Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

2018

Victims' Perspectives of Management's Interventional Efforts Regarding Relational Aggression in the Workplace

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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MBA, Keller Graduate School of Management, DeVry University, 2006

BS, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, 1996/97

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration – Law and Public Policy

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

Relational aggression (RA) is a social phenomenon that can severely impact profitability

and employee productivity. A gap in the literature exists concerning appropriate

interventions to manage RA. The purpose of this study was to explore successful

interventions that have been used to manage RA. The theoretical framework was

informed by psychological contract theory. Data were collected via semistructured face-

to-face interviews with 12 victims, and then analyzed using data management, reading

and memorization, description, classification, interpretation, and representation. NVivo

software was used to organize the data in this study. The research consisted of 3

subquestions addressing the role of written policies in interventions, common practices

and reactions of management, and victims' requests for attention to grievance reports.

Five key themes emerged. The first and second pertain to the proactive and reactive role

of written policies. The third and fourth focus on management's negative and positive

reactions in response to grievance reports. The fifth identifies victims' expectations for

their grievance reports. Commonly found interventions include impartially listening to

both sides, investigation, restoration of damages, social justice, and identifying root

causes for RA in the workplace. Implications for positive social change include enhanced

employee well-being and performance and increased organizational effectiveness.

Results may lead to positive changes by providing useful information that can be

implemented by organizations to prevent and address RA, which can improve employee

well-being.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Amaka Don-Simmons. Her hours of work in loving our children, Carissa, Rawlins, Chelsea, and Zane aided the hours of study, thought, and writing crucial to completing this study. She is a precious treasure, "My excellent wife… worth far more than jewels."

This study is also indebted to Dr. Olivia Yu, my professor, my guardian and mentor, who told me the first truth about this journey and guided me through its rigorous path.

Acknowledgments

With a heart filled with gratitude, my appreciation goes to God, who has guided me through some tough times during these past few years. I always felt His guidance and strength as I progressed through this study and other life events, and for that, I am forever grateful.

I would like to thank my committee chair; she has been an incredible mentor. I initially had difficulty finding a committee chair, but after approaching her and listening to her perspective, I was able to grasp the concept of which topic to choose, and I could not have made a better choice. She is my academic guardian angel.

My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Kathleen Schulin and Dr. Gregory Dixon, who exercised a lot of patience waiting for me to make a move towards the completion of this program. Their encouragement and support helped me through this very challenging yet enlightening process, and I will always be grateful to them.

This entire process would not have happened without the invaluable support and understanding of my family, who stood by me. I wish to thank my children, Carissa, Rawlins, Chelsea, and Zane, for their patience during the periods in which I had a full schedule that included moving between writing the dissertation and working a fulltime job. Every so often, when the challenges are stacked up, they showered me with love and their beautiful smiles. I hope that my achievement will inspire them in their future endeavors to become better people. They are truly my greatest blessings in life, and I enjoy every moment of their presence. I have an infinite love for my kids and I pray to God to continue to bless them. To my mother, Mrs. Gladys Nwankwo, who through

impossible situations set me on the path of success: I love you, Mom. I would also like to

thank my wife, Amaka Don-Simmons, for her love and enduring support these past few

years. I am looking forward to catching up on family life with her.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Relational aggression (RA) is a type of workplace bullying that is characterized by psychological and emotional manipulation (Field, 2013). Gossip, spreading rumors, slander, name-calling, and giving the silent treatment are common examples of RA in the workplace (Stephens, 2017). RA is detrimental to both victims and organizations because of the negative effects associated with this form of workplace bullying (Park & Ono, 2016; Stephens, 2017). If RA is not addressed, organizational effectiveness and productivity can be compromised as a result of toxic working environments and demoralized employees (Cherwin, 2013).

Given the lack of specific laws that criminalize RA, management, through human resource (HR) leaders in individual organizations, acts as the main protectors of employees from workplace bullying (Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2013; Escartín, 2016). Grounded in the psychological contract between employers and employees, organizations and their leaders have the responsibility to provide healthy working environments (Hwang, Moon, & Oh, 2015). Generating effective strategies that can prevent and address RA in the workplace is essential for organizations and their leaders to be effective protectors of employees (Branch et al., 2013). Therefore, this study aims at addressing management interventions that are necessary from the perspective of the victim.

In this chapter, I introduce the research problem relating to interventions to prevent and address RA that comprised the focus of this study. The chapter includes the following key sections: (a) background of the study, (b) statement of the problem, (c) purpose of the study, (d) research questions, (e) theoretical framework, (f) nature of the

study, (g) definitions, (h) assumptions, (i) scope and delimitations, (j) limitations, and (k)

significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main ideas of the

research problem and an overview of the study.

Background of the Study

RA is a form of bullying in which power or leverage is gained by manipulating

personal relationships and connections (Field, 2013). RA often develops through tension,

wherein individuals engage in manipulative behaviors (Field, 2013). Employees who

experience RA in the workplace encounter instances of bullying characterized by

psychological or emotional abuse (Dellasega, Volpe, Edmonson, & Hopkins, 2014).

Some common examples of RA in the workplace include engaging in gossip, spreading

rumors, and giving the silent treatment (Field, 2013; Nwaneri, Onoka, & Onoka, 2016).

Other manifestations of RA in the workplace include refusal or purposefully delayed

response to emails, withholding of information, and disregarding and excluding or

ignoring an employee. It can also present as meaningless assignments, unclear,

conflicting, or continually altering directions, undermining performance and work efforts,

reluctance to make eye contact, and an unrealistic workload, schedule, and deadlines

(Field, 2013; Nwaneri et al., 2016). Relational aggression in the workplace can also occur

in the form of delaying an employee's advancement and promotion or hiding documents

or equipment from an employee (Field, 2013; Nwaneri et al., 2016).

RA has negative effects on both victims and organizations. At the individual

level, victims of RA may experience psychological difficulties such as social anxiety,

depression, maladjustment, and decreased life satisfaction (Dellasega et al., 2014; Park &

Ono, 2016; Stephens, 2017). From an organizational perspective, whether bullying is overt or covert, Cherwin (2013) reported that 64% of individuals targeted by a bully or RA perpetrator give up their employment which costs organizations an estimated $250 million in expenditures relating to health issues, litigation, and employee retraining.

Knowledge of interventions that can be used to manage RA would help organizations reduce these costs, manage RA, and improve employees' well-being. However, there is a gap in the literature with regard to such appropriate interventions about RA in the workplace. The purpose of this study was to explore successful organizational interventions that have been used to manage RA.

Other than antidiscrimination laws, there are no state or federal laws that prohibit RA in the workplace (Frolik, 2014). According to participants in the 2014 U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey, 93% of Americans want a law to protect them from abusive workplaces. Yet, despite high support for such legislation, delay of laws at the state level is common due to organizations' claims of self-policing and the opposition of powerful lobbying groups such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, because of their motivation for power (Wooldridge, 2014). The lack of laws that prohibit RA makes organizations and their leaders responsible for protecting their employees from workplace bullying (Branch et al., 2013; Escartín, 2016).

Problem Statement

In a meta-analytic inquiry that summarized researches conducted across a range of countries, Nielsen et al., (2010) reported that prevalence of workplace bullying rate of

26% exist in non-European countries, primarily in North America. Workplace bullying such as RA is detrimental to employees' psychological health, negatively affecting their ability to be effective in their jobs (Dellasega et al., 2014; Park & Ono, 2016; Stephens, 2017). If RA becomes prevalent and part of the organizational culture, toxic work environments can develop, impairing organizational effectiveness and productivity (Gilman, 2015).

Interventions intended to prevent and address RA in the workplace have not been a priority in many organizations (Branch et al., 2013; Escartín, 2016; Kemp, 2014). Despite the ongoing efforts of the HR leaders in some organizations to prevent and address workplace bullying through structured interventions, the body of literature on appropriate interventions for workplace bullying remains limited (Branch et al., 2013; Escartín, 2016). According to Escartín (2016), most of the literature on workplace bullying interventions is only descriptive in nature and does not undertake an in-depth exploration of victims' experiences. In order to successfully address any form of workplace bullying such as RA, Branch et al. (2013) contended that greater efforts should be made to examine strategies or interventions that have been successful in terms of resolving workplace conflicts based on victims' experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace based on victims' experiences. By exploring the experiences of RA victims in the workplace, deeper insight can be gained regarding the strategies that need to be

implemented in other organizations to address and manage RA. By learning how to address and manage RA, the negative effects of RA on individuals and organizations can be prevented.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: How do organizations intervene or manage workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims? I then posed three sub questions to specify the scope of the study's research question further:

RQ1: How do written policies or protocols play a role in the intervention or management of workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims?

RQ2: What are the most common reactions or practices of organizational management regarding RA in the workplace?

RQ3: What do victims need most from management when encountering RA in the workplace?

Theoretical Foundation

I used psychological contract theory to frame the inquiry of this study. Psychological contract theory is concerned with the expectations of each party regarding the employment relationship between organization and individual, with shared promises and duties inferred in the relationship. Rousseau (1995) referred to a psychological contract as a belief or view that an employee and employer hold concerning the terms of their exchange agreement.

The involved parties have a perception of what their mutual obligations are. For the employee, safety and fair treatment from the employer are among these expectations. A failure of either party to uphold these expectations primarily implies a breach of trust because the psychological contract relates only to what is in the minds of both parties (Virgolino, Coelho, & Rbeiro, 2017).

Many independent studies have established the negative effects of perceived breach of psychological contract, which includes reduced trust, reduced organizational citizenship behavior, reduced organizational commitment, and increased distrust and cynicism (see Hwang et al., 2015; Naeem, Ihsan, & Mahmood, 2014; Virgolino et al., 2017). Hwang et al. (2015) found that when employers breach their psychological contracts and safety obligations with their employees, turnover intentions increase. Naeem et al. (2014) found that a perceived breach of a psychological contract is associated with low job satisfaction. According to Virgolino et al. (2017), perceived organizational justice mediates the relationship between breach of psychological contract and employees' performance.

Violation of the psychological contract pertains to the employers' failure to fulfill one or more obligations to employees. These violations are sometimes the result of the parties' inability to keep their promises, such as the organization's inability to maintain employee safety (Hwang et al., 2015; Naeem et al., 2014). Workplace bullying such as RA, therefore, can be considered a breach of the psychological contract for failing to protect employees from mistreatment or harm (Kakarika, González-Gómez, & Dimitriades, 2017).

Psychological contract theory has been used as a framework to manage conflicts among employees in the workplace. When a psychological contract is breached, the solution is to create a formal contract that clearly identifies the rules and policies involving a specific issue (Lioliou, Zimmermann, Willcocks, & Gao, 2014). Formal policies can take away the perceived breach of the psychological contract by enabling the notion that leaders recognize their shortcomings by making an effort to correct their mistakes (Huber, Fischer, Dibbern, & Hirschheim, 2013). When applied in managing workplace bullying, psychological contracts provide the impetus to create formal policies to uphold mutual trust and commitment (Lioliou et al., 2014). As a result, leaders of organizations act as mediators of conflicts arising from workplace bullying (Kaya Cicerali & Cicerali, 2016).

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I focused on collecting rich and detailed data from the participants in order to make sense of the meaning or essence of a unique and natural phenomenon. According to Hill, Thompson, and Nutt-Williams (1997), "qualitative methods offer a unique way to address some of [the] more complicated phenomena" (p. 518) occurring within organizations. Qualitative research is exploratory because the raw data drives the findings, not previous theories on the same phenomenon (Silverman, 2016; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative researchers aim to detect trends in thoughts and experiences in order to make sense of a phenomenon (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because of its capabilities

for using rich narratives to understand appropriate interventions needed to prevent and address RA in the workplace.

I employed a phenomenological research design in this study, which is a qualitative research design that focuses on the experiences of individuals to understand a specific phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research is concerned with unpacking the inner thoughts of a small group of individuals to make sense of their experiences (Constas, 1992). Phenomenological research emphasizes awareness in order to understand individual first-person accounts (Moustakas, 1994). The selection of phenomenological research was appropriate because, by exploring the experiences of RA victims, I aimed to provide useful information about interventions that can be used to prevent and address RA in the workplace.

I considered but did not select other qualitative research designs such as grounded theory and case studies because of their lack of alignment with the research purpose. Grounded theory was not appropriate because the intent of the research was not to generate a new theory but to understand the experiences of RA victims regarding the interventions that can prevent and address RA in the workplace. A case study uses multiple sources of data to explain a bounded phenomenon (Yin, 2003). A case study was not appropriate for this study because data collection methods such as observation or document analysis were not required to address the research question.

This study focused on the perspectives of 12 victims of RA in the workplace who comprised the sample. Victims of RA were selected as their experiences placed them in the best position to identify how management could help alleviate the problem. I did not

select management leaders as participants because of the possibility that these individuals would remain loyal to the organization and would be unlikely to tell the whole truth. Moreover, organizational policies may have prevented management leaders from participating in such research similar to how they are prevented from becoming union members. I used individual face-to-face semi structured interviews to collect the data. I then employed the data analysis processes prescribed by Kleiman (2004), which included reading the interview transcripts in order to get a sense of the meaning of the data, integrating units of meaning, using free imaginative variation, elaborating on meaning, finalizing themes, and critical analysis of the data. The interviews were coded on the same day so that any missing values could be retrieved again. Next, this coded sheet was used for different suitable statistical analyses.

Definitions

The following definitions explain the commonly used terminology relating to the phenomenon of RA in the workplace.

Perpetrator: The individual whose behaviors toward the target can be well defined as RA in the workplace; also called a bully (Zapf, 1999).

Psychological contract: The perceptions of parties, organizations, and individuals of their employment relationship and the shared commitments inferred in that relationship (Guest, 2007).

Relational aggression (RA): All behaviors projected to threaten relationships and friendships or harm the victim's relationships through social isolation or estrangement (Crothers, Schreiber, Field, & Kolbert, 2009).

Target: The recipient of the workplace RA or bullying behavior conducted by the perpetrator (Einarsen, 1999).

Workplace: Where people spend most of their life making a living (Muschalla & Linden, 2011).

Workplace aggression: A broad range of counterproductive workplace behaviors that rely specifically on the perpetrator's intention to inflict harm on the recipient (Neuman & Baron, 2003).

Workplace Bully: According to Hodson et al. (2006), a workplace bully is any individual who possesses power in the workplace and uses it over another for an extended period in such a way that the receiver systematically begins to exhibit negative workplace behavior that occurs on multiple occasions and results in psychological and physical consequences for the target. This possession of power does not necessarily have to be in the form of authority; this can be in any form that makes the other person helpless. This helplessness in organizations gives rise to bullying because the person lacks confidence and is, therefore, vulnerable to becoming the victim of RA (Hodson et al., 2006).

Assumptions

According to the constructivist position, the truth is relative and dependent on a personal standpoint. Although the subjective human creation of meaning is recognized in the constructivist paradigm, it undeniably maintain some ideas of objectivity (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). According to Searle (1995), constructivism is built on the principle of social construction of reality. The collaboration between the researcher and the participants suggests the benefit of constructivist paradigm, which allows participants to

convey their stories (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Through their stories, participants articulate their opinions and views of reality while enabling the researcher to comprehend the participants' narratives (Lather, 1992; Robottom & Hart, 1993).

Goulding (2002) maintained that some supporters of the quantitative paradigm believe that qualitative research is not empirical but filled with inference. In qualitative research, some believed that positivists are pseudoscientific, rigid and obsolete with limitations for testing only existing theories (Goulding, 2002). In the final analysis, Goulding (2002) argued that both constructivists paradigm and positivists paradigm has its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, researchers who intend to answer important questions apply procedures that permit them to arrive at a sensible, credible, and interpretable conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987).

In this study, I employed a qualitative phenomenological research approach because the quantitative research design would not have provided the depth and scope needed to answer the research questions, which required the collection of rich narratives and textual data. This type of inquiry was beyond quantitative investigation because the quantitative method was not suited for open-ended research questions. Applying qualitative research methods provides practitioners with a deeper understanding of phenomena because of the scope and depth of data that can be generated and analyzed.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The philosophical basis for qualitative research such as phenomenology is the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm is that truth is dependent and relative to personal thoughts.

This qualitative study was framed by constructivism. This approach means that individuals do not all create meanings in the same way even when they experience the same event (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) identified some assumptions for constructivism, of which three were central to this study. First, human beings make meaning when they are engaged in the environments they are interpreting, and based on that, qualitative researchers are likely to employ open-ended questions so that participants will have more opportunities to illuminate and share their views. Second, people form opinions based on their experiences and their social viewpoints. Third, meaning is shaped by social interaction; by engaging and interacting with the human community. Therefore, it is not out of context to deduce that findings and interpretations in qualitative studies are context specific or based on the circumstances or facts that surround a particular event or situation. Constructivism was beneficial as the philosophical framework for this study. According to Stake (1995), A large number of modern-day qualitative researchers believed that knowledge is constructed and not discovered.

