African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

WORKPLACE BULLYING AND JOB ENGAGEMENT OF TEACHERS IN SELECTED PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OJO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT
Bullying encompasses a range of harmful behaviours directed at individuals with the intent to cause pain, distress, or fear. In the workplace, it represents a significant social issue for organizations, as it undermines the cognitive, emotional, and physical capacity of teachers in carrying out their duties. This study explored how person-related bullying and work-related bullying each relate to job engagement, drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and the Job-Demand Resources (JD-R) Theory to explain the phenomenon. Using a descriptive survey design, data were gathered from 108 teachers across selected private secondary schools in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos. Results revealed a negative correlation between workplace bullying and job engagement, showing that higher levels of bullying lead to reduced engagement. In other words, both person-related and work-related bullying contribute to teacher disengagement, with potentially damaging long-term consequences. Based on these findings, the study recommends regular monitoring of teachers' activities by school management and training initiatives that promote acceptable workplace behaviours to help curb bullying.

Keywords: Job Engagement, Person-Related Bullying, Secondary School, Teachers, Work-Related Bullying.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the primary aim of any organisation is to maximise profits by motivating its employees. Organisations prefer motivated and dedicated employees who strive to do their best work and make a prosocial difference within their organisation (Grant, 2017). Likewise, organisations want employees to maintain their well-being through positive communicative acts such as empathy, social support, conflict management, and teamwork (Miller, Ellis, Zook, & Lyles, 2017; Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 2018) in order to identify with and remain committed to their organisation (Bartels, Pruyn, de Jong, & Joustra, 2017). Employees who are engaged and dedicated are more likely to work hard, support the organisation's goals and objectives, and contribute to increased productivity and performance effectiveness. According to Harter and Rubenstein (2020), job engagement is a critical factor in organisational success. Engaged employees tend to be more productive, more innovative, and more likely to remain with their organisation. However, for some organisations, these ideal outcomes remain unattainable when employees engage in workplace bullying. Workplace bullying among employees is a major challenge facing organisations worldwide.

Workplace bullying has emerged as a serious concern in workplaces, and school settings are not an exception. The extent to which bullying spreads in workplaces is worrisome and highly challenging (Arathi & Soumyaja, 2020). At present, organisations are striving to create bullying-free environments where employees in the teaching profession are encouraged to express their individuality and creativity without hindrance (Basit & Chauhan, 2017; Osler & Carol, 2020). It is troubling to imagine that teachers face issues of bullying despite their contributions to knowledge and their social role in shaping the lives of citizens who were once students. A newspaper report titled *"Teachers bully teachers"* by BBC News (2021) highlighted that workplace bullying interferes with the personal and career development of victims, leading to loss of interest, enthusiasm, communication, initiative, and participation in school activities. It also affects classroom teaching, compilation of student performance records, contributions to institutional planning, and involvement in social events, thereby weakening teachers' guidance and support for students, particularly in preparation for competitions.

Additionally, Busby (2019) reported that victims' non-participation in school activities undermines the core essence of the teaching profession in building future leaders. This issue is not necessarily the fault of students or parents but results from maltreatment, abuse, and ostracism by principals and, most notably, co-teachers. Shearer (2016) further noted that most bullying behaviours are manifested by co-teachers, making institutions hostile and toxic environments. When cases of bullying are repeated and teachers' psychological needs are not met at work, their psychological health is affected (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Employee disengagement is therefore a prominent indicator of poor psychological health, which is a negative outcome of bullying experiences. Today's workplace can indeed be a stressful environment that places considerable strain on teachers, who may, in turn, react by bullying other employees (Goodboy, Martin, Knight, & Long, 2017; León-Pérez, Notelaers, Arenas, Munduate, & Medvigy-González, 2014; Soliman & Wahba, 2019). Unfortunately, employers either fail to recognize the damaging effects of workplace bullying or are unaware that it occurs (Salin, 2003). As a result, bullies continue to exert control, terrorizing and victimizing their colleagues. Against this backdrop, this study examines the interplay between person-related and work-related bullying and the job engagement of teachers in Ojo Local Government.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Workplace Bullying
According to the American Psychological Association (2005), the definition of a typical bully is a person who exhibits "aggressive behaviour" that is intended to cause harm or distress, occurs repeatedly over time, and occurs in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. In order for the label bullying to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process, it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months).

Person-related bullying
Liu, Wang, Liao, Liao, and Chen (2020), as well as Dussault and Frenette (2015), describe person-related bullying as a problem that can negatively affect workers' health, invariably leading to mood or personality changes, psychiatric disorders, and psycho-physical symptoms. The effects include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic disorders, and chronic adjustment disorders. Person-related bullying takes the form of spreading rumours, public humiliation, insults, or gossip, along with repeated offensive remarks about a person or their personal life (Anjum & Muazzam, 2018).

