Effect of workplace bullying on employee performance in the public sector

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ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying presents a serious problem causing substantial damage to the employees, the organization and the society as a whole. The focus of this research is two-fold: to find out if workplace bullying exists in Uganda, and to examine its effects on employee performance. By using a questionnaire survey, data was collected from 180 public employees in Uganda. The results indicate that bullying is present in workplaces in Uganda and poses a serious problem for the respondents affecting their performances adversely. The research contributes to the literature on workplace bullying by developing a comprehensive framework that examines its existence and effect on employee performance. Policy and research implications are discussed.

Key words: Employee performance, public employees, public sector, workplace bullying.

1. Introduction

Today’s public sector organizations have become synonymous with poor performance, poor quality service delivery, and inability to meet set targets. In the situation, little has been done as to understand how workplace bullying contributes to failures of these organizations. Workplace bullying presents a serious problem which often goes unnoticed, with, in some cases causing irreparable damages harmful to the individual and very costly to the economy (Gardner & Johnson, 2001). According to Hoel and Cooper (2003), the negative impact of workplace bullying range from lower productivity and motivation among the employees to higher costs of health care and loss of human resource in the society as a whole.

From the literature, workplace bullying is seen as a hostile and unethical communication that is directed in a systematic way by one or more persons, mainly towards one targeted individual who, due to bullying is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position (Tambur&Vardi, 2009). Einarsen (2005) indicates that workplace bullying is a repeated and enduring negatives act not a one-off instances such as conflicts between two equal parties, which are solved between participants. Vartia (2001) states that workplace bullying is very common in many organizations. It is therefore, a matter of utmost importance to study the existence of workplace bullying and their effects on employee performance.

Even if current studies tend to concentrate on developed countries (Oghojafar et. al. 2012), it does not mean the problem does not exist in developing countries. In Uganda, despite the increasing fascination by the media to create awareness on workplace bullying (Cowie et. al. 2002) no serious studies has been undertaken on it. More so, no effort has been made to recognize and/or alleviate it. Studies so far conducted on workplace bullying in developing countries (e.g., Adenuga, 2009; Owoyeni & Oyelere, 2010) have not been very helpful.
because they lacked statistical hypothesis to examine the effects of workplace bullying on employee performance. This gap will be addressed by the current study.

There are three major reasons why this study was undertaken in the Ugandan context. First, bullying at work has not so far been studied in Uganda whether be in its forms, dispersals, causes, or impact. Second, there is no specific law or policies to deal with the problem of bullying at work in the country yet it’s very common in the public sector. Third, work context of Uganda being a developing country differs substantially from that of developed countries. Henceforth, the Ugandan context, presents an interesting topic for exploration of workplace bullying and its effects on employee performance. The aim of this basic research is to find the prevalence of workplace bullying in Uganda and examines its effects on employee performance. This is a first attempt to look into the problem of workplace bullying in Uganda by responding to the overarching question of “Does the complex problem of workplace bullying exists in Uganda? If so, what are its effects on employee performance?” The specific objectives of the present study are the following; a) to establish the existence of workplace bullying, and b) to determine the effects of workplace bullying on employee performance in Uganda.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis

It is difficult to precisely define workplace bullying, hence it’s varies definitions with several explanations (Ikanyon & Ucho, 2013). Workplace bullying even goes by several names such as “mobbing”, “harassment”, “badgering”, “niggling”, or “freezing out” (Einarsen, 2001). Whatever the name, workplace bullying can be understood as personalized-sustained attack on an employee by another employee using behaviors which are emotionally and psychologically punishing (Aryanne, 2009). The behaviors are usually regular, repeated, unwanted, offensive, humiliating, unwelcome, unnecessary, unpleasant and shameful intended to be hostile and/or perceived as hostile by the recipient (Bano & Malik, 2013). Simply put, workplace bullying is a repeated mistreatment of an employee who is targeted by one or more employees with malicious mix of humiliation, intimidation and sabotage of performance (Margaret, 2007).

