

Exploring Workplace Bullying in a Para-Military Organisation (PMO) in the UK: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Research into workplace bullying is taking various turns with most of the studies broadening understanding of the concept. Although much progress has been reported in research on the understanding of what is workplace bullying, its effects and how to deal with it. In this paper, exploratory semi-structured interviews were conducted on twenty-five participants to create a better understanding of their experiences of workplace bullying in a para-military organisation in the UK. This method of data collection helped to understand how things happen and why it happened in the para-military organisation. The study revealed that workplace bullying is as a result of organisational change, organisational division into uniformed and non-uniformed staff, power relations, management style and witnessing bullying. The study also revealed that workplace bullying has a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of the victim. While all the accounts discussed above were given by those who have experienced workplace bullying, the key informants within the organisation gave conflicting account of what is going on in PMO. The findings revealed different views to bullying within the PMO. It may be concluded from this study that bullying is part of the culture of this organisation, and that may be why it is perceived to be accepted as a norm and is continuing.

Keywords: Workplace Bullying, Negative Effect, Para-Military Organisation

1. Introduction

The existing literatures such as Einarsen (2006), Lewis and Gunn (2007), Leymann (1996) Salin (2004) and Sheehan (2006) have shown that there are various approaches to study bullying in the workplace. These approaches have led to a series of debates on how to define workplace bullying. To date, there has been no general agreement on the definition of workplace bullying. However, even with several conceptual and methodological differences across various studies, there has been a growing convergence of definitions of workplace bullying in recent years by researchers, practitioners, organisations and even government. For instance, research by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2007) is an indication of the government's concern regarding workplace bullying. The research was aimed at providing comprehensive results on the extent of unfair treatment, discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment at work. The study reported a high incidence rate of bullying in the British workforce with about 3.8% of the employees reporting to have experienced bullying at work within the last two years (DTI, 2007).

When considered together, however, and with ongoing research on workplace bullying, it is obvious that workplace bullying is a problem facing employees and employers in the UK. The evidence has revealed that workplace bullying has negative consequences. It impacts negatively on the organisation (Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003), and the individual (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Sheehan, 2006). In addition to the effects on the recipients, studies have shown that those who have observed or witnessed workplace bullying are also likely to experience some of the negative consequences (Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Vartia, 2001; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia, 2003). In this paper, exploratory semi-structured interviews were conducted to create a better understanding of the employees' experiences of workplace bullying in a para-military organisation in the UK.

2. Antecedents of Workplace Bullying: Literature Reviewed

Workplace bullying commonly happens in organisations where dominant subordinate hierarchical relationships exist, for example, where there are quasi-military supervision arrangements (McCarthy *et al.*, 1998). Many of the tactics used by the perpetrators are initially subtle and covert, but intensify over time into threatening and demeaning

behaviours (Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper 2003). At the organisational level, culture, organisational structure, and job design are all components that can enhance the climate for workplace bullying (Salin, 2004). For instance, bullying may be prevalent in organisations where confrontation is part of the working culture or is encouraged, and where perpetrators feel there are no recriminations for their actions (Sheehan, 2006). In regard to the organisational climate, changes such as restructuring, globalisation, downsizing, and competition have all contributed to the increase in bullying within the work environment (see Archer, 1999; Vartia, 2001; Sheehan, 2006).