Work-related bullying
Yahaya, Ing, Lee, Yahaya, Boon, Hashim, and Taat (2012) define work-related bullying as consistent actions, practices, and behaviours directed at one or more individuals in an organisation, which may be deliberate or unintentional but are offensive, distressing, and humiliating to the victim, thereby negatively affecting employee engagement, activities, and performance (Azizi et al., 2012). Work-related bullying includes the assignment of unmanageable workloads, unpleasant and unnecessary tasks, and threats to an employee's security, all of which contribute to a toxic work environment.

Job Engagement
Shuck (2017) defined job engagement as a "positive, active, work-related psychological state operationalized by the maintenance, intensity, and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy." On the other hand, Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement as harnessing the self in one's work roles cognitively, physically, and emotionally, thereby driving in-role behaviours. The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability must be met for employees to be engaged (Kahn, 1990). Research has revealed that psychological conditions influence overall job engagement (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013; May, 2014). Engagement creates a psychological connectedness with employees' work, and engaged employees demonstrate high levels of energy and enthusiasm for their tasks.

THEORETICAL REVIEW
Conservation of Resource Theory
The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory postulates that individuals strive to preserve their current resources (conservation) and acquire new ones (acquisition). Resources can be mental, emotional, or physical, and employees can draw on these to overcome harsh conditions (Hobfoll, 2007). Resources may be material (e.g., money, housing), social (e.g., support, status), or psychological (e.g., personal mastery, sense of autonomy) (Wao & Tao, 2023). COR Theory suggests that stress arises from difficulties in achieving the common goals toward which members of a culture strive. In this regard, stress is largely culturally determined, since most major demands placed on individuals occur within a shared social context, and culture itself is a social phenomenon.

Through personal experience and learning, people come to recognize what they need to affirm the acquisition and ownership of what is important—directly, indirectly, or symbolically—for success within their culture and for survival. These valued elements are called resources. This is also true for bullied employees, who must protect their resources in the face of hostile behaviours. However, those with fewer resources are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of bullying on work engagement. When bullying as a work stressor exceeds employee resources, anxiety, depression, and distress may arise, leading to disengagement. The COR Theory also identifies perceived employability as a vital resource (Kirves, 2014), enabling individuals to adapt to changing work environments (Baruch, 2014; Baruch & Rousseau, 2019) and serving as a coping mechanism for job security and sustainable careers (Donald et al., 2020).

Job Demand Resources Theory
Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) Theory offers valuable insights into workplace dynamics, including the relationship between job demands, resources, workplace bullying, and job engagement. In this context, job demands refer to aspects of the job that require sustained effort and are associated with physiological and psychological costs, such as high workload or time pressure. Resources, on the other hand, are aspects of the job or the work environment that help employees achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth and development, such as social support from colleagues or autonomy in decision-making (Vranjes, Notelaers, & Salin, 2022). According to Tummers and Bakker (2021), when job demands outweigh available resources, employees may experience stress and burnout, increasing their vulnerability to workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying, characterized by repeated and hostile behaviours aimed at harming, intimidating, or humiliating others, can further exacerbate employees' stress levels and decrease their engagement with work. Conversely, when employees perceive adequate resources to meet job demands, they are more likely to feel supported, motivated, and engaged in their work, thereby reducing the likelihood of experiencing or engaging in workplace bullying behaviours.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW
Person-Related Bullying and Job Engagement
Person-related bullying, as described by Yin-Yang, Yi, Chi-Jane, Hsiu-Yun, Yu-Mei, and Hsing-Mei (2020), includes character assassination, withdrawal or detachment, and malicious gossip about an employee. In a study conducted by Judith (2008) titled *Aggressive Behavior and Its Effect on Job Satisfaction and Productivity,* bullying behaviour was shown to affect an individual's ability to perform their job, which in turn impacts employee morale and the financial performance of an organisation. The central finding of the study highlights the frequency of workplace bullying, examining specific types of mistreatment and negative acts experienced by targets, investigating the physical and mental stress associated with bullying, and revealing the relationship between workplace bullying and its effect on job satisfaction and productivity (Azizi Yahaya et al., 2009).

Data from this study indicated that 75% of participants reported witnessing mistreatment of co-workers during their careers, 47% had been bullied, and 27% admitted to being a target of bullying in the past 12 months.

A similar finding was reported by Goodboy, Martin, Knight, and Long (2017), who, through the lens of self-determination theory, demonstrated that workplace bullying significantly decreased engagement among a sample of 243 full-time employees. Furthermore, Coetzee and Vandyk (2018) evaluated the mediating effect of work engagement between workplace bullying and turnover intention, showing that both organisational and person-related bullying were linked to lower vigour and dedication, which subsequently increased turnover intention.

