

# A REVIEW OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE MANAGEMENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND BULLING IN WORKPLACE

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Despite considerable efforts directed toward the reduction of work related stress, little is known about the content of work place emotions and how it affect work performance. This paper discussed the place of emotional intelligence in the management of the interpersonal stressors of sexual harassment and bullying. It focused on the extent to which the four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self awareness, self management, social awareness, and relationship management mediate the expression and management of these stressors, by analyzing theoretical and empirical studies on the subject matter. Using frustration- aggression hypothesis as framework, the paper opines that sexual harassment and bullying are evidently caused by low emotional intelligence, and engender aggressive behavior among staff, which escalate stress and predispose to substitute attack responses, low productivity, and absenteeism, among others. It is recommended that work places should create an emotionally intelligence culture where employees are encouraged to display and utilize their emotions in a constructive way.*

**Keywords:** *Emotional Intelligence, Management, Sexual Harassment, Bullying.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the major factors influencing organizational behaviour in relation with others at work is stress, and psychologists have stressed that stress has an adverse effect on employee's work performance, job satisfaction and productivity. Stress – a negative emotional state occurring in response to events that are perceived as tasking or exceeding a person's resources or ability to cope – is often regarded as a negative consequence of modern living. Individuals are stressed from overwork, job insecurity, information overload, and the increasing pace of life (Aamodt, 2007). These events

produce distress marked by a degree of physiological, psychological and behavioural deviation from healthy functioning (Quick, Quick & Hurrell, 1997). However, the stressors of interest to this paper are sexual harassment and bullying.

It must be observed though that there is also a healthy side of stress called eustress – this is a healthy, positive, constructive outcome of stressful events and the stress responses (McShare & Von Glinow, 2005). Eustress is the stress experience in moderation, enough to activate and motivate people towards achieving goals and succeed in life's challenges (Simons & Nelson, 2001). Furthermore, Aamodt (2007) opined that eustress (from the root eu-, meaning something that is proper) occurs when stressors result in feelings of challenge or achievement –the feelings of stress get converted into positive energy and actually become motivating. You might say it is a desirable outcome of stress (Quick, Quick & Hurrell, 1997).

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This implies that humans need some stress to survive, but it must be emphasized that although a certain amount of stress may arguably be seen as a good thing and helps to promote a high level of performance, it is potentially harmful (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2004). Most researches focus on distress because it is a significant concern in organisational settings and employees frequently experience enough stress to hurt their job performance and increase their risk of mental and physical health problems (Mullins, 1996). Work-related stress is not just an individual affliction but a universal phenomenon. From the analyses presented by McShare & Von Glinow (2005), it is revealed that over half of call centre staff in India feel so stressed out by the tough working conditions that they end up quitting. Also, the Canadian Institute of Health Information reports that over one-quarter of employees in that country say they are suffering from “quite a lot” of stress. Furthermore, nearly 20 percent of employees in the United Kingdom think their job is very or extremely stressful. (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1980).

Furthermore, James (2003) opined that work related stress costs American businesses about \$300 billion each year in lower productivity and higher absenteeism, turnover,

alcoholism and medical costs. The story in Nigeria is not different as there are many organisational factors that contribute to pressure, tension, and stress in Nigeria (Suleimanu, 2007).

While stress entails and adaptive response to a situation that is perceived as challenging or threatening to a person's well-being, stressors are the causes of stress including any environmental conditions that place a physical and emotional demand on the person (Frank & Ivancevich, 1998). Also, Cooper (1995) indicated that there is high incidence of stress throughout organisations irrespective of job and rank, and suggested that "every job has its own stress fingerprint. In the same vein, Quick & Quick (2001) observed that individual characteristics moderate the extent to which people experience stress or exhibit, a specific stress outcome in a given situation, thus supporting the paradigm of individual differences in stress.

Mckenna (1994) and Kenneth (2005) had observed that everyone has a range of comfort within which they can feel steady and safe and in human terms, burdensome, threatening, ambiguous or boring situations are likely to induce stress and overtax, the body resources to the point where one become susceptible to stress-related disorders (Kemeny, 2003).

