (2001). Conflict escalation and coping with workplace bullying: A replication and extension. *European journal of work and organizational psychology*, *10*(4), 497-522.

Zharkovsky, D. (2010). If Man Will Strike, Strike through the Mask: Striking through Section 230 Defenses Using the Tort of International Infliction of Emotional Distress. *Colum. JL & Soc. Probs.*, *44*, 193.