Other factors identified at the organisational level that have contributed to the increase in workplace bullying include leadership style (Skogstad, Einarsen Torsheim, Aasland & Hetland, 2007), job design (Salin, 2004) and the features of work (Vartia, 2001). Other research has focused on two main explanations for workplace bullying, namely the psychosocial work environment and personality or individual characteristics (Einarsen, 1999). At the individual level, workplace bullying focuses on the personalities and characteristics of the targets, the perpetrators and the organisation (Einarsen and Mikkelsen, 2003; Vartia, 2001). The personality of the bullies and the victims are the individual antecedents which, according to Coyne, Seigne and Randall (2000) are causes of exposure to bullying. Characteristics in terms of demographic factors may help to explain why some individuals are subjected to more acts of bullying than are others (Einarsen, 2000; Lewis & Gunn, 2007; Salin, 2004). Gender appears to be one of the most debated factors that contribute to the risk of being bullied (Vartia & Hyyti, 2002). Studies have shown that the less-represented gender in a work environment is more targeted than the more-represented one (see Einarsen, 2006). Power relations underpin many of the arguments pertaining to workplace bullying and may be linked to all the levels at which workplace bullying can occur. Workplace bullying, according to Turney (2003), does not occur between parties of equal power, but rather arises when conflict occurs between people with different strengths. Power imbalance is demonstrated through a wide range of situations such as gender, physical size, age, position and grade within the organisation, educational qualification, and intelligence. Other parameters, such as the inability to defend oneself, silence, and being non-confrontational, are some of traits associated with power relations (Branch, Ramsay & Barker, 2006; Salin, 2004). It is stressed that many different sources of power exist in an organisation, but in the case of workplace bullying, it rarely comes as physical strength, but rather as 'legitimate power' possessed due to hierarchical positions occupied by members of the organisations (Salin, 2004; Turney, 2003). Power imbalance is often supported with an argument that the targets or victims of bullying cannot defend themselves on an equal basis (Vartia, 2001; Salin, 2004). Power imbalance can take different forms, such as the formal power differences found in a highly structured organisation with ranks and grades (Archer, 1999), social group (Salin, 2004), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), and ganging up.

3. Individual's Perception of Bullying Behaviours

A person's perception of behaviours or incidents and meanings and reactions are crucial to the understanding of workplace bullying (Liefoghe & Olafsson, 1999). Studies have shown that individuals' perception of bullying incidents is dependent on the available social representation (see Lee, 2002; Vartia, 2001; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). In describing workplace bullying, several interpretations of the acts of bullying have been given, such as belittling, trouble maker, insecurity, bad mood, divide and rule, embarrassment, injustice, hypocrisy, control, power, downsizing, stress, and weak personality (Liefoghe & Olafsson, 1999). Those who experience being bullied have a corresponding set of shared beliefs, attitudes and behaviours which need to be identified in order to be able to understand the individual's interpretation of a particular situation (Liefoghe & Olafsson, 1999). In this study here reported, exploring people's interpretations and representations has enabled a more detailed view of workplace bullying to be taken (following Einarsen, 1999).

4. Method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted on the 25 participants. This method of data collection can be used to for exploratory and explanatory research, which will help to understand how things happen and why it happens. The choice of this method was used to identify the relationships between employees and workplace bullying (following Saunders *et al.*, 2007). This method was chosen because it has helped to provide a detailed account of the social, political and organisational processes that might have affected employer-employee relationships in the organisation (following Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). It was also chosen for its flexibility because it allows varying order and logic in the conversations (following Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Saunders *et al.*, 2007). The semi-formal nature of the interviews allowed the maximum exploration of the employees' accounts of their experiences of workplace bullying. Within the workplace bullying literature, researchers such as Branch (2006) and Salin (2004) have proposed that qualitative studies on workplace bullying would increase our understanding of the processes involved in workplace bullying.

4.1 Results

Participants

Participants were interviewed once and a total of twenty-five interviews were conducted. Eight of the participants were key informants within the organisation, ten were uniformed or operational staff, and the remaining seven were non-uniformed or support staff. Obtaining information that cuts across the operational and functional groups meant the data collected was rich in source and since the research is exploratory in nature, new insights were developed concerning the understanding of workplace bullying. The response rate for the interviews was low, but this is expected for this kind of study, whereby most of the victims of bullying are reluctant to come out and share their experiences because they are afraid that they could be further victimised (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). Also some people might find sharing their experiences of workplace bullying too traumatic and distressing, so they will rather not talk about it again. Nonetheless 25 responses can still be regarded as sufficient for a qualitative study (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003). Given the consistency in most of the answers given by the respondents, the sample size therefore could be considered adequate for this research (following Glaser & Strauas, 1969).

