



## THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL LABOUR ON PERCEIVED WORKPLACE BULLYING OF BANK EMPLOYEES IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Despite literature findings on the importance of emotions in employees' subjective experience of work, wellbeing and performance, few studies have explored this in the Nigerian work environment. This study focused on examining the influence of emotional labour on perceived workplace bullying among bank employees within the Ibadan and Lagos Metropolis areas of Nigeria. A sample size of 1032 (55.4% male and 44.6% female) employees was conveniently sampled from selected banks. The results showed that emotional labour significantly predicted organizational bullying among bank employees ( $\beta=.235, p<.01$ ). In particular, surface and deep acting jointly predicted organizational bullying [ $F_{(2, 1031)}=65.208, R^2=.369; p<.01$ ] while only surface acting individually predicted organizational bullying ( $\beta=.299; p<.01$ ). The findings, recommendations and implications were discussed accordingly.*

*Key words: Emotional Labour, Organizational Bullying, surface acting, deep acting, , Nigerian bank*

### INTRODUCTION

Bullying within organizations and its negative consequences has received increasing research attention globally. Workplace bullying has been defined in several ways by various scholars such as Brodsky (1976) who defines it as repeated and persistent attempts by one person to torment, wear down, frustrate or get a reaction from another and Salin (2012) who defines workplace bullying as repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individual(s), which involve a perceived power imbalance and create a hostile work environment. It can thus be seen as antisocial, hostile or interpersonally aggressive behaviour in the workplace. Despite the different perspectives of the authors, most definitions of workplace bullying generally agree on three common defining factors namely: i) all bullying is defined in terms of its impact on the recipient i.e. the victim must feel bullied ii) most definitions suggest a negative effect on the victim (iii) the bullying behaviour must be persistent.

Bullying behaviours are observed in different forms. Rayner and Hoel (1997) suggest that there are five basic categories of bullying behaviour. These are: threat to Professional status (e.g. belittling opinion, public professional humiliation, accusation of lack of effort); threat to personal standing (e.g. gossiping about you, name-calling, insults, teasing); isolation (e.g. preventing access to opportunities such as leave or training, physical or social isolation, withholding with holding of information); overwork (e.g. undue pressure to produce work, impossible deadlines, unnecessary disruptions); and destabilization (e.g. failure to give credit when due, meaningless tasks, removal of responsibility, shifting of goalposts, repeated reminders of error, setting up to fail).

Bullying has been found to result in several negative consequences. For the employee (victim), it has been found to negatively affect both physical and psychological wellbeing. Particularly, bullying has been reported to directly affect employees by resulting in lower levels of job satisfaction (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), increased level of stress and burnout, increased psychosomatic symptoms and physical illnesses (Niedl, 1996; O'Moore, 2000; Zapf, Knorz and Kulla, 1996), increased feelings of unfairness (Tepper, 2000) and greater chances of expulsion from the labour market (Leymann, 1996). Health symptoms include: anxiety, depression, headache and musco-skeletal problems ( Einarsen, Raknes, Mathiesen & Hellesoy, 1996; Vartia, 2001). Interestingly, studies also show that, not only the victims but also, observers of organizational bullying report higher stress reactions and reduced job satisfaction and increased negative feelings towards the organization than non- observers (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Sutela &



Lehto, 1998; Vartia, 2001). These consequently result in increased turnover, absenteeism and organizational citizenship behaviour (Rayner, 2000); reduced productivity (Giga, Hoel & Lewis, 2008); reduced motivation (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997) and increased direct financial cost to the organization such as for legal fees (Rayner & McIvor, 2006).

Recognizing the gravity of workplace bullying's detrimental effect on the employee and employer of labour, several researchers have focused on investigating the possible antecedents of workplace bullying. Some of the established antecedents include, individual/dispositional factors (gender, age, marital status, educational level); organizational factors (interpersonal conflicts, role ambiguity, role conflict, and workplace social support), psychological factors (communication and cooperation, low morale and unhealthy social climate stress, emotions, organizational support, organizational culture etc.) societal/cultural factors (general culture, attitudes and behaviour towards bullying of locals power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long or short term orientation) or structural factors (lack of policies and laws guiding against bullying) (Hofstede, 1976; Domínguez, Gil-Monte & Devis, 2011; Rayner and Hoel, 1997; Vartia, 1996 etc.)

Accordingly, several studies have investigated the relationships between psychological variables such as stress, burnout, exhaustion, leadership styles, organizational culture, and workplace bullying in the Nigerian workplace (Ogbonnaya, Ukegbu, Aguwa & Emma-Ukaegbu, 2012; Ayodele, 2003; Ikanyon, 2013, Adenuga, 2009). While few have considered the role of employee emotions in workplace bullying, fewer still considered the possibility of a significant interaction between workplace bullying and emotional labour as a possible antecedent.

Employees carry their emotions with them everywhere they go, even while performing their work functions and these emotions have the power to aid or interfere with their performance. Emotional labour is defined as the display of expected emotions by employees during service encounters. It is performed through surface acting, deep acting, or the expression of genuine emotion (Hochschild, 2003). Emotional labour also implies that employee emotions are being commercialized and controlled by employers during work hours which may result in discomfort for employees.

