

Exploring Personal and Organizational Determinants of Workplace Bullying and Its Prevalence in a Japanese Sample

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Objective: The purpose of this study is twofold. First, we examine the prevalence rate of workplace bullying among employees in Japan. Second, we explore antecedents of bullying exposure at work in this population. **Method:** 699 employees recruited in 5 labor unions in the Tokyo area (Japan) voluntarily participated in this questionnaire-based study. We provided participants with a definition of bullying and asked them to indicate whether or not they have been bullied during the last six months according to this definition (self-labeling method). We also asked participants to complete items about a number of personal (e.g., gender, individual tendencies toward depression) and organizational (e.g., team cohesion, supervisor's support) variables. **Results:** The prevalence rate of workplace bullying was 15%. Regression analyses revealed that female workers reported higher levels of perceptions of being bullied than male workers. Additionally, depression was positively associated with perceptions of being bullied, whereas team cohesion, supervisor's support, and an innovation-oriented climate were negatively associated with being bullied. **Conclusions:** The present study demonstrates the importance of considering individual differences as predictors of bullying and, in particular, suggests that mental health promotion might play a role in bullying prevention. In addition, findings indicate that organizational interventions for workplace bullying may benefit from introducing elements aimed at improving group cohesion and organizational climate.

Keywords: workplace bullying, negative acts, harassment at work, mobbing, depression

Bullying at work reflects a gradual process wherein an individual is subjected to indirect and subtle forms of psychological violence (also referred as negative acts) in a systematic way (e.g., on a weekly or daily basis) and over a prolonged period of time (e.g., at least six

months). Individuals exposed to such behaviors tend to experience considerable distress and therefore are likely to leave the organization in which the bullying situation has occurred (e.g., Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011). As a result, a considerable number of studies on

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workplace bullying have been conducted since Leymann's initial reports of the detrimental consequences of this phenomenon in Sweden during the 1980s and 1990s (see Leymann, 1990, 1996).

However, this extensive research has been primarily conducted in Northern Europe and the United States. As a result, limited empirical evidence exists on bullying taking place in other cultural contexts. In order to address this limitation, the current study aims to replicate and extend prior findings in the context of Japanese organizations. In doing so, we focus on both (a) the measurement strategies for estimating the prevalence rate of workplace bullying and (b) the exploration of individual and organizational characteristics associated with the experience of workplace bullying. These findings have important theoretical and practical implications, as they provide an indication of whether antibullying interventions and policies based on previous research evidence in other countries would also be applicable in Japan.

Workplace Bullying Measurement

Researchers have primarily taken a behavioral approach to measuring workplace bullying in which workplace bullying is operationalized as several unwanted behaviors of psychological nature (social negative acts) that individual engages in order to force another individual into leaving the organization (Leymann, 1990, 1996; Nielsen, Notelaers, & Einarsen, 2011). Researchers have distinguished between two-related forms of workplace bullying behaviors: (a) *work-related bullying*, which includes behaviors such as having imposed unreasonable deadlines, being exposed to an unmanageable workload, having excessive monitoring, and experiencing that crucial information is being withheld; and (b) *personal bullying*, described as exposure to behaviors such as gossip, insulting remarks, excessive teasing, and persistent criticism (e.g., Nielsen et al., 2009).

Different questionnaires have been developed according to this behavioral approach; however, the *Negative Acts Questionnaire—Revised* (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009) appears to be the most widely used. Nevertheless, this questionnaire is not a diagnosis tool and simply asks participants to indicate the frequency they are exposed to negative acts

(usually ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *daily*) without offering a cut-off score point for identifying whether or not a person has been bullied. This is problematic because different response patterns may lead to the same total score (e.g., a person with intermediate scores in all items and a person with both a very high score in some items and a very low score in others). Thus, scholars have opted for using an operative criterion of being exposed to a certain number of negative acts (e.g., one or two) in a persistent and systematic way (e.g., weekly or daily) in order to label a person as a victim of bullying at work (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2009; Leymann, 1996; Nielsen et al., 2009; 2011).

