Prevalence of workplace bullying of South African employees

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Orientation: Workplace bullying has negative physical and psychological effects on employees and several negative effects on organisations.

Research purpose: The purpose of the research was to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying in South Africa and whether there are differences in employees' experiences of bullying with regard to socio-demographic characteristics, sense of coherence (SOC) and diversity experiences.

Motivation for the study: This study intended to draw attention to the implications and negative effects of workplace bullying and to determine whether employees with certain socio-demographic characteristics, SOC levels and diversity experiences experience higher levels of bullying than others do.

Research design, approach and method: The researchers used a cross-sectional field survey approach. They used an availability sample (N = 13 911). They computed frequencies to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying and used a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to determine the differences between the groups.

Main findings: The results showed that 31.1% of the sample had experienced workplace bullying. The researchers found significant differences between all the socio-demographic groups. Participants with higher levels of SOC, and who experienced diversity positively, reported lower levels of workplace bullying.

Practical/managerial implications: Employers need to realise that workplace bullying is a common problem amongst South African employees and should ensure that they have the necessary prevention methods.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes to the limited research on the prevalence of workplace bullying and its relationship with SOC and diversity experiences in the South African workplace.

Introduction

Background to the study

Workplace bullying has devastating physical and psychological effects on employees. It also has negative effects on the bottom line of organisations (Hood, 2004).

Workplace bullying manifests in a wide variety of behaviours. They include:

- public humiliation and criticism
- verbal abuse
- social exclusion
- intimidation
- inaccurate accusations
- spreading rumours
- ignoring people for long periods
- undermining victims' professional status (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009; Escartin, Rodriquez-Carballeira, Zapf, Porrúa & Martin-Peña, 2009).

Research has shown that bullying affects people all over the world. Its consequences include:

- intentions to leave the profession
- physical effects like sleep and eating disorders
- psychological effects like anxiety, depression and lowered self-esteem (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001; Vessey, Demarco, Gaffney & Budin, 2009).

However, these are not the only physical and psychological consequences of bullying. Bullying also affects companies because it hinders group communication and creates hostile work

environments that is characterised by distrust, apprehension, anger and suspicion (Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2008; Frost, 2003).

Researchers all over the world agree that bullying occurs frequently in the workplace (Hoel, Cooper & Faragher, 2001; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia, 2003). This makes it a phenomenon worth investigating in South Africa.

The researchers could find only one study in South Africa that investigated the prevalence of workplace bullying on the web (WorkTrauma.com). This study (that the Work Dignity Institute conducted in 2000) found that approximately 77.8% of South Africans had experienced workplace bullying. However, no recent studies on the prevalence of workplace bullying in the South African context are available. Furthermore, only a few studies examined how socio-demographic groups differ in their experiences of workplace bullying. This is important because of the multicultural and multiracial composition of the South African workforce as well as socio-demographic factors like race, gender, age, level of education and type of industry. Researchers should investigate these factors to determine whether there are differences in the experiences of workplace bullying.

International research has focused on the possibility that different race groups experience different levels of workplace bullying (Archer, 1999; Dinsdale, 2006; Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Lewis & Gunn, 2007). However, the researchers could not find any studies that focused on the possible differences between race groups in South Africa.

Gender differences in the experience of workplace bullying have also received some attention in international research. However, the results of these studies have been inconclusive (Cortina, Magley, Williams & Langhout, 2001; Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, 2004; Ortega, Høgh, Pejtersen & Olsen, 2009). There have been only two studies so far in South Africa that investigated whether one gender group experiences more workplace bullying than the other does (Pietersen, 2007; Steinman, 2003). However, the studies focused only on the health and academic sectors. This limits the generalisation of their results to other sectors.

The researchers found contradictory results for age and workplace bullying in international research. Most studies found that younger employees experience more workplace bullying than older employees do (Einarsen & Rakness, 1997; Magerøy, Lau, Riise & Moen, 2009). However, other studies found no significant differences between age groups (Cortina et al., 2001; Ortega et al., 2009).

Researchers have also investigated differences between groups with higher and lower levels of education. Only two international studies found significant differences based on education (Niedhammer, David & Degioanni, 2007; Ortega et al., 2009). Currently, there is no literature in South Africa regarding differences in the experience of workplace bullying based on age or education.

It is also important and interesting to note how the experience of workplace bullying differs between industries. International literature has shown that there are higher levels of workplace bullying in the health and public sectors than there are in other industries (Niedhammer et al., 2007; Ortega et al., 2009). Workplace bullying studies in South Africa focus mainly on the health sector. However, there are no studies comparing the experiences of workplace bullying in different industries.

Although it is important to investigate whether there are differences in the experience of workplace bullying between socio-demographic groups, it is also important to keep in mind factors like personal resources that can cushion the experience of workplace bullying. Several studies have shown that different people handle stress differently and that personal resources can act as a buffer against the effects of stress (Glasø, Matthiesen, Nielsen & Einarsen, 2007; Vessey et al., 2009).

One such personal resource is sense of coherence (SOC). Studies have shown that people with high levels of SOC cope better with stressful external stimuli (Diraz, Ortlepp & Greyling, 2003; Du Toit, 2002). Therefore, it is possible that people with higher levels of SOC are more resistant to workplace bullying because of their ability to better cope with stressful external stimuli and would report lower levels of workplace bullying than people with lower SOC would. There is currently no literature available in South Africa that compares the experiences of workplace bullying between people with high and/or low SOC.

In South Africa, legislation is forcing organisations to integrate their workforces to reflect the country's demographics better. This will create diverse workgroups who have to work together to reach their organisations' goals. Managers are looking to diverse workgroups to find solutions to organisational problems because the ability to work together in diverse workgroups results in a higher morale amongst employees because of the groups' ability to overcome obstacles in their search for efficiency (Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999).

These workgroups can experience diversity positively or negatively depending on their perceptions of status and power in the groups. If they experience diversity issues negatively, it could cause them to experience higher levels of workplace bullying (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Heames, Harvey & Treadway, 2006). To date there is no literature that compares positive and negative diversity experiences and workplace bullying.

Trends from the research literature
Theoretical framework for workplace bullying

The psychologist Heinz Leymann (1996) first identified workplace bullying in the 1980s. Leymann (1996, p. 165) called bullying '… mobbing others at work' and described workplace bullying as conflict that lasts for a long period, occurs regularly and where the victims are not able to defend themselves because of the unequal distribution of power

between the victims and the perpetrators. For the purpose of this study, bullying is:

repeated actions and practices that are directed to one or more workers, which are all unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offence, and distress, and that may interfere with job performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment. (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006, p. 14)

The main question that arises when one studies workplace bullying is why some people experience bullying when others do not. Tajfel's social identity theory (SIT) could provide some insight (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The theory proposes that, in order for people to achieve positive self-images, they use the process of categorisation.