Hochschild (1983) defines surface acting as an emotional labour strategy in which employees comply with organizational display rules by managing and hence stimulating expressions that are not actually felt by the employee. This therefore involves the faking emotional responses, repression and hiding of felt emotions that are considered inappropriate to display. On the other hand, deep acting is also an emotional labour strategy wherein the employee makes a cognitive effort to produce the required emotional display by changing both expressions and feelings and aligning them to match to suit the desired emotions. This could involve concentrating on positive thoughts, invoking memories and thoughts that could induce desired emotions or reevaluating the situation (Lee & Ok, 2014). Research has shown that a continued experience of emotional labour could result in emotional dissonance, emotional disharmony and deep feelings of incongruence which could in turn influence the quality of customer service, employee job satisfaction, turnover, intention to turnover, productivity, self-esteem and a host of associated somatic and psychological issues (Jung & Yoon, 2014; Lam & Chen, 2012; Kim, 2008; Trougakos, Weiss & Green, 2006)

In the banking industry, employees are required to modify their displayed emotions to promote customer service relations and satisfy organizational rules. This emotional management requires a lot of effort which may be harmful to the employee (Schiopu, 2014). "Not only must the employee make an effort to support the processes of surface and deep acting, but also the commoditization of feelings, where the



organization controls something as personal as emotions, is unpleasant to the employee and may cause burnout and job stress (Hochschild, 2003)". In light of the delicate nature of the transactions taking place in the banking industry, the saying that "the customer is always right" must be upheld at all times and this can create immense feelings of stress for employees. This is especially possible when the feelings of the employee are not in congruence with the expected displayed emotions.

Though emotional labour may help employees successfully complete their tasks and increase effectiveness (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), Hochschild (2003) reiterates that emotional labor may result in problems such as drug or alcohol abuse and absenteeism. Also, there is sufficient support in the literature to show that emotional labor has strong relationships with burnout, emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction (Morris and Feldman, 1996; Grandey, 2000 etc.). These feelings of stress and emotional exhaustion may cause employees to seek emotional release and control by way of expressing deviance or subjugating a fellow employee. Mulki, Jaramillo & Locander (2006) suggests that emotional exhaustion leads to reduced organizational commitment and increased job dissatisfaction which may result in organizational deviance. Also, Lee & Ok, (2014) propose that employees who experience emotional labour and emotional dissonance may participate in "service sabotage", deliberate deviant actions by service employees, intentionally designed to adversely affect functional service encounters. This may also manifest in form of aggression to fellow employees, management and the organization itself.

Despite a dearth of empirical data linking emotional labour and organizational bullying, literature proposes a possible link between these two variables. Salin (2003), asserts that there are three basic antecedents to organizational bullying, namely: enabling structures and processes, motivating structures and processes and lastly precipitating structures. The enabling factors refer to those conditions that make it possible for bullying to occur in an environment. This may include perceived power imbalances between the victim and perpetrator, low perceived costs for the perpetrator and dissatisfaction and frustration in the working situation and organizational climate. Particularly, higher levels of frustration and dissatisfaction are perceived when an employee has experiences: little to no control over his own job, high levels of organizational constraint, job, role conflict and ambiguity, job insecurity, high levels of stress, poor communication, high work load, hectic work schedules and high levels of emotional abuse (Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2000; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Appelberg, Romanov, Honlasalo & Koskenvuo, 1991; Einarsen Raknes & Mathiesen, 1994; Spector, 1997). The motivating structures are those factors that make it rewarding for perpetrators to bully others at work such as: expected benefits for the perpetrator, certain reward systems and high internal competition. Lastly, the precipitating factors refer to changes in the organizational circumstances such as downsizing, restructuring, massive layoffs, changes in work groups etc.

In an attempt to better understand the relationship between employee emotional aspects of work and their influences on wellbeing and work outcomes in Nigeria, this study explored the possible relationship between emotional labour and workplace bullying among bank employees within this context.

## **METHOD**

**Design:** This study adopted an Expost facto design. The survey method was used to collect data. The independent variable for this study was emotional labour and the dependent variable was workplace bullying.



**Participants:** Out of the 1032 participants in this study, 572 were male respondents representing 55.4% of the population while were 460 female participants representing 44.6% of the entire sample. The age of participants ranged from 20 to 59 with a mean of 31.41(SD= 5.98). All participants were bank employees conveniently sampled for this study. Below is a table showing the detailed demographic distribution of participants.