The limited studies that have been conducted on bullying in Japan have adapted different operative criteria to this behavioral approach (NAQ-R). Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a considerable disparity in the prevalence rates of workplace bullying they have reported. For instance, Takaki et al. (2010) found that 15.5% of the 517 manufacturing workers that participated in their study were bullied according to the criteria of being exposed to one negative act in a weekly or daily basis, whereas the prevalence was reduced to 7.7% when they used a more restrictive criteria of being exposed to at least two negative acts. In addition, Tsuno, Kawakami, Inoue, and Abe (2010) revealed a workplace bullying prevalence of 9% when they applied the "one-act criteria" to the responses of 1,626 civil servants to the NAQ-R, whereas Abe (2007) indicated 16% of bullying cases using both the same criteria and questionnaire in a sample composed by 946 nurses. In contrast, Asakura, Ando, and Giorgi (2008) found that the prevalence of workplace bullying in a multioccupational sample of 715 employees was 14% using the "two-act criteria."

Given these findings and the lack of consensus about the criteria for identifying victims of workplace bullying, we opted to estimate the prevalence of workplace bullying by using the called "self-labeling" approach (see Nielsen et al., 2011), which focuses on the individual's perception of being bullied by providing participants with a precise definition of bullying and asking the extent to which they were exposed to workplace bullying over a period of time (e.g., Nielsen et al., 2009; 2011). We are only aware of two studies taking place in Japan that have used this estimation method; these studies have

reported a bullying prevalence between 6% and 10% (see Abe, 2007; Tsuno et al., 2010).

Although both methods of assessing bullying have their strengths and limitations, the self-labeling approach appears to be better indicated to assess the subjective experience of being bullied, which has been at the heart of the bullying construct as what may be experienced as bullying by one person may not be perceived in the same manner by another (Hoel, Faragher, & Cooper, 2004; Nielsen et al., 2011). In other words, what is fundamental in the bullying domain, at least as far as predicting outcomes is concerned, is the victim's *perception* of being bullied rather than the objective evidence of the phenomenon. Accordingly, a recent study has found that self-labeling a situation as bullying partly mediates the relationship between exposure to social negative acts and health, providing evidence that the perception of bullying plays a crucial role in the association between the bullying experience and health consequences (Vie, Glaso, & Einarsen, 2011).

In addition, the nature of the behaviors involved in bullying situations may be different in Japan than in other countries (Abe & Henly, 2010; Asakura et al., 2008; Giorgi, Asakura, & Ando, 2008; Takaki et al., 2010; Tsuno et al., 2010), suggesting that there may be bias in the behavioral approach and that questionnaires like the NAQ-R would need to be adapted rather than simply translated. This idea is supported by evidence that the dimensionality of the NAQ-R in its Japanese version did not converge on the two-factor structure that distinguishes between personal bullying (behaviors directed to personal derogation, intimidation and social exclusion) and work-related bullying (behaviors directed to professional discredit and devaluation). For example, Asakura et al. (2008) found that professional discredit characterized by having responsibilities removed, work below competence assigned, and efforts devalued is considered a "personal attack" that seems to play a crucial role in the bullying genesis in Japan. These behaviors also composed factors labeled as "undervaluation" (Abe & Henly, 2010) and "occupational devaluation" (Tsuno et al., 2010) in respective studies on the NAQ-R in Japan. This professional discredit/devaluation is perceived quite negatively in collectivist cultures since it implies less social recognition and is "a sign of social exclusion from the workplace"

(Tsuno et al., 2010, p. 223). Therefore, it may be concluded that bullying perceptions are different among Japanese employees in comparison with employees from other cultures. Furthermore, more aggressive behaviors such as intimidation and physical bullying are rarely reported in Japanese samples, while behaviors related to work overload or demanding productivity may be used as a managerial practice (Abe & Henly, 2010), suggesting that these behaviors may be seen as part of related but distinct concepts than workplace bullying.