Scope and Delimitations

The participants in this study were victims of RA in the workplace; the perspective of RA perpetrators was not included in this study. Because RA can occur in both the private and public sectors, I included both sectors in this study. The geographical environment was the Washington, D.C. metropolis or the National Capital Region. Other forms of workplace bullying, such as physical aggression and cyberbullying, were beyond the scope of this study.

Limitations

Qualitative studies usually accommodate smaller sample sizes. Given that this study employed small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to all workplace settings in which RA occurs. The result may be transferable in other scenarios where a significant overlap occurs between the context and the phenomenon. It is not the researcher but the reader who decides what can apply to his or her context.

The limitations of qualitative case studies relate to the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher. Using qualitative studies provided a clear advantage over the use of quantitative studies because the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Although it is crucial, training in observation and interviewing were not readily available to me, nor were there any guiding principles for framing final reports. Therefore, I had no option other than to rely on skills learned during the research through media technology such as the Youtube.com.

Other limitations associated with qualitative studies concern reliability and validity. In order to minimize these possible limitations, I enhanced the trustworthiness of the study through rigorous procedures. Trustworthiness of qualitative research findings was addressed through advanced procedures in the research design, primarily through my knowledge as the primary investigator. Researcher bias was consciously set aside in order to strengthen the study's credibility.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to advance knowledge in the discipline concerning the identification of appropriate interventions to prevent and address RA in the workplace.

The study adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding the appropriate organizational response to the issue of RA in the workplace. Future researchers may find this study helpful in their quest to find effective interventions for RA in the workplace.

The potential contributions of the study that advance organizational practice include providing information to help shape more effective management intervention practices and enhance organizational effectiveness. The results of the study may also be used to advocate for healthy working environments that allow employees to reach their potential. The results of the study may further help HR leaders to assess different strategies that may be effective in preventing workplace environments in which RA can prosper.

The potential implications for positive social change consistent with and bounded by the scope of the study include healthy working environments, enhanced employee well-being and performance, and increased organizational effectiveness. Applying the findings of this study may lead to positive changes in the attitudes of management and organizational leaders regarding the significant effect of RA in the workplace. The results of the study will provide useful information for organizational leaders regarding the interventions that can be implemented to prevent and address RA in the workplace. Healthier working environments can be instrumental not only in enhancing organizational effectiveness, but also in the success of organizations across the United States.

Summary

RA is a psychological type of workplace bullying that is detrimental to both victims and organizations and leads to poor employee performance and the creation of

toxic working environments (Park & Ono, 2016; Stephens, 2017). However, interventions intended to prevent and address RA in the workplace have not been a priority in many organizations (Branch et al., 2013; Escartín, 2016). In order to address workplace bullying such as RA successfully, Branch et al. (2013) contended that greater efforts should be made to examine strategies or interventions that have been successful regarding resolving workplace conflicts. To address this gap in this qualitative phenomenological study, I explored organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace based on the experiences of the victims. This study has implications for positive social change, including creating healthy working environments, enhancing employee well-being and performance, and increasing organizational effectiveness.

The theory used to frame the inquiry of this study was psychological contract theory, developed by Argyris. Psychological contract theory is concerned with the expectations of each party to the employment relationship between the organization and the individual, with the shared promises and duties inferred in the relationship. Constructivism provided the philosophical foundation of this study, with qualitative phenomenology as the research design. To address the research question clearly, the primary research question was further divided into three sub questions. These sub questions were helpful in identifying the role of written policies and protocols in interventions, the reaction of organizational management regarding RA, and identification of victim needs from the management.

A qualitative study design was employed because detailed data was needed to extract real meaning from the natural phenomenon. Semistructured interviews were administered to get unique responses from participants in this study. Twelve participants from various private and public sector organizations were selected for interviews. There are multiple limitations of this study as the data was collected from a single geographical location. Also, only the perspective of RA victims is considered, and no weight is given to the perspective of the perpetrators. Cyberbullying and physical aggression are not considered in this research study because of limited scope. From the prevention of aggression in the workplace, meaningful interventions can be derived from this study that can be helpful in improving workplace environments and, therefore, effecting positive social change. In the next chapter, I present a literature review on RA and the different interventions that have been used to address workplace bullying.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

RA is considered a form of workplace bullying that can negatively affect the performance of employees and entire organizations (Park & Ono, 2016; Stephens, 2017). The research problem is that interventions intended to prevent and address RA in the workplace have not been a priority in many organizations. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace based on victims' experiences.

In this chapter, I first explain the literature search strategy I used to compose the literature review. I then discuss the theoretical foundation of the study, which is the psychological contract theory. Next, I focus on the prevalence of RA in the workplace, followed by the effects of RA on individuals and organizations. I then review the organizational factors that support RA, along with interventions that have been used to prevent and address RA. I conclude with a summary of the key points regarding the literature review, including the identified gap in knowledge that I addressed through this study.

Literature Search Strategy

In developing this study, I considered the relevant literature on RA and workplace bullying. I used Google, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, EBSCO (Academic Search Premier and Business Search Premier), libraries, and local universities to research the relevant literature on the topic. I utilized a subject-based approach for the searches.

Search terms included *relational aggression*, *workplace bullying*, *victimization*,

psychological contract, *incivility*, *workplace aggression*, and *mobbing*.

Theoretical Foundation

Psychological Contract Theory

The theory used to frame the inquiry of this study was psychological contract

theory, which first emerged in the work of Argyris. Psychological contract theory is

concerned with the relationship between employee and employer that is comprised of

mutual unwritten expectations towards one another. The relationship dynamics are set,

and practical details are defined about the work that should be performed. It can easily be

distinguished from a written contract. Rousseau (1995) defined a psychological contract

as beliefs or views that an employee and employer hold concerning the terms of their

exchange agreement; the involved parties have a perception of what their mutual

obligations are. For the employee, safety and fair treatment from the employer are among

these expectations. A failure of either party to uphold these expectations primarily

implies a breach.

In adopting psychological contract theory, the premise of this study was that in

the U.S. workplace, a tacit contract between employees and their organizations exists

irrespective of whether formal contracts have been signed. Researchers have used

psychological contract theory as a framework for understanding the employee-employer

relationship. Although psychological contract theory was coined by Argyris, the idea of

the employment relationship as an exchange existed before Argyris. The writings of

scholars such as Barnard and March and Simon earlier expressed the concept of the

psychological contract. Using the theory of equilibrium, Barnard (1938) suggested that employees' continued contribution to the workplace depends on satisfactory rewards from the employer and organization.

According to Rousseau (1995), the idea of a psychological contract explained the beliefs surrounding the promises and commitments reached during the establishment of the exchange relationships. The psychological contract involves the perceptions of parties, organizations, and individuals regarding the employment relationship and the shared commitments inferred in the relationship (Guest, 2007). It outlines the needs and expectations of the organization and the employees, how they interact with each other, what employees receive in return, and workplace safety, rewards, satisfaction, and motivation. These professed promises and commitments hold both parties (workers and organizations/employers), who in most cases remain represented by their appointed supervisors and managers, to mutual obligations that allow the exchange relationship to thrive (Rousseau, 1989). Different from legal employment contracts, psychological contract agreements are informal and often implied and indirect, built on opinions and interpretations of others' actions and conduct. Therefore, psychological contracts center on individual interpretations of relationships.

Most organizations do not make their psychological contracts obvious; however, from time to time, matters related to psychological contracts surface during hiring processes or performance reviews. For example, organizations and employees create added value for one another, where organizations offer training and good pay to the employees and, employees in turn add value for shareholders by raising the capital of the

company. This psychological contract is implied. Employees and their employers express these expectations through related discussions and occasional direct comments (Wellin, 2007).

Violation of the Psychological Contract

Many independent studies have established the negative effects of perceived contract breaches, including reduced trust, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational commitment, as well as increased distrust and cynicism (see Hwang et al., 2015; Naeem et al., 2014; Rai & Agarwal, 2017; Virgolino et al., 2017; Zagenczyk et al., 2015). Any breach by either party can have severe consequences, although in most cases it is the employee who suffers when the contract is breached. The effects of such breaches are obvious in terms of employee actions and conduct such as starting conflicts and rumors in the workplace. Hwang et al. (2015) found that when employers breach their psychological contracts and safety obligations, turnover intentions increase. Naeem et al. (2014) found that perceived breaches of the psychological contract are associated with low job satisfaction. According to Virgolino et al. (2017), perceived organizational justice which refers to anyone's subjective perceptions of the fairness of allocations reconciles the relationship between breach of psychological contract and individual employee performance.

Most organizations rarely articulate or communicate their psychological contracts to their employees. When such contracts are communicated, they are often marred by various violations (Wellin, 2007). For a growing number of workers, expectations are

violated, owing to different forms of bullying that include relational or social aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

    The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI, 2014) indicated that 27% of Americans had experienced abusive conduct at work, another 21% have witnessed it, and 72% are aware that workplace bullying happens. Violation of the psychological contract pertains to the failure to fulfill one or more employer obligations. These violations are sometimes the result of one party's inability to keep its promise, such as to provide safety for employees (Hwang et al., 2015; Naeem et al., 2014). Workplace bullying such as RA, therefore, can be considered a breach of the psychological contract for failing to protect employees from mistreatment or harm (Kakarika et al., 2017).

Psychological contracts can be understood as perceptions of whether or not promises were fulfilled (Kakarika et al., 2017). A perceived violation elicits an emotional feeling of treachery that can result in deeper psychological grief, in which the victim feels wrongful harm, resentment, a sense of injustice, and bitterness (Rousseau, 1989). These feelings mirror what RA victims in the workplace go through when their safety is not guaranteed by the other party (i.e., the organization/manager) in the psychological contract (Hwang et al., 2015; Naeem et al., 2014).

Studies of psychological contracts have shown that employee approval of the rule of reciprocity concerning the exchange ideology or principles can be helpful in clarifying how workers react to the treatment they receive in the official discharge of their duties (Coyle-Shapiro & Neuman, 2004). Similar to justice, a perceived breach of a psychological contract may help provide a clearer understanding of RA and other

bullying activities that employees experience in the workplace. More specifically, violations of psychological contracts may reflect increases in the incidence of both vertical and horizontal RA and other bullying activities in organizations. It is probable that being exposed to insulting supervision does not meet employees' hopes for fair treatment and encroaches on the rule of reciprocity, which is one of the rules that govern employee-employer relations (Friedman & Reed, 2007). When this happens, employees evaluate their employers negatively (Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994)

Victims of RA and other bullying activities expect organizations and their representatives to take action when abuse and victimization occur, and they believe that dispute and grievance procedures should be efficient (Parzefall & Salin, 2010). If these processes are not in existence or do not function efficiently, the victims may conclude that their organizations have failed in fulfilling their part of the psychological contract regarding their care and, consequently, perceive this failure as a breach. Similarly, a mere threat of dismissal could change the attitude of the victim, who may think that the employer is not keeping his promise of career advancement. A dismissal notification to coworkers means a breach of the psychological contract to any surviving staff members (Kakarika et al., 2017). Left unchecked, this could lead to negative changes in attitude and conduct.

Psychological contract theory has been adopted as a clarifying tool in studies that have confirmed the negative outcomes of dismissals on surviving employees. Consistent with this line of findings, Parzefall and Salin (2010) argued that, in addition to victimization, targets perceive employers' inability to interfere with RA or other bullying

activities as breaches of the psychological contract. Onlookers have similar perceptions

of violation. To this end, failure to intervene in RA incidents may be interpreted as a

psychological contract breach and may negatively influence victims' evaluation of their

employment relationships (Salin, 2013). As such, when employers ignore reports of RA

in the workplace, it may be interpreted as a violation of a psychological contract, given

that employees depend on organizations to provide safe work environments.

The Relevance of Psychological Contracts

A psychological contract reinforces work relationships and offers a foundation for

understanding complex organizational phenomena. For example, Erkutlu and Chafra

(2014) found that psychological contracts mediate the relationships between ethical

leadership and workplace bullying. Using the psychological contract as a theoretical

framework, workplace bullying can be regarded as a breach because organizational

leaders fail to protect employees from harm (Kakarika et al., 2017). Fulfilling

psychological contracts may or may not result in superior performance. However,

nonfulfillment of psychological contracts is likely to demotivate employees, which may

lead to less commitment and increased absenteeism and turnover (Salin, 2003).

When both employees and employers fulfill their parts in the psychological

contract, the result is often improved employee performance and citizenship. In contrast,

when there is a breach of psychological contract, the resultant effect is reduced employee

performance, among other negative outcomes (Hwang et al., 2015; Naeem et al., 2014;

Rai & Agarwal, 2017). The result of a psychological contract breach may go beyond a

sense of betrayal, hurt feelings, and lack of interest shown by employees who observe

that their organizations do not live up to their promises (Virgolino et al., 2017; Zagenczyk et al., 2015). Employee offerings to employers may decrease because of psychological contract breach, which, in the long run, results in negative impacts on organizations' profits.

The benefits from a trusting relationship are inestimable for all stakeholders. Workers want respect from organizations; they appreciate jobs that involve them rather than use them and that complete their sense of achievement in the workplace (Kahn, 1990). Consequently, employers need to preserve secure workforces, decrease dysfunctional turnover, and retain a healthy base of good organizational citizenship. By establishing and respecting psychological contracts, as well as communicating with employees, employers can avoid circumstances in which critical decisions are misinterpreted, leading to employee resignations (Rousseau, 2004). Employees are valued assets and are sensitive to perceived breaches of their psychological contracts. As such, employers are advised to be thoughtful and to show their commitment to their employees (Guest & Conway, 2002).

Literature Review

In this section, I review literature relevant to preventing and addressing RA in the workplace. I first describe RA in the workplace and identify characteristics of the different actors involved in RA (i.e., the victims, the perpetrators, and the organizations). Next, I examine the literature on the prevalence of RA in the workplace as well as its effects on individuals and organizations. I then look at the organizational factors that support RA followed by interventions that have been utilized to prevent and address RA.

RA in the Workplace

In the workplace, direct forms of aggression are less common because society typically does not tolerate aggressive behaviors (Fenclau, Albright, Crothers, & Kolbert, 2014). As a result of society's general low tolerance for aggression, some people resort to covert, less direct forms of aggression such as RA (Fenclau et al., 2014). Relational aggression is a form of bullying in which power or leverage is gained by manipulating personal relationships and connections (Field, 2013). It often develops as a result of tension wherein individuals engage in manipulative behaviors (Field, 2013). Employees who experience RA in the workplace encounter instances of bullying characterized by psychological and emotional abuse (Dellasega et al., 2014).

Despite the wide recognition that RA exists in the workplace as a form of bullying, a clear definition of RA has not emerged (Kent, Troth, & Jordan, 2014; Vaillancourt, 2013; Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). Various definitions have been generated to describe RA, resulting in different conceptualizations of the construct (Kent et al., 2014). For instance, RA is also referred to as *indirect aggression* or *social aggression* further contributing to the lack of precision that confounds the literature on RA (Vaillancourt, 2013; Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). However, RA is generally regarded as a form of bullying in which the method is both indirect and socially inflicted (Grimaldi, Napper, & LaBrie, 2014).

Some common examples of RA in the workplace include engaging in gossip, spreading rumors, and giving the silent treatment (Field, 2013; Nwaneri et al., 2016). Other manifestations of RA behaviors in the workplace include refusal to respond to e-

mails or purposefully delaying responses, withholding information, and disregarding, excluding, or ignoring employees in other work activities. In some instances, RA may occur in the form of meaningless assignments, unclear, conflicting, or continually altering directions, undermining performance and work efforts, reluctance to make eye contact, or unrealistic workloads, schedules, and deadlines (Field, 2013; Nwaneri et al., 2016). Relational aggression in the workplace can also present itself in the form of delaying an employee's advancement and promotion or hiding documents or equipment from an employee (Field, 2013; Nwaneri et al., 2016).

According to Puline and Luther (2014), victims of RA in the workplace feel bullied, isolated from peers, and barred from advancement opportunities. Perpetrators covertly intimidate their victims by ignoring them, excluding them from group events, minimizing their associations with coworkers, or harassing them privately in communications through conversations or e-mail. Puline and Luther (2014) identified examples of RA in the workplace including giving the silent treatment, sabotage or manipulation, undermining victims' work, claiming victims' work as their own, or promoting someone with less knowledge to a position of authority. Other tactics include eye-rolling or crossing the arms; ignoring, mocking, and put-downs; disseminating rumors and gossip; establishing particular factions; and advantaged treatment by management (Puline & Luther, 2014).

Characteristics of RA Actors

For RA to occur in a given social setting such as the workplace, several actors or entities need to be present. The three main actors in RA are the victim, the perpetrator,

and the organization (Lyons & Hughes, 2015). I discuss each of these actors in this section of the literature review.