They categorise other people into in- or out-groups (where they are members of the in-group). In order to maintain positive self-images, people compare these groups (Duffy, 2004). They maintain positive identities if they favour the in-group above the out-group. However, should they find the out-group more favourable, the in-group members could choose to compete with the out-group in order to achieve a positive distinctiveness. This tends to cause in-group favouritism, group polarisation, stereotyping, discrimination and minority influence (Duffy, 2004). Therefore, it is possible that prejudice and discrimination (that manifests in bully-like behaviour) derives from the desire of people to identify with the social groups they regard as superior to other groups in order to increase their self-esteem and shared identity (Haslam & Reicher, 2006).

It is important to note that the term 'group' does not necessarily refer only to ethnicity or racial orientation. It could result in men teaming up against women (or vice versa), older against younger employees, or people with higher education feeling superior to unskilled employees and engaging in bullying behaviour.

This research focuses specifically on the experiences of bullying amongst these different groups in the workplace.

Prevalence of workplace bullying

For the purpose of this study, the researchers will use the term prevalence in the same context as that given in the definition of The Free Dictionary (2011, http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/prevalence): 'the total number of cases of a disease in a given population at a specific time'. Therefore, this study will report on the total number of employees who reported frequent experiences of workplace bullying.

In Scandinavia, between 1% and 5% of the workforce has experienced some form of workplace bullying (Zapf et al., 2003), whereas in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) the prevalence is in the range of 10% – 30% (Hoel et al., 2001). Research that Curtis, Bowen and Reid (2007) conducted showed that the prevalence of bullying in Australia is between 50% and 57%. In South Africa, the

Internet survey that the Work Dignity Institute conducted in 2000 reported that 77.8% of South Africans feel bullied in the workplace. Based on these findings, the researchers expect that employees will report frequent experiences of workplace bullying.

Manifestations of workplace bullying

According to Ross (1996), one can divide bullying behaviours into two broad categories: direct and indirect (relational) bullying.

Direct bullying is behaviour that happens on a face-to-face, interpersonal level. It includes acts of verbal abuse like belittling remarks, public humiliation, criticism, inaccurate accusations as well as threatening behaviour and intimidation (Einarsen et al., 2009; Escartin et al., 2009).

Indirect bullying is more subtle. It aims to harm people on an emotional level and to manipulate relationships intentionally (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukiainen, 1992). Acts include:

- gossiping
- spreading rumours
- excluding victims from social events
- not informing victims of decisions that directly influence their departments or people
- intentionally sitting as far away from the victims as possible
- manipulating the information victims receive
- neglecting the working conditions of victims (Einarsen et al., 2009; Escartin et al., 2009).

In the workplace, both direct and indirect bullying behaviour can be displayed by the victims' colleagues and/or supervisors. They represent the hierarchy of the organisation and refer (in broad terms) to the top, senior, middle and junior management levels (Department of Labour, 2010). The skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers follow, allowing for clear dividing power relations within the organisation.

How these power relations play out has important consequences for organisations because bullying by supervisors can be devastating to maintaining trust (Hodson, Roscigno & Lopez, 2006). However, it seems that supervisors might not be the main culprits. Studies have found that co-workers comprise 3.4% to 71.5% of the aggressors (Free Press Release, 2010; Ortega et al., 2009). Acts of humiliation, sarcasm, rudeness, practical jokes, isolation and gossiping are the types of bullying behaviour that colleagues practise (Farrell, Bobrowski & Bobrowski, 2006). Based on these findings, the researchers expect to find that indirect bullying is more prevalent than direct bullying and that bullying by colleagues will be more prevalent than bullying by supervisors.

Workplace bullying and socio-demographic characteristics

Race: Most research into workplace bullying focuses on its effects on different race or ethnic groups in organisations and explores how these differences might relate to the bullying (Giga, Hoel & Lewis, 2008; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Quine, 2002).

The consensus in most of the literature is that there is often a direct relationship between a minority ethnic group and the likelihood that that group will experience bullying (Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003). Fox and Stallworth (2005) found that ethnic minority groups in the workplace reported higher levels of specific racial or ethnic bullying than their majority counterparts did.

It seems that, if people of a certain ethnic group work in an environment in which they are the minority, they could become easy targets for bullying (Lewis & Gunn, 2007). Archer (1999) confirms this and notes that, if a person belongs to a minority group (either gender or race), the likelihood of being bullied increases radically.

Based on the literature, the conclusion is that, in South Africa, minority groups are more likely to experience bullying than majority race groups are. In 2010, the Indian (or Asian) and Coloured race groups were in the minority whilst Blacks were the largest group (Statistics South Africa, 2010). Therefore, according to the SIT framework and the findings of previous research, the researchers expect the Indian (or Asian) and Coloured race groups to experience higher levels of workplace bullying:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Employees of Indian or Coloured ethnicity will experience higher levels of workplace bullying than Black and White employees will.

Gender: Together with race or ethnicity, the researchers investigated the relationship between gender and experiences of bullying (Grainger & Fitzner, 2007; Quine, 2002).

Researchers agree that women are easy targets for bullies (Cortina *et al.*, 2001; Grainger & Fitzner, 2007; Namie, 2003; Niedhammer *et al.*, 2007; Quine, 2002), whilst one study found men were the likelier victims (Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, 2004). Some studies suggest that there are no significant differences between the levels of workplace bullying experiences of men and women (Ortega *et al.*, 2009).

Researchers agree that men and women experience different types of bullying. Men tend to suffer physical abuse and women, especially in the nursing profession, experience verbal abuse (Farrell *et al.*, 2006). Women and men experience workplace bullying differently because of different interpersonal styles and the male-dominated work environment (Rayner & Cooper, 1997).

The results of two studies in South Africa contradict each other. Pietersen (2007) found no significant difference between the workplace bullying experiences of men and women, whereas Steinman (2003) reported that South African women were more vulnerable to workplace bullying than men were. Based on this information, the second hypothesis follows:

- **Hypothesis 2:** Women will experience higher levels of workplace bullying than men will.

Age: Researchers all over the world are undecided about the effect of age on the experiences of workplace bullying. Einarsen and Rakness (1997) found that the younger the employees, the higher were their chances of experiencing harassment and bullying. Cortina *et al.* (2001) and Ortega *et al.* (2009) could find no significant relationship between age and the experience of workplace incivility. In a study conducted with American navy personnel, bullying experiences were higher in the younger age group (34 and younger) (Magerøy *et al.*, 2009). Currently, there is no literature in South Africa that investigates whether bullying is more prevalent in younger or older employees. The third hypothesis follows:

- **Hypothesis 3:** The victims of workplace bullying are younger.