There are numerous stressors in organisational settings and other life activities; these include interpersonal, role-related, task control, organisational and physical environment stressors. Among these stressors, interpersonal stressors seem to be the most pervasive at school and work place (Narayanan & Spector, 1999). This is because the trend towards teamwork generates interpersonal stressors as employees must interact, relationship at work with co-workers, the boss, office politics, and various types of interpersonal conflicts also exist in organisation and take their toll on employees. Also, emotional episodes and cognitive judgments about relationships abound in work place and virtually all human relationships are heavily influenced by emotions, hence emotion plays a crucial role in organisation and indeed would induce work-related stress (Aamodt, 2007).

Stress influence employees' behavior and his/her relationship with others. It does not only affect employees' interpersonal style, it can have serious health implications if ignored and not properly managed. Thus, the principal aim of this study is to examine specifically, the incidence of workplace stressors with particular emphasis on sexual harassment and bullying. The study also examines how these interpersonal stressors affect employees' performance and how emotional intelligence could be applied in the management of these workplace stressors.

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN WORKPLACE**

Sexual harassment; according to McShare & Von Glinow (2005) is an unwelcomed conduct of sexual nature that detrimentally affects the environment or leads to adverse job-related consequences for its victim. Sexual harassment has also been defined by Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as an unwelcome sexual advances, request, for favours and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individuals employment, submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis of the purpose of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment for the individuals (EEOC, 1980).

Legally, sexual harassment can take one of two forms: quid pro quo or hostile environment. One form of sexual harassment call quid prop quo includes situations in which a person's employment, or such employment decisions as promotions and salary increment are tied to granting of sexual favours. An example could be a situation where a supervisor tells his secretary that she must sleep with him to keep her job. The second type is the hostile environment case which includes sexual conduct that unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001).

Corporate leaders and social researchers increasingly recognized that sexual harassment is a serious problem that impede and hamper performance. It is a serious interpersonal stressor as the victims experience persistent trauma from quid pro quo harassment and tense co-worker's relations in a hostile work environment. Nevid (2007) found that sexual harassment is a serious source and opined that of work stress, the key feature of sexual harassment is that, it is unwanted.

### **What act s constitute sexual harassment?**

Practically, many kinds of conduct- verbal, visual, or physical-that is of a sexual nature may be termed sexual harassment, if the behaviour is unwelcomed and it is severe or pervasive. Here are acts or behaviour which may contain sexual undertones.

1. **Verbal or Written:** making comments about clothing, personal behavior or a person's body, sexual or sex-based jokes; requesting sexual favours or repeatedly asking a person out, sexual innuendoes; telling rumours about a person's personal or sexual life, threatening a person. For example, in Harris versus. Forklift systems (1993), the court ruled that a male supervisors comments such as, 'let's go to the Holiday Inn and negotiate your raise' and 'you are just a dumb-ass woman' constituted harassment

2. **Physical Assaults:** These include impeding or blocking movements; inappropriate touching of a person or a person's clothing, kissing, hugging, patting and stroking with sexual undertone.
  3. **Non-verbal:** This includes looking up and down a person's body, making derogatory gestures or facial expressions of a sexual nature and following a person.
  4. **Visual:** This includes posters, drawings, pictures, screensavers or emails of a sexual nature and exposing in workplace.
- Non-sexual conduct may also be sexual harassment if one is harassed because "she" is a female, rather than male or vice versa.

Hickman (2005) opined that; the conduct of the harassment must either be severe or it must be pervasive to be sexual harassment, and Nevid (2007), emphasized that a single incident is probably not sexual harassment unless it is severe. Moreover, a single unwanted request for a date or one sexually suggestive comment might be offensive and/or be inappropriate, but may not be sexual harassment. However, a number of relatively minor separate incidents may add up to sexual harassment if the incident affects one's work environment. Thus, for a conduct to be considered sexual harassment based on a hostile environment, the conduct must be a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated incident. Hence, if one is fired in work place, refused a promotion, demoted, given a poor performance evaluation or reassigned to a less desirable position because one rejects a sexual advance that almost certainly is sexual harassment (Hickman, 2005).