Several studies have reported cases of bullying in organisations. Yahaya, Chu Ing, Lee, Yahaya et al. (2012) conducted a study on the effect of workplace bullying on workers' performance in Malaysia. Their findings indicated that bullying behaviours such as belittling comments, constant criticism, and withholding resources inflicted significant harm on employees, which in turn affected turnover and organisational performance. Park and Ono (2017) examined the relationship between bullying and work engagement through the COR Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. Similarly, Rai and Agarwal (2017), in their research among 835 full-time administrative personnel in manufacturing and service organisations, found that workplace bullying is directly related to work engagement.

Devonyish (2017), in *Dangers of Workplace Bullying: Evidence from the Caribbean*, argued that person-related bullying positively predicts work-related depression, adversely affecting the psychological state of the target and undermining their personal standing and professionalism at work. Javed, Nazi, Alim, et al. (2023) found that workplace bullying has a negative relationship with work engagement in the Pakistani banking sector. Their study revealed that in cultures with high power distance, employees are often abused and mistreated by supervisors, creating devastating effects on motivation, satisfaction, and engagement. Workplace bullying, which depletes resources, has a detrimental effect on internal employability, as different bullying activities manifest in various adverse outcomes. Bullying erodes resources such as self-esteem, self-confidence, physical and mental health, and trust in the organisation and colleagues (Krishna & Soumyaja, 2020). As these resources decline, workplace bullying can undermine perceptions of internal employability and increase job insecurity (Krishna & Soumyaja, 2020).

Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, and Truss (2008), in their study *Job Engagement: A Literature Review*, argued that engagement implies fulfilling, positive work-related experiences and a stable mindset that fosters good health and positive outcomes for employees. The study found that bullying behaviours negatively affect employees' emotions at work, and if not properly managed, can lead to withdrawal, disloyalty, reduced commitment, distrust, and lower productivity. Conversely, individuals with strong personal relationships at work experience higher levels of satisfaction and meaningfulness in their roles.

Work-Related Bullying and Job Engagement
According to Dussault and Frenette (2015), work-related bullying signifies consistent criticism of a person's job or work-related activities. They argued that individual differences at work affect the engagement or disengagement of employees in the workplace. When employees experience emotional setbacks based on individual differences, it significantly impacts not only their personal lives but also their behaviour at work. It was found that individual differences at work influence a person's perception of reality, which ultimately affects their ability to be engaged or disengaged in some or all work roles, thereby deterring performance. Employees tend to be more productive

when their feelings and emotions are considered and properly managed (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2008).

Nimmi, Jose, Paul Vincent, and John (2022) investigated the relationship between workplace bullying, job engagement, and perceived internal employability, using the role of the organisation as a factor. Their findings reported a significant negative influence of workplace bullying on perceived internal employability and job engagement. Chandani, Mehta, Mall, and Khokar (2016), in their study *Job Engagement: A Review Paper on Factors Affecting Job Engagement*, posited that work-related stress, unfriendly work environments, and personal relations determine how engaged an employee will be. A friendly workplace free of work-related bullying positively impacts employee engagement, which in turn fosters self-efficacy, positive feelings, and workplace involvement. Work-related bullying has been reported to have serious negative effects on victims' mental and physical health, as well as their job performance and satisfaction. It remains a significant issue that many organisations strive to address through policies, training, and support mechanisms for employees.

METHODOLOGY

The study which adopted the descriptive survey research design examined the relationship between workplace bullying and job engagement in four (4) purposively selected private secondary schools in Ojo Local Government area of Lagos. The selected schools include Tossvi Precious College, Joeihevic Private School, Jeff Private School and Emelia Foremost High School which were purposively selected from a Teachers' Forum on Facebook due to the report on teachers' bullying in those environments. The total population of the teachers from these schools is one hundred and eight (108) teachers as tabulated below.

Table 1: Sample size

Secondary school	Population	No of copies distributed	Retrieved copies
Tossvi Precious College	30	30	29
Joeihevic Private School	26	26	25
Jeff Private School	22	22	22
Emelia Foremost High School	30	30	29
	108	**108**	**105**

Source: Field work (2024).

The census sampling technique was adopted as all teachers in the schools were invited to participate in the study. Two existing scales were adapted to elicit information from teachers who worked in the selected secondary schools in Ojo, Lagos. To measure workplace bullying (person-related and work-related forms), the Workplace Bullying Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) developed by Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers (2009) was adapted, using a 5-point Likert's type rating scale; ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). In the study, the authors reported an acceptable reliability coefficient for the scale (α=.90) and sub-scales (personal-related bullying α=.91, work-related bullying α=.98). In this current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was α=.79. On the other hand, job engagement was measured by adapting the Job Engagement Scale (JES) developed by Rich, LePine and Crawford (2010). The scale measured job engagement using 8 items on a 5-point Likert's type rating scale; ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). The authors of JES reported a good internal consistency of Cronbach alpha coefficient of α=.89. In this current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.71.