Quine (2001) rightly observed that workplace bullying has three common themes, namely, impact on the recipient; negative effects on the victim; and the persistent nature of bullying behavior. The impact of workplace bullying on an employee arise from its perception in a negative light which translate into making the victim to feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable with a high level of anxiety, depression, helplessness, burnout and frustration (Keashly & Neuman, 2004). There is, however, no specific reason why people bully others but scholars have indicated that its probable causes includes both organizational and individual factors with multiple layers of antecedents within each of them. The individual factors that can cause bullying includes attempt to protect self-esteem to boost one’s worth by either undermining a subordinate or being envious of subordinates’ talents/work ethic (Zapf & Einarsen 2003); lack of social competencies including emotional intelligence (Salin, 2003 micro-political behavior to protect one’s position (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003); being outside of the group; having low self-esteem and social competence; being an overachiever; differences in age, race, gender, ethnicity, and educational levels (Harvey et. al., 2006); and lack of self-confidence or sufficient conflict management skills (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2007). Organizational factors that may cause bullying includes restructuring, downsizing, mergers (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008); culture, leadership styles (Davenport et. al., 2002);
increased span of control (Hoel & Salin, 2003); organizational implementation of anti-employee policies; laissez-faire management style; and decline in the economy.

Generally, workplace bullying occurs mainly as a result of power imbalance when the victim is usually not on an equal standing with the bully. Bullying is usually directed either to the personality of the employee or to his/her work. Personal related bullying manifests itself in the form of insults, verbal abuse, and excessive teasing (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006). It can also be in the form of public humiliation, excluding, ignoring, insulting, spreading rumors, gossips, intruding on privacy, yelling, insolent comments, teasing, dispersals, playing impractical jokes etc. (Beswick, Gore & Paffermann, 2006). The manifestation of work related bullying includes giving unachievable task, impossible deadlines, unmanageable workloads, meaningless tasks, withholding information deliberately or supplying unclear information, threats about job security, and scapegoating (Tumbur & Vardi, 2009). In spite the form, workplace bullying leads to negative psycho-physical conditions (Keashly, 2002) such as post-traumatic stress disorder, erosion of self-esteem, terror, annoyance, nervousness, chronic adjustment disorder like loss of social relationship, job or income (Bowling & Beehr, 2006), Left unchecked, workplace bullying, according to Georgakopolous, Wilkin and Kent (2001) can be costly both for the employee and the organization. This has been confirmed by several empirical studies. For example, Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts, (2007) and Mikkelsen and Einarsen, (2001, 2002) have shown that workplace bullying is not an isolated problem to the target only but a systematic one that has an immense effects on other employees. Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003) demonstrate the negative effects of workplace bullying on an employee. Oghojafaret. al. (2012) studied workplace bullying in Nigeria. They found that workplace bullying adversely affects employee commitment, job satisfaction, absenteeism and turnover. Most studies on workplace bullying links it to organizational cost implications rather with employee performance (Hoel & Faragher, 2004; Mathiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Penny & Spector, 2005) a gap filled by this study.

Informed by the self-interest theory (Harvey et. al., 2009), this study suggests that the interactions among individuals in an organization relative to their aggressive behavior indicate that accountability has an effect on the occurrence on bullying. The study uses the theory to demonstrate that individuals can act in an aggressive and/or egoistic way towards others in the organization causing a reduction in the “healthiness” of the environment with likely impact on productivity. This has been corroborated in a study by Bano and Malik (2013) who indicated that the negative effects of workplace bullying on the employee is not new. In this respect, therefore, and in line with the second objective of the study, the hypothesis formulated is that workplace bullying has a significant positive relationship with employee performance.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Design

The study was a survey that examined the presence of workplace bullying and its effect on employee performance in Uganda.

3.2 Population

The total number of those who participated in the study is 200 from ten selected Ministry, Department and Agencies (MDAs) of the public sector in Uganda. They were determined
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using purposive sampling by keeping in view the major concerns of social research along with basic statistical requirements. 200 questionnaires were administered to the participants, out of which 190 were completed and returned, representing 95 per cent response rate. From the questionnaire returned, 10 (5.3 per cent) were rejected due to improper completion and only 180 (94.7 per cent) were used for analyses. 94(52.2 percent) of the participants were males and 86 (47.8 per cent) were females. Majority of them, that is 88 (48.9 per cent) were between 31-41 years of age, 47 (26.1 per cent) were in the bracket of 20-30 years, 39 (21.7 per cent) were between 42-52 years, and 6 (3.3 per cent) over 52 years. Results also show that 73 (40.6) were married, 72 (40 per cent) were unmarried, and 35 (19.4 per cent) were divorced/separated. Further investigations show that 82 (45.6 per cent) had first degree, 68 (37.8 per cent) of them had diploma, and 30 (16.6 per cent) of them had post graduate qualification. 54 (30 per cent) were management staff, 44 (24.4 per cent) were senior staff, and 82 (45.6 per cent) were junior staff. Similarity, 103 (57.2 per cent) of them had worked in the public sector between 1-10 years, 57 (31.7 per cent) had worked between 11-21 years, 20 (11.1 per cent) had worked between 22-32 years.

