

Correlates of Workplace Bullying, Depression, Anxiety, Narcissism, and Self-esteem

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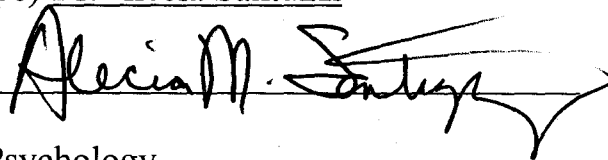
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Correlates of Workplace Bullying, Depression, Anxiety,
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Abstract

The following study examined the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying. To achieve this goal, a survey was administered through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk ($N=122$). To measure workplace bullying, the study used the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ). Other aspects of emotional health including self-esteem, depression, and general health were assessed with corresponding scales in order to determine the impact workplace bullying has on its victims. Bivariate correlation analyses were conducted. The study found positive correlations among workplace bullying intensity, workplace incivility, and paranoia. Negative correlations were discovered between workplace bullying intensity and self-esteem. Further research on this topic should be undertaken in order to confirm these findings and examine the variables in greater detail.

Keywords: workplace bullying, workplace incivility, depression, self-esteem, paranoia

Correlates of Workplace Bullying, Depression Anxiety, Narcissism and Self-esteem

Bullying is defined as persistent, nonphysical, and inappropriate treatment expressed towards one or more people (Namie & Namie, 2004, as cited in Namie & Namie, 2009) which occurs at least once a week for six months or more (Namie & Namie, 2009). Although the public has recently become more aware of school bullying, workplace bullying is often underreported in the media. According to Namie and Namie (2009), counseling for workplace bullying began just 12 years ago in the United States, while research on the topic has only spanned a decade. Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001) found that 71% of those surveyed indicated that they had experienced “workplace incivility.” Workplace incivility includes behaviors, such as, being excluded from a meeting and being undermined by coworkers (2001). Researchers asked over 1,000 workers to fill-out the Workplace Incivility Scale which quantifies rude, disrespectful, and condescending behavior. Generalized workplace harassment and positive work experience have been shown to have weaker effects on the people that receive this treatment. However, the former was found to have a stronger impact on workers in the short term (Hoobler, Lemmon, & Rosa, 2010).

Research indicates that the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying may be downplayed due to social stigma and lack awareness for the phenomena. Lutgen-Sandvik, Sarah, Alberts, & Jess (2007) found that although several workers report having negative experiences at work, they do not attribute these experiences to workplace bullying. The researchers suggested that this misperception could be due to the inability to understand bullying is occurring. There is no agreed upon statistic denoting the severity of workplace bullying (Martin & Lavan, 2010). This finding may be due to the fact that there is widespread disagreement as to the behaviors that constitute workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, Sarah, Alberts, & Jess, 2007). Therefore, the

reported prevalence of this behavior may in fact be higher than the incidence rate suggests. Furthermore, alleviating workplace bullying is difficult because employers fear that discussing the subject will reflect poorly on their businesses (Namie & Namie, 2009). When workers bring cases of bullying against their employers, it is found that they will likely lose them (Martin & LaVan, 2010). Therefore, more attention should be brought to these issues.

For the purposes of research, workplace bullying is often measured using constructs such as humiliation, intimidation, and isolation (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracey, & Alberts, 2007). Namie (2003) conducted an online survey with 1,000 participants. Several of these individuals were seeking solutions to problems regarding workplace bullying. Namie (2003) found a correlation between workplace bullying experiences and depression. The validity of that study is brought into question due to its participant self-selection biases. Surveying this group of people could exaggerate the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying. These individuals are not likely to be representative of the general population because they have probably had more experience with workplace bullying than most of their peers have. Due to there being little conclusive research on workplace bullying, the present study attempts to understand the impact of this antisocial behavior.

Although workplace bullying is more severe than workplace incivility, both behaviors significantly impact emotional health. In order to effectively treat the victims of this trauma, it must be more deeply understood. Understanding this behavior and its correlating psychological states is the primary goal of the present study. To achieve this goal, the researcher administered a survey containing those measures of workplace bullying prevalence as well as those assessing emotional states likely to be affected by these experiences.

Hypotheses

Workplace Bullying Intensity and Workplace Incivility

The Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) and the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS) were used to measure workplace bullying intensity and workplace incivility, respectively. One goal of the present study was to determine if these two behaviors occurred in the workplace simultaneously.

