

Exposure to workplace bullying and group dynamics: A social network analysis

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Purpose

The aim of this study was to analyze how employees' position in the social network affects their exposure to bullying behaviours at work and how this exposure in turn affects group dynamics.

Design/Methodology

Longitudinal data on exposure to bullying behaviours (NAQ – short version) and network data on relationship quality (friendship relations; difficult relations) were collected in eight Finnish organizations. Hypotheses were tested based on two waves of data (n = 249) using stochastic actor-oriented modeling for the coevolution of networks and attributes, as implemented in RSiena.

Results

Contrary to expectations, the number of friends and the number of difficult relations (T1) had no effect on exposure to bullying behaviour (T2). However, respondents with higher exposure to bullying behaviours at T1 reported both more friendships and more difficult relations at T2, suggesting that on the group level bullying behaviour might lead to group polarization. Also, employees' exposure to bullying behaviours was affected by the bullying behaviours experienced by their friends, pointing to contagion or social influence effects.

Limitations

RSiena does not allow taking into account the multilevel nature of the data.

Research/Practical Implications

The findings highlight the importance of taking into account group dynamics for understanding exposure to workplace bullying and its consequences.

Originality/Value

The study introduces a new methodological approach to workplace bullying research, making it possible to take into account dynamics of social networks and the interdependencies between the actors and their responses to workplace bullying.