3.3 Instruments and measurements

The main mode of collecting primary data for the study was by the use of a questionnaire while secondary data was collected through documentary checklist. The questionnaire made it possible to obtain required data in a relatively short time and anonymity of the participants was assured. The instruments used measured socio-demographic information on the participants as well as the study variables. The socio-demographic information elicited responses in form of multiple choices. The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) (Yahaya, et. al. 2012) consisting of 22 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale was used to assess the existence of workplace bullying that affected participants’ performances. The items on the scale were written in behavioral terms with no reference to the term bullying or harassment, based on the definition of Einarsen and Hoel (2001). Earlier researches indicated that NAQ-R has high validity and reliability (Hoel & Faragher, 2004). A high reliability coefficient for the NAQ-R of 0.93 was obtained in this study. Job Performance Questionnaire (JPQ) was adapted from Fisher (2003) to measure employee performance. It had 6 items with a Likert scale ranging from 1(very low), 2(low), 3(not sure), 4(high), and 5(very high) that assessed the performance of the employees in terms of quantity, quality, effectiveness, efficiency etc. The total ratings of the respondents on these items had an alpha coefficient of JPQ of 0.91.

3.4 Procedure

The researcher sought the consents of respondents by explaining the purpose of the study which made participation voluntary. Participants’ confidentiality was securely ensured. They were later thanked for their cooperation, participation, and support in the study. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire and the completed ones were returned within the stipulated two weeks.

3.5 Data analysis

Microsoft Computer software (SPSS Ver. 17) was used to analyze the collected data. Socio-demographic data were analyzed in frequencies and percentages. Descriptive statistics in terms of percentages, mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression analysis were used to analyze the study variables as well as to test the hypothesis.
4. Results

The researcher screened and cleaned the data by removing outliers before conducting the main analysis.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

According to the structure of the NAQ-R, the results are given in two parts. First, the existence of workplace bullying is evaluated according to 14 person related items. The results are indicated in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person related acts</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree 1</th>
<th>Disagree 2</th>
<th>Neutral 3</th>
<th>Agree 4</th>
<th>Strongly agree 5</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being ordered to do work below your level of competence</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spreading rumors and gossip about you</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being ignored, excluded or being “sent to Coventry”</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person (i.e. habits and background), your attitude or your private life</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger or rage</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidating behavior such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hints or signal you are from other areas that you should quit your job</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent criticism of your work and effort</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having allegations made against you</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percentage/mean/standard deviation</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>1.783</td>
<td>1.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field data

For purposes of analysis the responses were reduced to three: that is agree for strongly agree and agree; neutral; and disagree for strongly disagree and disagree, such that from Table 1
those who agreed that workplace bullying existed in the public sector of Uganda is 62.5 per cent (i.e., 34.6 and 27.9). This shows that the majority of respondents experienced workplace bullying in one way or the other during the last six months. However, 35.7 per cent of the respondents who were against this position were below 50 per cent that is 25.6 per cent and 10.1 per cent for those who disagreed and neutral respectively. Further, the results in the Table indicate that the statement of “repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes” generates the highest mean=2.604 (SD=1.136), 26.1 per cent (n=47) strongly disagreed with this statement. 23.9 per cent (n=43) disagree, 22.2 per cent (n=40) neutral, 18.9 per cent (n=34) strongly agree, and 8.9 per cent (n=16 per cent) agree. “Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse” generates the lowest mean=.994 (SD=8.71), 25.5 per cent (n=44) strongly agree with this statement. 24.4 per cent (n=44) agree, 21.6 per cent (n=39) strongly disagree, 17.8 per cent (32 per cent) disagree, and 10.6 per cent (n=19) neutral. The second part of the questionnaire was where the evaluation was done on 7 work related bullying items. The results are presented in Table 2.