Table 1: Summary of participant demographic characteristics

Demographic Variable		N	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	572	55.4%
	Female	460	44.6%
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	392	38%
	Married	590	57.2%
	separated	50	4.9%
<b>HEQ</b>	WAEC	31	3%
	OND/NCE	258	25%
	HND/BSC	609	59%
	PG	134	13%
<b>Employment Status</b>	Full-time	455	44.1%
	Contract	577	55.9%
<b>Position in Organization</b>	Junior cadre	705	68.3%
	Midlevel cadre	266	25.8%
	Managerial cadre	61	5.9%

**Instrument:** The instrument used for data collection was divided into three sections. Section A measured demographic variables. Section B consisted of the emotional labour scale by Brotheridge & Lee (1998) which was adapted for this study by the removal of the duration subscale. In this study, it was comprised of 4 subscales, namely: variety ( $\alpha=0.76$ ), intensity ( $\alpha=0.74$ ), surface acting ( $\alpha=0.74$ ) and deep acting (0.83) and made up of 11 items. Section C consisted of Organizational Bullying Scale (Legbeti, 2017) which was used to measure workplace bullying. A cronbach alpha of 0.947 was obtained for this scale indicating a high reliability level.

**Procedure:** This study was carried out in Lagos and Ibadan Metropolis areas. Three banks (First Bank, Zenith Bank and Guarantee Trust Bank) were purposively selected from the 22 Nigerian commercial banks. Permission was sought from the branch heads and operations managers of each branch sampled for this study. The instruments were administered to conveniently sampled bank employees within work hours/ days and



collected at the close of work each day. Out of 1,600 participants sampled, 1250 completed and returned filled questionnaires and only 1032 questionnaires were properly filled and used for data analysis.

**Results:**

**Table 2: Summary of Mean, Standard Deviation and scale maximum score of independent and dependent variables in this study**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Turnover intentions	1032	47.9	13.3
Workplace bullying	1032	76.3	23.5
Emotional Labour	1032	28.3	8.2
Surface Acting	1032	7.6	2.8
Deep Acting	1032	7.9	2.9

Table 2 shows the mean score and standard deviation of participants with in this study.

**Table 3: Linear Regression Summary Table Showing Predictive Influence of Emotional Labour on Organizational Bullying**

	R	B	T	P
Emotional Labour	.235	.235	7.746	<.01

Results from Table 1 shows that emotional labour emerged as a significant predictor of organizational bullying ( $\beta=.235$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This result implies that an increase in emotional labour will result in a subsequent increase in organizational bullying of employees

**Table 4: Multiple Summary Table Showing Joint And Individual Influence Of Surface And Deep Acting On Organizational Bullying**

	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig	$\beta$	T	P
Surface acting					.299	6.160	<.01
Deep acting	.535	.369	65.208	<.01	.191	2.120	>.01

The results in Table 4 reveal that surface and deep acting jointly predicted organizational bullying of employees [ $F_{(2, 1031)}=65.208$ ,  $R^2=.369$ ;  $p<.01$ ] and accounted for 36.9% of the variance in organizational bullying. Further results on the independent prediction of the emotional labour subscales, show that surface acting ( $\beta=.299$ ;  $p<.01$ ) significantly predicted organizational bullying while deep acting did not significantly predict organizational bullying ( $\beta=.191$ ;  $p>.01$ ). Results imply that an increase in surface acting within an organizational will result in a consequent increase of organizational bullying.

**DISCUSSION:**



The study examined the influence of emotional labour on perceived organizational bullying among bank employees in Nigeria. The results of the study revealed a significant and positive predictive relationship between the two variables implying that an increase in emotional labour will result in a consequent increase in perceived organizational bullying of employees. Further analyses revealed that although the two dimensions of emotional labour, surface acting and deep acting, jointly have a significant impact on organizational bullying, surface acting in particular was responsible for the significant contribution to this relationship.

This finding is consistent with the findings Salin (2012) which showed bullying to result from an environment that nurtures, motivates and has recently experienced organizational changes which can potentially fuel bullying such as the Nigerian banking sector.

Although the Nigerian banking sector is one of the major employers of young graduates today, it has been described as a difficult and high pressure work environment characterized by long working hours, high demand work schedules and job insecurity which often result in stress, reduced employee physical and psychological wellbeing, poor work-life balances and general job dissatisfaction. Recently, it suffered several structural and policy changes that have led to huge salary slashes, massive and unfair retrenchment of employees, bank mergers and the more recent crisis caused by the Single Treasury account bill (TSA) implementation. Employees who have remained in this profession often experience feelings of anxiety, frustration and low job security (caused by the possibility of being retrenched at any moment). Being a financial service industry, employees are expected to carry out their tasks while wearing a brave mask of joy and enthusiasm at work, especially while relating to customers. In such an environment, in which employees perceive injustice, and emotional abuse while trying to manage their emotional displays towards both management and customers, bullying and other negative acts can freely flourish and be expressed without any barriers.

In addition, many researchers also agree that surface acting is a more difficult strategy for emotional labour and as such conveys different long-term negative impacts on employee well-being such as low job satisfaction, depression, alienation, burnout, ill health and poor service quality (Lam & Chen, 2012; Kim, 2008; Trougakos, Weiss & Green, 2006).

Therefore this study advocates for increased monitoring of the management policies of the banking sector. It also recommends employee training on coping with emotional demands of work and workplace bullying enlightenment. Lastly, channels should be open for increased communication between management and employees for a more 'friendly' and productive work environment.



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