      The victim. Aquino, Grover, Bradfield, & Allen, (1999) identified two groups of employees who are predominantly at risk of victimization in the workplace: submissive employees and proactive employees. Passive or submissive victims often have low social competence, low self-determination, high anxiety, and low self-esteem (Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015). Proactive victims include individuals who are forceful, high achievers, driven, and successful in their jobs (Field, 2013). Inquiry into why perpetrators engage in RA in the workplace has shown that sometimes victims are targeted because of their successful records. According to Field (2013), successful employees are sometimes targeted in order to preserve social hierarchy within organizations. The WBI (2015) reported that victims are sometimes more skilled than their bullies; targets are often the "go-to" people for other employees who need guidance. These abilities make perpetrators perceive their victims as threats. Given the knowledge that targets are non-confrontational when abused, perpetrators may continue their victimization.

      Personality can also be a risk factor for being victimized in the workplace by bullies (Nielsen, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2017; Pallesen, Nielsen, Magerøy, Andreassen, & Einarsen, 2017). Nielsen and Knardahl (2015) found that neuroticism was a significant predictor of being bullied in the workplace, based on a sample of Norwegian employees. When role conflict and role ambiguity were controlled, only conscientiousness emerged as a significant predictor of being victimized by a bully. Nielsen et al. (2017) further found that personality traits such as neuroticism were positively associated with

harassment, whereas traits such as agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness were negatively associated with workplace harassment. Pallesen et al. (2017) also identified neuroticism as a personality factor that predisposed individuals to be bullied in the workplace. Based on these findings, neurotic personality characteristics appear to put some individuals in more vulnerable positions and, therefore, predispose them to victimization from workplace bullying such as RA.

The relational aggressor (the perpetrator). There are two types of relational aggressors in the workplace: dominating perpetrators and reactive perpetrators. Dominating perpetrators are concerned with maintaining social superiority over their victims using coercive behaviors, whereas reactive perpetrators exhibit retaliatory aggression against intended victims for violating established norms in social interactions, responding only to violation or threat by another person (Neuman & Baron, 2003; Aquino & Douglas, 2003). The perpetrators in workplace bullying such as RA may be superiors, subordinates, or colleagues, though the most common are superiors (Gardner, Bentley, Catley, Cooper-Thomas, O'Driscoll, & Trenberth, 2013). Seniority can play a role in bullying in the workplace (Gardner et al., 2013). According to Fenclau et al. (2014), the goal of individuals who perpetuate RA is to establish power or inflict harm within a relationship. In order to execute subtle forms of aggression, perpetrators of RA tend to have sophisticated and complex social skills and cognitive abilities (Fenclau et al., 2014).

There have been many proposed explanations as to why some employees engage in RA and other indirect forms of workplace aggression and bullying. These factors

include the perpetrator's temperament, low-self-esteem, enhancement of social status, and infliction of harm in response to perceived threats (Lyons & Hughes, 2015). These characteristics provide some core labels that can identify perpetrators of workplace bullying such as RA. Low self-esteem was also identified as a characteristic of perpetrators of workplace bullying (Falkenbach, Howe, & Falki, 2013). Jaafar, Jalali, & Dahalan, (2017) found that workplace bullying and low self-esteem were associated with perpetrators. This finding is consistent with the findings of Falkenbach et al. (2013), who reported that self-esteem and aggression were significantly correlated. An insecure person may find a victim in order to release frustration and anger (Escartín, Ullrich, Zapf, Schlüter, & van Dick, 2013).

Temperament is another antecedent that can explain the behaviors of RA perpetrators (Grimaldi et al., 2014). Lack of emotional control and thoughtfulness may also account for abusive behaviors in the workplace. Atherton et al. (2017) found that low self-control predicts the perpetration of RA. Equally negative emotions are associated with higher probability of perpetuating RA. Grimaldi et al. (2014) similarly found that ineffective control of negative emotions increases the likelihood of perpetuating RA.

Indirect aggression such as gossiping may also be motivated by the desire to enhance social status or to protect one's social group (Lyons & Hughes, 2015). For instance, Fenclau et al. (2014) noted that women may use RA maneuvers such as spreading rumors or making negative comments about appearance in order to exclude and alienate female coworkers or lower their self-esteem. According to Fenclau et al., RA

perpetrators often have good ability to take perspective in order to gain insights into the psychological worldviews of their victims.

Adult bullies may have learned aggressive behaviors in childhood that carry over to adulthood and manifest at home and in the workplace. Jaafar et al. (2017) found that workplace bullying is a learned behavior that may originate from being a previous target of other bullies. For instance, Samnani (2013) noted that revenge is a motivator for adult bullies who show willingness to abandon religion and culture in order to compensate for feelings of inadequacy during childhood or adolescence. Being able to seek revenge can be a source of motivation among adult bullies (Jaafar et al., 2017; Samnani, 2013).

The organization. Organizations and their cultures define victim-perpetrator role relations and provide a context in which RA can prosper and persist (Field, 2013; Nica, Hurjui, & Ştefan, 2016). The institutionalization of standards that condone RA in the workplace may intensify victimization (Field, 2013; Nica et al., 2016). Through modeling, employees may learn from observing the aggressive behaviors of company leaders and administrators amongst themselves (Field, 2013).

High-pressured environments also provide a context in which employees are challenged to fight for validation, attention, and resources (Field, 2013). Even though competitive environments do not automatically lead to RA, lack of collaboration and teamwork can lead to RA through gossiping, sabotage, and rumor spreading in order to gain power within organizations (Field, 2013). Team cohesion has been found to be negatively associated with workplace bullying (Giorgi, Ando, Arenas, Shoss, & Leon-Perez, 2013).

Prevalence of RA in the Workplace

RA is often associated with young girls; however, some evidence has shown that young men also engage in behaviors that can be characterized as RA (James, Lawlor, Murphy, & Flynn, 2013; Platt, Raile, & Burnett, 2016). It is proven that when relational aggression is used at high rate in high school, this leads to harassment in workplace settings (Krueger, Rao, Salzer, & Saucerman, 2011). For instance, James, et al. (2013) conducted a focus group to examine the extent to which boys perpetrate RA and found that RA can be used as a way to maintain power or preserve social status through exclusion. However, James et al. (2013) also reported that even though RA was perceived as possibly useful in achieving a particular goal, boys were less likely to utilize such techniques. However, there is a difference between relational aggressive behavior in the workplace and adolescent RA. In workplace, these behaviors include taking credit for the work of others, while adolescent behavior includes talking behind others' backs (Krueger et al., 2011).

RA has a higher association with school settings during adolescence, although Platt et al. (2016) contended that the phenomenon can also manifest in various workplace settings among adults. Aggression in the workplace has become a prevalent feature of many organizations (Platt et al., 2016). According to Butterworth, Leach, and Kiely (2016), person-related and work-related bullying behaviors are more common than physical intimidation and violence. In any society, violence and stress are the reasons behind increasing pressure on social welfare and services, especially in cases when ill-health can become the reason behind retirement or unemployment (Hoel, Sparks, &

Cooper, 2001; Spector & Fox, 2005). Within the workplace, then, anyone can be a perpetrator of RA, including managers and supervisors, coworkers, subordinates, people in higher authority, elected officials, vendors, contractors, or members of the public (WBI, 2013). When the perpetrator is a coworker, social isolation and attacks are common methods of bullying (Escartín et al., 2013). Social-based tactics such as engaging in gossip, spreading rumors, and attacking through isolation are less frequent when the perpetrators of workplace bullying are superiors (Escartín et al., 2013).

Women are more commonly associated with RA behaviors, which is sometimes colloquially regarded as being "catty" (McAndrew, 2014; Vaillancourt, 2013). For instance, Livingston, Hurst, and Kammeyer-Mueller, (2014) found that women engage more in indirect RA with other women than men do with other men. McAndrew, (2014) also noted that women are more likely to engage in aggressive and competitive gossip in order to exclude and ostracize competitors than men are. However, McAndrew, (2014) contended that even though women tend to express their aggression through gossip and other indirect methods when compared with men, men engage in more direct aggression. So, harassment and victimization are common among men in organizational settings, and these include verbal abuse, ridicule, rumors, gossips and insulting teasing, (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). Spector and Zhou, (2014) found that men are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors than women when certain personality traits and/or high job stress are present.

The perpetrators and victims of RA tend to be women (Johnstone, 2016; McAndrew, 2014; Nwaneri et al., 2016). As such, RA is more prevalent in professions

that are dominated by women, such as nursing (Johnstone, 2016). Nwaneri et al. (2016)

found that RA perpetrated by female nurses tended to be against other female nurses.

According to Nwaneri et al., women's tendency to engage in RA against other women

can be explained by perceived male oppression in the workplace. There is less knowledge

of the workplace bullying that result in more female oppression and the prevalence of

relational aggression in the workplace. The characteristics of perpetrators, nature of

bullying, outcomes of bullying and behavior exhibited among nurses are affected because

of poor knowledge (Nwaneri et al., 2016).

      According to Namie, (2014) responses in the 2014 WBI survey showed 93% of

Americans wanted a law that would protect them from bullying activities in the

workplace. However, despite the high support for the legislation, laws at the state level

have persistently stalled because most organizations claim they police themselves

(Wooldridge, 2014). Consequently, no state or federal laws prohibit RA and other

bullying activities in the workplace without the grounds of discrimination (Frolik, 2014).

      Whether employers and organizations are doing enough to curb RA in the

workplace remains debatable. This is because to date, there is little or no national

determination to pursue a legal mandate on the use of RA in the workplace. Rather, the

fates of both perpetrators and their victims are left in the hands of individual

organizations and their management. Christensen, Phillips, and Namie (2014) argued that

employers do little or nothing to stop workplace aggression such as RA. Employers'

reactions on the 2014 WBI survey showed that only 6% of employers condemned

workplace bullying; 25% denied that it happened in their organizations and, therefore,

failed to investigate any complaints. Fifteen percent of employers rationalized RA as an innocent, routine way of doing business, and 5% encouraged it as necessary for a competitive organization.

Effects of RA

The effects of RA not only involve the victims but also impact the productivity of the organization (Field, 2013; Hutchinson, 2013; O'Farrell & Nordstrom, 2013; Stephens, 2017). In this section, I begin by discussing the effects of RA on the individual employee. Next, I discuss the effects of RA on the organization.

Effects on the employees. Although it is generally not physical, RA is a form of abuse that can affect victims' psychological well-being (Dellasega et al., 2014). RA consists of behaviors that threaten relationships and friendships and harm victims' relationships through social isolation or estrangement. Victims' psychological and physical health is the most extensively studied consequences of aggression in the workplace (Giorgi, Leon-Perez, & Arenas, 2015; Park & Ono, 2016; Stephens, 2017). Research has confirmed that RA can cause as much harm as physical aggression, if not more (Marshall, Arnold, Rolon-Arroyo, & Griffith, 2015; Park & Ono, 2016; Wu, Birtch, Chiang, & Zhang, 2016). Internalizing symptoms of depression and anxiety is common among victims of RA (Butterworth et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2015). According to Butterworth et al. (2016), person-related and work-related bullying predicts both depression and anxiety among victims. Other negative effects of RA include psychosocial maladjustment and decreased life and job satisfaction (Park & Ono, 2016; Stephens, 2017).

In a study involving the effects of workplace bullying through gossiping upon victims' psychological well-being, Wu et al. (2106) found empirical support for the negative effects of RA behaviors on victims' self-esteem and dispositional tendencies. Similarly, Giorgi et al. (2015) found that workplace bullying had a significant U-shaped curvilinear relationship with job satisfaction among employees from different types of organizations in Italy. This means that the impact of workplace bullying on the job attitudes and well-being of employees is in the form of a U-shaped curvilinear model in which there is a positive relation between both variables up to a specific point, and after that, one variable increases while the other one decreases. Kakarika et al. (2017) also found that workplace bullying is significantly related to life satisfaction, particularly among older women. In terms of work engagement, Park and Ono (2016) found that workplace bullying is only indirectly related to work engagement through its intervening interaction with job insecurity.

Effects on organizations. Another area of research that focuses on the effects of RA involves organizational outcomes (Dellasega et al., 2014; Johnstone, 2016; O'Farrell, & Nordstrom, 2013). Regardless of work context, RA is considered destructive to an organization, affecting absenteeism, productivity, and turnover (Field, 2013; Salin, 2001; O'Farrell & Nordstrom, 2013). Healthy relationships among employees and leaders are important in the success of organizations (Field, 2013). From an organizational perspective, the human costs of bullying, including RA, have noticeable effects such as the development of hostile work environments (Dellasega et al., 2014).

Relational aggression is generally associated with negative organizational outcomes (Dellasega et al., 2014; Kent et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2016). Dellasega et al. (2014) found that RA had a significant but weak association with job satisfaction and intent to leave among nurses. Among women in the legal profession, Stephens (2017) found that RA was associated with higher levels of workplace incivility and less job satisfaction. Wu et al. (2106) also found that workplace gossiping was associated with decreased levels of organizational citizenship behaviors.

When workplace bullying such as RA is prevalent, employees' ability to provide quality work is diminished and affects the organizations' overall effectiveness in providing services or products (Hutchinson, 2013; Laschinger, 2014). For instance, Hutchinson (2013) found that a high prevalence of bullying among nurses can result in a reduced ability to provide quality patient care. Laschinger (2014) also found higher incidences of subtle forms of workplace bullying such as RA among nurses, physicians, and other healthcare leaders predicted increased perceived risks to patient safety. Even if workplace bullying such as RA is not directed toward patients, these negative behaviors can still threaten and compromise patient safety in acute care hospital settings (Laschinger, 2014).

The use of different bullying tactics in the workplace is an expensive liability for many organizations as a result of loss in productivity and efficiency. Cherwin (2013) reported that 64% of individuals targeted by workplace aggression give up their employment, costing organizations an estimated $250 million in expenditures relating to different health issues, litigation, and employee retraining. Whether overt or covert,

workplace aggression can have negative outcomes such as diminishing job satisfaction and confidence, promoting absence from work, high staff turnover, and declining productivity (Cherwin, 2013; Stephens, 2017; Park & Ono, 2016).

Organizational Factors That Support RA Behaviors

Research has identified situational precursors that encourage or foster workplace bullying behaviors such as RA. These factors include organizational culture, negative working environment, leadership style, and poor implementation of policies (An & Kang, 2015; Nica et al., 2016; Salin, 2015; Francioli, Conway, Hansen, Holten, Grynderup, Persson, & Høgh, 2016; Giorgi et al., 2013; Laschinger, 2014; Laschinger & Feda, 2014; Woodrow & Guest, 2017; Escartín, 2016; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). In this section, I discussed these facilitating factors.

Organizational culture. Organizational environments can be fertile grounds for those who thrive on aggressive, bullying activities. Organizational culture is another factor that can influence workplace bullying behaviors such as RA (An & Kang, 2015; Field, 2013; Giorgi et al., 2013; O'Farrell & Nordstrom, 2013). Research that focused on the associations between workplace bullying such as RA and organizational culture has emphasized the socialization processes by which victimization behaviors are normalized and institutionalized (An & Kang, 2015; Field, 2013; Giorgi et al., 2013; O'Farrell & Nordstrom, 2013). For example, researchers such as An and Kang (2015) and Giorgi et al. (2013) found support regarding the relationship between workplace bullying and specific types of organizational culture. An and Kang (2015) examined the role of organizational culture and workplace bullying among nurses in Korea; culture was

operationalized as rank-oriented, relationship-oriented, innovation-oriented, and task-oriented. The nurses' responses revealed that rank-oriented culture was the most common organizational culture in Korea. The results of the multivariate logistic regression analysis revealed that workplace bullying was more likely to occur in rank-oriented cultures than in relationship-oriented cultures. Using a sample of Japanese employees in five labor unions in Tokyo, Giorgi et al. (2013) alternatively found that innovation-oriented cultures were negatively associated with workplace bullying. One limitation of these two studies is that that the samples were drawn from Asian countries and, as such, may not be generalizable to the U.S. context.

Another aspect of organizational culture associated with workplace bullying is the lack of structure or explicit rules. O'Farrell and Nordstrom (2013) examined the role of organizational culture in workplace bullying, including RA, slandering, sexual harassment, and physical assault. The results of the data analysis revealed that chaotic organizations in which transparency is lacking, accountability is limited, and appropriate rewards and guidelines are not clear were positively associated with workplace bullying.

Bullying activities that include relational aggression thrive in competitive workplace environments in which employees are prepared to sabotage and oust colleagues and subordinates to increase their chances for higher positions in the organization (Field, 2013). Competitive environments permit an atmosphere in which employees are allowed to sabotage the work of others to advance themselves. Spagnoli and Balducci (2017) also found that high workload during organizational change is associated with workplace bullying. High job insecurity and excessive workloads are the

two variables that indirectly result in workplace bullying (Spagnoli & Balducci, 2017). In contrast, Tsuno, Kawakami, Tsutsumi, Shimazu, Inoue, Odagiri, Kawachi, (2015) found that larger companies with more formal structures for preventing bulling through policies and implementation limited the climate for workplace bullying. However, RA and other bullying activities can flourish in bureaucratic and larger organizations because aggressors and perpetrators are difficult to identify; RA is easier to address in smaller organizations because perpetrators may be less difficult to identify.