5. Findings

The interviews conducted were semi-structured and previously identified themes were used to accelerate the initial coding phase of the analysis. These themes on which the analyses are based are as follows: the position of the participants within the organisation; how a respondent knew he or she was being bullied; who were the alleged perpetrator(s); the surrounding circumstances when the participant was bullied; the number of times the bullying occurred; the types of bullying experienced; the effects of the bullying; and the roles played by the management of the PMO. Out of the twenty-five interviews conducted, only two cases will be presented. These are, one most elaborate case of the bullied employee and the key informant.

Case 1

Gill (A non-uniformed member of staff felt bullied by Mark: A senior uniformed member of staff)

➤ *Gill has been working for PMO for 20 years. Gill reports that there has been a recent change in the promotional system, whereby employees have to prepare for an oral and written assessment in order to get promoted. Gill made an official report on the how the new promotional system might affect the organisation, especially negatively. Mark started picking on him and would constantly verbally abuse Gill in the staff room. A formal grievance was brought against Gill for resisting change, and Gill was brought to the disciplinary hearing. All the people that testified were senior uniformed member of staff. Gill was accused of undermining and demeaning the authority of the management. Gill noticed that Mark was eavesdropping and monitoring him. Gill almost resolved into quitting his job. Gill reports that he has lost his health and reputation thanks to Mark. Gill is presently on anti-depressant and finds it quite scary going to work everyday. All Gill is left with is resentment for the organisation and just waiting for his retirement. Gill now goes to work late, leave early and doesn't care about the job any more.*

Case 2

Leo (A key informant in the organisation)

Leo reports that the change in the promotional system is a move towards achieving maximum performance, which centres on getting the right people to work for the PMO. Leo said this initiative has ensured that the right people who are performance driven, are the ones occupying strategic positions in the organisation. Leo reports that those employees who are not happy with the change are just being rigid, scared and are resisting change. Leo said most of them are the older employees, with longer length of service in the organisation. They don't want to embed changes and modernisation. Leo further reports that there is a general misconception and a wrong perception among many staff that the senior managers are the bullies and that bullying is going on in PMO. However, Leo said that he cannot conclusively say that bullying is not going on, but there is no evidence to support it. Leo said that there have not been cases of increased absenteeism, grievances brought against anyone, high labour turnover or an increase in the amount of sick leave taken, which are some of the expected effects of workplace bullying on those who have experienced bullying.

6. Understanding Workplace Bullying in PMO

These summarised cases analyses suggest that workplace bullying is as a result of the following factors, organisational change, organisational division, power relations, management style and witnessing bullying.

6.1 Organisational Change

Organisational change emerged as one the causes of the increase in workplace bullying in the PMO. Organisational change, according to McCarthy *et al.* (2005), can affect how we organise ourselves and how relationships work among individuals, institutions and communities. The changes reported in this situation have affected some of the

employees negatively. With respect to the situation in PMO, six of the participants reported that the changes, especially those related to the speed of change, the promotional system and the new assessment centre, have affected them negatively. These accounts indicate a change in the promotional system from one based on experience, duration of service and performance to that of written assessment and role playing. When change creates an avenue for uncertainty, anxiety, stress, fear and confusion to increase, it can lead to unhealthy competition among employees (for instance, those applying for a higher position), which if not well managed might lead to acts of aggression towards one another (Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Salin, 2004). When conflicts between the employees are not managed properly, it can lead to aggression, which if not truncated, may result in bullying tactics.

6.2 Organisational Division

Drawing from some the characteristics of the organisation, the PMO is known for its masculine culture, for being highly structured, power based and male dominated, and for the group identification therein. Two main sub-themes emerged from the analyses of organisational division, which are operational division and rank. Operational division focuses on the position, duties and roles that the perpetrators and the victims play within the PMO. This assertion is based on the finding that the operational group and the position of the victim is a factor that can increase the likelihood of being exposed to bullying. The different accounts of the participants split operational division into two groups, which are the two main functional groups: the operational or uniformed staff, and the support or non-uniformed staff. For some of the participants, they believed that *those who are uniformed are given a form of priority over the non-uniformed*, which implies that there is a sense of inequality among the two functional groups.

For five of the participants, *being a member of the support staff is a vulnerability factor, and they all believe that the management are turning a blind eye to bullying, especially if it comes from the uniformed ranked officers towards the support staff*.