Because workplace incivility exhibits a form of relational aggression (as opposed to overt aggression), perpetrators of this behavior are more likely to engage in it because they are less likely to be punished (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). Due to the fact that workplace bullying experiences have also been prevalent (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy & Alberts, 2007), the present study anticipates a positive correlation between both phenomena.

H1: A positive correlation will be found between intensity of workplace bullying and workplace incivility.

Workplace Bullying Intensity and Self-esteem

Mathiesen and Einarsen (2008) found that those who were deemed victims of workplace bullying exhibited lower levels of self-esteem. The present study expects results similar to those found in this study. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H2: A negative correlation will be found between workplace bullying intensity and self-esteem.

Workplace Bullying and Depression

Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001) have found a few studies that examined the ways in which workplace incivility can impact psychological well-being. However, Namie (2003) has discovered some evidence that bullying at work increases depressive symptoms.

Biörkqvist Osterman, and Hjelt-Back (1994) detected a significant relationship between harassment at work and depression. Given the conclusions drawn from this research, the present study forms the following hypothesis.

H3: A positive correlation will be found between workplace incivility and depression.

Workplace Bullying and Positive Affect

Because research contends that positive affect is negatively correlated with depressive symptoms (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The current study has hypothesized the following:

H4: A negative correlation will be found between workplace bullying intensity and positive affect.

Workplace Bullying Intensity and Public Self-Consciousness

Biörkqvist, Osterman and Hjelt-Back (1994) concluded that victims of workplace harassment felt as though their personalities caused them to be bullied. Due to the fact that this claim is only speculative, the current study forms the following hypothesis in an attempt to examine the phenomena in greater detail:

H5: A positive correlation will be found between workplace bullying intensity and public self-consciousness.

Workplace Bullying and Paranoia

Fenigstein and Vanable (1992) have found a positive correlation between paranoia and self-consciousness. Previous studies measuring workplace bullying and paranoia were unable to be found. However, studies of bullying among children could be reviewed. Campbell and Morrison (2005) discovered that 14 to 16 year-old children who have been bullied were more likely to develop symptoms of paranoia. The present study predicts a similar diagnosis for victims of adult bullying. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H6: A positive correlation will be found between workplace bullying intensity and paranoia.

Method

Participants

To better understand how workplace bullying incidents are related to psychological traits and states, a random sample of 122 Mechanical Turk users were electronically surveyed in order to get their feedback on these issues. The sample had the following ethnic description: 83.5% *White*, 1.7% *American Indian*, 1.7% *Hispanic/Latino* 9.6% *Asian or Pacific Islander* 6% *Black or African American*. The sample had the following age characteristics ($M= 35.83$, $SD= 12.94$; 9 participants did not answer this question). One participant made an error in reporting his age. The case was omitted from the analysis. Several of the participants have received an advanced education: 9.6% *High School Graduate*, 39.1% *Some College*, 4.3% *Trade/Technical/Vocational Training*, 4.3% *College Graduate*, 33.0% *Some Post Graduate Work*, 3.5% *Post Graduate Degree* 10.4%. 37.4% identified as male while 62.6% identified as female. Seven participants did not report their gender.

Measures and Apparatus

The Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ.) Because workplace bullying has not been studied widely in the United States finding a measure which is sensitive to its culture is difficult. Einarsen, Staale, Hoel, Helge, Notelaers, and Guy (2009) indicate that even research from the UK, a region that has been found to have strong concern for workplace bullying, shows that few measurements for these antisocial incidences have been proposed. One of the most widely used measures of workplace bullying is the NAQ (2009). The NAQ is a 21 item measure which

contains a response set with the following options 1=*Never*, 2=*Now and Then*, 3=*Monthly*, 4=*Weekly*, 5=*Daily*. Some of the items on the NAQ include *Had information withheld that affected your performance* and *Ordered to do work below your level of competence*.

Although the original NAQ and variations of it have been used in many international studies (Abe & Henly, 2010; Einarsen, Staale, Guy, Hoel, Helge & Notelaers, 2009 ; Trijueque & Gomez, 2009; Vie, Glaso & Einarsen, 2009), the survey has also been implemented in research conducted in the United States as well (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007). These researchers measured workplace bullying intensity by averaging the score of the entire NAQ. Workplace bullying frequency was measured by only averaging the number of instances that were reported as occurring daily or weekly. In the present study, the NAQ was found to have high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha equaling .937.