Negative work environment. Negative work environment is another organizational factor that can facilitate the occurrence of workplace bullying such as RA (Nica et al., 2016; Salin, 2015; Samnani & Singh, 2016). Salin (2015) found that both poor physical and psychosocial working environments are associated with more observations of workplace bullying. Other situational factors that may create fertile ground for RA and other bullying activities are a lack of a compassionate environment, interpersonal conflicts, and controlled flow of information.

Leadership style. Leaders and managers play an important role in developing environments that either encourage or discourage workplace bullying such as RA (Giorgi et al., 2013; Laschinger, 2014; Nica et al., 2016; Woodrow & Guest, 2017). Leadership is considered an antecedent of workplace bullying because leaders are instrumental in both preventing and permitting behaviors that involve mistreating other people (Woodrow & Guest, 2017). According to Giorgi et al. (2013), support from leaders and managers is negatively associated with workplace bullying. Additionally, the quality and style of leadership is an important factor in establishing environments that encourage workplace

bullying (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2014; Francioli et al., 2016; Laschinger & Fida, 2014). For

instance, perceptions of authentic leadership are associated with less workplace bullying

among nurses (Laschinger & Fida, 2014). Ethical leadership is also negatively associated

with workplace bullying in higher education (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2014).

     Poor implementation of policies. Discipline and subordination are critical

devices that organizations use to make workers accept RA and other bullying behavior as

part of the workplace values. Poor implementation of policies in the workplace is another

organizational factor that may increase workplace bullying such as RA (Escartín, 2016;

Woodrow & Guest, 2014). According to Woodrow and Guest (2014), when HR leaders'

policy implementation is uneven, workplace bullying fosters and persists. Lack of

implementing formal policies may trickle down to employees and their supervisors and

be diffused in the organization through modeling. When bullies are not reprimanded by

HR leaders for violating organizational policies, the continuance of these negative and

aggressive behaviors is implicitly encouraged (Escartín, 2016). As such, RA and other

bullying activities thrive when perpetrators see that such behaviors go unpunished

because of the nonexistence of policies or the lack of policy implementation in

organizations (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Employees are thus more likely to accept

bullying or RA behaviors when these behaviors are not punished. Conversely, bullying is

likely to be discouraged when there are clear sanctions for aggressive behaviors in the

workplace (Fox & Cowan, 2015).

Interventions to Address RA in the Workplace

Given that victims of workplace bullying typically experience psychological distress, interventions are necessary (Fenclau et al., 2014). Most of the studies on interventions to address RA have focused on educational settings, given that students are more often exposed to different kinds of bullying (Horton, 2014;Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). The goal of these interventions is to help students develop healthier behaviors in order to enhance social relationships and interactions. In educational settings, counseling is one of the most common interventions used to address RA (Horton, 2014;Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). Through counseling, students are taught how to understand social cues appropriately and respond in ways that are productive and instrumental (Horton, 2014). Social and emotional learning are also emphasized in order to facilitate positive behaviors (Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015).

In a study conducted by Voulgaridou and Kokkinos (2015), use of social based interactions is incorporated in schools to address RA while focusing on the roles and relationships of other individuals. This same method of social based interactions is proposed for the prevention of RA in the workplace. However, limited information is available about interventions that have been implemented by HR leaders to address RA in the workplace. Most of the interventions that have been utilized in workplace settings have focused on the broader issue of workplace bullying (Branch et al., 2013; Field, 2013; Giorgi et al., 2013; Namie & Namie, 2009). The few studies that have focused on interventions intended to prevent and address RA in the workplace have been descriptive in nature and based on experience, but have lacked methodological rigor to determine

their effectiveness (Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). They were not rigorous because there is a need to have coherent picture about the prevalence of RA, number of contextual and personal parameters; and relationship of RA.

Human resource leaders play an important role in preventing and addressing workplace bullying such as RA, and are an essential component in the success of interventions for workplace bullying (Branch et al., 2013). For instance, Field (2013) suggested that HR leaders can prevent RA by assessing employees during the hiring process. Relational aggression is less likely to occur when prospective employees are able to handle conflicts appropriately (Field, 2013). Human resource leaders have the ability to create and implement interventions that can minimize workplace bullying such as RA (Fox & Cowan, 2015).

Formal approaches that have been used to prevent and address workplace bullying include explicit policies that prohibit bullying or education programs that inform employees about the different forms of bullying (Thompson & George, 2016). According to Field (2013), companies should create anti-bullying policies that explicitly identify bullying behaviors. Clear procedures should also be established regarding reporting bullying, the investigation process, and the corresponding penalties for proven bullying. These policies should be made according to the trends such as industrial and male dominant organizations which have a high risk of victimization in which older employees suffer more in comparison of young workers (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). Explicit policies about RA are often necessary given the lack of understanding attached to this form of bullying (Fenclau et al., 2014). Thompson and George (2016) also

recommended the use of education programs to protect prospective employees from bullying by increasing their self-efficacy. One challenge that arises is difficulty in verifying RA because of the nature and mechanisms of this form of indirect aggression, in which perpetrators deliberately conceal their involvement (Johnstone, 2016).

Informal approaches that have been used to prevent or address workplace bullying include offering leadership development opportunities, training, and mental health education (Giorgi et al., 2013). Stephens (2017) suggested that interventions should emphasize the importance of common decency and positive behaviors in order to curb tendencies toward RA behaviors in the workplace. Field (2013) also emphasized the importance of training in order to learn about RA and why such behaviors are not appropriate in the workplace. Giorgi et al. (2013) suggested that mental health promotion may be effective in preventing workplace bullying such as RA. Developing a healthy organizational culture and team cohesion has also been suggested as a strategy that can prevent workplace bullying (Giorgi et al., 2013).

Despite the ongoing efforts of organizational leaders to prevent and address workplace bullying through structured interventions, the body of literature on this topic remains limited (Branch et al., 2013; Escartín, 2016). According to Escartín (2016), most of the literature on workplace bullying interventions is descriptive in nature. In order to address workplace bullying such as RA successfully, Branch et al. (2013) contended that greater efforts should be made to examine strategies or interventions that have been successful in resolving workplace conflicts.

Summary and Conclusions

Relational aggression in the workplace is a form of bullying that is characterized by psychological and emotional abuse, rather than physical abuse (Dellasega et al., 2014; Field, 2013). Victims, perpetrators, and organizations are the major players in RA , and RA negatively affects both individuals and organizations (Atherton et al., 2017; Grimaldi et al., 2014; Field, 2013; Hutchinson, 2013; O'Farrell & Nordstrom, 2013; Stephens, 2017). Internalizing symptoms of depression and anxiety and low job satisfaction are common experiences of victims of RA (Giorgi et al., 2015; Marshall et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2016). In terms of negative organizational outcomes, financial consequences from RA behaviors and other workplace bullying can occur from expenditures relating to employee health issues, litigation, and employee retraining.

Most research on RA has emphasized perpetrators and targets. As such, there has been less emphasis on the roles of organizations in cultivating environments that foster RA behaviors. Despite the ongoing efforts of organizational leaders to prevent and address workplace bullying through structured interventions, the body of literature on this topic remains limited (Branch et al., 2013; Escartín, 2016). In order to address workplace bullying such as RA successfully, Branch et al. (2013) contended that greater efforts should be made to examine strategies or interventions that have been successful in resolving workplace conflicts. As such, in this qualitative phenomenological study, I aimed to address a gap in the literature, exploring the experiences and informed perceptions of RA victims regarding interventions to prevent and address RA in the

workplace. The results of this study may be useful in helping companies implement interventions that can prevent RA in their organizations.

In the next chapter, I detail the research design and the rationale for the selection of phenomenology. I also identify my role as researcher and discuss the methodology pertaining to participant logic selection, the research material for the interview, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. I then discuss issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations, concluding with a summary of the key points of the research method.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

RA in the workplace is a form of bullying that is characterized by psychological and emotional abuse rather than physical abuse (Dellasega et al., 2014). The problem addressed in this study was the lack of research on appropriate interventions to prevent and address RA in the workplace. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace based on victims' experiences. In this chapter, I detail the research design and rationale for the selection of phenomenological interviewing. Then, my role as researcher is discussed, followed by the methodology pertaining to participant selection, the research material for the interview, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Next, I consider issues of trustworthiness and ethics that occurred during the course of this research process. I conclude with a summary of the key points of the research method.

Research Design and Rationale

The reason for phenomenological interviews in this study was their capacity for exploring how organizations intervene or manage workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims with semi structured interview questions. The resulting data was rich in information regarding the interviewees' personal experiences and enabled me to discover main themes. Without predetermined and structured responses, the participants' narratives were free from the researcher's personal beliefs, limitations, and biases; therefore, the results were better reflective of the participants'

viewpoints. Moustakas (1994) called this phenomenological method epoche; it opens and produces for the researcher new meanings from these data.

The selection of a qualitative research method for this study led to the discovery that this is a suitable research method for complicated procedures occurring inside an organization. This research is exploratory in nature because the raw data drives the findings, not previous theories on the same phenomenon. The qualitative approach to research is focused on understanding a phenomenon in a comprehensive manner (Taylor et al., 2015). Conversely, the quantitative approach tends to make generalizations about the data it collects from a large number of individuals. Both research approaches use data to answer the research question; however, they differ in the kind of data they collect. The qualitative approach requires gathering information that focuses on describing a phenomenon in a deep, comprehensive manner; the quantitative approach requires gathering information that focuses on describing a phenomenon involving a larger number of participants, thereby providing the possibility of summarizing characteristics across groups or relationships (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This research focused on qualitative data so that a comprehensive idea about interventions in the workplace for addressing the issue of RA can be accessed while keeping in mind the perspectives of victims.

In this study, I used the qualitative research approach to examine the experiences of a small number of individuals. The qualitative data provided information about this seldom investigated territory of interventions about RA, specifically from the perspective of victims. It would not have been possible to collect in-depth information if other

research methods, such as the quantitative approach, had been used. This is because the quantitative approach limits the respondents' ability to express themselves beyond the confines of the response options provided in a survey questionnaire.

The phenomenological approach involves unpacking the inner thoughts of a small group of individuals in order to make sense of their experiences. These experiences provide transferability, applicability, and external validity to the research process (Burchett, Umoquit, & Dobrow, 2011). Phenomenological research emphasizes consciousness in order to understand individuals' first-person accounts (Moustakas, 1994). The selection of phenomenological research was appropriate because I aimed to explore the experiences of RA victims with interventions used to prevent and address RA in the workplace. In terms of the participants in phenomenological studies, selection must be based on individuals' experiential knowledge regarding the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, having experienced a phenomenon is a fundamental criterion in selecting respondents, who are then thoroughly investigated; in the process, they narrate their experiences, which eventually yield data for the study. As such, the participants' experiences and perceptions formed the basis for understanding the phenomenon under study.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, the researcher is considered the main instrument (Bresler, 1995; Goulding, 2002). My role as a researcher was central to making this process effective and possible. I was the one collecting data and interacting with the respondents; therefore, my abilities as a researcher to analyze the real concerns of respondents was

significant for this research process. As a researcher, I was involved in every aspect of data collection, including contacting people in my network, accepting referred participants, and recording information to categorize themes in the recorded data format.

One of the risks that I guarded against as a researcher involved trustworthiness. This is because there was no process to guide respondents on how to share their experiences with ease and without anxiety. The research results are highly dependent on the methodology adopted for overcoming the issue of trustworthiness (Borland, 2001). I focused on setting my preconceptions aside. Epoché allowed me to use the three approaches of "acceptance of natural attitude of participants, reflexive critical dialogue with self and active listening" (Bevan, 2014, p. 139). This was helpful in conducting quality research with better results based on balanced information.

Methodology

This study was aimed at understanding and addressing interventions regarding RA in the workplace through RA victims' narratives of their own experiences and interpretations. According to Apori-Nkansah (2008), to fill the gap in the literature, the research can be strengthened by detailed and in-depth analysis. This can be achieved through the inclusion of adequate details, different perspective, and introduction of different variables. I aimed to balance the structure of the narrative in this study with analysis, interpretation, discussion, and background information. In this section, I discuss key components of the study's methodology, including: (a) participant selection logic, (b) instrumentation, (c) procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, and (d) a data analysis plan.

Participant Selection

In qualitative studies, the population and sample size are not determined based on statistical calculations, but on data saturation. Saturation is reached at a point where no new information or theme is present in the interviewing data (Walker, 2012). The sample size was further decided by the type of the research questions as well as the likely outcome or findings (Wertz, 2005). A total of 12 RA victims in the workplace were interviewed, and their information met the saturation point. Their narratives presented wide-ranging views on the issue and were helpful in achieving the purpose of this research.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument for data collection in this research was semi structured face-to-face interviews. The use of interview in qualitative studies is the practice of collecting data through participants' answers to a series of questions. Interviews occur through dialogue between the researcher and the participants and are, therefore, innately relational in nature (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Researchers in different disciplines use interviews as a data collection method that helps them answer their research questions (Giorgi, 2009). Structured interviews are among the interview techniques on use in research studies. This category of interview techniques pursues consistency among interviews through the use of an established set of questions that does not give room for deviation, whereas unstructured interviews allow for continuous dialogues steered by the core topic of study, normally with open-ended queries and emphasis on drawing out experiences in the form of storytelling (Bradburn, Sudman, & Blair, 1979). Semi

structured interviews land in between the first two methods. Irrespective of the method interviewers choose, there are always core challenges such as establishing suitable relationships with participants, understanding how the interview shapes the answers to the questions, and how to probe for additional information or ask follow-up questions (Seidman, 2006). In this study, interviews played significant role as a major component of phenomenological research. Some research studies are wholly interview-based, whereas others combine interviews with other data collection methods. This research is solely based on the interviews and no other data collection method was used.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I recruited 12 participants using purposeful sampling, a nonprobability method of selecting participants based on their ability to provide data relevant to the research. The purposeful sample was selected by the snowball or chain method, where the first participant referred other individuals who could serve as participants (Patton, 1990). The process is called *snowball sampling* because the sample grows with participants' referrals. My first referral came through the help of my online circle of friends. To make the study possible, all participants were recruited from the Washington, D.C. Metropolis or the National Capital Region. Samples were collected from both public and private sectors. The age range of the sample was 32 to 48 years old. One of the participants is a retiree, while others are currently active in the workplace. Sample participants had different roles in their organizations, including data analyst, contract specialist, medical coder, engineer, management analyst, program and management analyst, healthcare, and procurement analyst.

Some of the referred participants claimed they were encouraged to participate because of the policy impact of the study on social change. Eligible participants included currently employed individuals or retired employees who experienced RA in the workplace. The use of RA in the workplace includes all behaviors projected to threaten relationships and friendships or to harm the victim's relationships through social isolation or estrangement (Crothers et al., 2009). To ensure that the respondents have experienced RA in the workplace, some qualifying questions were asked. Potential participants were asked if they had encountered any of the following: (a) exclusion from social activities, (b) damaging of reputation through gossip and rumors, (c) public humiliation, (d) withdrawal of interaction or attention, (e) coercion or psychological manipulation, or (f) online bullying. Selecting a sample based on these qualifying questions ensured that the participants experienced RA in the workplace. Respondents showing positive responses to these questions were selected.

Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. They had the opportunity to stop the interview at will if they so wished. Obtaining participants' consent before data collection is the standard for any ethical research (Strauss, Sengupta, Quinn, Goeppinger, Spaulding, Kegeles, & Millett, 2001). With these approaches in place, I gained direct personal contact and secured the trust, commitment, and convictions of the participants.

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews with participants. At first, the respondents were asked their availability with respect to date and time, and on the agreed upon date, the interviews were conducted. Before starting the interview,

respondents were informed via written form that the information collected would be secured with no third party having access to the information. The participants were informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded to enhance the accuracy of the transcription in preparation for the data analysis. Respondents were assured that the data would be preserved according to the school's instruction, and their consent to participate in this study was willingly given. The interviews occurred in a library with a private room. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes each.

