The Other Side of the Coin: An Exploratory Study of Perception of Instructors' Bullying in University

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Abstract—When we try to put an end to bullying in campus, unintentionally or purposely, the bullying of instructors was passed over. The study intended to explore the relationships among self-assertiveness, school support, organizational commitment and perception of instructors' bullying in undergraduates. In the current study 268 college students was recruited and internet questionnaire was used to collect data. The results showed that above half of the participants (51.87%) had experienced instructors bullying, and the verbal bullying was the most common form, relational bullying was followed. As hypothesized, the perception of instructors bullying was negatively related to self-assertiveness, school support, and organizational commitment. The findings suggest that educational organizations can develop self-assertiveness programs to enhance assertive interpersonal interaction skills in both instructors and students. More radically, the school may execute zero-bullying policy.

Keywords—Organizational Commitment, Perception of Instructor's Bullying, School Support, Self-Assertiveness

I. INTRODUCTION

BULLYING might not uncommon in education facilities. Reference [29] conducted a bullying study targeted the first to ninth-graders in Norway and Sweden. The researchers found 15% of students had encountered bullying events in the recent five months. Reference [7] surveyed the fifth, seventh to eighth, and tenth to eleventh graders with stratified random sampling in Republic of China (Taiwan) in 2013. It was found that 48% of male and 52% female students ($N = 4,980$) had experienced bullying in schools, and prevalence was 30.1%, 36.0%, and 33.9% in primary, junior high and senior high schools respectively. Therefore, bullying is a worldwide phenomenon.

Bullying can create great impacts and long term influence on victims, witnesses, families, schools, and the society [42], such as adaptation problem, psychological and physical traumas, loss of learning interests and learning effectiveness [6], [37], [38].

Usually bullying is more often in the primary schools and the prevalence gradually decreases when students step into the last year in senior high school [28], [39]. It might due to the older students show self-assertiveness which is an important determinant in bullying [16].

Bullying will not limited among students, the instructors might expose bullying nonverbally or verbally, just like the phenomenon in working place [25]. However the related studies are scarce, therefore, the purposes of the research was to understand the prevalence of instructor's bullying, at the same time, explore the relationships among undergraduates' self-assertiveness, school support, organizational commitment and perception of instructor's bullying.

A. Perception of Instructor's Bullying

Bullying is someone or a group of people with imbalanced power who impose intentional, aggressive and potential to be repeated physical, psychological, and/or verbal aggression, and the bullied person with no way to resist [9], [21], [30], [36].

Reference [30] defined nine types of bullying, other than physical, verbal, relational, counter attack, sexual, and cyber bullying, he suggested bullying through lies and false rumors, having money or other things taken or damaged, threats or being forced to do things, and racial bullying. Most of research found that verbal bullying is the most common form of bullying, even in Taiwan, ROC [20], [44].

Most of bully would deny their violent behaviors, therefore the study target on the perception of bullying.

B. Self-Assertiveness

Self-assertiveness usually means a positive behavior by which one can properly express one's emotion and opinions in taking care of one's own and others' right and without too much anxiety or worries [23], [24]. At the same time, self-assertiveness will influence one's self-evaluation, which makes oneself feeling sense of importance and value, also improves acceptance of self and self-liking [40].

Reference [2] found that unassertive persons often feel ashamed, unable to maintain their right, and rely on others to make decisions for them. Unassertiveness results in low self-esteem and feeling anxious in unassertive person, while other people might misunderstand and neglect, even incur violence on unassertive person's rights [32].

On the contrary, assertive people would be honest to self and use a way to refuse unreasonable request and yet will not hurt the other party's dignity [16].

Take a step further, self-assertiveness can be the explicit expression of self-confidence, and it is positively related to self-protection effectively [16]. Self-assertiveness can been seen as behaviors which speaks for, defending, and pursuing one's personal interests but not harm the other's side's interest [3].

C. School Support

The victims who having few social support tend to experience higher frequency and types of bullying. Mush of the past research support this point of view [12], [15], [35].

School support is one form of social support, students in institute acknowledge the care and assistance of administrative systems, instructors, and the peers through school support.

In dealing with bullying in campus, the administrative systems play an important role in it. The school may help students in problem solving, adaptation to the environment, overcoming learning difficulties, and provision of resources in need [21]. Additionally, if the school can establish clear policy about bullying and are responsible for the enforcement, the bullying problem will be under controlled [30].

Reference [10] found that peer support and response will increase the awareness of bullying and buffer the impacts of bullying. At the same time, if the teacher can intervene immediately, appropriately and impartially, the bullying among students would fade away [10], [13].

D. Organizational Commitment

Reference [27] developed an organizational commitment questionnaire and proposed three components of organizational commitment, which were identification of organization's goals and values, and a willingness to contribute to and stay in the organization. Organizational commitment is seen as a positive attitude which maintains the organizational competition [26], and contribute to employees' better performance, lower absence, and higher retention [11], [34].

Research found victims of bullying in workplace would impact their commitment to organization, thereafter job performance and satisfaction decreased [4], [14], [22]. Similarly, student victims of bullying in campus will have a falling grade, lack of interesting in study, and might develop school phobia [6], [37].