Education: Current research seems to suggest that the lower the skill level, the higher is the chance of exposure to workplace bullying (Niedhammer *et al.*, 2007; Ortega *et al.*, 2009). Previous studies have found that employees with lower academic qualifications, as well as unskilled workers, reported higher levels of workplace bullying than their managers and supervisors did. However, Magerøy *et al.* (2009) found no significant differences in the experience of workplace bullying of employees with lower levels of education:

- **Hypothesis 4:** Employees who report higher levels of workplace bullying have lower levels of education.

Industry: Researchers seem to agree that workers in some industries (like information technology, academics, the public sector, telecommunications as well as the health and military sectors) might be susceptible to different levels and manifestations of workplace bullying (Escartin *et al.*, 2009; Magerøy *et al.*, 2009; Niedhammer *et al.*, 2007; Steinman, 2003). Employees who work in the public sector seem to be more at risk than employees in the private sector are (Hoel & Faragher, 2004).

The focus in South Africa has been on the health and academic sector (Pietersen, 2007; Steinman, 2003). However, researchers have not conducted a study that compares several different sectors. The researchers' next hypothesis follows:

- **Hypothesis 5:** Employees who report higher levels of workplace bullying, work in the public sector.

Workplace bullying and sense of coherence: Workplace bullying can be highly stressful as it could lead to people becoming more anxious and easily upset (Glasø *et al.*, 2007). SOC is about people's orientation to the world. People with high SOC experience a persistent, long-term sense of self-confidence. They understand, and can cope with, the external stimuli to which they are exposed (Du Toit, 2002). Antonovsky (1979) developed the SOC construct and defined it as:

> A global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring, thought dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected. (p. 132)

For the purposes of this study, the researchers will see SOC as an indicator of resilience. It could have both direct and indirect effects on people's well-being because it influences their perceptions of their coping-abilities (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006).

Researchers have found that SOC moderates stress (Diraz *et al.*, 2003). It should be relevant to the effects of bullying as the experiences create stress for the victims (Vessey *et al.*, 2009).

In a multicultural society like South Africa, managers with a high SOC have a high degree of self-reflection, awareness, self-confidence and acknowledge conflict (like experiences of direct bullying) as normal parts of life (Mayer, 2011). Therefore, people with high SOC could have a better understanding of different cultural systems, appear to cope better and manage stressors at work (Mayer, 2011). Riedel, Wiesmann and Hannich (2011) suggest that a higher SOC might also be a resource during the acculturation process of organisations' members.

One should note that the organisational environment affects employees' health and well-being. Therefore, the well-being of employees and their organisations are strongly inter-related (Grant & Mack, 2004). Consequently, it is important for organisations to focus on promoting health, especially in multicultural environments, because the components of SOC (predictable requirements, the ability to adapt to change and to achieve their collective objectives) can characterise healthy organisations (Mayer & Krause, 2011).

The conclusion the researchers drew from the literature is that people with a low SOC tend to be less able to manage stressful experiences (like workplace bullying) and will report higher levels of workplace bullying than people with a higher SOC will. Therefore, the researchers formulated hypothesis 6:

- **Hypothesis 6:** People with a higher SOC will experience lower levels of workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying and diversity experiences: In the light of the study's theoretical framework, one can describe diversity experiences as individual perceptions and experiences of values and cultures. One can measure diversity experiences in terms of race or ethnic discrimination (negative) and race or ethnic diversity appreciation (positive).

These aspects have discrimination, prejudice, understanding, respect and socialisation across groups as their roots (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006). When organisations place members of different ethnic, social and cultural groups in one workgroup, either a pool of resources or a breakdown in performance can result. Breakdowns in performance can cause conflict and tear employees apart (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Greenberg, 2004; Spataro, 2002).

The resulting behaviour will depend on the employees' experiences of diversity. Employees and workgroups can see these diversity experiences positively or negatively. If they view them negatively, they might display behaviour like discrimination and prejudice towards other group members.

This will result in a negative diversity experience for all concerned. One can associate the manifesting behaviour with workplace bullying, thereby increasing the experience of workplace bullying during negative diversity experiences.

South Africa is one of the most diverse countries in the world and South African organisations are becoming more and more aware of the differences between employees (Maier, 2002). Researchers have found that intolerance for these differences leads to conflict, hurt, competition and resentment amongst employees (Cilliers & May, 2002). Employees often react to attempts to address these differences in the workplace with fear and bewilderment (Motsoaledi, 2009).

South Africa's history of apartheid and the existing legislation on affirmative action and employment equity plays an important role in how employees perceive each other. Research suggests that, if employees experience the diversity in African organisations positively, harmony and effectiveness could result (Nyambegera, 2002). Departments in organisations that are willing to work with diversity show cooperation and a more positive attitude towards overcoming these differences (Motsoaledi, 2009). The researchers formulated their last hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis 7:** Employees who experience more positive diversity practices than their co-workers do will experience lower levels of workplace bullying.

Research objectives

The objectives of this research were to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying in South Africa and to see whether there are differences in the experiences of bullying of groups that differ in socio-demographic characteristics, SOC and diversity experiences. Socio-demographic characteristics include race, gender, age, education and industry.

In order to answer these questions, the researchers asked South African employees, who vary in age, gender, race, and level of education, from six different industries to participate in this study. The researchers compared these groups to see whether there were significant differences.

Research design
Research approach

The researchers used a quantitative research design. They used a cross-sectional survey design and collected the data at a single point in time (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). They used a correlational approach to analyse the data.

Research method
Research participants

The population for this study consisted of employees who worked in six sectors in South Africa: financial, mining, government, manufacturing, academic and call centres.

The researchers used a convenience sample (N = 13 911) because of the availability of the employees to participate in the study. Table 1 presents some of the characteristics of the participants.

The participants lived in all nine provinces in South Africa and consisted primarily of Whites (36.9%) and Blacks (26.3%). Coloureds (1.50%) and Indians (1.70%) were the smallest of the race groups. Most of the participants were men (65.8%) and married (63.4%). The participants were mostly between the ages of 30 and 49 (59.1%) and lived in Gauteng province (49%). Of the participants, 48.2% had completed Grade 12 whilst 30% had tertiary qualifications.

Measuring instruments

The measuring instrument that the researchers used is part of the South African Employee Health and Wellness Survey (SAEHWS). It is a self-report instrument. The SAEHWS has been validated for South Africa. It provides cut-off norms, is culturally sensitive and not biased against any cultural group in South Africa. A predictive model, which allows for human capital risk prediction and the proactive management of risks and work-related wellbeing of employees, teams and areas of operation supports the SAEHWS. The internal consistencies are also acceptable because the Cronbach alpha coefficients fall above the cut-off point of .70 (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006). The researchers used the scales that follow.