Data Analysis Plan

In qualitative research, data analysis begins at the onset of data collection (Goulding, 2002; Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002); Neuman (1997) argued that the whole exercise of data analysis is to examine for a pattern from the date received. I utilized Kleiman's (2004) data analysis process, as outlined in Figure 1. First, I read the interview transcripts to interpret the general meaning of the data as a whole (Kleiman, 2004). I then reread the transcripts in order to develop codes that served as the units of meaning for the data. I read all of the generated data repeatedly in search of new meanings until no new information was revealed. The first developed codes reflected the meanings that emerged from the data in abstraction through iterative processes. These codes represented the most essential meanings of particular portions of text for each participant. Second, I integrated units of meaning into themes, generating codes for each participant (Kleiman, 2004). I then integrated related codes into a single category. Third, I used free imaginative variation, or experimentation using my imagination about the meaning of a particular portion of text (Moustakas, 1994). This helped to reduce the data

and examine meanings of particular codes. Fourth, I described the essential meanings that resulted from the previous analysis, generating themes from the interviews that reflected the experiences of the participants as a single group (Kleiman, 2004). Fifth, I finalized the themes by going back to the raw data to ensure that every result could be supported (Kleiman, 2004). I examined each theme and assessed whether sufficient data was available to support the findings. Specific attention was given to the portions of the transcripts that embodied the essence of a particular theme. The final step involved the critical analysis of the data (Kleiman, 2004). I utilized a series of verification processes to strengthen the credibility of the results, including verifying the detailed descriptions for each participant, proper maintenance of the phenomenological reduction, discovering the essential meanings of the participants' experiences, and articulating the structure of the results.

| Reading of transcripts | | Integration of units into themes | | Free imaginative variation | | Description of essential meaning | | Finalization of themes | | Critical analysis of data |
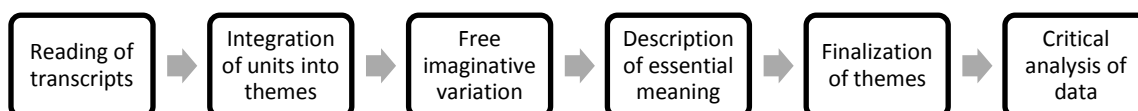
Figure 1. Data analysis process.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In quantitative studies, trustworthiness is referred to as validity and reliability, however, in studies using qualitative method, there are no instruments to establish metrics about validity and reliability. Therefore, it becomes crucial for qualitative researchers to address how to establish that their study's findings are trustworthy. Trustworthiness was operationalized in terms of four criteria: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c)

dependability, and (d) confirmability, as discussed below (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The importance of trustworthiness is to establish these four criteria listed above.

Credibility

Credibility, otherwise known as descriptive or internal validity, connotes that the researcher has accurately comprehended and captured the data through the participants' accounts of events (Maxwell, 1992). A study's credibility is dependent upon the extent to which its findings accurately represent the reality they purport to describe (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Bryman (2008), the researcher can address credibility by recording interviews, transcribing them, and verifying each transcript. Additionally, participants may provide unreliable accounts of events (Bryman, 2008). To address this problem, I engaged in follow-up meetings with participants. Swanson and Holton (2005) posited that this gives the participants the opportunity to review whether the emerging story meets their original accounts. The follow-up meetings were conducted one week after the original data collection. The venue for follow-up meetings was the same private room in a public library used for the first interview. The interviews lasted about 20 minutes each, as they were carried out as a review of the previous session. The participants were asked about, the similar questions again so that any differences in their narratives could be fixed. These follow ups were also recorded so that information bias could be eliminated. Also, the questions that were not addressed clearly in previous sessions or seemed vague were asked again in order to obtain a clear answer to match with earlier collected information.

In summary, I addressed credibility by recording interviews, transcribing them, and verifying each transcript with the corresponding interviewee. I also asked each participant to review preliminary coding and theming results to confirm that the emerging interpretation was consistent with their perceptions and beliefs. I also solicited some participants' feedback by e-mailing the relevant information along with a request that they review the materials and indicate by e-mail any changes that might have been needed to ensure credibility. All participants replied that the transcripts and preliminary interpretations were accurate.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the results of the study can be applied in other similar contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Transferability was not the objective of this study; rather, the aim was to explore organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace based on victims' experiences. Bryman (2008) observed that qualitative research studies are rarely transferable without sufficient similarities in contexts. In this study, I provide a detailed description of the context to aid other scholars in their decision-making when analyzing the transferability of the findings. The context is explained by showing the geographical location of the research area. It was also made clear that respondents include former or current employees from public and private sectors. All of these are clearly specified in Table 1 of participant demographics.

Dependability

Dependability is the extent to which the results of the study can be considered stable (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). A study's dependability is the extent to which the same results can be obtained if the study is repeated by other researchers using the same methods in the same research context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following Shenton (2004) recommendation to give detail of research processes in order to address dependability, I descriptively listed steps taken in this study to allow repetition of the research in the future. Practices based on this recommendation permit the reader to see the benefit of utilizing the same research processes in a study, therefore making the research process and results dependable. As such, I detailed the methodology in this chapter to adhere to this suggestion to ensure the dependability of this research findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the results can be considered free from bias or subjectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). A study's results are determined by the ideas and experiences of the participants, rather than by any characteristics of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I addressed confirmability by continuously taking the time to recheck gathered data as proposed by Bryman (2008). Furthermore, I used bracketing as part of the research design to make a distinction between my perspective and that of the findings/participants. Bracketing is the conscious process of setting aside personal biases and opinions to ensure that all findings are from the true essence and meaning of the raw data (Moustakas, 1994).

Ethical Procedures

Following the Belmont Report from the Office of Human Subjects Research

(1979), effort was made to incorporate into this study respect for individuals,

beneficence, and justice. Aware that research study involving human subjects, and other

ethical issues should be considered critical, therefore, in preparation for this research, I

completed the mandatory training of all modules of the Collaborative Institutional

Training Initiative, including those concerning vulnerable populations. Each of the five

areas of ethical consideration, confidentiality, privacy, risk and benefit, data security, and

bias were incorporated into the research design.

Respondents were clearly informed about the purpose of the study. Participants'

confidentiality and anonymity throughout the course of this study and afterward was

guaranteed. I advised participants of any possible risks from participating in this study. In

particular, participants were told about the possibility that their participation could bring

back memories of their victimization. To mitigate this risk, I adopted a four-step

approach to protect and safeguard the participant. First, at the first sign of a participant in

distress, I would stop the interview to give the participant time to recover. Second, if a

participant was unable to calm down or recover from the distress, I would ask the

participant if he or she wanted to continue or stop the interview. Third, if a participant

was emotionally or physically incapable of continuing, I would seek outside care for the

participant, such as family members or friends. Fourth, in the absence of outside support

when a participant was at high risk, I would access skilled personnel resources to assist

the distressed participant. I would contact a psychologist if I encountered any such

situation. However, none of the respondents showed signs of stress because the interview sessions took place after rapport building and in an undisclosed room of a public library. To further ensure minimal risk to the participants, I excluded from the study individuals who had experienced or had been diagnosed with PTSD or any other mental illness.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2008), confidentiality means that the researcher will hold sacred and not expose participants' identities, and that access to this information will be limited to the researcher only. Similarly, privacy, according to McCabe (2016), implies that individuals have the rights to preserve their thoughts, and identifying information carved in their body tissue. Participant identities were replaced with codes in all documentation and analysis to protect confidentiality and privacy, and all participants provided their informed consent before participating in the study. All electronic data are stored on two jump drives, with one serving as a backup. The data were encrypted and password protected to prevent unauthorized access. All data will be retained for five years and destroyed permanently by shredding and cracking.

Summary

This study utilized phenomenological interviewing to obtain and examine participants' experiences as workplace RA victims. The interviewer, as the primary instrument, was responsible for all aspects of the study, including administering the qualifying questions to referred participants, data collection, and data analysis. The sample included 12 victims of RA in the workplace selected using purposeful sampling that was coordinated by snowball method. There was no specific calculation for determining sample and population size; the technique of data saturation was used to

make it consistent. The primary data collection method was semi structured interviews. The timeframe for interviewing was in the range of 30 to 45 minutes, and this took place in a public library conference room. Data was analyzed using the processes of data management, reading and memorizing, description, classification, interpretation, and representation. Participants were recruited from public and private sector organizations. The roles of participants differed in those organizations and ranged from data analyst, contract specialist, medical coder, engineer, management analyst, program and management analyst, healthcare workers, and procurement analyst. There were six males and six females in the selected sample. The inclusion criteria were based on a few questions and prospective participants who gave positive responses to those questions were selected for the study. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, academic rigors were observed to improve transferability, dependability, confirmability, and dependability of the research findings. In the next chapter, I present the results of the data analysis. Demographic details of participants are described along with the narratives collected during the interview process. I conduct analysis of the collected data in the next section, along with the codes formed for analysis. At the end, the data was critically analyzed to get the emergent themes out of the research study, and the narration of participants' answers is presented in response to research question and sub questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore

organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace

based on victims' experiences. RA includes all behaviors which threaten relationships or

lead to social isolation or estrangement (Crothers, et al., 2009). Accordingly, the main

research question addressed in this study emphasized the lived experiences of the

participants. The main question for this study was: How do organizations intervene or

manage workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims? This

question framed the sub questions and provided an opportunity for each participant to

recount their lived experiences:

RQ1: How do written policies or protocols play a role in the intervention or

management of workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims?

RQ2: What are the most common reactions or practices of organizational

management regarding RA in the workplace?

RQ3: What do victims need most from management when encountering RA in the

workplace?

Essentially, both the overarching research question and the sub questions led to the

formation of semi structured open-ended interview questions. My dissertation committee

members reviewed the interview questions prior to data collection to decide whether the

questions were: (a) balanced and not biased and (b) suitable and logical to answer the

main research question. These questions were put forward to produce narrative

information about the phenomena from the participants. By analyzing participants'

information, themes that linked to the questions emerged.

Those who were selected after answering the inclusion criteria questions affirmed

they had experienced RA in the workplace. Argyris' psychological contract theory guided

the development of the central research question to capture how organizations intervene

or manage workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims. When

used to manage workplace bullying, it offered the motivation to create formal policies to

allow trust, collaboration, and commitment to thrive in the workplace (Lioliou et al.,

2014). If trust, collaboration, and commitment are introduced, organizational leaders will

then act as mediators when conflicts arose in the workplace (Kaya Cicerali & Cicerali,

2016). This chapter, allowed me to present the setting of data collection and the study

participants' experiences, detail the implementation of the data collection and analysis

procedures described in Chapter 3, discuss evidence of the trustworthiness of the study,

present the results of the data analysis, and conclude with a summary of the results.

Setting

With participants' consent, the interviews were conducted in a private room

located in a public library. All interviews occurred one-on-one except for Participants 4

and 5, who asked to be interviewed together. During the interview with Participants 4 and

5, I took care to ensure that both participants fully answered every question in the

interview protocol. The concealed public setting of the interviews helped participants to

feel safe, and the private room helped to ensure confidentiality so that participants felt

comfortable giving full and rich responses to the interview questions. The interviews

occurred at a time of the participants' choosing so they would not feel pressured to meet other obligations while providing their responses. No personal or organizational conditions influenced participants or their experience during the study in a way that might influence interpretation of the study's results.

Demographics

All 12 participants had experienced at least one of the following at their current or former workplace: (a) exclusion from social activities, (b) damage to reputation through gossip and rumors, (c) public humiliation, (d) withdrawal from social interaction or avoidance of attention, (e) coercion or psychological manipulation, or (f) online bullying. Table 1 shows a summary of participants' relevant demographic characteristics. I then provided brief narrative descriptions of the relevant background information for each participant. The demographic variables considered in this research include age, sex, race, position, and type of organization. These aspects were considered because there are racial and ethnic aspects of bullying, especially in American workplace settings (Peguero & Williams, 2013).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Age	Sex	Race	Position	Organization Type
1	43	Male	AA	Data Analyst	Public sector
2	41	Male	AA	Contract Specialist	Public sector
3	44	Male	AA	Medical Coder	Private sector
4	47	Male	AA	Engineer	Public sector
5	38	Female	AA	Contract Specialist	Public sector
6	32	Male	AA	Management Analyst	Public sector
7	35	Female	White	Program & Management Analyst	Public sector
8	38	Female	White	Healthcare	Private sector
9	40	Male	White	Project Manager	Public sector
10	41	Female	AA	Program Analyst	Public sector
11	48	Female	White	Procurement Analyst	Public sector
12	34	Female	White	Management Analyst	Public sector

Note. AA = African American.

Experience with Workplace RA in the Participant Narratives

The following brief case descriptions for each participant are written in narrative form and provided background information for each participant concerning their experiences with RA. In this section, participants' words are quoted and sometimes, paraphrased. This was very helpful to each participant because they can recognize their words during the verification process that takes the form of second interview.

P1 was subjected to personal humiliation when his personnel file was accessed by an unauthorized coworker/peer, who then shared confidential information about him with other coworkers. P1 reported the situation to his manager, who transferred the perpetrator out of the department.

P2, an African American, was subjected to public humiliation when he became the target of a coworker/peer's racist comments. He was hurt by the remarks, but did not

report the incidents because he felt obligated to deal with the matter himself without managerial intervention.

P3 was subjected to withdrawal of interaction or attention when he was prevented from completing his work on time because a director whose approval was needed withheld it for an unreasonable amount of time, despite P3's repeated requests and appeals. However, when a lateral coworker of P3 emailed the director about the matter, the director provided the necessary approval within minutes, demonstrating that the delay had been arbitrarily imposed. P3 did not seek redress in this matter. In the same workplace, a coworker withheld work from P3, making him late in his delivery of the needed materials. When he complained to this coworker, she made the accusation to management that P3 had verbally abused her, and stated that she would leave the organization if he was not fired. An upper-level manager who sided with the coworker refused to listen to P3's account of the incident. However, P3's immediate supervisor, who was aware that P3's accuser had been the instigator, intervened with upper management and prevented P3 from being disciplined.

P4 was named Employee of the Year in his workplace, but he was subjected to withdrawal of interaction or attention when he was repeatedly denied promotion in favor of less qualified candidates whom he was then required to train. His complaints were ignored by management, and eventually he left the organization.

P5 was unable to do her job properly because colleagues subjected her to withdrawal of interaction or attention when they withheld their work from her (and other colleagues). P5 and other victims explained the situation to their manager, who passed

their complaint up the chain of command. Upper management issued a directive that work could not be withheld, and the situation was resolved. In addition, like P4, P5 was repeatedly passed over for promotion in favor of less qualified candidates whom she was then required to train. When her complaints about this situation were ignored, she left the organization.

P6 was the only African American in his workplace, P6 was subjected to public humiliation when he was targeted for RA by conservative colleagues who presumed that he did not share their political or religious beliefs. His complaints to management about a particularly egregious perpetrator resulted in the man being reprimanded, but the RA continued, and additional complaints only resulted in further reprimands without tangible consequences.

P7 was a target for RA from her immediate supervisor, who damaged her reputation through gossip and rumors. The supervisor repeatedly accused P7 of neglecting tasks and duties that she had never been assigned, made false reports regarding P7's dereliction of duty to upper management and placed a formal reprimand to the same effect in her file. When P7 succeeded in getting herself transferred out of this supervisor's immediate purview and began to succeed in the organization, the supervisor had her transferred back to her previous position under his supervision. Managers and the union dismissed her complaints. P7 experienced severe depression as a result of this RA and was put on antidepressants and experienced crying fits and illness on her way to work each morning. She left the organization as soon as she was able, even though her new place of employment required her to make a 2-hour (round trip) commute.

P8 worked as a therapist in an office with other therapists and an administrative assistant (AA) who greeted patients and handled scheduling. The AA subjected her to public humiliation and damaged her reputation through gossip when she deliberately garbled P8's schedule, slandered her to patients, and made insulting remarks under her breath when she walked past her workspace. P8 and her colleagues complained repeatedly to the manager, who hesitated for 5 years before taking decisive action and firing the perpetrator. Before that, P8 found employment elsewhere.

P9 needed additional training and/or preparation time in order to do his job effectively, but neither was provided. When he consequently failed to perform in an optimal way, supervisors and coworkers subjected him to public humiliation by treating him condescendingly and insinuating that he was unintelligent. His complaints were dismissed by management, so he had to cope with the situation by using off-duty hours to study and prepare to do his job. He did not report the matter to management because he was afraid that his supervisors would retaliate, and that upper management would think badly of him.

P10 was new to her organization, colleagues withdrew attention and interaction by withholding work and information from her to prevent her from advancing and by refusing to interact with her. When she complained, management conducted an investigation and intervened, and the situation was resolved.

P11 was with her organization when it adopted a zero-tolerance policy for bullying. Prior to the adoption of the policy, she had been subjected to public humiliation in the form of derogatory remarks made by coworkers during meetings. She had spoken

to a manager, but the manager had not intervened. After the zero-tolerance policy was adopted and a sufficient amount of time had passed for it to be assimilated into day-to-day operations, P11 again approached her manager about the RA she was experiencing, and her manager intervened.

P12's coworker/peer neglected her duties, such that P12 and another colleague had to take on extra work to prevent the department from falling behind. To cover her dereliction of duty, the perpetrator repeatedly damaged P12's reputation with false accusations to management that P12 and the other coworker were the ones who were not doing their jobs. Instead of directly intervening when P12 complained, her manager passed the matter on to human resources, and the problem was not effectively addressed.