A final concern is that although "a behavioral approach is considered to provide a more objective estimate of exposure to bullying behaviors than self-labeling approaches, as respondents' need for cognitive and emotional processing of information would be reduced" (Einarsen et al., 2009, p. 27). Tsuno et al. (2010, p. 224) indicated that "some participants wrote they could not complete the questionnaire because the items of the NAQ-R reminded them of a past unhappy experience." Hence, we opted for estimating the prevalence of workplace bullying in a Japanese sample by using a measure of bullying based on the perception of the employees (self-labeling approach), which is more consistent with the conceptualization of workplace bullying as a subjective phenomenon (Einarsen et al., 2011; Nielsen et al., 2011).

Antecedents of Workplace Bullying

An understanding of the factors involved in bullying situations is important for ultimately developing effective strategies to prevent and counteract the negative effects of workplace bullying. As a result, previous research has specifically focused on the organizational antecedents of bullying at work (e.g., Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Topa-Cantisano, Depolo, & Morales, 2007). However, beyond working conditions (e.g., workload), which are considered to be important sources of strain and frustration that may facilitate bullying situations by promoting conflict escalation and negatively influencing interpersonal relations (e.g., Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2009; Notelaers, De Witte, & Einarsen, 2010), we pay attention to factors that are more related to group dynamics. For example, social support perceived from co-

workers and supervisors is associated with less bullying behaviors presumably because this reflects a positive organizational or team climate that promotes collaboration between employees (e.g., Giorgi, Arenas, & Leon-Perez, 2011; Parzefall & Salin, 2010). Moreover, in Japan, organizational or group conformity to informal rules and traditions may result in a lack of support for and social isolation of victims and thereby exacerbate the experience of bullying (Bhagat & Steers, 2009; Tsuno et al., 2010).

In addition, we also focus on individual characteristics that have been less comprehensively studied in comparison to organizational factors but may play an important role in perceptions of bullying (Bowling, Beehr, Bennett, & Watson, 2010). We focused on individual characteristics that may be related to the victim's perception of being unable to cope with the negative acts, given that these perceptions are central to some definitions of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2011). For example, individuals with depressive tendencies (e.g., hopelessness, irritability, distress) may be more likely to perceive, and suffer from, victimization than are others when facing aggression or harassment (Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004). Thus, depression is usually found to be a consistent correlate of self-reported exposure to bullying (e.g., Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001). Along these lines, results from a recent longitudinal study among Norwegian workers indicated that psychological distress predicts both higher exposure to negative acts and greater perceptions of victimization from bullying (Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2012).

Finally, job-related and demographic factors may be related to the experience of bullying. First, Hoel et al. (2001) found that hierarchical level or job status may influence bullying. Particularly, supervisors have been shown to be the most frequent perpetrators of bullying and their repeated negative acts have proved to have strong direct health effects on their subordinates (Tepper et al., 2009; Hershcovis, 2011). Second, gender differences have recently received increasing research attention in the workplace bullying domain. Some studies have provided support for the idea that women who perceived themselves as bullying victims experienced higher levels of anxiety and reported more psychosomatic complaints than men (Salin, 2011; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996). Perhaps, power

and gender roles, particularly among female workers are important in the bullying process (Lewis & Orford, 2005), making females more likely to be bullied due to the "glass ceiling" phenomenon (Hoel et al., 2001). However, more research is needed to examine the relationship between gender and bullying since conflicting findings have been reported: Some studies have reported that women are more frequently bullied than men at work (e.g., Vartia & Hyyti, 2002), whereas other studies have not found gender differences (e.g., Giorgi, 2009). Finally, the relationship between marital status and health has been widely explored in the occupational health psychology, but it has been rarely studied in connection with workplace bullying. It is assumed that married adults are generally healthier than unmarried adults because marriage provides social, financial, and psychological resources (Kessler & Essex, 1982). According to Asakura et al. (2008), such an assumption seems to apply in the case of workplace bullying since marriage might provide resources for seeking social support, coping with negative acts and maintaining integrity but also marriage confers social respectability in Japan, thus bullying against unmarried people might be more acceptable in this country.

Study Aims

In order to contribute to the literature on workplace bullying in Japan, the present study first aims to assess the prevalence of bullying in a sample of Japanese employees by providing respondents with definition of the concept of bullying and asking them whether or not they felt that they have been exposed to workplace bullying.