Workplace bullying: The researchers measured experiences of bullying at work using four dimensions:

- direct bullying by supervisors (seven items, like 'how often do you feel that you are unfairly criticised by your superiors in the workplace?')
- indirect bullying by supervisors (four items, like 'how often do you feel that your superiors are spreading unfair rumours about you?')
- direct bullying by colleagues (12 items, like 'how often do you experience unpleasant personal remarks from your colleagues?')
- indirect bullying by colleagues (12 items, like 'how often do you feel that your colleagues are spreading unfair rumours about you?').

The researchers rated all items using a Likert response scale. It ranged from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). Rothmann and Rothmann (2006) reported Cronbach alpha coefficients for workplace bullying that varied between .81 and .86.

Sense of coherence: The researchers measured SOC by means of 13 items. They used a Likert scale response of 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*), with a Chronbach alpha coefficient of .78. A typical question is 'Do you have the feeling that you don't really care about what goes on around you?' During the statistical analysis, the researchers confirmed a three-factor model (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006). However, the researchers used a higher order one-factor model for this study.

TABLE 1: Characteristics of the participants.

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Men	9158	65.80
	Women	4753	34.20
Age	Younger than 20	202	1.50
	20–29	2233	16.10
	30–39	4180	30.00
	40–49	4052	29.10
	50–59	2806	20.20
	Older than 60	438	3.10
Race	Black	3659	26.30
	White	5128	36.90
	Coloured	212	1.50
	Indian	236	1.70
	Other	11	.10
	Missing values	4665	33.50
Education	Grade 8	1989	14.30
	Grade 9	114	.80
	Grade 10	657	4.70
	Grade 11	263	1.90
	Grade 12	6702	48.20
	Three-year degree or diploma	2382	17.10
	Four-year degree or diploma	1069	7.70
	Five- to seven-year degree	214	1.50
	Master's degree	448	3.20
	Doctoral degree	70	.50
	Missing values	3	.00
Industry	Call centres	165	1.20
	Financial	4658	33.50
	Government	263	1.90
	Manufacturing	3364	24.20
	Mining	5250	37.70
	Other	116	.80
	Academic	94	.70
	Missing values	1	.00

Diversity experiences: In order to determine the perceptions of the participants about the diversity in their organisations, the researchers used six items. Again, they scaled the responses from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). The items included questions like 'Do employees from different racial or ethnic groups show prejudice towards each other at work?' The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .72 (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006).

Research procedure

The researchers collected their data using self-administered, self-reporting questionnaires. All the questionnaires were in English and participants completed them online on a secure website.

The researchers gave respondents a detailed description of the purpose of the study and assured them of the confidentiality of their responses before they completed the questionnaires. The respondents gave informed consent and had 20 minutes to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

The respective organisations gave permission to use the data anonymously for research purposes. Before administering the

questionnaires, the researchers informed the workforce of the purpose of the research. They distributed the questionnaires to participants, who willingly completed the survey.

Statistical analysis

The researchers conducted their statistical analysis using the SPSS programme (SPSS Inc., 2009). They used Cronbach alpha coefficients to calculate the reliability of the constructs they measured in this study. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to describe the data and product-moment correlations to determine the relationships between the variables. They used frequency tables to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying.

The researchers decided to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying in terms of the definition:

> those *repeated actions and practices* that are directed to one or more workers, which are all unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offence, and distress, and that may interfere with job performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment. (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006, p. 14)

The layman's interpretation of workplace bullying suggests that bullying behaviour is a consistent, concrete action directed towards a person. It need not consist of a combination of behaviours, as frequent subjection to one type of bullying behaviour, like verbal abuse, creates the experience of workplace bullying. Therefore, the researchers used frequency tables to determine the percentage of the participants who answered *always* or *often* to any of the workplace bullying questions, even if the test item implied only one type of bullying behaviour. If participants indicated that they *always* or *often* experienced any of the described behaviours, it would constitute frequent bullying behaviour.

In order to compare groups within SOC and diversity experiences, the researchers performed a median split on each of the two groups. This divided SOC into higher and lower groups and diversity experiences into positive and negative groups. They decided that median splits would be the most appropriate for the study because this is common practice when one uses analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to analyse statistical data (Aiken & West, 1991).

The researchers used MANOVA to determine the significance of the differences between the levels of bullying in the different socio-demographic groups, sense of coherence and diversity experiences. MANOVA is at its best when the assumptions are met and when there is a substantial correlation between the dependent variables (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). MANOVA is the counterpart of ANOVA methods. It covers cases where there is more than one dependent variable and where one cannot simply combine the dependent variables. One also uses it to identify whether changes in the independent variables have a significant effect on the dependent variables.

The researchers used Wilk's lambda to test the likelihood that the population mean vectors are equal for all groups against the likelihood that the population mean vectors are identical to those of the sample mean vectors for the different groups.

When an effect was significant in MANOVA, the researchers used ANOVA to discover which dependent variables had been affected. ANOVA reflects the expression of the hypothesis tests of interests in terms of variance estimates (Muller & Fetterman, 2002).

The researchers made a Bonferroni-type adjustment for inflated Type 1 errors. They used the Games-Howell procedure to determine whether there are statistically differences between the groups (Field, 2009).

Results

Table 2 gives the descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations between the dimensions.

Table 2 shows that there were acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients for all the scales. All the coefficients were higher than the guideline of $\alpha > .70$ (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). All the scales also had statistically significant relationships. Sense of coherence was the only scale that had a negative correlation with bullying.

The researchers then reported the prevalence of bullying. In order to provide a more detail description of the different types of bullying, they divided the scales into the categories that follow:
- *overall bullying*, which includes all four dimensions of workplace bullying (direct and indirect bullying by supervisors, direct and indirect bullying by colleagues) in order to gain a global perspective of the current prevalence of workplace bullying in South Africa

TABLE 2: Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha coefficients and correlations of the South African Employee Health and Wellness Survey.

Item	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5
Direct bullying by supervisors	10.73	4.06	.91	–	–	–	–	–
Indirect bullying by supervisors	5.72	2.44	.87	.79*	–	–	–	–
Direct bullying by colleagues	4.84	1.57	.89	.46*	.56*	–	–	–
Direct bullying by colleagues	9.77	3.51	.88	.51*	.55*	.72*	–	–
Sense of coherence	59.62	13.07	.83	-.37*	-.35*	-.27*	-.37*	–
Diversity experiences	16.67	3.36	.70	.31*	.32*	.23*	.28*	-.24*

SD, standard deviation; α, alpha.
*, Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

- *direct bullying*, which includes direct bullying by supervisors and colleagues, to determine the prevalence of direct workplace bullying behaviour
- *indirect bullying*, which includes indirect bullying by supervisors and colleagues, to determine the prevalence of indirect workplace bullying behaviour
- *bullying by supervisors* (direct and indirect) to determine the prevalence of supervisor-related workplace bullying behaviour
- *bullying by colleagues* (direct and indirect) to determine the prevalence of colleague-related workplace bullying behaviour.