Data Collection and Analysis

I collected data from 12 participants through semi structured interviews. Each interview took place in a private room in a public library, with an average duration of approximately 45 minutes. I audio-recorded all interviews using a digital recording device. The data collection proceeded according to the planned method described in Chapter 3 with no exceptions.

Prior to analysis, I transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim, yielding approximately 120 pages of single-spaced transcriptions. I then uploaded the transcriptions into NVivo 11 software and analyzed it using the five-step process described by Kleiman (2004).The first step involved reading and rereading the interview transcriptions in order to interpret the general meaning of the data as a whole. During the first reading of the transcriptions, I made notes of ideas, themes, and meanings that

seemed salient and relevant to the phenomenon being investigated. During the second and third readings of the transcriptions, I used the notes made during the first reading to create NVivo nodes, which I labeled with descriptive words or phrases. These nodes represented codes. I generated a separate set of codes for each participant. I then grouped phrases or other data elements expressing similar meanings or ideas into the code(s) with the labels that expressed those meanings or ideas. As I grouped additional data elements into the codes, I modified the names of the codes to reflect the meaning of the data more accurately, and created new codes when I identified a distinction between subsets of the data elements within a code. During the fourth reading of the transcriptions, I carefully reviewed the labels of the codes to ensure that they accurately reflected the data included, and reviewed the data elements within each code to ensure the manner in which they were grouped accurately reflected the meanings and ideas they expressed.

In the second step of data analysis, I combined the codes across participants when codes from different participants appeared similar. No codes that emerged during this step included data from all participants, and some codes that had emerged from a single transcription could not be reduced to any of the codes to which other participants had contributed (e.g., the single-participant codes *legal consultation* and *request granted*). In total, I grouped 150 data elements into 26 codes during the second step of the analysis. Table 2 identifies the codes that emerged during the second step of the analysis, the number of participants who contributed to each code, the number of data elements included in each code, and the percentage of the total number of data elements included in each code. This percentage of elements shows frequency distributions that represent

the data elements present in codes in percentage form. Codes are listed alphabetically, as

this step of the analysis led to the grouping of codes into themes.

Table 2

Data Analysis Step-Two Codes

Code	Number of Participants Contributing to Code	Number of Data Elements in Code	% of Data Elements in Code ($N = 150$)
Chain of command	6	8	5.33
Hotlines	2	3	2.00
HR mediators	2	3	2.00
Informing employees	6	6	2.67
Insufficient reaction	4	4	4.00
Investigation	5	6	0.67
Legal consultation	1	1	0.67
Manager quashes victim-blaming	1	1	0.67
Need for cultural change	2	2	1.33
Need for dedicated resources	1	1	0.67
Need for more policies	6	7	4.67
Need for training	7	10	6.67
Need managerial observation	4	10	6.67
Need to be taken seriously	9	18	12.00
Need to know rights and report	4	5	3.33
Need to talk to someone	1	1	0.67
No help from management	7	12	10.00
No policy for RA	1	1	0.67
Perpetrator removed	3	3	2.00
Punishing victim for reporting	3	7	4.67
React only when RA reaches crisis point	3	5	3.33
React quickly to work-slowly to social	1	1	0.67
Reactive – victim must come forward	3	3	2.00
Request granted	1	1	0.67
Training for employees	7	8	5.33
Training for managers	1	1	0.67

Note. RA = Relational aggression.

In the third step of data analysis, I used free imaginative variation to test

interpretations of the data elements (Kleiman, 2004). No additional changes to the codes

resulted from this step. The fourth step consisted of describing the essential meanings that

resulted from the previous phases of the analysis (Kleiman, 2004). This process resulted

in grouping similar codes into themes that reflected the abstracted experiences of the

participants as a single group. In the fifth step of data analysis, I examined each theme

and assessed whether sufficient data were available to support the findings. Specific

attention was given to the portions of the transcripts that embodied the essence of a

particular theme. Consequently, I grouped the 26 codes into five themes to answer the

research question and sub questions. Table 3 provides the finalized themes from the fifth

step of analysis, the codes that contributed to the themes, the number of participants who

contributed to each theme, the number of data elements included in each theme, and the

percentage of the total number of data elements included in each theme.

The final step of data analysis involved critical analysis of the data. This process

entailed a series of verification processes intended to strengthen the credibility of the

results. These processes included verifying the detailed descriptions for each participant,

proper maintenance of the phenomenological reduction, discovering the essential

meanings of the participants' experiences, and articulating the structure of the results.

The results of the final step of the analysis are discussed in the presentation of results

below.

Table 3

Emergent Themes

Theme	Codes Contributing to Theme	Number of Participants in Theme	Number of Data Elements in Theme	% of Data Elements in Theme ($N = 150$)
Written policies play a proactive role	Informing employees; no policy for RA; training for employees; training for managers	12	16	10.67
Written policies play a reactive role	Chain of command; hotlines; insufficient reaction; background narratives	12	44	29.33
Negative reactions of management	Punishing victim for reporting; no help from management; reactive-victim must come forward; react only when RA reaches crisis point; react quickly to work but slowly to social	12	31	20.67
Positive reactions of management	HR mediators; investigation; legal consultation; quashes victim-blaming; request granted; perpetrator removed	10	15	10.00
Victims' needs	Cultural change; dedicated resources; more policies; training; managerial observation; to be taken seriously; know rights and report; talk to someone	12	54	36.00
Total		12	150	100

Results in Response to the Research Questions

The results indicating how organizations intervene or manage workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims are organized by research sub question. The results associated with the first sub question indicated how written policies or protocols have played a role in the intervention or management of workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims. In relation to the second sub question, the results indicated the most common reactions or practices of organizational management regarding RA in the workplace as experienced by study participants. The

results related to the third sub question indicated what victims need most from management when encountering RA in the workplace. Within the presentation of results related to each sub question, results are organized by theme. Responses from the public sector participants and the private sector participants were consistent with each other. There were no indications that sector affiliation affected the research results.

Research Sub question 1

SQ1 was: How do written policies or protocols play a role in the intervention or management of workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims?

Two themes emerged during the analysis of data related to this sub question: Written policies play a proactive role (Theme 1) and written policies play a reactive role (Theme 2).

Theme 1: Written policies play a proactive role. In the personal experiences of 11 out of 12 participants, written policies played a proactive role in the intervention or management of workplace bullying in one or more of the following ways: by prescribing training in bullying prevention for employees (in the experience of seven participants), by serving as a source of information about bullying for employees (in the experience of six participants), or by prescribing training for managers in bullying intervention and management (in the experience of one participant). P7 was a discrepant case, as she reported that the workplace in which she experienced RA did not have written policies for the management of workplace bullying; as such, written policies were unable to play any role.

Seven out of 12 participants stated that written policies had played a proactive role in workplace bullying intervention and management by prescribing training for employees. P12 indicated some of the content of the training: "We have to take training [on workplace bullying] when we first get there, online training about what's inappropriate and what's okay in the workplace." P2 stated that he had received training in the prevention of workplace bullying, "mostly through annual training sessions for equal opportunity employment, employer relationship, and workplace relationship." P8 said of the preventative training on workplace bullying in organizations where she had worked:

> So in other jobs I've had, they've had training modules that you do on the computers. So the larger corporations had training modules that you would do on the computer, and you were required to do those things once a year or biannually. You had to keep up with it, like a continuing type of thing. (P8)

P1 suggested that online training might not be taken critically by employees; however, "the training that we're required to do is online training. How many people take those trainings serious is another question. But the training is mandatory for all employees."

Six out of 12 participants stated that written policies had played a proactive role in workplace bullying intervention and management by serving as a source of information for employees about acceptable and unacceptable workplace behavior. P10 stated that policies about workplace bullying were displayed and disseminated in her organization:

> There is e-mail correspondence[s] [stating the policies], there's posters. . . So that stuff is available for people to visually see. From a policy standpoint, I think the

practice of it all can differ and vary, but the policy is definitely around and available. (P10)

P11 described how the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy for bullying in her workplace had changed employee behavior after a delay during which employees and managers learned from the new policy which behaviors were unacceptable:

I think initially [the policy] goes on paper. I think there's a transition period of, I would say, anywhere from 3–6 months to a year. . . . But it wasn't just one day, boom, the hammer dropped and it was zero tolerance. I mean, they said it on paper, but it took a while to implement. Yeah, I would say within 6 months to a year, people knew this is our policy. You need to know. (P11)

P2 indicated that policies forbidding bullying in his workplace were displayed on posters on the wall and on the company's website. In P3's organization, policies were verbally conveyed as a means of informing employees which behaviors were unacceptable: "I remember the human resources telling me that they have zero tolerance against any form of bullying." P8 described how written policies were prominently displayed as a means of proactively managing workplace bullying:

[The policy is] posted in several of the workplaces. Because I work in healthcare, they're posted on the walls typically in the break room. And sometimes working for larger companies, they had very distinct written-out policies. And in the smaller privately owned places, they were in a handbook or something that you were issued during training. (P8)

P9 was given a copy of the written policies and required to add his signature, signifying that he understood them and would abide by them: "We have policies in writing that all employees have to read and sign. So it just breaks down what's expected of us, what's not expected. Proper etiquette, everything else."

In the experience of P1, written policies had played a proactive role in workplace bullying intervention and management by prescribing training for managers:

> Our leaders in my particular organization, they are actually required to do additional training beyond the mandatory training that's required of all employees. Through their "leadership training" they're actually told to, or taught to solve conflict. Or they're taught about conflict resolution, and different ways to approach different situations as leaders and management in our particular organization. (P1)

Theme 2: Written policies play a reactive role.

In the experience of 11 out of 12 participants, written policies played a reactive role in the intervention or management of workplace bullying in one or more of the following ways: by indicating that complaints about bullying should be submitted to immediate supervisors first and then sent up the chain of command until a resolution was reached (according to six participants), by forbidding overt forms of bullying but leaving subtler forms unaddressed such that managers seemed to be excused from intervening in or managing RA (according to four participants), and by providing a hotline for the use of victims of workplace bullying (in the experience of two participants).

Six out of 12 participants stated that written policies played a reactive role in workplace bullying intervention and management by indicating that complaints about bullying should be submitted to immediate supervisors first, and then sent up the chain of command until a resolution was reached. P5 stated:

> [We have] zero tolerance [for] abuse or relational aggression [and] we also have chain of command, [a] reporting chain if situation[s] do happen, we have policies in place to how we can make leadership know about those situations. . . . There is pretty much the same chain of command that you have to follow. To pick up you start with your supervisor and then move up the chain of command if the issue is not resolved. (P5)

P4 gave a similar account of how written policy required complaints to proceed upward through the chain of command:

> [Bullying] has to be reported to the manager, go to the supervisor, and go to the manager. If you don't get it you can go to the captain, if the captain cannot do it you can take it to . . . human resources. (P4)

P8 also described written policies as requiring complaints about bullying to proceed up the chain of command:

> You're supposed to go to your manager and start with the chain of command. So you start with your manager or your director, and then they take it to the next person. And then we let them handle it if you need to. (P8)

Asked who enforced the policy of zero-tolerance for bullying in her workplace, P11 stated, "It would definitely be my supervisors whether it was the top supervisor or an

assistant supervisor. Usually started on the lower realm. But if more incidents occurred, it would go up the chain."

Four out of 12 participants stated that written policies played a negative reactive role in workplace bullying intervention and management by forbidding overt forms of bullying but leaving subtler forms unaddressed, such that managers seemed to be excused from intervening in or managing RA. P3 gave a representative explanation of how policies of zero-tolerance for bullying often failed to play an adequate reactive role in managing RA:

> I know most workplaces . . . there's relational aggression going on. . . . [A zero-tolerance policy] might be there, but what I read in the document does not specify all these details. We just know that there [are] policies for bullying, sexual harassment, all those, the big ones that people see. . . . [But] those individuals gossiping and all that stuff, it's not on paper, we don't see, but they exist. . . . We don't see management do anything about it unless it gets to a higher level [i.e., the bullying becomes overt enough to violate the letter of the written policy]. (P3)

Two out of 12 participants stated that written policies played a role in workplace bullying intervention and management by providing a hotline for the use of victims. Asked about policies in his workplace, P1 stated, "We have hotlines. . . . If you don't feel comfortable going to those individuals in your chain of command, there's usually a crisis line that you can call." P10 included in her answer to the same question about her workplace's policies, "There's different hotlines that you could call if you're being bullied or if you're experiencing victimization."

Research Sub question 2

SQ2 was: What are the most common reactions or practices of organizational

management regarding RA in the workplace? Two themes emerged during the analysis of

data related to this sub question, including: (a) negative reactions of management (Theme

3) and (b) positive reactions of management (Theme 4). A managerial reaction or practice

was regarded as being among the most common for the purposes of this discussion; at

least 25% of participants reported that they had experienced or witnessed it. For purposes

of comparison, Table 4 indicates the number and percentage of participants who reported

each of the most common reactions of management to RA, both positive and negative.

Table 4

The Most Common Reactions of Management to Relational Aggression in the Workplace

(N=12)

Reaction of Management to Employee Report of RA	Number of Participants Reporting Reaction	% of Participants Reporting Reaction
Ignoring or dismissing report	7	58.33
Initiating an investigation	5	41.67
Punishing victim for reporting	3	25.00
Reacting only when RA escalates to overt bullying	3	25.00
Removing perpetrator from victim's department	3	25.00

Note. RA = Relational aggression.

Theme 3: Negative reactions of management. In participants' experience, the

most common negative reactions of management to RA in the workplace were: ignoring

the complaint (in the experience of seven participants), punishing the victim for making

the complaint (in the experience of three participants), and failing to react until the RA

had escalated to overt bullying (in the experience of three participants). The most

common reaction of management to RA was to ignore or dismiss the complaint. Seven out of 12 participants reported that when they reported RA, their managers ignored them. P3 stated:

> I have had personal experience of what I call aggression towards me, but there was nothing done though, so I wouldn't say I have any experience of the policy being implemented. . . . Yes, my manager knew about it. (P3)

When P4 complained of being passed over for promotion in favor of a less-qualified candidate whom he then had to train, his manager placated him verbally but took no action: "He said be patient, be patient but [my promotion] never happened." Participant P5, who had also reported her frustration at being passed over for promotion in favor of less qualified candidates whom she then had to train, reported that even after she had resigned from the organization over this issue, it had not been addressed:

> They're still doing the same thing to some employees now where they believe they could be promoted to a position but then they bring in somebody from outside when this person [has] been in the company for 10, 15 years. She pretty much knows the ins and outs of the company so how can't you promote that person instead of taking somebody from the outside—and then this person will be training that person, learning the policy of the company and the processes. . . . No, management did not assist at all. (P5)

Participant 6 was frustrated by his organizational management's failure to take effective action when he and other coworkers reported RA:

To give you an instance, there was an employee that was very aggressive with

different types of subjects, mainly politics and religion. So, he was reported by

somebody else. So he went through the process, he was reprimanded, he was

given a warning. But he still does it anyway, but when you have tenure I guess

you can do whatever you want. . . . If I feel offended I'll go report it, and I guess

they see [the perpetrator] as, he's older, he's about to retire, so let him [do

whatever he wants]. (P6)

P7 took advantage of an "open door" policy to report RA in her workplace, but she was

ignored or rebuffed by every manager she approached:

The captain would say that there's an open door policy. His deputy would say that

there is an open door policy, if we have any issues, we can go talk to them about

anything. But when it came down to it, and issues actually arose, they brushed it

under the rug. They did not take our word seriously . . . and nothing was ever

done about it. . . . I was basically told, "You need to suck it up, there's nothing I

can do for you." (P7)

P8 went with a group of her coworkers to report ongoing RA, but the manager repeatedly

ignored their complaints:

Myself and some coworkers tried to address the girl about her behavior, and then

we went to our manager as well. The manager really didn't do a whole lot about

it. . . . I think the manager was not strong back-boned. She didn't like

confrontation. . . . She blew it off. (P8)

P11 said of managers in her workplace: "They just want to dismiss [RA] because in my workplace, that's not one of the top concerns." When P12 reported RA to her manager, she was sent to HR, a reaction that may have been counterproductive:

> Our managers didn't really do anything other than direct us towards HR, human resources. And then we had to sit down with human resources and then the two of us and then this other coworker and kind of talk about it openly, which I don't think was very helpful and honestly probably resulted in like more animosity. . . . I think [the manager] treated it more like it was like a girl attitude problem. And that's why he passed it to HR when the issue was more with the work. (P12)

Three out of 12 participants reported that they or their coworkers had been punished or had reasonably anticipated being punished for reporting RA. P3 was deterred from reporting RA because he had seen coworkers punished for complaining about the behavior of other coworkers:

> One of the problems why people don't report is they are scared of losing their job. . . . I didn't [report RA] because I was afraid of the consequences. I didn't want to lose my job. . . . Some employees are favorites of certain managers or certain directors. So you're afraid to say anything against that particular employee. Because you don't know what the consequence might be, the consequence might be reassigning you to another location, or to another desk, to a different function that you don't like. So instead of being in such a position, you just swallow it and keep quiet. (P3)

When asked, P3 confirmed that he had seen coworkers punished in the ways he described for reporting RA. P9 was also afraid to report RA because he anticipated retaliation from management:

> You feel like, if you did speak up, would management look down upon you? Look down upon you later down the road, or would they provide some retaliation? And it's not retaliation as far as something that everyone's going to see. They could do something, provide more workload for you, make you do something that's outside of your expertise, let's say, and that would really put you in a bind, because your job might be affected at that point. (P9)

Participant 7 confirmed that she had seen victims in her former organization being punished by managers for reporting instances of RA.