Others blamed on the rank structure of the PMO; that is, the higher your rank, the more powerful you are in the organisation. For most of the participants, the bullies are those with high ranks. Reference to the bully as *untouchable* by one of the participants is an indication of a total surrender on his part and helplessness in this situation.

6.3 Power

Power is the third theme that emerged under the causes of bullying in the PMO. A number of sub themes emerged. Three sub-themes are discussed in this section: gender, hierarchy, and group identification. All four of the women interviewed believed that they were bullied because of their gender and the inability of the majority of the men to accept them into the PMO. Gender in this case is a vulnerability factor. The reports given by some of the participants identified the managers and people within the higher levels of the hierarchy as the bullies. Nine of the participants reported that they were bullied by someone above them because the bullies have the power to do so. In this situation, the bully could equally be either uniformed or non-uniformed staff. Some of the interviewees reported that, most of the bullying is top down with the management of the PMO having full knowledge of such bullying behaviours. For some of the non uniformed participants, they were bullied by a group of uniformed staff. The identification with an in-group could trigger conflicts with an out-group, which could further lead to either direct aggression or indirect aggression towards each other. Others blamed it on peer pressure, which is akin to a group influence on one another. That is, people imitate one another, especially when they belong to the same social group.

6.4 Management

The management emerged as one of the causes of bullying and another factor that had increased the prevalence of bullying behaviours in the PMO. Most of the participants blamed it on the management, especially with the divide between the uniformed and the non-uniformed staff. Most of the accounts given by the participants indicated some ineffective management of employees. For instance, some participants reported that *the change in the promotional system was too fast and not well communicated*. For some of the participants, *the change was not needed*. However, realistically, in any dynamic organisation, change is inevitable. Good management of change therefore requires taking into account the resistance of employees to that change. Thus, in order to reduce the resistance, the change should be communicated properly, the impact of such change on the employees should be considered and the change should be well planned, executed and managed.

6.5 Deficiencies in the Work Environment

Other accounts of causes of bullying identified deficiencies in the work environment. Gill said that he was bullied because he made various concerns about standards within the organisation. He reports that he *started hitting the (brick walls) and being poorly treated and bullied*, as a result of raising some concerns about the new promotional system. Furthermore, the lack of consistent policies for handling bullying cases is another factor that was reported in

this study. For instance, the application of equal negative sanctions for the bullies irrespective of their level in the organisation or their operational roles and duties within the organisation. It appears that for most of the participants who were bullied by their managers or people with higher ranks, nothing was done to the bullies. An extreme case of a lack of consistent policies in handling workplace bullying left the victim with no choice but to leave PMO. For one of the participants, she would *rather not report bullying because the bully is one of the management team*. Information like this might suggest that the same rule does not apply to all bullying cases and employees are treated differently. That is, if bullying occurs between employees at a lower level, the management might be strict when handling such cases. However, if a case is brought against a senior member of staff, it is not handled fairly.

6.6 Witnessing Bullying as Vulnerability Factor

Witnessing bullying is an under explored area in the literature on workplace bullying. This factor emerged as a result of identifying that witnessing or observing bullying is another factor that can increase the likelihood of being subjected to bullying. Five of the participants reported that they became targets of bullying after witnessing others being bullied. *One of the participants was able to substantiate his experiences of workplace bullying with documents. Taking up a bullying case in this situation has exposed the participants to bullying by the alleged perpetrators.* Counter-reactions like this form one of the reasons some people who have observed or witnessed bullying in the workplace do not do anything about what they have experienced. The fear of being picked on or used as a scapegoat has discouraged other witnesses of workplace bullying to come forward.

7. The Effects of Workplace Bullying

The themes related to the effects of workplace bullying on those who have experienced it are discussed. Two main themes emerged, and each theme is further divided into sub-themes. The first theme addresses the personal effects of bullying, while the second theme is work and organisation.