Additionally, even if a conduct does not result in economic injury or change of status in one's job, it may be sexual harassment if the conduct significantly interferes with your work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. This includes illegal sexual comment said repeatedly that the comment makes one uncomfortable at work that your performance suffers.

### **Who is the harassed and the harassers?**

Sexual harassment in the work place can affect anyone in any job. While not limited to women, the statistics show that only 15% of charges are filed by males. Stockdale (2004) observes that in USA about 50% of women suffer sexual harassment in school or on the job. A national survey also found that about 80 percent of teenage boys and girls reported being sexually harassed by their peers (Smith, 2001). Also, women in traditionally male-dominated work settings, such as construction sites of firehouse reported an especially high risk of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment can be made by members of the same gender (Hickman, 2005) and it does not have to be from a person in a position of superiority over the victim. The



harasser may be a co-worker or even a non-employee depending on the circumstances.

### **Effects of sexual harassment in work place**

Sexual harassment has a significant effect on interpersonal relationship as many women react to sexual harassment in different ways. Some confront the harassers which results in industrial disharmony, whereas others ignore and avoid the situation through absenteeism, yet others attempt to appease the harasser (Magley, 2002). Coercing someone into sexual activity by threat of punishment, which involving threatening negative job evaluations, job termination, or withholding of promotions for failure to comply with sexual request lead to work alienation, emotional and interpersonal conflicts in work place (Nevid, 2007). The issue of sexual harassment in workplace and the associated influence on employees' productivity has been analysed extensively. Researchers have also indicated that sexual harassment in the corporate workplace has had a negative impact on the job involvement and psychological well-being of its victims. For example, Fitzgerald (1998) produced data among Valdosta State staff revealing that when sexual harassment is experienced as intense and frequent, the victims reported feeling depressed, anxious and exhibited physical problems which may lead to turn over and lack of concentration and poor performance on their jobs. Thus, sexual harassment destroys the work environment. The anxiety and frustration experienced by victims can impact their quality of life and the quality of their work.

### **Bullying as interpersonal stressor**

Work place bullying, also called work-place uncivility is another form of interpersonal stressor. It refers to offensive, intimidating or humiliating behaviour that degrades, ridicules, or insults another person at work (Cowiea, 2002; Pearson & Porath, 2000).

Bullying in the work place has become rampant, judging from a couple of analyses. Some 30 Irish victims of bullying described their work to be a highly stressful and competitive environment plagued with interpersonal conflicts and lack of a friendly and supportive atmosphere, undergoing organisational changes and managed through an authoritarian leadership styles. Victims of industrial bullying complain that because of the influence of bullying in their organisation or workplace, they find it difficult to focus on their jobs (Siegne, 2008). Einarsen (2007) revealed that both victims and observers of bullying at work reported being more dissatisfied with their work than those who are not bullied in their work environment.

Employees who feel treated with human dignity are proud to work for such an organisation, and this is a prelude to high job commitment. Findings reported by Keashly (2002), and Einarsen & Raknes (1999), support this assertion. They found that

victims of bullying and harassment at work suffer social isolation and exclusion, devaluation of self-concept, and worth, and negative effect. Teasing, insulting remarks and ridicule were the most commonly negative acts which have serious psychological effects on their jobs.

Who are the bullies? Einarsen and Skogstad(2006) found that managers and supervisors are the bullies in many cases. A survey with Norwegian State Shipyard staff revealed that among some 8,000 Norwegian employees, some 54% of the victims reported being bullied by a supervisor. Other reports from Germany, Australia, and some African countries supported the assertion, proposing that between 70% and 80% of workers are bullied by a supervisor (Einarsen and Raknes, 1999), and that victims bullied by their supervisors suffer more in psychological terms and are obviously more traumatized and less involved in their jobs than victims of co-workers bullying, and they also experience more problems in their work more than those who are not bullied by their supervisors.

