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Effects of workplace bullying against female employees who work in the female- dominated workplace in the Department of Social Development, Regional Office, Gauteng

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Effects of workplace bullying against female employees who work in the female-dominated workplace in the Department of Social Development, Regional Office, Gauteng.

A report on a research study presented to:

The Department of Social Work
School of Human and Community Development
Faculty of Humanities
University of the Witwatersrand

In partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Social Work in the field of Occupational Social Work
by

Lungisile Lorraine Simelane
Supervised by
Professor Thobeka Nkomo

November 2024

DECLARATION

This research report was compiled and submitted as the requirement of the Master of Arts in Social Work by coursework and Research for Occupational Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand. I, Lungisile Lorraine Simelane declare that this research report is my own original work, and it has never been submitted to any other university before. I have followed all the ethical requirements and referenced all the sources used.

___L.Simelane_____
Signature

09 December 2024_____
Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity and thank God, the Almighty for being with me throughout this research report writing, it has never easy. There were times where I would want to give up and there were so many trials and tribulations that needed my attention, but he did not fail me. He kept his promise and gave me strength to carry on as he said, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; and do not be discouraged for, I, the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." I lost my elder brother after submitting my research proposal, but God stood by me and gave me strength to carry on. May his soul rest in peace. Secondly, I would like to thank my ancestors "abogogo nabomkhulu abomavula kuvaliwe amathonga amahle. UMakhosemvelo isangoma esifundile "Makhosi amakhulu".

Thirdly. I would like to thank my research supervisor, Professor Thobeka Nkomo who believed in me even if could feel that I cannot take it anymore. She kept on pushing and believing that I can. Furthermore, I would like to say thank you to my boys, Ntando and Asemahle who believed in me regardless of me struggling to spend time with them due to working and studying even on weekends. I did this to motivate my boys to show them that they can do it as well and in life education will give you the life that you want. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my research participants from the Department of Social Development, my female colleagues cluster and regional offices who made sure that I reach my goal and excel in my research topic. A thank you to all my friends and family especially my brother and my sister-in-law.Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my late parents, Ntombikayise and Mpisendlini Mfeka who did not get a chance to be educated but they raised me with stability, encouraged me and always reminded me that education is the key. To my late father who used to say he was cursed, and he was told that 'no child of his will be educated', Mzimela uthumbu wakho ufundile ugogothile.'nikhulise imbokodo. I know you and my mother you would have been so proud of me, but I know spiritually, you are shining in heaven.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research report to my dear husband who is my best friend, pillar of strength, my brother, and my yonk'into, Mr Dumsani Joseph Simelane. You gave me an opportunity to excel in life, you believed in me and supported me all the way. As from the beginning of our relationship as young as we were you knew gave me a relationship that allowed me to be myself. We got married and you proved the point that you promised to love and cherish me in everything from my undergraduate course where others were saying I would not cope with being a wife, a mother, and a student, but God sent you. I attended the full-time course where I had to learn to keep track of being a wife, mother, and the student I would have sleepless nights sometimes I could feel that I am drained, but you helped me to balance, and you kept on reminding me of my goal. I made it and moved on to this master's course and you were at it again supporting me in all the challenges that I went through where I nearly gave up, but you kept on reminding me that it is possible. Thank you so much for your unconditional love, support, and energy when I lost mine, I will never trade you for anything in life ungenze umuntu ebantwini I did this for you and our children, Ntando and Asemahle. Thank you so much Mpembe kaLokothwayo, Magutshwa, Ndlov'ezidl'ekhaya ngoba ziswele abelusi! You helped me prove that; Indawo yomuntu wesifazane ayikho ekhisini kuphela!