7.1 The Personal Effects

One of the impacts of workplace bullying is a detrimental effect upon the physical and mental health of the victim. All of the participants reported that it has indeed affected their health. Most of the participants reported a physical condition, including hair loss, weight loss, rashes, headaches, and even pregnancy miscarriage for one of the female participants. For others, the effects of the bullying they experienced were psychological. Eight of the participants reported that they experienced anxiety symptoms such as sweating, feeling uncomfortable, frightened and scared any time they were around the person(s) by whom they were bullied. Two of the participants reported that they experienced a nervous breakdown. Thus, all the participants reported that the effects of bullying on their health were severe, especially as most of the cases of bullying reported continued for more than two years.

In addition to the personal effects, all the participants reported that the bullying they experienced affected their family life. For instance, one of the participants reported that the bullying she experienced affected her relationship with her husband, especially when she stopped talking to him. These reports reflect how workplace experiences can have a negative effect on the participant's lifestyles.

7.2 The Effect on the Work and Organisation

The second theme that emerged from this phase of analysis is the effect of bullying on the work of employees and the PMO as a whole. According to the participants, their experiences of bullying have affected their work and especially their attitude to work. Four sub-themes, which are a loss of respect for the management of the PMO, reduced commitment, worsening attitude to work, and reduced performance emerged. Six of the participants reported that their performance and productivity had reduced since they experienced workplace bullying. The reduced efficiency in this case can be interpreted as deliberate, especially since the victim perceived the management of the PMO as not keeping to their psychological contract of maintaining a safe work environment.

Others reported that the bullies are unrepentant and that they have lost trust in the management of the organisation. Most of the participants said they were angry, bitter, and no longer committed to the organisation or efficient at work. Thus, these types of psychological detachment from the PMO will have an adverse effect on the performance and the productivity of the participants and the organisation as a whole. From these analyses, it appears that the effect of bullying on the recipient is a factor of the type of bullying experienced and the duration of exposure to the bullying.

8. Workplace Bullying from the Key-Informants Perspective

While all the accounts discussed above were given by those who have experienced workplace bullying, the eight key informants gave conflicting account of what is going on in PMO. Three themes emerged from the analysis of the information collected from the key informants: change, no evidence of bullying and pressure of work. The main

change, as discussed previously, centred on the promotional system and the introduction of an assessment centre as a means of promotion of individuals to the next level. All of the key informants were in agreement and supported the initiative. For instance, Leo said that the *change in the promotional system is a move towards achieving maximum performance, which centres on getting the right people to work for the organisation.*

That is, the key informants reported that the new assessment process has helped the management of PMO to identify the right people to implement the other changes in progress. Thus, one of the participants referred to those employees who are not happy with the change as just being “*rigid, scared and anti-change*”. Thus, there are two sides to these experiences. First, there are those who do not support the change (*anti-change*). They are the employees who believe that the change in the promotional system will lead to a situation where employees with inadequate experience and qualifications are occupying various positions. Secondly, there are those in support and in favour of the change (*pro-change*) and they believe that the PMO is moving towards modernisation. These two different views are an indication of the support from employees for change, or their resistance to and inability to embed change. For those that were seen as resisting the change, clear justification of their reasons for not supporting the change are apparent.

8.1 No Evidence of Bullying

Most of the key informants believed that there is a general misconception and a wrong perception among many staff, that the senior managers are the bullies and that bullying is going on in PMO. However, most of them reported that they cannot conclusively say that bullying is not going on, but there is no evidence to support it. This finding stands in contrast to the reports of those who have been bullied. The key informants reported that there have not been cases of increased absenteeism, grievances brought against anyone, high labour turnover or an increase in the amount of sick leave taken, which are some of the expected effects of workplace bullying on those who have experienced bullying and the organisation as a whole. The inability to support the various accounts of bullying with reports that have been made and evidence that has been brought forward renders them, according to the key informants, mere speculation with nothing to back them up. These statements contrast completely with some of the effects of workplace bullying reported in the literature; that is, workplace bullying can affect the performance and productivity of employees, and increase absenteeism, sick leave, and labour turnover. However, in this study, the reports given by the key informants show none such effects have been reported; rather, the evidence suggests employees work for the organisation until they retire. Furthermore, some of the key participants also revealed that, some of those people who have reported having been bullied *might be too sensitive and not tolerant enough*; that is, for some of the alleged bullying cases reported to researcher, what is perceived as bullying behaviours might just be misinterpreted actions or gestures. For instance, one of the most reported types of bullying by the recipients is *being shouted at*. However, Gill made a clear distinction between being shouted at and the raising of one’s voice.