A second aim of this study is to identify potential antecedents of workplace bullying by using hierarchical regression analysis. Consistent with the arguments presented above, we propose that workplace bullying will be positively associated with individual characteristics like depression tendency and particular demographics (gender, job status, and marital status), whereas workplace bullying will be negatively associated with team cohesion, supervisor's support, and the various climate dimensions we describe.

Method

Participants

Five of 10 unions contacted in the Tokyo metropolitan area between 2006 and 2007 agreed to voluntarily participate in the study: Tokyo Management Union (TMU), All Japan Federation of Transport Workers' Unions, All-Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers Union (JICHIRO), Tokyo Network Union, and Women's Tokyo Union.

With the cooperation of these unions, researchers randomly selected the participants through the unions' members list by using the following randomizer function in Excel: "= $\text{Randbetween}(1,x)$ " where x was the total number of members in the list. Then, we ordered the list using the random number assigned to each member and we invited approximately the first 1,000 members to participate in this study without receiving any incentive or form of payment.

A total of 715 employees from different occupations completed the questionnaires (response rate = 71%). However, questionnaires with missing data in excess of 5% were excluded, leaving a final dataset of 699 participants. Of these participants, 208 were women (29.76%) and 491 men (70.24%). The participants averaged 43 years in age and had an average of 16 years of work experience. 66.9% of employees were married, whereas the remained 33.1% were unmarried or divorced. The sample included 21.3% white-collar employees and 78.7% blue-collar employees.

Procedure

Data were collected by means of an anonymous self-report questionnaire. The variables used in the current study are part of a larger survey on working conditions applied in 2008. Particularly, we consider participants' responses to demographic variables, a scale of depression, a question on bullying at work, and a short measure of organizational climate. After consent was obtained from each labor union, the labor unions' officers invited workers to voluntarily participate in this study. Both researchers and union officers collected the questionnaires.

Measures

The measures written in English and Italian were translated into Japanese. Another translator back-translated the instruments into English or Italian. The retranslated versions and the original versions were then compared. Because no discrepancies were found, we included the following measures in the present study:

Workplace bullying. This measure was assessed according to the self-labeling approach. A definition of bullying at work was introduced to respondents, who then indicated whether or not they consider themselves as victims of bullying at work according to this definition as well as the frequency with which they experienced being bullied at work (response choices included: 1 = *no, never*; 2 = *yes, rarely*; 3 = *yes, now and then*; 4 = *yes, weekly*; and 5 = *yes, daily*). Bullying was defined as "A situation where one or several individuals persistently over a period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of bullying has difficulty in defending him/herself against these actions. A one-off incident is not bullying." This single question has been shown to be a valid measure of exposure to bullying at work (Nielsen et al., 2009).

Depression. The Center for Epidemiologic Study for Depression (CES-D) scale was used to measure this variable. This scale assesses levels of depression by using 20 items with a 5-point Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). It has been normed successfully for Japanese populations (e.g., Wada et al., 2007). In the present study, its internal consistency was satisfactory ($\alpha = .85$). Higher scores reflect higher levels of depression.

Organizational climate. Five dimensions from the Majer D'Amato Organizational Questionnaire 10 (MDOQ10: D'Amato & Majer, 2005) were used as organizational antecedents of workplace bullying. The validity of these dimensions has been confirmed in the Japanese version (Ando, Asakura, & Giorgi, 2009). Although two dimensions of this climate measure (job description, dynamism) did not reach a preferred Cronbach's alpha of .70, values over .60 are generally considered acceptable for correlational studies like the current one (e.g., Aron & Aron, 2003; George & Mallery, 2003). The

MDOQ10 uses a 5-point Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (*false*) to 5 (*truth*), with higher scores indicating perceptions of organizational climate (i.e., higher levels of team climate, awareness of roles, support, and so forth). In line with previous research on the relationship between climate and bullying (Giorgi, 2009), participants responded to the following scales:

Team climate. This scale was comprised of 4 items that assessed the cohesion of the group and the social support from the coworkers (e.g., “There is a mutual understanding among colleagues.”). The internal consistency of the scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .87$).