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). According to Shean and Baldwin (2008), the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) is one of the most widely used measures of depression. Their study on a random sample of college students found that the scale accurately assessed this emotional state. The BDI has 21 items with a scale that ranges from 0 (*emotion is not at all present*) to 3 (*emotion is very severe*) (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961). The BDI includes items such as *Sadness* and *Worthlessness*. There is no universal threshold score to diagnose depression. Higher scores on the BDI indicate more severe levels of this trait (Beck, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961). Cronbach's alpha of the BDI for the present study was found to equal .924.

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSS). To assess self-esteem among the participants, the study will be using the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSS). According to Rusticus, Hubley, and Zumbo (2004), the RSS is one of the most widely used measures of self-esteem. The scale

contains 10 items: 5 of the scale items are phrased positively while the other five have negative phrasing. Total scores range from 10 to 40. Higher scores suggest higher levels of self-esteem. Items on the RSS include *I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others* and *All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure*. The RSS is a ten question survey with a 4 point rating scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The measure has been found to accurately measure self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). For the present study, Cronbach's alpha totaled .901.

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). Twenge and Campbell indicate that the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) is the most common measure of narcissistic behavior. The researchers indicate that the NPI has been found to have a high reliability rating ($r=.85$). The scale is highly correlated with antagonism and extroversion (Miller, Gaughan, Pryor, Kamen, Campbell, 2009). The NPI contains 40 items and has dichotomous response options. The scale is scored by giving those responses that exhibit narcissistic behavior 1 point while giving non-narcissistic responses 0 points. Higher mean scores indicate higher narcissistic tendencies. (Konrath, 2007). Twenge and Campbell (2009) report that many people tend to confuse narcissism with high self-esteem. The researchers explain that narcissists differ from those who have high self-esteem in that they lack empathy for the concerns of other people.

The Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). The PANAS is a measure of state affect. The scale is a combination of the positive and negative affect schedules. The PANAS contains 20 items. The authors of the scale have found a Cronbach's alpha of .87 for the positive affect schedule and a score of .88 for the negative affect schedule. The PANAS is a combination of two affect subscales used in previous research (Watson & Clark, 1984). Both measures ask respondents to what degree they experience particular emotional states. Response

options range from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to (*extremely*). The positive affect scale includes items such as *interested*, *excited*, and *strong*. The Negative Affect Schedule includes items such as *guilty*, *upset*, and *distressed*. The items within the two measures are averaged in order to determine the levels of the corresponding constructs being measured. A higher score on each of these scales indicates larger amounts of the corresponding type of affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen 1988). The two scales can be analyzed in isolation to determine how much of each type of affect a sample carries, or they can both be used conjunctively to calculate overall affect. The present study will use the former method in its analysis. Extroversion is highly correlated with positive affect, while the negative affect schedule is commonly associated with neurotic tendencies (Watson & Clark, 1984). Cronbach's alpha for the Positive Affect Scheduled totaled .902 while that of the negative affect schedule equaled .930.

The Revised Self-Consciousness Scale. According to Scheier and Carver (1985), the Revised Self-Consciousness scale is one of the most commonly used of its kind. The revised self-consciousness scale was found to be highly valid (Schier & Carver, 1985). Furthermore, the researchers discovered that the measure had high test-retest reliability. The Revised Self-Consciousness Scale has 22 items with response scale consisting of the following options 3 (*a lot like me*), 2 (*somewhat like me*), 1 (*a little like me*), 0 (*not at all like me*). Items from this scale include *I'm always trying to figure myself out* and *I'm concerned about my style of doing things*. The scale has three measures: private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety. Higher scores on each of these scales indicate higher levels of the psychological states they are attempting to measure. The private self consciousness subscale contains nine items. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this subscale equaled .765. The public self-consciousness subscale includes seven items. Cronbach's alpha for scale in the present study equaled .831. The

social anxiety subscale contains six items. Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study totaled .567.

The Paranoia Scale. Fenigstein and Venable (1992) created the paranoia scale to measure the personality trait of social paranoia. The researchers determined that those who scored highly on the paranoia scale were also found to have characteristics similar to those outlined in the current clinical definition of paranoia. The paranoia scale contains 20 items, none of which are reversed coded. Some items in the scale include *Someone has it in for me* and *I have often felt that strangers were looking at me critically*. Response options range from 1 (*very slightly or not at all like me*) to 5 (*extremely like me*). Higher scores found on this scale indicate increased levels of paranoia. Cronbach's alpha for this scale equaled .924.

The Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS). According to Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001), the Workplace Incivility Scale was found to be highly reliable. The researchers have defined workplace incivility as an act that is not a blatant attempt to harm, but nevertheless causes distress. Items within the WIS include *Put down or was condescending to you in some way* and *Made demeaning rude or derogatory comments about you*. The workplace incivility scale contains 7 items each with likert-type response scale options ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very often*) (Kain, 2008). The WIS is scored by adding corresponding values of the responses options chosen. Higher scores suggest more severe experiences of workplace incivility. The WIS was found to have a Cronbach's alpha value of .854.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Cohen, Kamark, and Mermelstein (1983) explained that the perceived stress scale is a 14-item measure that assesses the ability to manage general stressors. The PSS includes items such as *In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly*. The scale contains response options ranging

from 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Very Often*). 7 of the 14 items are positively phrased and are to be reversed coded while the 7 negatively worded items are to be left unchanged. The PSS is scored by adding the total values of the response options. Cohen, Kamarak, and Mermelstein (1983) found the PSS to be highly reliable when they tested the measure on two samples of college students and one adult sample. In the current study, the PSS was found to have a Cronbach's alpha value of .850.

The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ). The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) comes in various forms. The version of the GHQ used in this study contains 12 items with a response scale ranging from 1 (*Less than usual*) to 4 much more than usual. (Goldberg & Blackwell, 1970). The GHQ contained items such as *Lost much sleep* and *Felt that you are playing a useful part in things*. Higher scores on the GHQ indicate better general health quality. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for the GHQ was .879.

Procedure

The survey was created using SurveyMonkey. The link to the survey was posted on Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk website as a weblink. A consent form detailing the purpose of the study was given to the participants before they completed it. Participants were informed that one dollar would be placed in their Amazon payments account as compensation for taking the survey. The participants were told in their informed consent that they were invited to take a survey which was being conducted to examine the effects of workplace bullying. Because the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) measures workplace bullying incidences within the last 6 months, participants were first asked if they had been employed within this time frame. Only those individuals who answered "yes" were invited to fill out the entire survey package ($N=$ 102). Those that answered "no" were only asked general personal questions. Mean scores

among the scales were gathered in order to learn of the overall psychological health of the sample. Pearson correlational analyses were conducted in order to test the hypotheses of the current study.

Results

The survey analysis found that 19 people had not worked within the last 6 months. These individuals were omitted from the analysis. Scores on the workplace incivility scale may range from 8 to 40. The workplace incivility score among those who had worked was somewhat low. ($M=15.7$, $SD= 5.69$). Scores on the Negative Acts Questionnaire may range from 0 to 88. Scores for this scale in the present study were moderately high ($M= 38.65$, $SD= 14.40$). The analyses for these variables and all others measured in this study are summarized in Table 1 (See appendix).

All correlational analyses were conducted using continuous survey measures. The researcher found a strong correlation between workplace bullying intensity and workplace incivility ($r=.658$, $p = 0.01$). The study surmised that as workplace bullying intensity increases, self-esteem levels will decrease. The analysis found a significant negative correlation between these two variables ($r= -.289$, $p= 0.01$). A weak, insignificant positive correlation was found between positive affect and workplace bullying intensity ($r=.110$, $p= 0.01$). As found in previous research and as predicted in the current study, analyses found a strong relationship between workplace incivility and depression ($r=.658$, $p = 0.01$).

Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between workplace bullying intensity and paranoia ($r= .568$, $p= 0.01$). However the current study failed to find a significant correlation between workplace bullying intensity and public self-consciousness ($r= .164$, $p= 0.01$). Given the results, the researcher rejects the null of hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 6 and *fails* to reject the null of hypotheses 4, and 5.

Discussion

The present study conducted Pearson correlational analyses and discovered the following:

- A. A positive correlation between workplace bullying intensity and workplace incivility
- B. A negative correlation between workplace bullying intensity and self-esteem
- C. A positive correlation between workplace incivility and depression
- D. A positive correlation between workplace bullying intensity and paranoia

The first correlation potentially provides evidence that the constructs of workplace incivility overlap. This analysis could indicate that both incidences are occurring simultaneously. However, it could also reveal something much more important: the two scales may in fact be measuring the same construct.

The analysis showing a positive correlation between workplace bullying intensity and paranoia should be examined more closely. Due to the limitations of the present research, it is not indicated which of these variables holds temporal precedence. Does paranoia cause an individual to be bullied or do victims of bullying suffer from paranoia?