### Table 2: Responses on work related bullying (n=180)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work related acts</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Someone withholding information which affects your performance</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having your opinions and views ignored</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical jokes carried out by people you don’t get on with</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadline</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive monitoring of your work</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being exposed to unmanageable workload</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average percentage/mean/standard deviation</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>2.088</td>
<td>1.168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Data

Likewise, Table 2 on work related bullying reveals that considering the average percentage of strongly agree (33.5 per cent) and agree (25.8 per cent) is 59.3 per cent. The percentage of strongly disagree (13.1 per cent) and disagree (14.5 per cent) is 27.6 per cent of the combined percentage for disagree, while the percentage for neutral is 13.1 per cent. The combined percentage of disagree (27.6 per cent) and neutral (13.1 per cent) is 40.7 per cent which is below average of 50 per cent. In this regard, the researcher concluded that work related bullying exists in the public sector of Uganda. The results in Table 2 further indicate that the statement of the “Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave holiday entitlement, travel expenses)” generates the highest mean=2.041 (SD=1.175), 50 per cent (n=90) strongly agreed with this statement. 16.1 per cent (n=29) agree and 12.2 per cent (n=22) neutral. Only 11.7 per cent (n=21) disagree and 10 per cent (n=18) strongly disagree. “Practical jokes carried out by people you don’t get on with” generates the lowest mean=1.620 (SD=.945), 34.4 per cent (n=62) strongly agree with the statement. 33.3 per cent (n=60) agree with this statement and 15.7 per cent (n=28) disagree. 11.6 per cent (n=21) of the respondents stated neutral and 5 per cent (n=9) strongly disagree with the statement.
To appreciate the factual evidence of the existence of workplace bullying in the public sector of Uganda, a comparative analysis is presented in Table 3.

### Table 3: Workplace bullying with percentages mean and standard deviation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace bullying subscales</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person related bullying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work related bullying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field data

Table 3 presents the commonest form of workplace bullying in the public sector. Results show that person related bullying is the most common form as indicated by 62.5 percent of those who agreed (n=112), though 25.6 per cent (n=46) disagreed, and 10.1 per cent (n=22) neutral. Work related bullying is least practiced in Uganda as shown by 59.3 per cent (n=106) who agree, 27.6 per cent (n=49) disagree, and 13.1 per cent (n=25) neutral. The mean of the study variables lie between 2.088 to 1.783. The standard deviations ranged from 1.008 to 1.168 suggesting that none of the measures were marked by excessive restrictions on the range.

### 4.2 Hypothesis testing

The hypothesis formulated in this study was also tested by the use of correlation and regression analyses. Correlation was used to determine the relationship between workplace bullying and employee performance. Results are presented in Table 4.

### Table 4: Correlation between workplace bullying on employee performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace bullying</th>
<th>Employee performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person related bullying</td>
<td>-.471**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work related bullying</td>
<td>-.376**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results given in Table 4 indicate the Pearson correlation between the study variables. The findings indicated that there is a significant negative relationship (person related bullying = -.471**; work related bullying= -.376**) between workplace bullying and employee performance. These findings support the hypothesis that there would be a relationship between workplace bullying and employee performance. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the contribution of independent variable (work place bullying) on dependent variable (employee performance). The results are shown in table 5 below.

### Table 5: Multiple regression workplace bullying towards employee performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R square</th>
<th>R square change</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>df 1</th>
<th>df 2</th>
<th>Standard coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>38.045</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td>4.391</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.376</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>21.167</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>.376</td>
<td>3.998</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Person related bullying, work related bullying
b. Dependent Variable: Employee performance

The findings in Table 5 suggest that workplace bullying and its two types: person related and work related was entered as predictor variables. The findings in model 1 (person related bullying), $R^2$ change indicate 16.6 per cent of variance in the score for employee performance can be accounted for by independent variable (person related bullying) entered in the analysis with $F(1,668) = 38.045$, $p=0.01 < 0.05$. The results further show that in model 2 (work related bullying), $R^2$ change indicate 12.6 percent of variance in employee performance can be accounted for by the independent variable of work related bullying entered in the analysis with $F(1,333) = 21.167$, $p=0.001 < 0.05$. These findings supported the hypothesis that workplace bullying has a significant relationship with employee performance.