ABSTRACT

Bullying is humiliating, damaging, and cruel. However, its significant impact on the psychological well-being of the victim is often overlooked. In addition, bullying within the workplace affects productivity, staff turnover, morale, and motivation of employees. This study explores the effects of female-to-female employee bullying within a female-dominated workplace in Gauteng. The study adopts a qualitative approach and a phenomenological design to explore participants' perspectives on their experiences, actions, and events. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 10 participants who were employees working in a female-dominated workplace in Gauteng. Semi-structured interviews were used for collecting the data which was then analysed using semi-structured interviews. The study findings contribute to filling the research gap on female-to-female workplace bullying in South Africa.

KEYWORDS: bullying, bullyism, patronising, female-dominated workplace, employees.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1.BACKGROUND

Employment forms a critical part of human survival and growth. Therefore, the employment relationship is a source of growth. According to Botha (2019), employment relationships can be described as a complex combination of human interactions across various roles. However, different forms of workplace bullying such as verbal, written, or physical, often occur (Botha, 2019). The common narrative in relation to workplace bullying suggests that men bully women employees. This is often described as men exercising hegemonic masculinity over women. Some employees develop a negative perception of workplaces after experiencing bullying, whether related to their personal characteristics or work-related.

The study's aim is to explore the effects of bullying against female employees in a female-dominated workplace in Gauteng. This chapter presents the statement of the problem and the rationale for the study, research question, aims, objectives, theoretical framework, literature review, as well as the research method and instruments. The trustworthiness, ethical principles and the limitations are also discussed. Furthermore, the chapter describes the dissertation outline.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Employees spend most of their time in the workplace, where they are expected to work hard to enhance productivity and improve their lives as well as those of their families. There are various forms of bullying, and some employees choose to keep their jobs than to report the bullying.

STOMP Out bullying Organisation (2005) identifies bullying as the behaviour that causes pain and distress on the victim. According to STOMP Out bullying Organisation (2005), the most common form of bullying is physical. Physical bullying includes actions such as kicking, hitting, and beating (Jungert et al., 2024). Verbal bullying often accompanies physical behaviour such as name calling and spreading rumours. Emotional intimidation is being deliberately excluded from the group or activities (Bjarehed et al, 2021). Whereas racist bullying includes many forms such as racial slurs, making offensive gestures and mocking the victim's cultural customs (Sapouna et al., 2022).

In addition, Matatjie and Mbajiorgu (2024) stated that sexual bullying includes inappropriate

physical contact which can make the victim feel uncomfortable such hugging, kissing, or sharing of sexual photos and it includes sexual comments for example taunts and threats. Cyberbullying is a form of bullying often conducted by a group of children, or teenagers using electronic devices, such as computers and mobile phones, to harass, threaten, or embarrass others (STOMP Out bullying Organisation, 2005). Nenzhelele (2020) highlights that women are more likely to stay in their jobs, even in abusive work environments, because they must fulfil their and their families' needs. Additionally, Ehlers (2004) states that employees enter labour relations to earn an income. Several authors, (Mkhabela, 2021; Makamu, 2022; Mangolothi and Mnguni, 2021); Masango, 2020; Botha, 2019) had discussed workplace bullying to raise awareness about the issue. Mkhabela (2019) notes that workplace bullying is often overlooked, and typically associated with individuals in positions of power. Bullying occurs when a colleague mistreats others, subjecting them to emotional and spiritual abuse (Omar, 2017).

Einarsen (1999) indicated that workplace bullying can be described as repeated negative actions directed at one or more individuals, causing humiliation, offence, and distress. It can also interfere with job performance or contribute to an unpleasant work environment. Furthermore, workplace bullying can be seen as a social interaction where the perpetrators use verbal or non-verbal communication consisting of negative elements (Suggala et al., 2020). The common workplace bullying behaviours lead to verbal aggression, physical intimidation, and personal or professional attacks. These obstruct one's work, isolate them from the group socialisations, and may lead to the spread of rumours about another colleague (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). Furthermore, as a way of workplace bullying, some employees are made 'laughingstock' and are exposed to verbal or physical acts of humiliation and degrading (Suggala et al., 2020).