Previous research has addressed similar concerns. Paranoia is a symptom of a principle known as the hostile attribution bias (Dodge & Newman, 1981). The researchers tested hostile attribution bias in grade school children. Dodge and Newman (1981) concluded that those who were originally highly aggressive expressed a hostile attribution bias when provided with an ambiguous stimulus. Epps and Kendall (1995) found similar results in adults. This study provides a unique prospective on the issue of workplace bullying as it suggests that people who feel they are victims of this treatment may be perceiving harassment where none exists.

Skepticism should be left for the data showing correlations between workplace bullying intensity, self-esteem, and depression. High levels of workplace bullying intensity may be

causing low self-esteem and high levels of depression. However, the converse interpretation could also be an accurate assessment of what is actually occurring. Perhaps victims with these particular traits are more likely to be bullied. The perpetrators of bullying may see those with low self-esteem and high levels of depression as easy targets. Therefore, victims of bullying suffer from traumatic events on regular basis. In order to confirm these assertions, studies examining the perspectives of those committing acts of incivility in the workplace would need to be conducted. Gathering data would be difficult as the study will likely attract the confounds of social desirability bias.

No matter the true reasoning for the analysis, there are other reasons why the analyses should be examined more closely. Because participants were told of the constructs under assessment before they took the survey, some findings may be the result of demand characteristics. The researcher understands that instruments could have been added to the survey package to account for these confounding variables. Due to the fact that the survey was already deemed to be fairly extensive however, it was determined that adding yet another set of questions could cause excessive discomfort among participants. Therefore, the validity of the results may be brought into question. If the study were designed in such a manner that the participants were surveyed multiple times in a less intensive manner, these design flaws could potentially have been minimized.

Several researchers may wonder why the purpose of the study was revealed before participants completed the survey. This information was provided for ethical reasons. It was anticipated that being asked to recall traumatic events in the workplace could cause participants undue psychological distress. Perhaps the survey would not have brought this discomfort. As I

am an amateur researcher, however, I believe it is important that I err on the side of caution to ensure that no one is caused unnecessary harm.

Mechanical Turk users are known for taking surveys for personal enjoyment. Therefore, they would be less likely to become confused or exhausted as they participated in the research. These attributes suggest that participants clearly understood what they were asked. Given that the survey is so extensive, these traits could also negatively impact the results. Asking participants to complete detailed surveys may have created a fatigue effect. (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Due to these limitations, it is important that future studies be conducted on the effects of workplace bullying.

Several people are aware of school bullying because it is given strong media attention. However, few understand the harm caused by workplace bullying. Perhaps those who were once victims of school bullying are currently being abused at their places of employment. The researcher suggests that a longitudinal study be conducted in order to determine the extent to which developmental variables and the onset of psychological trauma can impact mental health. Improved psychological health will not only promote quality of life, it will create a more productive workforce. Therefore, workers and employers alike should have strong concern for workplace bullying experiences and the damage they cause.

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*Table 1**Means for Measures Used in the Present Study*

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Workplace Incivility Scale	15.56	5.69
Bullying Intensity	38.65	14.40
Workplace Bullying Frequency	40.19	15.00
Beck Depression Inventory	30.93	9.49
General Health Questionnaire	13.29	3.22
Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale	22.94	4.66
Perceived Stress Scale	21.94	5.53
Social Anxiety Scale	14.26	3.04
Private Self-consciousness Scale	21.35	4.85
Public Self-consciousness Scale	17.55	4.58
Negative Affect Schedule	18.20	8.01
Positive Affect Schedule	31.44	7.38

The Negative Acts Questionnaire**Had information withheld that affected your performance**

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Been exposed to an unmanageable workload

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Ordered to do work below your level of competence

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Given tasks with unreasonable/impossible targets/deadlines

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Had your opinions and views ignored

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Had your work excessively monitored

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Reminded repeatedly of your errors or mistakes

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Had gossip and rumors spread about you

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Had insulting/offensive remarks made about you

- Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Been ignored, excluded or isolated from others

Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Received hints or signals from others that you should quit your job

Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Been intimidated with threatening behavior

Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Experienced persistent criticism of your work and effort

Never Now and Then Monthly Weekly Daily

Been ignored or faced hostile reactions when you approached coworkers

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Had key tasks removed, replaced with trivial, unpleasant tasks

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Had false allegations made against you

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Subjected to excessive teasing and sarcasm

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Been shouted at or targeted with spontaneous anger (or rage)

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Pressured into not claiming something to which you were entitled

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Been subjected to practical jokes

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Experienced threats of violence or abused/attacked

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