Three out of 12 participants reported that managers in their organizations typically refused to react to RA until the abuse had escalated to overt bullying. P2 stated, "It's only when [RA] becomes deplorable. . . . It's only when [RA] becomes out of hand that you at least get to channel it up." P3 said:

> For example, like a gossip, like eyeballing people, like withholding work, withholding information from somebody, information relating to your job that would help you grow or would help the organization. Your supervisor can withhold it or your peers can withhold that. . . . We don't see management do anything about it . . . unless it gets to a higher level where people are [more tangibly] affected. . . . Because of that, people don't report [RA] issues. They only report the bigger ones. They only report sexual harassment, physical assault. (P3)

Theme 4: Positive reactions of management. Ten out of 12 participants reported that they had experienced positive reactions from management when they reported RA, although these positive reactions were often ineffective. The most common positive managerial reactions and practices reported by participants were initiating an investigation (reported by five participants) and removing the perpetrator from the victim's workplace (reported by three participants).

Investigation was a flexible term which, in practice, could indicate a formal investigation conducted by multiple third parties and resulting in extensive documentation of the RA (in the experience of three participants), or may only refer to the victim's direct supervisor sitting down separately with the victim and the perpetrator and making an informal inquiry into the RA with no further action being taken (in the experience of two participants). P10 described a formal investigation by a separate department that had included questioning of potential witnesses:

> That is the most known to me, is starting with the equal employment opportunity
> [EEO] office, and working your way. Because there're different levels of
> escalation, there're investigations that have to be done, and things of that nature
> by a third party versus those being included. Where you're able to get some buy-
> in from other people who may or may not have witnessed the behavior. (P10)

P11's supervisors had investigated the RA and created documentation:

> I think [RA has] become more important to the administration and the
> supervisors. I think they take it more seriously in terms of documenting it on
> paper so they have a paper trail if things keep on happening. . . . I reported it, I

know it was documented, some of the behavior definitely decreased and desisted.

(P11)

P11 added, however, "Nothing really changed dramatically. So I was like, you know what? I'm not saying anything else." Like P10, P6's workplace had a separate department that investigated reports of bullying:

[The] department where they want us to direct all types of abuse, all of our problems is . . . an Equal Opportunity Office. Any problem we have we just give them a call and they'll investigate and they'll come ask both sides questions, and they'll go from there. (P6)

However, P6 said of the perpetrator of the RA he had experienced and reported, "He still does it anyway." P7's supervisors had not investigated her reports of RA, though she had witnessed informal but effective investigations of reports of RA and bullying in other departments:

Talking with [workers in other departments], their management would sit down with them and would talk it out and get both sides of the story and try to come up with a solution. . . . They would get it out on the table, they would talk about it, settle it, and move on. So I know other organizations handle it properly, I just have not been in that environment. (P7)

P8's supervisor also conducted an informal investigation:

[The supervisor] would talk to [the perpetrator]. She would not talk to us together. She did not talk to us together. So I do think that coming in and having the

manager acting somewhat as a mediator and kind of hearing both sides, she would

hear both sides. (P8)

The outcome of the manager's informal inquiry, however, was that "she blew it off" (P8).

Three out of 12 participants reported that managers had reacted to reports of RA

by removing the perpetrator from the victim's workplace. When an unauthorized

coworker accessed P1's personnel file and shared confidential information with other

coworkers, management reacted quickly: "The management felt that action needed to be

taken where the individual who violated me, they were removed from that particular

office quickly." P6 described intraorganizational transfers as a common way of

addressing bullying and RA in his workplace, although the man who had targeted him

was not transferred:

Where I work, it's hard for you to get fired no matter what you do. So, how they

would handle [RA] after they, you know, maybe it could be better, they may place

you somewhere else. Like if I'm the one that's the aggressor in this scenario,

they'll try and place me somewhere else. (P6)

P8 said of her perpetrator, "The girl eventually was fired, but it took about 5 years," by

which time P8 had resigned from the organization, partly as a result of the RA.

Research Subquestion 3

SQ3 was: What do victims need most from management when encountering RA

in the workplace? One theme emerged during the data analysis related to this

subquestion: victims' needs (Theme 5).

Theme 5: Victims' needs. For the purposes of this discussion, a need was

identified as being among the most urgent when at least 25% of participants reported it.

Table 5 indicates what victims needed most from management when encountering RA in

the workplace.

Table 5

Relational Aggression Victims' Outstanding Needs From Management (N=12)

Victims' Need	Number of Participants Reporting Need	% of Participants Reporting Need
High level of attention to RA report.	9	75.00
More training in bullying awareness and prevention	7	58.33
More policies forbidding RA	6	50.00
Closer managerial observation of workplace relationships	4	33.33

Note. RA = Relational aggression.

Nine out of 12 participants reported that when they experienced RA in the

workplace, they needed management to consider their reports as important. P11 stated, "I

think [managers] should always take [reports of RA] seriously. I think they should always

document it on paper and make the paper trail, policing, you report every incident." P12

used similar language, saying, "I think any complaint should be taken seriously." P2 used

slightly different terms to the same effect, stating, "Complaints shouldn't be taken

lightly." P3 indicated what "taking complaints seriously" might entail:

> If you are affected, if you are a victim, we support you, we give you what it takes,
>
> you know we won't sack you, we won't do anything, we won't reprimand you,
>
> we won't send you to where don't like. . . Management doesn't even need a lot of
>
> resources to take care of this. So they should start by investigation, investigating

the issue or the matter. So investigation should start with interview of the parties

involved. So interview them separately. Interview the victim, interview the

aggressor. Then when you have got your information separately, then you can

now bring them together. Yeah, so interview them together, and then see and

make a decision. (P3)

P7 also stated that managers should take reports of RA critically by hearing both sides:

I think [management] should get those involved in the room together. And

seriously, seriously listen to both sides. Not just the lead, because they're the lead.

But listen to everybody. I'm not a lead, but I know how do my job and I do it

well. . . So I think management needs to take it very seriously, and don't go with

the lead just because they get paid more. (P7)

P5 discussed why it was in the interest of management to meet the need of RA victims to

be taken sincerely:

Definitely I think management should address [RA], especially when you start

losing your best employees. Once those complaints come to you, investigation

and really addressing this issue will be helpful not only to the company but to the

morale of the employees as well. (P5)

P3 stated that management should meet RA victims' need to be taken critically because,

"Your employees are the ones who make productivity effective. So if management

overlooks the employees, it's going to affect productivity."

Seven out of 12 participants reported that when they experienced RA in the

workplace, they needed management to provide and undergo more training in bullying

awareness and prevention. P2 described how additional training would raise awareness of what constitutes RA:

> Make the training much more efficient instead of making it just [a] 1-year annual training requirements which people don't take seriously because it's one year. Make it such that the managers or the people at the higher level are letting people know at the workflow that hey, by the way if these jokes are going, maybe I'm not seeing what's going on but please be mindful. [It] might be a joke to you [but it] might not be a joke to them because you don't know what they've experienced. You don't know what their backgrounds are. So it may be a joke to you but it might not be a joke to the person. (P2)

Participant 7 indicated that RA victims needed their managers to be more effectively trained in RA management and intervention:

> I think management leadership needs to be better trained. They go to these trainings; management goes to these trainings, how to deal with, not difficult, but just different personalities. But I think it's kinda like school for high schoolers. They go, they do what they have to do, they leave and they don't implement anything. I think there should be monthly trainings for them until they get it. I think they should have situations, I can't think of how to say it, but acting situations, real-time situations [i.e., role-playing] to practice it. (P7)

P12 also indicated that RA victims needed their managers to undergo more effective training:

My manager who didn't do much, if HR realized he didn't do much, it would be

good if he got some sort of coaching or training on a better way to handle it. I

think that would be a good way to implement policies to make sure that managers

who are expected to do something get a little more training than the average

employee. (P12)

Six out of 12 participants reported that when they were experiencing RA in the

workplace they needed management to create and promulgate policies forbidding RA.

P10 stated, "I think policies are needed. I think policies are needed because they're like

the governing body, if you would, where you are. It gives you a framework for the

behavior that should be displayed in an office setting." P9 felt that RA victims needed

policies to be simplified but also promulgated more effectively:

I think simpler policies that would pertain to RA, it would be posted. You know;

respecting others, talk to other people how you want to be talked to. Anything else

as far as getting into lines of harassment or sexual harassment, it would have to be

discussed. And then everyone acknowledges it and signs a paper. So the more

small it is as far as policies go, it would be posted. (P9)

P12 suggested a zero-tolerance policy for RA:

I think it should be zero-tolerance policy. I think it should be unacceptable in the

workplace, like you said, we all should be adults. We should learn this by now

and be respectful. I think that the policies in place would help. (P12)

Four out of 12 participants reported that when they were experiencing RA in the workplace, they needed management to monitor employee behaviors and relationships more effectively. P2 stated:

> It needs more hands-on observation from the high management to be able to say, "Hey, that behavior is not tolerated here,". . . more of management by walking around. Get to know who your employees are. Get to know them not just on the work level but [at a] much more lower, closer level than the work level because you are the supervisor. . . . [Managers] should be able to know [how] their individual employees operate and how they behave.(P2)

P4 indicated that RA victims needed managers to solicit employee input about the presence of RA in the workplace, without employees needing to initiate the discussion themselves:

> I think proactive managers, what they do most of the time is create a survey on their own and give to their subordinate and say, "Let me see how you people feel." Tell you, "Be open, don't be afraid of anything just be open." That's what proactive managers do. In [my] case, they don't do that. . . . They should be proactive. (P4)

Summary

In this study, I investigated how organizations intervene or manage workplace bullying. The personal experiences of the 12 RA victims revealed five themes that fall into three main findings: (a) the role of written policies or protocols, (b) common

managerial reactions, and (c) victims' needs from management. Following are the findings that emerged as a result of these key themes.

The findings indicated that policies could play a proactive or reactive role in the intervention or management of workplace bullying. Proactive roles included serving as a source of information for employees about what constituted acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and prescribing training in bullying awareness and prevention for employees and managers. Reactive roles included requiring reports of bullying to proceed upward through the chain of command and providing hotlines for the use of victims of bullying. However, policies also played a negative reactive role by forbidding overt forms of bullying while leaving subtler forms unaddressed, such that managers might appear to be excused from intervening in RA. In this study, the human, economic and social cost of relational aggression in the workplace present a very high cost to both the employee and the employer. In the interviews, the victims of RA were worried, frightened, threatened and embarrassed. They exhibited frustration and anger, leading to stress and loss of self-confidence. They lost motivation, which affected their work performance and, in addition, increased their rate of absence. These issues can lead to self-harm. Additionally, organizations will also suffer some costs due to bullying. Such costs can manifest in low quality work, loss of quality staff, increased turnover, and increased cost of training new employees. Proactive organizations can curb this endemic culture by instituting a robust policy that does not tolerate any form of bullying.

The study showed that participants had experienced or witnessed positive and negative reactions from management when employees reported RA. The most common

managerial reaction was to ignore or dismiss the complaint. The second most common

reaction was to initiate either a formal investigation or an informal inquiry, although both

practices were often ineffective in stopping RA. Other negative reactions included

punishing the victim for reporting and reacting only when RA escalated to overt bullying.

Positive practices included removing the perpetrator from the victim's workplace.

Finally, the findings identified victims' needs from management. The most commonly

reported need was to pay more attention to RA reports, which meant initiating an

investigation, listening impartially to both sides, and taking decisive action when

appropriate. Other needs included additional training in bullying awareness and

prevention for employees and managers, policies forbidding RA, and more effective

managerial oversight of employee behaviors and relationships in the workplace.

Employers and their managers are sometimes criticized for their inability to

handle grievance reports of bullying activity in the workplace. The main reason for this is

that line supervisors are not trained on how to respond to a bullying complaint and,

therefore, they handle it in a manner that makes it seem as though the manager is not

sympathetic to the victim. Most often, first line supervisors do not have training on how

to handle such grievance reports. In the literature review of this study, the Workplace

Bullying Institute survey acknowledged that 27% of the US workforce had experienced

abusive conduct at work, another 21% have witnessed it, and 72% are aware that

workplace bullying happens (WBI; 2014). Yet very few frontline supervisors are trained

on how to handle such complaints. This shows that most managers in the organization

lack a well-coordinated process and training to handle bullying complaints in the

workplace. Therefore, it is essential that first line supervisors learn how to effectively handle a grievance report about RA and in accordance with the organizational policy and processes.

To conceptualize the result of the three sub questions, employees are calling for workplace justice, and the need to be treated with respect, to actualize their professional goals, and receive a guaranteed workplace safety is foremost in their request. Conversely, the damages emerging from a workplace environment marred by bullying activities are irreversible. Therefore, employees desire their organization to establish a zero tolerance policy and mediation processes. The employees also want their employers to put effort into relation-building between them and their fellow employees, and to recognize and include them in decision-making (rather than just using them), and to treat them as valuable stakeholders in their organizations.

As a reminder to organizations, it is ultimately the collective recipe of positive workplace policies and customs, preemptive scrutiny of bullying activities, remarkable processes, and well-informed supervisors and employees that makes effective grievance report handling a reality. In Chapter 5 I discussed the interpretation and implications of these results, as well their limitations. The findings are interpreted, followed by the limitations that are prominent in this study process. The possible recommendations that can be helpful in improving the workplace and addressing the issue under discussion are presented. In the end, there are implications of research along with conclusions.

Chapter 5: Interpretations of the Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace based on victims' experiences. The selection of phenomenological research was appropriate because, by exploring the experiences of RA victims, I aimed to provide useful information about interventions that can be used to prevent and address RA in the workplace. Additionally, I aimed to add on the existing body of knowledge regarding the appropriate organizational response to the issue of RA in the workplace.

The findings from this study demonstrated the views of employees about organizational responses to the existence of RA in the workplace. The interview revealed five themes that fall into three main findings. These include the role of written policies or protocols with proactive and reactive results, common managerial reactions to the RA grievance report, and victims' needs from management.

Discussion

RA is a form of covert aggression used by the perpetrator to inflict or threaten injury to relationships, including harming the target's social standing. RA may result in lasting psychological damage to victims (Dailey, Frey, & Walker, 2015). In the past, bullying was believed to be peculiar to schoolyard settings; in reality, however, adults engage in such behavior to gain prominence in the workplace (American Nurses Association [ANA], 2012). This behavioral phenomenon, as noted by Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, (2011), has become widespread in several organizations. Employees

who encounter RA in the workplace exhibit symptoms characterized by psychological or emotional abuse (Dellasega et al., 2014). RA manifests in the workplace through the use of gossip, spreading rumors, and giving the silent treatment (Field, 2013; Nwaneri et al., 2016). Other manifestations of RA in the workplace include purposefully delayed responses to emails, concealment of information from victims, and exclusion of an employee in work activities. Managers engage in RA by giving meaningless assignments to their subordinates, undermining their work efforts, and assigning unrealistic workloads, schedules, and deadlines (Field, 2013; Nwaneri et al., 2016).

Some negative effects of RA to the victim and the organization have been identified. These include, at the individual level, the experiences regarding psychological difficulties such as social anxiety, depression, maladjustment, and decreased life satisfaction (Dellasega et al., 2014; Park & Ono, 2016; Stephens, 2017). From an organizational viewpoint, the effects include high turnover, reduced bottom line profit, and increased costs of retraining new employees (Cherwin, 2013).

This qualitative study explored from victims' perspectives organizational interventions that effectively managed RA in the workplace. Understanding the use of RA from the perspectives of the victims is essential to finding solutions that will eliminate the use of this behavior in the workplace. Victims and organizations are both at a loss when this phenomenon is not addressed. It will eventually spreads across the organization and become a prominent feature of the workplace.

This study showed that policies could help to intervene and manage workplace bullying either proactively or reactively. Proactive management includes providing

employees with information about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior and training in bullying awareness and prevention. Reactive roles consisted of requiring reports about bullying to proceed upward through the chain of command and providing bullying hotlines for employees. When management had a clear policy against overt aggression, but did not address indirect aggression such as RA, victims of RA had no recourse.