McCarthy & Baker (2000) stressed that most victims experience stress and its consequences following incidents of bullying. They also have more absenteeism and back on their job, have impaired decision making ability lower work performance, and more work errors (Kivimaki & Vahtera, 2000).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Experts in frustration – aggression hypothesis postulate that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. More specifically, the proposition posits that the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration. This notion has been subjected to some revisions in recent years, hence in its current form, it is generally accepted that aggression (such as bullying) is typically produced by frustration, but that being frustrated does not necessarily result in an aggressive response. Responses to frustration are now considered to be of four basic types: withdrawal responses, limitation responses; substitute and attack responses. Absenteeism, more work errors and lower work performance could account for responses to frustration in the domains of withdrawal, limitation and substitution responses.

If the structure of and nature of work environment alienates employees and is not possible for employees to select goals or to obtain goals required to satisfy his/her needs, then frustration-maladaptive in nature, then the job involvement of the worker is likely to be affected (Kenn, 1991).

Green (1994) presented an integration of affective or angry, aggressive into a simple diagram. It begins with a provocative situation, imagination, and ends with an overt act of aggression. This is based on a recognition of theory of aggression by Berkowitz (1964) and 1965), in which long term memory is organized into conceptual units of modes. The modes consist of cognition, related affective states, related emotions, and motor behaviour patterns. Activating any one of the modes can in turn activate any other modes along the same pathway, for e.g. when an employee encounters a provocative situation like, the initial response is negative affect: the person feels bad; and will choose fight or flight as the two basic options. The acceptable option will depend on one or a combination of these factors:

1. Genetic endowment of the innate biological tendencies
2. Associated factors such as learning.
3. Individual coping strategy.
4. Perceived consequences of reaction

### **Managing sexual harassment and bullying through application of emotional intelligence**

Although there are practical steps to be taken to eliminate sexual harassment in work place, employers and law enforcement agencies cannot always prevent sexual harassment except responding to complaints and dealing with violators. Moreover, harassment laws remain vague since what is considered harassment by one individual may not be for another.

The application of emotional intelligence in the management of sexual harassment and bullying could be effective means of curbing these interpersonal stressors. Emotional intelligence-one of the key aspects of emotions help individuals resolve conflict in a more constructive way. This is more desirable in the work environment which human relationships- (heavily influenced by emotions) is imperative, Therefore reducing and/or eliminating relationship stressors through non-legal methods could be more practical and realistic.

Emotional intelligence simply entails the capacity to understand and manage our own emotional experiences and to perceive, comprehend and respond appropriately to the emotional responses of others (Cherniss, 2001). In other words, emotional intelligence represents a set of competencies that allows one to perceive, understand and regulate emotions in oneself and in others. These competencies are learned capabilities based on emotional intelligence that leads to improved and healthy (stress-free) relationships.



Emotional Intelligence has been organized in to the following four dimensions by Goleman (1998):

1. **Self-awareness:** This entails having a deep understanding of one's own emotion as well as its strength, weakness, values and motives.
2. **Self-management:** This represents how well we control or redirect our internal states, impulses, and resources. It includes keeping disruptive impulses in check. Relating this to the management of sexual harassment and bullying, individuals high in emotional intelligence could substitute or replace unapproved or unacceptable impulses or feelings with those that are approved and accepted. Thus, a desire to give vent to aggressive feelings or impulses through overt aggressive acts (sexual harassment and for bullying) could be channeled into displayed honest and friendly relationship devoid of any ulterior motive.
3. **Social - awareness:** The third dimension is social awareness which is mainly about empathy; i.e. having understanding and being sensitive to the feelings, thoughts and situations of others. Empathizing reinforces the perceptual processes because it improves our sensitivity to external causes of another person's feelings and behaviour. For example, a manager or supervisor who imagines what it is like to be a single mother, would become more sensitive to the external cause of lateness and other events among the employees. Lacking such sensitivity, people are emotionally deaf which leads to social awkwardness whether from misconstruing feelings or through a mechanical out-of-tune bluntness or individual that destroys rapport (Carneil, 2003). A salient dimension this lack of empathy can take is responding and perceiving individuals stereotypically; in this case, regarding and treatment women only as "sex object" which should be harassed, rather than unique individuals and co-workers; that should be valued and accorded respect.
4. **Relationship - management:** Relationship management includes among others resolving conflict, cultivating healthy relationship, and supporting teamwork and collaboration.