The researchers also showed the prevalence of the four bullying dimensions separately. Table 3 gives the results.

It seems that people experience frequent overall bullying (4% reported being bullied often whilst 31.1% reported being bullied always). The results also show that direct bullying was more prevalent than indirect bullying was (28.4% reported being bullied directly compared to the 23.8% who reported being bullied indirectly). Bullying by supervisors was more prevalent than bullying by colleagues was (30.5% reported being bullied by their supervisors compared to the 15.7% who reported being bullied by their colleagues). The results showed that direct bullying tactics by supervisors were more prevalent than indirect tactics were (26.7% reported direct bullying by their supervisors compared to the 17% who reported indirect bullying by supervisors). Finally, indirect bullying by colleagues was more prevalent than direct bullying by colleagues was (14.1% reported being bullied indirectly by colleagues compared to the 6.1% who reported being bullied directly by their colleagues).

The researchers then used MANOVAs to determine the differences between socio-demographical groups, SOC and diversity experiences with regard to bullying.

Table 4 gives the results.

In an analysis of Wilk's lambda values, the researchers found statistically significant differences ($p \leq .05$) for the bullying dimensions for all the variables. They analysed the relationships between the variables further using ANOVA. Because of different sample sizes, they used the Games-Howell procedure to determine whether the differences were statistically significant. They labelled the groups a, b, c, et cetera in order to see more easily which groups differed significantly. They displayed the labels (a, b, c, etc.) of the groups that differed significantly from a particular group next to their means. Table 5 gives the results of the ANOVA based on race.

Table 5 shows that there were statistically significant differences between the race groups on all four bullying dimensions. It seems that Blacks experienced a higher level of workplace bullying compared to the other race groups on all four dimensions of workplace bullying. These results do not support hypothesis 1. Therefore, the researchers rejected it. Table 6 gives the results of the ANOVA based on gender.

TABLE 3: Prevalence of workplace bullying.

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Overall bullying	Often	526	4.0
	Always	4353	31.1
Direct bullying	Often	2845	20.5
	Always	1105	7.9
Indirect bullying	Often	2271	16.3
	Always	1043	7.5
Bullying by supervisors	Often	2920	20.9
	Always	1338	9.6
Bullying by colleagues	Often	1595	11.5
	Always	586	4.2
Direct bullying by supervisors	Often	2699	19.4
	Always	1019	7.3
Indirect bullying by supervisors	Often	1590	11.4
	Always	810	5.6
Direct bullying by colleagues	Often	629	4.5
	Always	222	1.6
Indirect bullying by colleagues	Often	1463	10.5
	Always	498	3.6

TABLE 4: Multivariate analysis of variance – differences in bullying levels based on socio-demographic characteristics, sense of coherence and diversity.

Variable	Value	F	df	p	Partial Eta squared
Race	.97	19.98	16	.00*	.01
Gender	.99	41.85	4	.00*	.01
Age	.99	4.29	20	.00*	.00
Education	.97	12.02	36	.00*	.01
Industry	.98	9.59	24	.00*	.00
Sense of coherence	.84	549.32	4	.00*	.13
Diversity experiences	.92	290.02	4	.00*	.08

F, frequency; *df*, degrees of freedom; *p*, probability value.
*, $p \leq .05$

According to Table 6, men and women experience statistically significant differences (men scored higher than women did) on all the bullying dimensions, except when the bullying is indirect and comes from colleagues ($p > .05$). Therefore, the researchers rejected hypothesis 2. Table 7 gives the results of the ANOVA based on age.

Table 7 shows that the 20–29 age group experienced the highest levels of bullying on all four dimensions. It is clear that older employees experience statistically significant lower levels of bullying on all four dimensions. Therefore, the researchers accepted the third hypothesis. Table 8 gives the results of the ANOVA based on education.

After the researchers had analysed the data for the differences in education, the Wilk's lambda values showed that there is a statistically significant difference between employees with secondary and tertiary levels of education. Participants with secondary education experienced statistically significantly higher levels of bullying on all four bullying-dimensions. These results confirmed the fourth hypothesis. Table 9 gives the results of the ANOVA based on industry.

According to Table 9, the researchers only found statistically significant differences between sectors for direct bullying (by supervisors and colleagues). It seems that the highest levels of direct bullying by supervisors were in government,

TABLE 5: Analysis of variance – differences in workplace bullying dimensions based on race.

Variable	Black	White	Coloured	Indian	p	Partial Eta squared
Direct bullying by supervisors	11.39[b,d]	10.38[a]	10.33[a]	9.71[a]	.00*	.02
Indirect bullying by supervisors	6.20[b,c,d]	5.35[a]	5.47[a]	5.35[a]	.00*	.03
Direct bullying by colleagues	5.05[b,d]	4.76[a]	4.75	4.66[a]	.00*	.01
Indirect bullying by colleagues	10.23[b,d]	9.40[a]	9.68	9.13[a]	.00*	.02

p, probability value.
[a,b,c,d], means with different superscripts differ significantly at $p \leq .05$.
*, $p \leq .05$

followed by the mining industry. These two sectors differed statistically from the financial, manufacturing and academic sectors. The researchers discovered that direct bullying by colleagues was the highest in the mining and manufacturing industries. The results partly confirmed the fifth hypothesis. Table 10 gives the results of the ANOVA based on SOC.

The results in Table 10 confirm that participants with a lower SOC reported statistically significantly higher levels on all of the bullying dimensions ($p \leq .05$). All dimensions reported an effect size of medium to large. The results supported the seventh hypothesis because employees with a higher SOC will experience lower levels of bullying than employees with a lower SOC will. Table 11 gives the results of the ANOVA based on diversity experiences.

According to Table 11, the researchers found statistically significant differences on all four bullying dimensions with regard to diversity experiences ($p \leq .05$). The effect sizes range from medium to large. This suggests large differences between the groups (specifically for direct and indirect bullying by colleagues). Therefore, the results support the seventh hypothesis.

Ethical considerations

The researchers executed the project according to fair and ethical standards. They considered issues like voluntary participation, informed consent, doing no harm, confidentiality and privacy. They also subjected the project to the approval of an ethics committee of the university.

The researchers did not identify any potential risks to participants because participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous.

The researchers explained the purpose of this study to all participants and obtained their informed consent before the participants completed the questionnaire.

Discussion

The objectives of this research were to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying in South Africa and whether there are

TABLE 6: Analysis of variance – differences in workplace bullying based on gender.

Variable	Men	Women	p	Partial Eta squared
Direct bullying by supervisors	10.90	10.39	.00*	.00
Indirect bullying by supervisors	5.79	5.58	.00*	.00
Direct bullying by colleagues	4.91	4.71	.00*	.00
Indirect bullying by colleagues	9.75	9.79	.47	.00

p, probability value.
*, $p \leq .05$

differences in how employees experience bullying according to their socio-demographic characteristics, SOC and diversity experiences. Socio-demographic characteristics include race, gender, age, education and industry.