Job description. This scale was comprised of 4 items that assessed employees’ awareness of their roles (e.g., “I am fully clear what my duties and responsibilities are.”). The internal consistency of the scale was .67 according to Cronbach’s alpha.

Leadership climate/supervisors’ support. This scale was comprised of 5 items measuring the extent to which employees experience support from their supervisors (e.g., “My supervisors are not interested in my professional development.”). The internal consistency of the scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .83$).

Innovation climate. This scale was comprised of 4 items measuring the extent of encouragement for innovative approaches (e.g., “Employees’ autonomy and creativity are positively evaluated.”). The internal consistency of the scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .71$).

Dynamism. This scale was comprised of 4 items that assessed the extent of interdepartmental trust and cooperation and the concern with developing employees (e.g., “In my company slow and heavy procedures often result in targets not being met.” [item reverse coded]). The internal consistency of the scale was .64.

Demographic information. Basic demographic information was also collected, including gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), marital status (0 = *married*, 1 = *unmarried*), and job position (0 = *blue-collar*, 1 = *white-collar*).

Analytical Approach

First, we calculated basic descriptive statistics about bullying prevalence following the self-labeling method. According to the Leymann’s definition, which indicated that individ-

uals can be considered victims of bullying when they are exposed to bullying behaviors in a weekly or daily basis, our response categories measured were combined to create three groups following the suggestion of Hoel et al. (2004): not bullied (which included those who responded with 1 = *no, never*), occasionally bullied (which included responses 2 = *yes, rarely*, and 3 = *yes, now and then*), and regularly bullied or victims of bullying (which included responses 4 = *yes, weekly* and 5 = *yes, daily*). Second, following an initial examination of the correlations between the variables, we assessed the extent to which workplace bullying was associated with its possible antecedent variables by means of hierarchical linear regression using the statistical package SPSS v.16. Individual characteristics (demographic variables and tendency toward depression) were included in the first step, whereas organizational factors were included in the second step. We entered these variables in two steps in order to determine the extent to which the organizational variables contributed to the prediction of bullying beyond the individual characteristics.

Results

Bullying Prevalence and Associated Descriptive Statistics

We used employees’ indications of the frequencies with which they were bullied to calculate the bullying prevalence following the subjective method described above. Applying the above mentioned categories to the data, a total of 10.4% were “occasionally bullied” and 5.2% “regularly bullied.”

We then performed cross-tabulation analyses, using the chi-square statistic, to examine the relationships between the bullying groups that had emerged from these categories and the demographic characteristics. Percentages of employees reporting that they were bullied differed significantly by the three demographic characteristics ($p < .001$ for gender and marital status; $p < .01$ for job position): (a) gender: women perceived being more bullied than men (15.4% occasionally bullied and 9.1% regularly bullied vs. 8.3% occasionally bullied and 3.5% regularly bullied, respectively); (b) marital status: married individuals reported being less bullied than unmarried individuals (12% occasionally

bullied and 2.8% regularly bullied vs. 12.5% occasionally bullied and 9.9% regularly bullied, respectively); and (c) job position: blue-collar employees indicated being more bullied than white collar employees (11.4% occasionally bullied and 6.5% regularly bullied vs. 6.2% occasionally bullied and 0.7% regularly bullied, respectively).

Intercorrelations Among Variables and Regression Analysis

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the research variables. Table 2 presents the hierarchical regression used in order to explore antecedents of workplace bullying. As previously noted, we introduced individual difference variables in the first step and organizational variables in the second step in order to estimate the variance explained by the organizational factors over and above the individual difference variables. All predictors were mean centered prior to the analyses (Aiken & West, 1991).

Results revealed that all personal variables, except marital status, significantly contributed to the prediction of workplace bullying ($R^2 = .23$; $p < .001$; see Table 2, Step 1).

Thus, being a woman, a white-collar employee, and having higher levels of depression were associated with higher levels of bullying perceptions than being a man, a blue-collar employee and having lower levels of depression.