Out of the findings, there emerged two common managerial reactions to aggrieved RA victims: ignoring or dismissing the complaint and starting a formal investigation or an informal inquiry. The two practices were largely ineffective in stopping RA. In some cases in which the RA conflict escalated to overt bullying, management would punish the victim for reporting and reacting to the aggression. An effective response to stop the escalation of workplace RA in developmental stage is to remove the perpetrator from the workplace. These responses, however, were rarely implemented by management.

The victims expressed the need for management to give thoughtful consideration and provide a swift response whenever bullying activities are reported. This meant initiating an investigation, listening impartially to both sides, and taking decisive action when appropriate. Physical security, job security, and career growth are among the list of desired goals of employees. These are the basic needs employees' desire when they ask for workplace justice. The road to achieving these needs includes instituting bully training awareness for managers and employees, establishing policies forbidding RA in the workplace, adhering to appropriate response processes, and more effective managerial

oversight of employee behaviors in the workplace. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the interpretation of the findings, followed by the limitations of the study. I will present recommendations for future research and discuss the implications of the study. In conclusion, I will summarize the dissertation as a whole.

Interpretation of the Findings

Five themes from this study were consolidated into three findings. These include the role of written policies or protocols, common managerial reactions, and victims' needs from management. The interpretations of these themes will explain organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace.

Roles of Written Policies or Protocols

The roles of written policies or protocols relates to the first research subquestion. It revealed that policies could either have a proactive or reactive role in the intervention or management of workplace bullying. Some of the proactive roles include determining what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior, providing training and workshops about bullying in the workplace, and how to prevent it in the workplace. Reactive roles included the requirement for a process to report bullying and provide hotlines so the victims could report bullying behavior such as RA. Participants also cited some instances where policies played a negative reactive role. For example, some overt forms of bullying were clearly forbidden and frowned upon, while other subtle forms of bullying were left unaddressed. When this was the case, managers often found excuses not to intervene because covert forms of bullying like RA are not covered in policies. In such instances, Boyd (2018) suggested that the first step for organizations looking to stop harassment

such as RA in the workplace is to introduce a victim complaint response policy and procedure that spell out investigative processes to report bullying activities. This includes a collaborative process that brings together involved parties for the resolution of bullying complaints. Employees may judge organizational responses to bullying activities by referencing the organization's policies. Therefore, writing different forms of dispute resolution into the policy document could be a positive move (Boyd, 2018).

Earlier studies focused on strategies and interventions in addressing bullying in the workplace. These included formal and informal approaches to workplace bullying (see Branch et al., 2013; Field, 2013; Giorgi et al., 2013; Stephens, 2017). Field (2013) recommended the creation of antibullying policies that explicitly identify bullying behaviors. Fenclau et al. (2014) concurred, stating that RA is a covert form of bullying and often unclear or misunderstood. Thompson and George (2016) recommended training and workshops to increase employees' self-awareness of bullying activities in the workplace. These formal approaches have been recommended by various researchers. However, no study has examined the effects of these formal approaches.

Regarding informal approaches, Stephens (2017) suggested interventional programs that focus on human dignity and common decency to reduce the tendency toward RA behaviors in the workplace. Field (2013) focused on training about the nature of RA and why it is unacceptable and inappropriate in the workplace. Giorgi et al. (2013) recommended focusing on creating a healthy organizational culture to prevent workplace bullying. However, no study has examined the effects of informal approaches to RA behaviors in the workplace. Additionally, limited research has examined the efforts of

organizational leaders to prevent and address workplace bullying through structured interventions (Branch et al., 2013; Escartín, 2016). Escartín (2016) found that most literature about workplace bullying interventions are descriptive in nature. Branch et al. (2013) called for further research to examine strategies or interventions that have been successful in resolving workplace conflicts. This study provides new knowledge about the effects of formal and informal approaches to address RA in the workplace.

In psychological contract theory, both employees and employers hold a belief concerning the terms of their exchange agreement; the involved parties have a perception of what their mutual obligations are. One of the components of psychological contract is the maintenance of employee safety in the workplace. Additionally, employee's feels that the employer will protect them should the employee feel unsafe in the workplace. RA is one of the instances in which the safety and security of the employee is threatened. Employers should be able to intervene when RA occurs to avoid breaching the psychological contract. Hwang et al. (2015) and Naeem et al. (2014) found negative outcomes when a breach in the psychological contract occurs, such as turnover intentions and low job satisfaction. The findings from this study indicate that management must utilize a proactive role of existing policies and procedures when RA grievance is filed. Management must also address any negative reactions arising from such workplace policies.

If the goals of organization are to rebuild relationships, repair emotional harms and develop a forward-looking plan to restore serenity in the workplace following an issue like RA, then addressing the harm to the relationship could be one of the

approaches in management's arsenal to handle RA reports in the workplace. This is in line with the 2012 Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, which adopted a restorative justice approach to conflict resolution (Boyd, 2018). The director of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission argued that restorative justice that emphasized relationships building, repairing emotional harms, and developing a forward-looking plan where all the parties can assume a role in creating and implementing the plan. (Boyd, 2018). A simple investigation of the RA report and the belief that involved parties are ready to start working together again will not often result in a positive outcome. Therefore, Boyd (2018) suggested that organizations need to spend time and energy to make restorative justice approaches one of the pillars of their internal compliant resolution strategy in order to avoid repetitive conflict that could lead to an unsustainable work environment.

Common Managerial Reactions

The major finding for the second subquestion was that there are both positive and negative reactions toward the practices of organizational management regarding RA grievance reports in the workplace. The most commonly reported managerial reaction was to ignore or dismiss the complaint. The second was to start either a formal or informal investigation. However, investigations, whether formal or informal, are not necessarily effective in stopping RA. Some of the negative reactions include punishing the victim for reporting the RA and the fact that management will only intervene when RA escalates to overt bullying.

This finding extends knowledge in the discipline as earlier researchers focused on the intervention and policies implemented by organizational management. Limited

information is available about interventions implemented by HR leaders to address RA specifically in the workplace. Most of the intervention programs focus on broader issues of workplace bullying (Branch et al., 2013; Field, 2013; Giorgi et al., 2013). Other studies that focused on strategies to prevent and address RA in the workplace have been descriptive in nature and based on experience, but have lacked methodological rigor to determine their effectiveness (Field, 2013). This study is also descriptive in nature and based on the experience of currently employed individuals or retired employees who experienced RA in the workplace. The findings of this study provide new knowledge about the most common reactions of organizational management to RA in the workplace (i.e., to ignore or dismiss the grievance report).

Using psychological contract theory as a lens, a tacit contract between employees and their organizations exists irrespective of whether formal contracts have been signed. According to Virgolino et al. (2017), perceived organizational justice mediates the relationship between breach of psychological contract and employees' individual performance. Organizations and their management have the responsibility to address employees' complaints, be it RA or any other form of bullying. The finding that organizational management ignores or dismisses the RA grievance report of the employee is inconsistent with the psychological contract between the employer and the employee. By choosing to ignore or dismiss the complaint, the employer is not upholding the safety and security of the employee in the workplace. Moreover, the employer is not addressing an important concern of the employee that might be detrimental to the well-being and performance of the employee. As a result, workplace bullying such as RA can

be considered a breach of a psychological contract for failing to protect employees from mistreatment or harm (Kakarika et al., 2017).

An effective policy for preventing workplace bullying would create a sense of justice by ensuring employees that the organization is concerned for their safety and security in the workplace. The perception of justices itself varies from one person to another however; therefore, reporting bullying activities is a personal decision for the victim. Many see reporting as a first step to holding perpetrators responsible for their actions. In consideration, the U.S. Congress made a concerted effort to institute a safety net for victims by enacting the Victim and Witness Protection Act as well as a subsequent series of laws that gives crime victims greater legislative recognition. The judiciary also recognized the movement in the direction of participatory position for victims of crime. An example of this movement is manifested in *Payne v. Tennessee*(1991), in which the United States Supreme Court unequivocally acknowledged that victims of crime are not faceless anymore in the justice system (History of Victim's Rights, 2011). A responsible employer could follow the example set by our legal system by giving adequate accommodations to RA victims in their policies and through the implementation of those policies.

Victims' Needs from their Organization/Management

The third major finding is the need to give adequate attention to a victim's report of RA. This entails initiating an investigation, listening impartially to both sides, and taking decisive action when appropriate. This finding extends knowledge in the

discipline. Earlier studies have examined RA in the workplace in terms of its nature, prevalence in the workplace, effects to the individual, effects on the organization, factors that support RA behaviors, and interventions to address RA in the workplace (Lyons & Hughes 2015; James et al., 2013; Park & Ono, 2016; Dellasega et al., 2014; An & King, 2015; Francioli et al., 2016; Woodrow & Guest, 2017). However, limited information is available on the victims' desires or needs from the organizational management when RA cases arose in the workplace.

In the literature, there was a consensus that interventions are needed because RA causes psychological distress (Horton, 2014;Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). Most of the studies that explored interventions to address RA focused on educational settings, given that students are more often exposed to different kinds of bullying (Horton, 2014;Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). In these settings, counseling is one of the most common intervention tools used to address RA (Horton, 2014; Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015). In the workplace, explicit antibullying policies or education programs that inform employees about the different forms of bullying are implemented (Branch et al., 2013; Fenclau et al., 2014). Some informal approaches to workplace bullying include leadership development opportunities, training, and mental health education (Giorgi et al., 2013; Stephens, 2017).

This finding provides new knowledge about the employees' experience of RA in the workplace. The findings showed that RA grievance reports are usually ignored or dismissed; consequently, employees want organizations and their management to take steps which ensure their safety and respect. This study showed that employees want their

organization to give attention to the incidents of RA in the workplace and to recognize

their rights accordingly. This need was identified from the participants and analyzed to

mean that employers should recognize employees' rights and take actions when their

safety needs are endangered in the workplace. The feeling of safety and respect is a vital

need in the expectations of employees from their employers. Therefore, in a bid to uphold

the tenet of psychological contract, employers must hold employees' wellbeing at heart.

This is because the negative effects of perceived psychological contract breaches can

result in reduced trust, reduced organizational citizenship behavior, reduced

organizational commitment, and increased distrust and cynicism (Salin & Notelaers,

2017; Virgolino et al., 2017). It therefore becomes vital for organizations to give

maximum attention to the grievance report of RA by their most revered asset, the

employee. Refusal could lead to damaged employee relations and a disorganized work

environment. As an important step, the organization must take appropriate speedy

reconciliatory action whenever a report of bullying is made. To maintain a healthy

workplace following such a report, organizations may respond first by enabling

discussions between the parties involved. However, this depends on the severity of the

harassment, the ability and readiness of the involved parties, and the organizational needs

regarding relationships in the workplace (Boyd, 2018).

    Nevertheless, establishing a process to respond to harassment is a good practice,

yet very little has been done to actualize such practices in many organizations. The

reluctance to initiate and establish such good practices is not surprising, especially when

one considers that harassment often arises in organizations when there are excessive

workloads, a shortage of employees, and inadequate information, which results in stressful conditions. Whether the establishment of harassment in the workplace is purposeful or not, the concern of every employee in a stressful environment is to focus on personal tasks, leading in some cases to friction between coworkers. Employees ignore their sense of decency because they do not have time to care for one another due to excessive workloads, and managers do not have the time to monitor everything their employees are doing. Therefore, it becomes difficult to resolve issues such as bullying in the workplace. Hence, the need to confront bullying issues as a communal effort in the workplace, which can stimulate the healing and restoration of the workplace situation (Naito, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of qualitative studies is the small sample size. The small sample size limited the study because the findings may not be generalized to all workplace settings in which RA occurs. The participants for this research were taken from the public and private sectors. However, there was no indication of differences between these groups that would affect the generalizability of the study results, particularly with respect to the public-sector population of interest. Participants were drawn from a single geographical area, so it is not possible to generalize it in all work settings. The roles played by participants in their work environment vary from data analyst, contract specialist, medical coder, engineer, management analyst, program and management analyst, healthcare and procurement analyst. Most were analysts, so it is possible to generalize it in these subsectors, but that should only be done while

considering the demographic factors as they differ from place to place. The findings may be transferable to other scenarios that have similar contexts and phenomena. In addition, the geographic location of the recruitment of the participants was limited to the Washington D.C. Metropolis or National Capital Region. Additionally, in qualitative studies, the reliability and validity of the findings also serve as a limitation. To mitigate these limitations, I enhanced the trustworthiness of the study through rigorous procedures and minimized research bias by following the data collection and analysis procedures (Borland, 2001; Johnson et al., 2007).

The lack of prior research on the topic also served as a limitation. Previous research studies about the phenomenon may have helped to lay a stronger foundation for the research problem. The lack of previous studies also limit the interpretation of the findings. Due to this lack of research, I relied solely upon the participants' responses. This self-reported data may be viewed as a limitation, as I could not control the participants' answers. The participants may have provided answers that they thought I wanted to hear, remembered experiences differently than they occurred in the past, or exaggerated their answers to the questions. To address this limitation, I assured the participants that their answers were confidential and that honest answers would significantly help increase knowledge in the discipline. The participants were asked follow-up questions when they provided vague or exaggerated responses.

Recommendations

Future researchers could increase the sample size of this study. A larger sample may lead to more generalizable findings for the population experiencing RA in the

workplace. The sample should also be representative of the population. The participants

could come from a wider geographic location and a diverse set of fields to ensure

representativeness of the sample.

A different qualitative research design could also be applied to the current

research problem. I used phenomenological interviewing in this study because it

emphasizes awareness in order to understand individuals' first-person accounts

(Moustakas, 1994). The knowledge of discipline can be improved by the implementation

of these methods because systematic research leads to emerging conceptual categories

(Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

Finally, future researchers could add more variables to the research problem. The

current study addresses organizational interventions that have been successful in

managing RA in the workplace based on victims' experiences. Other factors influencing

the experience of RA in the workplace could also be examined, such as gender, years of

employment in the company, educational background, personality, and discipline. To this

end, a validated survey instrument could be developed to collect data from a large

number of participants based on these factors.

Implications for Social and Cultural Change

The findings of the study advance knowledge in the discipline by providing new

knowledge of RA that extends the existing body of literature on workplace bullying.

Previously, limited studies have examined the perceptions of employees on RA in the

workplace. This contribution to knowledge includes information on the positive and

negative effects of policies regarding RA in the workplace, the most common reaction of

organizational management to RA in the workplace, and the needs of RA victims from organizational management. These findings serve as a foundation for other researchers to find effective interventions to RA in the workplace.

Individuals and organizations may benefit from the results of the study. Organizations could develop and implement policies that lead to more effective management intervention practices and enhance organizational effectiveness. Human resource leaders could use the findings of the study to evaluate their organizations' policies and procedures for RA in the workplace. Managers could also benefit from the insights of the study, as they are directly involved in the day-to-day activities of their employees. They can observe whether RA occurs in their department and collaborate with the HR department to produce different strategies that may be effective in preventing RA. Employees may also benefit from the findings of the study. Based on the insights of the study, employees could assess their behaviors in the workplace to ascertain whether they are unconsciously or consciously contributing to RA in the workplace.

The findings of the study also hold implications for positive social change. The objective of the study was to explore organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace based on victims' experiences. The insights from the study provided more knowledge on the importance of healthy working environments and their relationship to enhanced employee well-being and performance and increased organizational effectiveness. The findings revealed that management and organizational leaders often do not take RA in the workplace seriously, even though it is a form of workplace bullying. As such, the findings may help to alter the attitudes of

management and organizational leaders regarding the significance of RA in the workplace. Specifically, management and organizational leaders must show urgency whenever RA reports are filed. Furthermore, management and organizational leaders should assess whether their existing policies and procedures sufficiently covers and address the use of RA and other forms of workplace bullying.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore organizational interventions that have been successful in managing RA in the workplace based on victims' experiences. The following research question guided the study: How do organizations intervene or manage workplace bullying based on the personal experiences of RA victims? Three sub questions further specified the scope of the study's research question as mentioned in the study above. Data was collected from 12 participants through semi structured interviews. All participants had experienced at least one of the following in a current or former workplace: (a) exclusion from social activities, (b) damaging of reputation through gossip and rumors, (c) public humiliation, (d) withdrawal of interaction or attention, (e) coercion or psychological manipulation, or (f) online bullying.

Five themes emerged from the data analysis. The first and second themes identified how written policies played both a proactive and reactive role, respectively, in the intervention or management of workplace bullying. The third and fourth themes illustrated the negative and positive reactions of management, respectively, in response to employees' reports of RA. Finally, the fifth theme identified victims' needs from

management when encountering RA in the workplace. The most commonly reported victims' need was to be taken acutely serious at the filing of RA report, which meant initiating an investigation, listening impartially to both sides, and taking decisive action when appropriate. These findings provide insight regarding additional strategies needed in organizations to prevent the negative effects of RA on both the individual and the organization. The reduction of RA in the workplace will result in healthier working environments, enhanced employee well-being and performance, and increased organizational effectiveness.

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