Dimensions of workplace bullying

Because research in South Africa on workplace bullying is scarce, this study adds to the research on this topic and aims to create awareness amongst employers and employees. To determine the prevalence of workplace bullying, the researchers decided to divide workplace bullying into the dimensions that follow:

- overall bullying
- direct bullying
- indirect bullying
- bullying by supervisors or colleagues
- direct bullying by supervisors
- indirect bullying by supervisors
- direct bullying by colleagues
- indirect bullying by colleagues.

Overall bullying gave an indication of the frequency with which the sample reported any type of workplace bullying behaviour. Direct and indirect bullying separated the sample in terms of reporting specific direct or indirect bullying experiences.

Direct bullying suggests that the victims experience threatening behaviour on an interpersonal level. It includes acts like verbal abuse, belittling remarks and intimidation (Einarsen et al., 2009; Escartin et al., 2009).

Indirect bullying is more subtle but just as damaging because the victim experiences stress on an emotional level (Björkqvist et al., 1992). Behaviour that constitutes indirect bullying includes spreading rumours about colleagues or subordinates, neglecting the workplace conditions of victims and gossiping (Einarsen et al., 2009). The researchers attributed these behaviours to colleagues or supervisors in order to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying that either colleagues or supervisors commit.

This study showed that 31.1% of the sample reported frequent experiences of overall workplace bullying in their organisations. This finding is consistent with previous research that Rayner and Cooper (1997) conducted. They reported that between 7.8% and 50% of their participants had experienced workplace bullying. The implication that 31.1%

TABLE 7: Analysis of variance – differences in workplace bullying based on age.

Variable	Younger than 20	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	Older than 60	p	Partial Eta squared
Direct bullying by supervisors	10.66	10.95[e,f]	10.77[e,f]	10.80[e,f]	10.49[b,c,d]	10.11[b,c,d]	.00*	.00
Indirect bullying by supervisors	5.39[b,c,d]	5.83[a,e,f]	5.77[a,e,f]	5.74[a,e,f]	5.58[b,c,d]	5.40[b,c,d]	.00*	.00
Direct bullying by colleagues	4.95[f]	4.95[c,d,e,f]	4.85[b,e,f]	4.85[b,e,f]	4.78[b,c,d]	4.81[a,b,c,d]	.00*	.00
Indirect bullying by colleagues	9.41[b]	10.04[a,d,e,f]	9.90[f]	9.77[b,e,f]	9.50[b,c,d,f]	8.99[b,c,d,e]	.00*	.04

p, probability value.
[a,b,c,d,e,f], means with different superscripts differ significantly at $p \leq .05$.
*, $p \leq .05$

of the workforce experiences workplace bullying can be devastating to organisations' productivity because workplace bullying decreases the performance of employees, could lead to increases in violent incidents, to more employees who want to leave their jobs and increases in recruiting costs because of vacancies (Mayhew *et al.*, 2004).

Bullying by supervisors and colleagues

The researchers found that direct workplace bullying and bullying by supervisors was more prevalent than indirect bullying and bullying by colleagues. This finding is similar to those of Namie (2003), who stated that more than 71% of workplace bullies outrank their victims. The positions of supervisors could be a reason for the bullying behaviour. It suggests victim-perpetrator structures and could explain why so many supervisors bully their subordinates (Salin, 2003).

According to the 2001 report of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), Ireland (HSA, 2001), bullies abuse the existing power structure because of the professional or personal power they have over their victims. Victims tend to wait for prolonged periods (sometimes up to 22 months) before reporting bullying behaviour. As a result, workplace bullying tends to be underreported and inadequately managed (Namie, 2007). Research also found that bullying by supervisors tends to be more hurtful than bullying by colleagues (Deniz & Ertosun, 2010). This may be because supervisory bullying behaviour tends to be out in the open and in front of other colleagues, is more often of a verbal nature and includes acts like swearing, name-calling and threatening the safety of the victim (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2007).

The researchers' next objective was to determine whether there are significant differences between socio-demographic groups.

TABLE 8: Analysis of variance – differences in workplace bullying based on education.

Variable	Secondary education	Tertiary education	p	Partial Eta squared
Direct bullying by supervisors	11.03	10.04	.00*	.01
Indirect bullying by supervisors	5.86	5.39	.00*	.00
Direct bullying by colleagues	4.97	4.53	.00*	.02
Indirect bullying by colleagues	10.02	9.19	.00*	.01

p, probability value.
*, $p \leq .05$

Race and workplace bullying

The researchers first investigated differences between race groups. The literature suggests that employees from a minority race group should experience higher levels of workplace bullying (Archer, 1999; Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003). However, the results of the current study showed that Black employees, compared to minority groups like White, Coloured and Indian employees, experienced the highest level of workplace bullying.

One could explain the results in terms of a study that Steinman (2003) carried out. She found that the largest ethnic group experienced more violence in the workplace, whereas minority ethnic groups reported a higher incidence of sexual harassment. However, the significance of her findings was that the prevalence was not related to race because the largest ethnic group in the country could well be the smallest in a particular organisation (Steinman, 2003).

Blacks are the largest political and race group. However, compared to other race groups, Blacks remain the economically disadvantaged group in South Africa and the minority ethnic group in organisations. Furthermore, according to the Commission for Employment Equity, White men remain the dominant supervisory group. They make up 54% of top managers and 46% of senior managers (Commission for Employment Equity, 2010).

Gender and workplace bullying

With regard to gender, the researchers found statistical significant differences between the experiences of men and women. Men reported statistically significantly higher levels of workplace bullying than women did, more direct and indirect bullying from supervisors, as well as more direct bullying from colleagues.

These findings contradict those of the studies that Pietersen (2007) and Steinman (2003) conducted. Pietersen (2007) found no statistically significant differences between the genders and Steinman (2003) found that women reported higher levels of workplace bullying than men did.

International research suggests that gender-related experiences of workplace bullying could be country-specific. Cortina *et al.* (2001) found that American women reported more workplace bullying experiences than men did. Niedhammer *et al.* (2007) came to the same conclusion about France, whilst Ólafsson and Jóhannsdóttir (2004) found that men experienced more workplace bullying in Iceland

TABLE 9: Analysis of variance – differences in workplace bullying based on industry.