4.3 Discussion

Although developed countries have aggressively addressed the complex problem of workplace bullying, research on this topic in developing countries in general and Uganda in particular is almost non-existent. As a result, many public sector organizations in developing countries do not fully understand the phenomenon; therefore, they fail to recognize the costs involved in the perpetuation of the vice. This study was designed to initiate and provoke a mega base of responses in handling this ‘cancer’ in organizations. The study therefore, investigated whether workplace bullying exist in Uganda and its effects on employee performance. It found a significant existence of workplace bullying in the public sector of Uganda. It was also hypothesized that there is statistically significant effects of workplace bullying on employee performance. Present research supports the hypothesis that there is a significant effect of workplace bullying on employee performance. The current research findings are therefore, consistent with those of Ahmed et. al., (2009), Ikanyon and Ucho (2013), Moreno-Timenez et. al. (2008), Tepperet. al., (2001) who found significant effects of workplace bullying on employee performance. The results further conform to the finding of Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003) who indicated that bullying has a negative impact on employee performance. They, however, cautioned that this impact is difficult to ascertain clearly due to other factors such as absenteeism, dissatisfaction, turnover, sickness, among others. However, since managers in the public sector organizations either do not recognize the detrimental effects of workplace bullying, or do not know how to productively intervene (Salin, 2004), bullies continue their reign of terror, and targets worry about the bully, lose trust in the organization or leave their workplaces (Georgajopoulos, Wilkin & Kent, 2011).

4.4 Trustworthiness and limitations of the study

The trustworthiness of this study is embedded in the fact that it was carried out among public employees who have had sufficient experience in the public sector work environment. Not only have they been participants in the processes of public sector workings, but are unique receptors of occurrences of workplace bullying. Additionally, they were at one time or another direct victims of bullying and/or witnessed their colleagues fell victims. As a result, their depth of practical knowledge on this topic and their abilities to recall whatever happened in their course of employment contributes to the trustworthiness of the research study. Also, the study is trustworthy because the participants applied, as accurately as possible their experiences in answering the questionnaire. Consequently, the study explored workplace bullying by charting out a way so as to carry out a sustained and systematic way since all organizations have a responsibility to protect their employees from the psychological
harassment of a workplace bully. This is supported by Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003). A limitation to the trustworthiness of the study is that the research process did not include qualitative method, and the result did not include qualitative data either. Yet Keashly and Jagatic (2003) recommends for both qualitative and quantitative methods to be applied in such a study. Therefore, the study was not triangulated. Ultimately, this research is a practical exploration of the problem of workplace bullying that lacks the application of the triangulation method in data collection and analysis.

4.5 Implications

Designed with a conviction that understanding the phenomenon is a first step in combating it, the study provides probable remedies to handle workplace bullying. It equips public sector organizations and individuals with a deeper understanding of this phenomena, as well as possible alternatives for combating it. The findings represent a step in the direction towards clarifying the complex problem of workplace bullying and its effects on employee performance. They also contribute new ideas in management research by opening up a debate on the importance of producing a perfect work environment free of bullying. Most importantly, the study provides a framework in which managers can proactively address the problems of workplace bullying so as to meet organizational goals. Although much of the current literature on workplace bullying addresses our research objectives, unfortunately from the viewpoint of the developed world, there is room for expansion of the current study as it addressed the questions from the developing countries’ perspective without comparative analysis of the two settings.

4.6 Recommendations

Given the degree, gravity, and regularity of workplace bullying there is need for policy change to couch workplace environment with bullying-free atmosphere. This calls for organizational programs to be data driven, have support from individuals at all levels, and be continually monitored, evaluated and adapted (Keashly & Neuman, 2004). Organizations can institute policies that depict zero tolerance to bullying at work by applying severe sanctions to perpetrators of bullying while providing adequate support to victims of workplace bullying (Ikanyon & Ucho, 2013). Above all, institute good standard operating procedures (Harvey et al. 2009) for all the employees to not only observe but strictly adhere to.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the problem of workplace bullying using quantitative method from an empirical view point. It discovered the existence of workplace bullying (person and work related) in Uganda’s public sector with its adverse effects on employee performance. Results obtained in the present research represent an advance over previous research, providing new insights in understanding of workplace bullying in a developing country context. It further confirmed that the numerous costs associated with workplace bullying (on both the employee and the organization) makes it a deleterious problem to be handled decisively due to physical, emotional, and psychological damages caused to the victims. It is therefore, concluded that a systematic approach needed to be adopted in order to make public sector organizations free of bullying. This approach must encapsulate proper communicative skills, supportive organizational culture, positive perceptions, and proper interpersonal skills. This is because the study results have shown that workplace bullying is not a simple problem requiring a one-size-fits-all solution (Georgakopolous, Wilkin & Kent, 2011),
6. References


Effect of workplace bullying on employee performance in the public sector
Peter Adoko Obici