Raising your voice is quite different: I have raised my voice in a sense of urgency; it is different when you are in an office or when you are discussing something

The wrong interpretation of an act such as this might be perceived as bullying from the perspective of the person on the receiving end.

8.2 Pressure of Work

The inability to cope with the pressure of work and performance has put managers under tremendous pressure. The need to perform can make managers behave in certain ways and, if such actions are not managed and communicated properly to their subordinates, might lead to a situation where such actions are perceived as bullying behaviours. All of the key informants made a very significant statement about the workload of managers and how the pressure to perform could increase the threshold for reacting to bullying behaviour. However, given such pressures of work and the need to perform, they reported that most of the managers are sufficiently well trained and experienced to be able to balance the demands of the work whilst ensuring that they are behaving in an appropriate manner towards their staff and colleagues. Hence, according to the key informants, there is no evidence that bullying is going on. All the parameters that can be used to measure or determine the occurrence of bullying, such as absenteeism, labour turnover, increased sickness absence and number of grievances, are absent. Therefore, according to Leo, workplace bullying taking place in the PMO cannot be proved or substantiated.

9. Discussion

This study has explored workplace bullying in a para-military organisation in depth. The findings revealed different views to bullying within the PMO. For those that reported to have been bullied, they are of the opinion that the management of PMO are aware of the social problem. However, due to the fact that some of the alleged bullies are those within the position of power and authority, the management of PMO are not taking appropriate measures to

tackle the problem. For this group of bullied employees, the bullying cannot stop unless the bullies are expelled out of the organisation. That is, as long as they are still in the organisation, the bullying will not stop. This accounts point to the authoritarian management style, which according to Hoel and Cooper (2003) could be conducive for bullying to grow.

The key informants not accepting that bullying is going in the organisation should not be treated as the true picture of what is going in the PMO, especially when organisations similar to PMO have been identified by researchers such as Archer (1999) and McIvor (2006) as prone to workplace bullying. The evidence put forward by some of the interviewed employees identified the fear of been further victimised or labelled trouble maker, lack of trust in management of the organisation and individual's self help in dealing with their experiences of bullying. The effects of bullying on the physical and psychological well-being of the recipients reported in this study confirm what the existing literature has identified (see Sheehan, 2006). However, individual accounts of these effects show that people are affected by their experiences differently. Some of them suffered physical symptoms, while others suffered emotionally and experienced feelings such as anger, fear and depression. The accounts of those who suffered many physical symptoms can be linked with the duration or severity of their exposure to such behaviours. The longer the exposure to bullying behaviours, the more severe the effects can be on the recipient. However, workplace bullying can be a one off experience, which according to Hoel and Cooper (2003) can have a long-lasting effect on the recipient (Hoel & Cooper, 2003).

This study also revealed deliberate sabotage as one of the effects of workplace bullying. Even though some studies have identified deliberate sabotage as one of the effects of bullying on the organisation (see Sheehan, 2006; Lewis, 2006), there is still a gap in the existing literature on whether or not sabotage is one of the coping mechanisms the victims of bullying have devised to deal with their experiences of bullying. Some of the participants reported that they stopped talking and playing with their children. These reports reflect how workplace experiences can have a negative effect on the participant's lifestyles. Transferring aggression to loved ones at home in this situation is one of the coping mechanisms used by some of the participants. Although little research has been done on the effects of bullying on the family of victims, the present study has clearly shown that bullying can have a negative effect on the immediate family of those experiencing bullying. The implication of this finding is that the impact of bullying within the broader social system and in particular the families of those who have experienced bullying at work is an area for future research.