Accordingly, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: The more self-assertiveness the undergraduate students have, the less the perception of instructor's bullying they might experience.

Hypothesis 2: The more school support the undergraduate students perceived, the less the perception of instructor's bullying they might experience.

Hypothesis 3: The more perception of instructor's bullying the undergraduate students perceived, the less organizational commitment they might demonstrate.

II. METHODS

A. Participants and Procedure

The study used web questionnaire to collect data from undergraduates in ROC. The questionnaires were completed anonymously and voluntarily. We obtained 268 effective samples, among these participants, 69% were female, 31% were male; 19% were freshman, 22% were sophomore, 24% were junior, 33% were senior, and 2% were other.

B. Measures

Self-assertiveness scale was adopted and revised from [5] and [1] to measure participants' degree of self-assertiveness on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). After pilot test, a 24-item scale was developed (Cronbach's α = .849 in the current study). Sample items include "I can always express my opinions in group discussion" as well as "It is difficult for me to refuse people's request" (reversed coded). We reversed the scores so that higher scores represent higher assertiveness.

A 10-item scale developed by [43] was used to measure perception of instructor's bullying (Cronbach's α = .872 in the present study) on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). We revised the wording to match the bullying between the instructors and students. An example item is "My instructor ridicules me." Higher scores represent more perception of bullying.

School support scale was adopted and revised from [17]. This 10-item scale assesses perception of school support (Cronbach's α = .834 in the current study), sample item is "School administrative departments will provide assistance to students in need." Respondents were asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

A 12-item organizational commitment inventory developed by [8] was used to measure participants' commitment to school (Cronbach's α = .842 in the present study). Sample items are "I identify with the mission and prospections of the school," "I strive for outstanding performance in honor of the school," as well as "I appreciate the chance to study in this school." Respondents were asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores represent better school commitment after we reversed the scores.

III. FINDINGS

Almost half, a 48.13% (n = 129) of participants reported no bullying experiences by the instructors (see Figure 1).
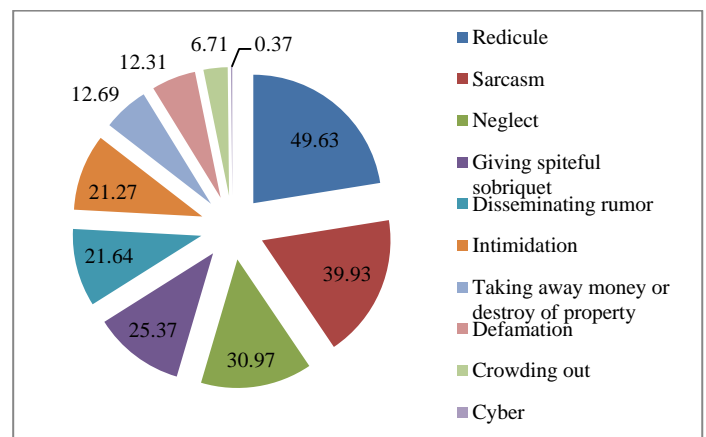

Fig. 1 Frequencies of types of instructor's bullying

Pearson's correlation showed that self-assertiveness, school support, organizational commitment were negatively related to perception of instructor's bullying ($r = -.29$, $p = .006$; $r = -.37$, $p = .008$; $r = -.18$, $p = .003$ respectively), suggesting that the more self-assertiveness and school support students had, the less perception of instructor's bullying they experienced. In addition, the more perception of instructor's bullying students experienced, the less school commitment they displayed. These results provided support for hypotheses 1, 2 and 3.

IV. GENERAL DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to explore the unspoken instructor's bullying toward undergraduate students. We believe that it is a double untouchable issue, because of the nature of victim plus underdog making it unnoticeable. The results show over half of the undergraduate participants (51.87%) had experienced instructor's bullying while studying in universities. Among these, ridicule is the most often used type of bullying (49.63%), sarcasm (39.93%) and neglect (30.97%) follows. Generally speaking, a 62.76% of bullying person/type is expressed verbally among ten forms of bullying. In addition, the results support negative correlations between self-assertive in students and perception of instructor's bullying, school support and bullying, as well as organizational commitment and bullying.

However, some limitations of this study are worth mentioning. The current study is a single-time cross-sectional study, which may lead to some common method bias [33]. We can make it into a longitudinal design to collect more data and reduce the common method variance problem and the possible homogeneity of the sample. Furthermore, power distance might be a moderating variable playing a role in students' perception of instructor's bullying, therefore, the further study can take it into account.

This research makes several contributions to the existing body of literature. First, we shed light on the instructor's bullying toward students. To our knowledge it is the first time the issue has been examined.

Secondly, the current study reminds us the counter-effect of instructor's bullying which might lead to the students losing of commitment to the school.

Third, the current study also provides some guidance for managing instructor's bullying. One way is to boost students' self-assertiveness which may result in personal benefit and the problem subsides. The other way, if the school can increase support toward students in administrative dimension, such as highlight the code of ethics for educators and set up friendly due procedure, it might decrease the prevalence of instructor's bullying. In addition, the school can create ways to make the campus friendly. In this way, we solve the problem not only focusing the individual level, but expanding the efforts in environmental level.

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