Empirically, some studies have confirmed the mediator role of emotional intelligence in the management of relationship stressors. A study by Salovey and Mayer (1990) on the relationship between emotional intelligence in the management of stress induced behavioural (misconduct and bullying), hypothesis showed that emotional intelligence enhances individual's ability to monitor their own and others feelings and emotions by using information to

guide their thinking and actions. Also, those who scored high in emotional intelligence test were found to rarely verbally assault others, did not make rushed or emotionally negative decisions, did not stereotype people or compromise values and their emotions.

Goleman (1998) also postulated that people who are low in emotional intelligence may have superior reasoning powers, yet many a time they experience failures. This is probably because they lack the ability to manage their own emotions, control their impulses, respect and comprehend the emotional responses of others, and respond appropriately to the emotions of other people. In contrast, people who are high emotional intelligence possess these abilities and they are able to understand and use their emotions to help motivate themselves and avoid conflictual situations (including bullying and sexual harassment) (Meyer and Salovey, 1993).

In a study on the application of emotional intelligence as a crucial determinant in the maintenance of social relationships Reus' (2000), observed that people often harass others when they lack the emotional awareness and/social skills to behave with intellectual honesty, and this can happen with all kinds of people regardless of position, age, background or any other demographic attribute.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite considerable efforts directed toward the reduction of work related stress, little is known about the content of work place emotions and how it affect work performance. This paper discussed the place of emotional intelligence in the management of the interpersonal stressors of sexual harassment and bullying. It focused on the extent to which the four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self awareness, self management, social awareness, and relationship management mediate the expression and management of these stressors, by analyzing theoretical and empirical studies on the subject matter. Using frustration- aggression hypothesis as framework, the paper opines that sexual harassment and bullying are evidently caused by low emotional intelligence, and engender aggressive behavior among staff, which escalate stress and predispose to substitute attack responses, low productivity, and absenteeism, among others. It is recommended that work places should create an emotionally intelligence culture where employees are encouraged to display and utilize their emotions in a constructive way.

## **Recommendations**

A healthy industrial or business climate is built on cooperation, trust and teamwork, whether it is in a white-collar environment or on the shop floor. Thus, since it is

established that work place bullying and sexual harassments are serious interpersonal stressors, efforts should be geared toward minimizing them.

The followings are some recommendations toward reducing and/or eliminating these interpersonal stressors in work place.

1. Workplaces have a responsibility to prevent harassment, discrimination and bullying. Organisations should establish sound conflict resolution training, sound certified emotional intelligence training and sexual harassment prevention trainings; these are extremely important and recommended. Individuals in organisation should note that their actions can have an unintended resulted on others. What they perceive as teasing or playing around, another can see it as bullying or harassment. So adults should learn to respond to others-verbally or behaviourally in appropriately acceptable way.
2. Emotional intelligence is a learned behaviour, organisations can significantly help control inappropriately displayed emotions and benefits by incorporating emotional intelligence in their management training programs. Exposing workers to emotional training and stress reduction training will significantly improve work performance.
3. Workplaces should create an emotionally intelligence culture. An emotional intelligence culture encourages employees to display and utilize their emotions in a constructive way.
4. Individuals should develop awareness of their strengths and weakness. They should be reflective, learn from experience. They should learn to identify the challenge that leads to emotional tension. They should ask self-awareness questions: what feelings do the situations trigger? What thoughts trigger these feelings?
5. Individuals should learn not to compromise values and their emotions. They should stop stereotypes.

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