Data were collected from respondents for six weeks during the academic session. Some of the research instruments were administered electronically, while others, personally by the researcher with the help of the schools' administrative officers. One hundred and eight questionnaires were administered, but one hundred and five were retrieved, while one hundred and two (94%) questionnaires were found usable for the final analyses. Collected data were coded and analysed

using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS
This section explains the result of the collected data. It presents the demographic information of the respondents, the hypotheses tested and the discussion of results.

Table 2: Results of Questionnaire Administration

Detailed response Rate	Distributed Copies	Retrieved Copies	Copies not Retrieved	Used Copies
Total	108	105	3	102

Source: Field Survey (2024).

The above table shows that 108 questionnaires were distributed, 105 were retrieved and 103 were usable, which signifies a response rate of (94%).

Test of hypothesis
HO₁: There is no significant relationship between person-related workplace bullying and job engagement

Table 3; Correlations between job engagement and person-related bullying

		Job Engagement	Person-Related Bullying
Job engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	-.792**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	102	102
Personal related bullying	Pearson Correlation	-.792**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	102	102

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 3, the findings **rejected** the state null hypothesis that states that there is no significant relationship between person-related workplace bullying and job engagement. The finding therefore reveals that there exists a significant relationship between both variables. However, the relationship is negative. This therefore implies that a negative relationship exists between person-related bullying and job engagement. That means increase in person-related bullying will result- to decrease in job engagement as both variables relate negatively.

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between work-related bullying and job engagement

Table 4: Correlations between job engagement and work-related workplace bullying

		Job Engagement	Work-Related Bullying
Job engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	-.528**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	102	102
Work related bullying	Pearson Correlation	-.528**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	102	102

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 reveals that a significant relationship exists between work-related bullying and job engagement. Therefore, the stated hypothesis that state that there is no significant relationship between work related bullying and job engagement is rejected. However, the existing relationship is negative. This means that both variables relate negatively. Which further implies that as workers experience increase work related bullying it will bring about reduced job engagement among these employees.

Discussion of Findings

Result from hypothesis one reveals that there exists a negative significant relationship between personal-related bullying and job engagement of teachers in selected private secondary schools in Ojo. This result implies that as long as teachers experience person-related bullying on their jobs, it will lead to a decline in their job engagement. Also, findings from hypothesis one aligns with the findings of Yin-Yang, Yi, Chi-Jane, Hsiu-Yun, Yu-Mei and Hsing-Mei (2020) and, Judith (2008) who revealed that character assassination, withdrawal or detachment and, malicious gossip about an employee will affect an individual's ability to perform their jobs, which can impact the morale of employees and disengagement on the job.

Also, Goodboy, Martin and Bolkan (2020) found that person-related workplace bullying significantly decreases the engagement of employees, putting in jeopardy, the physical, emotional and cognitive engagement, which is subsequently linked to high turnover intention.

Hypothesis two shows a significant relationship between work-related bullying and job engagement of teachers in selected private secondary schools in Ojo which is in line with the findings of Chandani, Mehta, Mall and Khokar (2016), here the authors posited that work-related stress, unfriendly work environment, personal relations determined how engaged an employee will be. A friendly workplace free of work-related bullying has a positive impact on the engagement of individuals in the workplace which in turn engenders self-efficacy, positive feelings and engagement in the workplace.

Conclusion

Engagement of teachers would help schools to stay productive due to their level of impact on society and in doing so, it would require a lot of effort and commitment on part of the to the institutions they work in and the practices in such organisations. For teachers to exhibit emotional, physical and cognitive engagement in their professions, the issue of bullying will need to be curbed. Disengaged workers will begin to see their work as insatiable and may develop less interest in putting their all into the teaching profession. The findings from this study, brings to the conclusion that work-related bullying and person-related bullying are hazards in the teaching profession which will lead to grave consequences like turnover, dissatisfaction, and disengagement on their jobs.

In this light, administrators will need to develop mechanisms in curbing workplace bullying within secondary school to intimidations of any kind on personal and work-related matters.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of this study, the study recommends the following to strengthen the engagement of teachers;

1. School management should implement programs that educate teachers on the impact of bullying and strategies for its prevention. Clear policies and procedures must be established for reporting bullying incidents, outlining specific consequences for offenders. Perpetrators should be held accountable for their actions, and disciplinary measures should be applied where necessary.
2. The school management should foster a culture of inclusivity, empathy, and respect for diversity. Institutions must continuously monitor for signs of bullying and conduct regular evaluations of anti-bullying measures to ensure ongoing improvement.

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