Furthermore, the associations between workplace bullying and both gender and depression remained significant when including the organizational variables in the second step; how-

Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Analysis With Exposure to Bullying Behaviors as Criterion Variable

| Predictors ^a | Workplace Bullying | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | Step 1 ^b | Step 2 ^b |
| Gender | -.09* | -.09* |
| Marital Status | .07 | .06 |
| Depression | .43*** | .27*** |
| Job Position | .07* | .04 |
| Job Description | — | -.03 |
| Innovation Climate | — | -.09* |
| Dynamism | — | .01 |
| Team Climate | — | -.20*** |
| Leadership Climate | — | -.12** |
| R^2 | .23*** | .32*** |
| ΔR^2 | — | .09*** |

^a Gender was dummy coded (0 = female, 1 = male); marital status was dummy coded (0 = married, 1 = unmarried); job position was dummy coded (0 = blue-collar, 1 = white-collar). ^b Standardized betas and probabilities: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

ever, job position became nonsignificant in this model (see Table 2, Step 2). With regard to climate-related and working conditions measures, results revealed that innovation climate, team climate, and supervisor's support were significantly negative associated with workplace bullying, whereas job description and dynamism were not significantly associated with workplace bullying. In other words, lower levels innovation climate, team climate and supervisor's support were associated with higher levels of perceptions of workplace bullying. Adding these organizational factors increased the explained variance to 32% ($\Delta R^2 = .08$; $p < .001$).

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Variables

| Variables | M | SD | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|--------------------|------|-----|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. Gender | 1.70 | .46 | -.25** | -.20** | .02 | .05 | .03 | .10** | -.06 | -.11** | -.17** |
| 2. Marital status | 1.33 | .47 | — | .19** | -.08* | -.08* | -.08* | -.13** | -.05 | .18** | .18** |
| 3. Job status | 1.79 | .41 | — | — | -.07 | -.09 | -.05 | -.18** | -.03 | .04 | .12** |
| 4. Team | 3.40 | .90 | — | — | — | .44** | .57** | .31** | .31** | -.40** | -.43** |
| 5. Job description | 3.40 | .84 | — | — | — | — | .43** | .37** | .30** | -.39** | -.32** |
| 6. Leadership | 3.12 | .64 | — | — | — | — | — | .38** | .27** | -.39** | -.40** |
| 7. Innovation | 2.83 | .88 | — | — | — | — | — | — | .35** | -.20** | -.29** |
| 8. Dynamism | 2.83 | .80 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | -.16** | -.17** |
| 9. Depression | 1.70 | .41 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | .45** |
| 10. Bullying | 1.33 | .91 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Discussion

This study aimed to assess the prevalence of bullying as well as its antecedent factors in Japanese employees. Our results indicated a very high rate of workplace bullying; this rate is up to 2 times higher than the prevalence rates reported in other countries (see Zapf, Escartin, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2011). For example, the 15.6% who responded positively to being bullied in our sample is considerably higher than the percentage reported using the self-labeling method in (a) representative national studies conducted in Europe, such as the 10.6% reported in U.K. (Hoel et al., 2001) or the 5% reported in Norway (Nielsen et al., 2009), and in (b) previous studies conducted in Japan that reported workplace bullying prevalence estimates between 6% and 10% (see Abe, 2007; Tsuno et al., 2010).

Concerning the possible antecedents of workplace bullying in Japan, it seems that demographic and personal factors may play an important role in predicting perceptions of being bullied. In particular, our results point to the positive association between depression and reports of bullying. This echoes prior research that has suggested that as depression levels rise, treatment indicative of workplace bullying tends to become less tolerable (Nielsen et al., 2011). Thus, those who are depressed may be particularly apt to perceive they are victims of bullying. Further, those with depression tendencies may frustrate others and violate social norms of desirable interactions and, as a result, elicit aggressive behaviors in others (Felson & Tedeschi, 1993). For example, in Japan, depression at work might be strongly discouraged, which is in line with research suggesting that Japanese workers, especially men, have unfavorable attitudes toward depression; this may stimulate the use of personal bullying (Nakayama & Amagusa, 2004).