According to the International Labour Law Organisation (ILO) workplace bullying can be defined as work trauma, a devastating experience that leads to turnover, uncontrollable absenteeism, abuse of sick leave, and lack of performance. Moreover, bullying, negatively impacts an individual's health (Badenhorst & Botha, 2022). A study conducted by Pearson (2001) highlighted the physiological and psychological effects of workplace bullying. The study reports that physiological effects include headaches, migraines, sweating, shaking, irritable bowel, sleepless nights, and loss of appetite. Then in most cases, the psychological effects include anxiety, panic attacks, and depression, leading to burnouts (Pearson, 2001).

Employees who experience bullying often suffer from low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, and a lack of belief in professional competency (Chirila, 2020). Bernstein and Trimm (2016) believe that bullying leads to severe mental health issues such as, depression, resulting in post-traumatic disorders, suicidal thoughts, and coronary disease.

Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) highlight that employees who experienced bullying have reduced job satisfaction, leading to retention. Mangolothi and Mnguni's (2021) study focused on workplace bullying in the higher education sector. The study emphasises that most Black women in academia leave some organisations due to low job satisfaction, social and intellectual frustrations, racism, disillusionment with management, and insufficient salary packages (Mangolothi & Mnguni, 2021). Additional factors that contribute to Black women leaving the sector are the inability to build rapport with department leaders, limited career development opportunities, a lack of assignments and teaching opportunities, exclusion from growth, and being left out of research opportunities (Mangolothi & Mnguni, 2021).

The current study focuses on any form of bullying that employees experience and affects their ability to cope at work physically or mentally. The study seeks to understand the effects of workplace bullying against female employees working in a female-dominated environment in Gauteng. The study contributes to the literature on workplace bullying against female employees, since women are reportedly not given enough research attention in South Africa.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the effects of bullying faced by female employees in a female-dominated workplace?

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 AIM OF THE STUDY

- To explore the effects of workplace bullying against females at the female's dominant workplace.

1.4.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore the challenges that female employees experience in a female-dominated workplace.

- To understand how female employees deal with the challenges they experience within the female-dominated workplace.
- To understand the impact these challenges have had on their productivity.
- To make recommendations on how to deal with workplace bullying.

1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 BULLYING

Bullying can be described as the act of intimidating someone, and it can take the form of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. It involves unwanted behaviour that affects someone's dignity in the workplace and can be defined as actions that make someone feel distressed, intimidated, or offended (Conco et al., 2012). Bullying includes actions that happen regularly, such as harassment, insult, and social exclusion, where victims struggle to defend themselves (Mangolothi & Mnguni, 2021). The current study uses the term 'bullying' to explain the kind of treatment experienced by female employees within the workplace.

1.5.2 BULLYISM

Bullyism can be described as the practice of bullying repeatedly done to someone with the intention to harm, control and manipulate (Tuckey et al., 2022). The term 'bullyism' was adopted in the current study to describe the effects of workplace bullying.

1.5.3 PATRONISING

Patronising can be defined as treating someone in a manner that makes them feel inferior, as if they are unintelligent or not important (Cunniff, 2011). Patronising can be a form of trauma that undermines an individual's ego, resulting from frequent confrontations with negative actions by a superior (Chirila, 2020). Patronising can cause anxiety, leading individuals to gradually lose interest and confidence in themselves, resulting in physical illness and mental distress (Saunders et al., 2007). This definition is adopted to demonstrate the effects of workplace bullying.

1.5.4 FEMALE-DOMINATED WORKPLACE

Female-dominated workplaces, often referred to as the pink-collar professions, can be defined

as workplace with more females compared to male employees (Limani & Sodergren, 2023). The workplace or office setting with minimal gender balance often consists of more female employees compared to males (Cunniff, 2011). This term is adopted in the current study to highlight gender dynamics in the workplace and provide context for the current study.