10. Implication of the Research

Most of the participants identified the bullies as the operational uniformed staff, especially as authority and recognition are attached to these operational staff. However, various explanations may be given for this finding, first, most of the people that took part in these interviews were uniformed staff and it is likely that they will work with other uniformed staff. If they are bullied, it will probably be perpetrated by the people with whom they work. Second, since there is a general misconception that the bullies are the uniformed staff, it is therefore probable that the behaviours perpetrated by the support staff might not be perceived as bullying, whereas if they were perpetrated by a member of the uniformed staff, they might then be interpreted as bullying. Third, the tolerance threshold of the support staff might be lower in comparison to that of the uniformed staff so the support staff might find some behaviour more offensive than do the uniformed staff. Tolerance levels in this situation can be said to be a factor of the type of induction, training, exposure and orientation the employee receive in the PMO. Such focus may affect the ability of employees to withstand stress, confrontation, direct control and sometimes being shouted at.

11. Conclusion

It may be concluded from this study that bullying is part of the culture of this organisation, and that may be why it is perceived to be accepted as a norm and is continuing. Individual counselling might be appropriate for the victims and assistance from specialist counsellors on how to deal with their experiences might also be very useful. Counselling may not only help people to get back to their normal lives, but also may help them to deal with any future workplace bullying. For the perpetrators, counselling and assistance is also required. Continuous counselling and training ought to be provided, because some bullies do not perceive themselves as bullies. In many situations the alleged bullies tend to justify their actions and blame it on the victims or other external factors such as the need to be firm and in control, or even organisational demands (Sheehan, 2006). Bullies in this situation may not be aware of what they are doing or how their behaviours may affect others. The intervention against such behaviours should be aimed at the victim(s), the perpetrator(s) and the management of the organisation. Putting in place intervention mechanisms, such as counselling, training on equality and diversity, and emphasising the effects of bullying on the employees and the organisation, may help to create a continuous awareness of this social phenomena. Furthermore, the management of the PMO should ensure that bullying cases are handled fairly, without giving preference to certain groups of staff within the organisation. All the policies and procedures aimed at ensuring that people work in

a safe environment should be implemented fairly and consistently, irrespective of the position or level of the parties involved.

12. Limitations and Areas of Future Research

The study revealed that the effects of bullying reported in most of the literature reviewed, such as absenteeism, reduced performance, increased labour turnover, job-dissatisfaction and increased sick leave, are not present in this organisation. Perhaps some of the negative effects of bullying reported in most of the literature needs to be further explored, so as to have a clearer knowledge of the effects of bullying on the organisation. Also carrying out this kind of research on another organisation might yield different results. This analysis is based on the information collected from seventeen people who reported to have been bullied and eight key informants within the PMO. This number of people is not large enough to be representative of the entire organisation. Therefore, the PMO is not representative of all UK workplaces, thus generalisability is limited. However, since making sense of the bullying experienced by people is dependent on the individual meaning and the interpretations they give to it, the findings cannot be treated as conclusive. However, the in-depth information collected from the main source (twenty-five interviewees) is considered to be suitable and consistent. Furthermore, this study was based on a policy of strict anonymity, it would be difficult to follow up those participants who have been bullied and are still experiencing the behaviours. Thus, one-to-one feedback, mediation or intervention measures might be a little difficult to provide.

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Table 1. Summary of the Research Findings

Themes	Sub-themes	Theoretical Background	Number of Responses
Causes of Bullying	Change	Lee (2000)	6
	Organisational Division	Lewis (2002)	9
	Power Relations	Eriksen & Einarsen (2004)	10
	Management	Sheehan (2006)	10
	Other Factors	Branch (2006)	3
Types of Bullying	Covert Bullying	Salin(2004),	8
	Overt Bullying	Vartia(2001)	9
	Upward Bullying	Hoel (2006)	1
Effects of Bullying	Personal Effects	Leymann (1996)	10
	Work and Organisational	Vartia (2001)	9
	No Effect	Salin (2006)	None
Actions taken	Did Something	Lee (2000)	17
	Did Nothing	Einarsen & Mikkelsen (2003)	8
		Zapf & Einarsen (2003)	
No Evidence of Bullying	Employees Resistance	Lee (2000)	3
	Lack of Evidence	Sheehan (2006)	8
	Pressure of Work		8