Variable	Call centres	Financial	Government	Manufacturing	Mining	Tertiary education	p	Partial Eta squared
Direct bullying by supervisors	10.74	10.58[c,e]	11.39[b,d,f]	10.49[c,e]	11.02[b,d,f]	9.72[c,e]	.00*	.01
Indirect bullying by supervisors	5.78	5.73	6.02	5.73	5.69	5.39	.06	.00
Direct bullying by colleagues	4.68	4.77[e]	4.68	4.85	4.92[b]	4.55	.00*	.00
Indirect bullying by colleagues	9.92	9.80	9.75	9.71	9.78	9.08	.23	.00

p, probability value.
[a,b,c,d,e,f], means with different superscripts differ significantly at $p \leq .05$.
*, $p \leq .05$

than women did. Ortega *et al.* (2009) found no significant differences between Danish men and women. Furthermore, Namie (2003) found that the perpetrators of the 62% of American men who experienced bullying were men.

Workplace bullying incidents tend to be same-sex harassment, which laws and employer policies generally ignore (Namie, 2003). Men predominate in management positions in South Africa. They are also the most economically active gender (Commission for Employment Equity, 2010).

One can explain the current findings about gender workplace bullying in the study that Namie (2003) conducted. They found that workplace bullying seems related to the gender of the perpetrators. The Workplace Bullying & Trauma Institute (as cited in Itstime.com, 2005) confirms this. It reported that men bullies tend to use public screaming, verbal tactics, calling people names and threats of job losses as well as all behaviour related to direct workplace bullying. It found that direct workplace bullying was the most prevalent behaviour that supervisors used. Man-on-man bullying accounts for 62% of bullying incidents (Namie, 2003).

Age and workplace bullying

The results confirmed that younger employees experienced higher levels of workplace bullying than their older counterparts did. The results are similar to those that Deniz and Ertosun (2010) found. They found that employees younger than 30 experienced more bullying than their older counterparts did. Einarsen and Rakness (1997) as well as Magerøy *et al.* (2009) support these findings.

One can explain these results in the research that Cortina *et al.* (2001) and Salin (2003) conducted. They found that young entrants to organisations (usually between 20 and 29) have low status in terms of pay and job security. This creates a power imbalance that is conducive to bullying. Relational powerlessness tends to be a core cause for victimisation (Roscigno, Lopez & Hodson, 2009).

Education and workplace bullying

The researchers examined the data to determine whether employees with different levels of education experience different levels of bullying. The results confirmed the hypothesis that employees with a lower education experience higher levels of workplace bullying than do employees with higher levels.

This is consistent with the findings of Niedhammer *et al.* (2007) and Ortega *et al.* (2009), who found that employees with lower skills reported more bullying experiences than did their managers and supervisors. This trend is based on the assumption of occupational categories, where people in low status jobs (like clerks) with low levels of decision-making power had a greater risk of workplace bullying than did their more professional counterparts, like managers (Niedhammer *et al.*, 2007).

Industry and workplace bullying

The results showed that employees in mining, manufacturing and government are most likely to experience direct workplace bullying. The results confirm the findings of international studies that workplace bullying prevails in most industries. However, it varies in the types of bullying behaviour that manifest in organisations (Escartin *et al.*, 2009; Magerøy *et al.*, 2009; Niedhammer *et al.*, 2007).

The literature suggests that bullying is more prevalent in large organisations, which men dominate, and which practise a bureaucratic leadership style where the lack of social support is the main cause of workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000; HSA, 2001). Studies that Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) carried out confirmed that men tend to be the main culprits of workplace bullying. According to Statistics South Africa (2011), the manufacturing industry employs approximately 1.3 million people in South Africa. This makes it the second largest industry in the country. Men employees account for

TABLE 10: Analysis of variance – differences in workplace bullying based on sense of coherence.

Variable	Low SOC	High SOC	p	Partial Eta squared
Direct bullying by supervisors	11.99	9.41	.00*	.10
Indirect bullying by supervisors	6.44	4.96	.00*	.09
Direct bullying by colleagues	5.23	4.44	.00*	.06
Indirect bullying by colleagues	10.67	8.62	.00*	.10

p, probability value.
SOC, sense of coherence.
*, $p \leq .05$

TABLE 11: Analysis of variance – differences in workplace bullying based on diversity experience.

Variable	Negative	Positive	p	Partial Eta squared
Direct bullying by supervisors	11.50	9.49	.00*	.06
Indirect bullying by supervisors	6.17	4.99	.00*	.06
Direct bullying by colleagues	5.09	4.45	.00*	.39
Indirect bullying by colleagues	10.42	8.72	.00*	.56

p, probability value.
*, $p \leq .05$

79% of the workforce (Commission for Employment Equity, 2010). In the mining industry, men workers outnumber women employees by 8:1 (Commission for Employment Equity, 2010).

Sense of coherence and workplace bullying

Previous studies have aimed at determining whether personality characteristics play a role in identifying victims (Glasø *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, this study investigated the resiliency-factor of sense of coherence and aimed to determine whether employees with a higher SOC would report lower levels of workplace bullying.

Consistent with arguments in the current literature, the findings confirmed that employees with a higher SOC reported lower levels of workplace bullying than those with a lower SOC did. One can argue that SOC influences employees' emotional responses to stress because SOC is a mechanism to cope with stressful situations (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1985; Du Toit, 2002).

Prolonged exposure to workplace bullying creates stressful situations. They could lead to employees becoming more worried, distraught and anxious (Glasø *et al.*, 2007). Research that Antonovsky and Sagy (1985) conducted supports this finding. People with a higher SOC had lower anxiety traits, thereby confirming that people with a higher SOC view the world with its stimuli as predictable, manageable and meaningful. They have the personality disposition to react with less anxiety in the face of stressful situations.

This is also consistent with previous research, which shows that people with low SOC tend to have difficulty in adapting to change and tend to view the world in more negative, and ultimately stressful, ways (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006). SOC also tends to influence thinking styles.

Lustig and Strauser (2002) found that a higher SOC relates to thinking that is more functional. Therefore, it seems that people with a high or strong SOC react to stressful situations in rational and emotionally stable ways. Strümpher (1990) suggests that, if one modifies employees' SOC, they can strengthen their self-concepts, accelerate their personal growth and create opportunities for change. Therefore, employees with high SOC seem able to cope better with the negative and stressful consequences of workplace bullying. This is consistent with other findings on SOC – employees with strong SOC cope better with secondary trauma (Ortlepp & Friedman, 2001), are less likely to experience burn out (Levert, Lucas & Ortlepp, 2000) and are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs (Pretorius & Rothmann, 2001).

Bullying and diversity experience

Because national labour legislation is forcing changes to the South African work environment, organisations are becoming more diverse than ever. For the purpose of this study, the researchers measured diversity experiences in terms of racial or ethnic discrimination (negative diversity experiences) and appreciation of racial or ethnic diversity (positive diversity experiences) (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006). Discrimination, prejudice, understanding, respect and socialisation across groups were the constructs the researchers used to determine the participants' diversity experiences.