On the other hand, it may be that the relatively high prevalence of bullying in this Japanese sample is associated with increased rates of depression and psychological distress in this population. Liu, Spector, and Shi (2007) reported that employees in Japan experienced more psychological and physical strains than employees in the United States. Similarly, Iwata, Okuyama, Kawakami, and Saito (1989) found a higher level of depression for the Japanese

than for Americans. Perhaps these patterns exist because the Japanese might not cope effectively with being bullied, leading to a negative cycle of deteriorating effects. Japan culture is rational and discourages expression of emotion as it relates to others (Bhagat & Steers, 2009). Further, the Japanese are educated to manage their negative emotions (e.g., frustration or anger) in order to keep group harmony. Researchers have suggested that the suppression of anger may cause anxiety or depression (e.g., Eysenck, 1994). Similarly, some empirical studies that have pointed out individualistic cultures have higher levels of well-being than collectivist cultures (e.g., Diener & Suh, 1999). Thus, this may be a valuable avenue for future research and possibly intervention.

We also found that women and men differed in their perceptions of workplace bullying in that females were more likely to indicate that they have been bullied than men. Societal pressures and expectations for a woman to become a "good wife, wise mother" are pervasive and may be still present in Japan (Yuasa, 2005), suggesting that women at work might be not yet fully accepted in the workplace. In line with Hoel et al. (2001), it is plausible that the "glass ceiling" phenomenon is playing an important role in the Japanese organizational culture, making females more likely to be bullied. In contrast, although married individuals reported somewhat lower levels of being bullied than those who were unmarried, this factor was not significant in our regression model. It may be that unmarried workers experience lower levels of social support in solving conflicts than those who are married rather than their necessarily being the targets of more bullying.

With respect to the organizational variables measured in the present study, team atmosphere appeared to be the climate dimension most strongly negatively associated with bullying. Team atmosphere assumes particular importance in Japan since the Japanese organizational culture disapproves of, or strongly discourages, individual exception to or exemption from group uniformity. Just one such incident might have a domino effect and disrupt organizational order (Giorgi et al., 2008). We also found that supportive leadership played an important role in decreasing perceptions of bullying. This is consistent with prior studies, which have demonstrated a negative association between super-

visors' support and workplace bullying as well as positive correlations between destructive leadership styles and workplace bullying (Salin & Hoel, 2011). Finally, there was also a significant negative association between innovative work environment and bullying. This follows a recent study in the Norwegian restaurant sector that pointed out that bullying prevails in the organizations where employees perceive that the creativity and change levels are low, indicating that bullying might be negatively related to innovation (Mathisen, Einarsen, & Mykletun, 2008). This is consistent with the aforementioned idea that bullying may tend to take place in cultures (both within organizations and nationally) where unconformity is viewed as potentially threatening the social order.

An unexpected finding was that job description and dynamism factors did not correlate with bullying in contrast with previous studies where role conflicts in particular have been associated with workplace bullying (e.g., Hauge et al., 2007). Perhaps employment provides not only financial but also psychological and social resources particularly for the Japanese even when employment duties are ambiguous (Giorgi et al., 2008). Accordingly, the Japanese workplace is well known for organizational ambiguity. Such systemic ambiguity serves as a basis to maintain loose cross-functional boundaries and to encourage flexible and interdependent relationships among the employees (Giorgi et al., 2008; Meek, 2004).

In addition, job position (i.e., blue vs. white collar) was not associated with workplace bullying in our regression model. On one hand, a plausible explanation is that workplace bullying in Japan tends to involve one individual against many and, thus, formal or social position might not be essential in the phenomenon (Munakata et al., 1998). On the other hand, organizational climate may mitigate the effect of the job position. Thus, further research is needed to clarify the relationship between job position and workplace bullying in Japan.

