

Research into the current state of workplace bullying and the intervention: The story of Manufacturing industry

Yoojeong Nadine Seo, Sunjin Kim, Jieun Lee

Workplace bullying causes employees psychological and physical sufferings and the enterprises loss of productivity. The magnitude of the workplace bullying issues has long been recognised and researched in the Scandinavian and Western European countries, which resulted in the large body of literature and anti workplace bullying legislations in these countries.

In South Korea, Workplace bullying is receiving significant recognition from the mass media and yet, only a little of the interest has been shared by the policy makers and researchers. Although a number of studies have been conducted within South Korean context, most of them were conducted at a small scale and were unable to show the picture workplace bullying in South Korea. Where the body of literature is already small, research within the manufacturing sector has been even more scarce despite that manufacturing takes up a large part of South Korean industry and employment.

Facing these issues, this study attempted to explore into the workplace bullying in manufacturing industry. Firstly, literature review was conducted examining the research conducted within and outside of South Korea. The anti-workplace bullying legislation of Norway, Belgium, and Canada were also discussed. The review of the literature and legal legislation highlighted the lack of the research into workplace bullying and of the policy support for bullying intervention.

A workplace bullying measure that were applicable to manufacturing industry was developed and named KICQ(Korean Interpersonal Conflict Questionnaire). The items of KICQ were developed based on the items of previous bullying measures and the interviews with 15 employees in the manufacturing industries. A questionnaire was devised based on the KICQ and a survey of 742 employees of manufacturing industries was carried out.

Additionally, four employees working in the HR department of manufacturing enterprises were interviewed.

With the data obtained from the 742 survey respondents, the reliability and validity of the measure were analysed and the measure was found to have a good level of reliability and validity. The overall prevalence of workplace bullying was 3.5% with subjective bullying and 5.8% with operational bullying.

Differences in the prevalence were found between the groups of gender, age, organizational status, the size of the organization, the industry(electronics vs. steel industries), the type of occupation, employment type, and the length of weekly working hours. However, the logistic regression revealed that only the length of weekly working hours, electronics industry, and the age groups were the significant predictor of being a workplace bullying.

The traits of bullying perpetrators were analysed according to the gender and the organizational status. In terms of the organizational status, the colleagues(at the same level as the victims) were most likely to be reported as the subjective perpetrators and the superiors as the operational perpetrators. In terms of the gender, men were more likely to be perpetrators of bullying than women.

The respondents were divided according to their responses into the 'victims', 'perpetrators', 'witnesses', and 'not-involved' groups and the group differences were analysed. The 'victims' were consistently lowest at their job satisfaction and productivity index and had the longest 'idle time' followed by the 'perpetrators' and the 'witnesses'. The 'not-involved' group had the shortest 'idle time' and the highest job satisfaction and the productivity index. The cost of bullying was analysed in terms of the productivity loss and the cost involved in resolving interpersonal conflict reported to the HR department. The results were discussed and conclusions were drawn to provide policy recommendations for bullying prevention and intervention.