Consistent with previous findings (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Greenberg, 2004; Spataro, 2002), this study showed that employees with positive diversity experiences reported lower levels of workplace bullying. The behaviour of members in diverse workgroups depends on their diversity experiences. They result either in a pool of resources or in conflict that tears employees apart (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Greenberg, 2004; Spataro, 2002). Consequently, employees who report negative diversity experiences have more experiences of workplace bullying.

According to the social identity theory, group members attempt to establish a positive social identity. However, discrimination and prejudice tend to disrupt group interaction (Jehn *et al.*, 1999). Heames *et al.* (2006) suggest that, if employees' diversity characteristics like gender, values, ethnicity and age are similar to those of the rest of the members of workgroups or organisations, and that individual feelings of satisfaction lead to functional group behaviour, they will ultimately lead to group performances that have positive effects on job satisfaction and group cohesiveness. They argue that employees who experience diversity positively are more likely to show appreciative behaviour towards their colleagues and reduce the incidence of the negative acts that constitute bullying behaviour.

Organisations that reinforce positive behaviour, trust-building and group identity create effective teams and reduce this behaviour (Einarsen, Rakness & Matthiesen, 1994). When organisations encourage diversity management, they motivate employees to perform to the best of their abilities. This results in the effective implementation of policies, higher productivity and returns on investment (Greenberg, 2004). This finding has certain implications for managers because diverse workgroups are becoming more prevalent because of the changing workforce in South African organisations.

Statistical significance of the findings

The findings on socio-demographic differences were statistically significant. However, the partial Eta squared values were small. Therefore, one must consider the practical significance of the results (Thompson, 1994). The implications are that, although the mean differences of the socio-demographic sampling groups are valid and statistically significant, it is questionable whether the effect sizes could really be useful to practitioners. For the purpose of this study, the researchers calculated the partial Eta squared cut off points for practical significance at .10 (small), .30 (medium) and .50 (large). MANOVA showed that none

of the socio-demographic characteristics reported a cut off point of .01 (see Table 4).

Unlike the differences in socio-demographic characteristics, the findings on SOC seemed to be practically significant (partial Eta squared = .13). This suggests that employees with higher SOC tend to be more resistant to workplace bullying. Researchers and practitioners should note this finding.

The findings also showed that workplace bullying by colleagues had the largest effect on diversity experiences (partial Eta squared = .39). The practical significance of this finding is the highest of all the findings in this study (medium effect). This shows that negative diversity experiences in South African organisations could account for experiences of workplace bullying.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a relatively large percentage of the participants reported that they had experienced workplace bullying. The researchers found significant differences for race, gender, age, education and industry groups. Participants with higher levels of SOC experience lower levels of workplace bullying and participants who reported positive diversity experiences in their organisations experienced lower levels of workplace bullying.

Possible limitations of the study

The main limitation of this study is the use of self-report measures. According to Razavi (2001), using self-report measures of dependent and independent variables can create concerns about the validity of casual conclusions because participants either over- or under-emphasise problems. This makes it difficult to distinguish the measurement artefacts (Hufnagel & Conca, 1994). This is 'common method variance' or 'nuisance'. The severity of this phenomenon is still under discussion because Spector (1987) found little evidence of common method variance in self-reporting measures. Crampton and Wagner (1994) conducted a meta-analysis and found that, even though self-reporting measures caused bias in some instances, method effects do not have the serious and pervasive consequence that critics originally aired. It is also important to bear in mind that few other methodologies offer to deal with important sources of accurate information about employees' unique work situations (Frese & Zapf, 1999).

One can consider other objective measures. The ratings of most observers appear to be good alternatives. However, they present problems of their own (like observer bias, halo and stereotyping effects).

Using cross-sectional data prevents strong inferences about changes over time. The researchers suggest a longitudinal study on workplace bullying in order to capture the development of workplace bullying in South Africa over time.

Recommendations and implications for managers

Research on workplace bullying in South Africa is still in its infancy. Research on this phenomenon emerged only in 1998, as Marais-Steinman (Pietersen, 2007) reported. One can argue that it is necessary to create an awareness of workplace bullying through national legislation. Although Section 6 of the Employment Equity Act protects employees from *harassment,* it seems that employees without knowledge of labour law or the effects of workplace bullying are unable to distinguish it from workplace bullying. Therefore, they are unaware that they can report this behaviour to managers.

Managers in organisations should investigate and address the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Workplace bullying costs organisations money (Giga *et al.*, 2008; Harbison, 2004) and employers could be held liable for employees' safety and for not protecting them from harassment (Namie, 2003).

This study has identified workplace bullying as a prevalent problem in the South African organisations the researchers included in the study. Therefore, it is increasingly important for employers to be educated on the manifestations and effects of workplace bullying in order to combat this phenomenon effectively. Furthermore, it is important for organisations to realise that workplace bullying can lead to absenteeism and high staff turnover (Djurkovic *et al.*, 2008).

Organisations need policies to regulate workplace conduct because it is clear that supervisors tend to be the perpetrators of workplace bullying. This makes it difficult for employees to stand up to them if there is no formal platform available. Steinman (2003) found that 50.6% of participants were unaware of any policies that manage workplace violence. Therefore, policies need to clearly identify the teams and staff members who drive the programmes as well as the reporting structures to enable employees to report on bullying (Steinman, 2003).

This study and previous literature emphasise the implications of a poor psychosocial work environment, organisational chaos, role conflict and poor management. They all create an ideal environment in which the workplace bully can thrive. By encouraging workplace diversity, inspiring and motivating employees to foster a culture of regard will go a long way to combating workplace bullying (Olender-Russo, 2009). Organisational indicators like 'transparency' (we will address bullying behaviour and not sweep it under the rug), 'accountability' (bullying-behaviour will have negative ramifications for the perpetrator) and 'capacity' (to motivate and control employees' behaviour through rules and standards) will go a long way toward creating working environments where bullying is less prevalent (Hodson *et al.*, 2006). It might be worth investigating whether factors outside of the organisations influence diversity experiences in them and their effects on the occurrence of workplace bullying, especially when one considers aspects like national legislation and the political environment.

With regard to future research, longitudinal studies on the prevalence of workplace bullying in South Africa should add further insight into the phenomenon. Longitudinal studies will yield better measurements of the prevalence of workplace bullying. This should control for single negative acts that one could interpret as bullying during a cross-sectional study.

Findings on the experiences of workplace bullying on socio-demographic groups showed that Black employees, men and employees of a younger age and lower education reported higher levels of workplace bullying. Researchers should conduct further research into racial tensions, especially into the finding that Black people experience more workplace bullying than other racial groups do. Studies should also investigate the relationship between youth, skills and the reasons for workplace bullying in certain sectors.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them when they wrote this paper.

Authors' contributions

L.C. (North-West University) wrote the manuscript as part of her master's dissertation. K.M. (North-West University) was the project leader and was responsible for the experimental and project design. K.M. (North-West University) supervised the writing of the article and assisted with interpreting the results.

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