In summary, individual characteristics explained a considerable amount of variance in bullying perceptions (23%), while the organizational characteristics incrementally predicted an additional 9%. Although this illustrates the importance of individual factors and suggests that the future research on bullying should take these factors into account, we acknowledge that this

finding may have resulted from our use of the self-labeling method to measure bullying. Associations between organizational variables and workplace bullying measured by a behavioral approach are usually stronger than those associations found by using a self-labeling measure (e.g., Hauge et al., 2007). Nevertheless, further studies should address cultural issues since the boundaries between work-related and personal-related bullying behaviors in Asian collectivist-oriented cultures like Japan seem to not be as clear as they are in European individualistic-oriented cultures, indicating that workplace bullying might be related to individual aspects (demographics and depression tendencies) rather than organizational characteristics in Japan (Asakura et al., 2008; Giorgi et al., 2008).

Limitations

Although our study has a number of strengths, it is not without limitations. We point out that the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for establishing causality in the relationship between the possible antecedents measured and workplace bullying (Zapf, Dormann, & Frese, 1996). Although these factors may certainly predict bullying, they may also be driven by the experience of bullying. Further, our measures were assessed via self-report; therefore, the significant relationships found in this study are not immune to inflation due to common method bias. However, the psychological separation of questions was used in the questionnaire as recommended by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) in order to alleviate some of this concern. We encourage future studies to integrate different methods to assess workplace bullying, ranging from the self-labeling approach used in the present study (although the advantages above mentioned are not exempt from criticisms; see Nielsen et al., 2009; 2011) to the use of diaries and critical incident examinations (Hershcovis, 2011).

Finally, the participants in this sample were mainly men, and the occupational categories were limited to those sampled by trade unions in the Tokyo area. Thus, it is clear that more representative and gender-balanced prevalence studies in Japan are required, although the percentages of males and females that participated in our study are similar to those percentages

reported in the same sectors in the general working population in Japan (Mai, 2007).

Research Implications

The current study extends our understanding of the prevalence and predictors of this phenomenon in Japan, a country where limited evidence on this topic exists. Findings from our study suggest several directions for further research on workplace bullying. Our findings suggest that cross-cultural studies are needed since bullying behaviors as well as bullying antecedents may differ across countries. Further research might also examine the specificity of impact of various climate dimensions. This may be important for designing and implementing programs directed at preventing workplace bullying since, as Giorgi (2009) indicated, bullying is more likely to appear in those organizations where a “climate for bullying” exists (e.g., poor leadership, lack of social support, and organizational injustice). Moreover, the nonsignificance of the job description factor measured in the current study might invite researchers to not conceptualize predominantly bullying as result of being exposed to poor working conditions but more as a group dynamic or a team process, especially in collectivistic cultures. Moreover, as we found in Japan, demographics and depression tendencies might play important roles in the bullying genesis, especially in those countries where personal bullying rather than work-related bullying seems to be more prevalent.

Prevention and Policy Implications

The present study also pointed out a number of individual and organizational characteristics that may be important for preventing and decreasing the incidence of bullying across Japanese occupations. In particular, our results suggest that organizational programs that take individual characteristics (especially depression) into consideration may also be important in preventing bullying. Identification and management of persons suffering from mental health problems, improved access to health and social services, and responsible reporting of negative acts by the observers might be effective strategies for the prevention of bullying. Moreover, the presence of formal procedures of complaints and the involvement of unions

might be also effective for helping the victims not be isolated.

In addition, supervisor training may be important for reducing bullying in line with our finding that leadership predicted bullying perceptions. Providing supervisors with necessary skills and information on bullying and on mental health might have a favorable effect on both individuals and teams. In that sense, since the team climate appeared to be important, training on bullying might be effective at the group level. Effective training should be planned, taking into consideration the identification of high-priority populations, planning the training with a focus on individual and group coping strategies. Finally, as previous research has suggested, counseling, active monitoring, and early interventions might be also important to preventing the negative consequences of bullying (see Tehrani, 2012).

Conclusions

To summarize, our study points to (a) the particularly high incidence of workplace bullying in our Japanese sample and (b) the individual and organizational factors that may potentially contribute to this phenomenon. As we point out, the nature of and contributing factors to bullying may differ in Japan as compared to other cultures. We encourage future cross-cultural examinations of the nature of bullying as well as the development of potential interventions to reduce bullying in a variety of cultural contexts.

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