1.5.5 EMPLOYEES

An employee can be defined as an individual who receives a payment for the work they would have done, aligning with the period in the form of hours or years worked. There are various types of employees such as full-time, part-time, contract, and temporary (Kasuso, 2015). Saunders et al. (2007) define employees as a group of people working for someone in a company or organisation. This group is paid through wages or salaries for the rendered services (Saunders et al., 2007). This term was adopted in the current study to identify the participants.

1.4. STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction of the study. The introduction provides the research topic, problem statement, justification of the study, the purpose of the study, the aim and the objectives of the study. The second chapter consists of the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Chapter three is the literature review, while chapter four consists of the adopted research methodology. Chapter five consists of the presentation and discussion of the findings. Lastly, chapter six discusses the main findings, and concludes the study.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework used for the current study. The study adopts the conflict theory as its theoretical framework. Therefore, the first part of the chapter discusses the background of conflict theory. The second part explores conflict and its factors in the workplace. The third part highlights the causes of conflict in the workplace and how they affect female employees, leading to workplace bullying. Finally, the chapter explores the management of conflict in the workplace, offering different ways to reduce it and prevent workplace bullying among females.

2.1 CONFLICT THEORY

The conflict theory was first developed by Karl Marx, as a sociological perspective underlining societal conflicts due to limited resources. The theory is relevant for the current study because it views conflict as an inherent part of social life, where neither change nor stability is considered the norm. It further states that power causes imbalances that affect individuals as well as the entire communities.

Conversely, Omisore (2014) mentioned C. Wright Mills as the founder of the modern conflict theory, who states that social structures are created by people using different structures and resources. The conflict theory interacts and clarifies the causes of conflicts that leads to workplace bullying. Einarsen (1999) states that in most cases of bullying, conflict emanates from a lack of coping resources and self-efficacy.

Therefore, conflict theory is adopted in the current study, to understand the balance of power and resources, and to further explain human behaviour. Individuals and groups of people will always compete for resources and available opportunities. According to Fredericks (2014), conflict can be defined as something that occurs between individuals in different social groups. Hence, the conflict theory seems relevant for understanding disagreements. In addition, modern conflict theory emphasises that social structures can emerge from conflicts between individuals or groups with different interests and resources (Fredericks, 2014).

Disagreements in relationships can occur between siblings or family members, among employees in the workplace, or even from self-perception and how others perceive them. Omisore (2014) states that the conflict theory is essential in analysing situations, as well as

actions. Hence, the theory considers conflict as part of social life (Omisore, 2014). Thomas (2005) defines conflict as a form of disagreement due to sharing of opinions between people, and groups with different attitudes, values, and needs.

Conflict theory suggests that conflict often arises when resources are unevenly distributed, making it particularly relevant in understanding workplace bullying, where there is competition and productivity pressures (Fredericks, 2014). In female-dominated workplaces, female employees may sometimes engage in bullying due to the desire for recognition and attention from managers. According to Shakoor et al. (2020) conflict may result in bullying in the workplace when individuals compete for work, recognition, ability, acknowledgment, and certainty. Additionally, competition over productivity and material resources can cause conflicts, further contributing to bullying. Valdes (2020) believes that conflict may arise due to limited resources where employees depend on shared resources pool. Therefore, it becomes a problem to share and that creates inequality amongst employees.

Omisore (2014) asserts that conflict is an inevitable aspect of human life and organisations. In organisations, it often arises due to competition for supremacy, differing leadership styles and the scarcity of shared resources. However, if the conflict is not managed, it leads to poor service delivery, negatively affecting individuals as well as organisations. Conflict can provoke psychological, behavioural, and physiological responses. The psychological responses could be a lack of interest at work, job dissatisfaction, and work anxiety, whereas behavioural responses include alcohol abuse, excessive smoking, and aggression towards colleagues (Riaz & Junaid, 2014). Physiological responses include coronary problems, migraine or headaches, and hypertension (Omisore, 2014). Conflict among females may result from material things rather than work production, leading to excessive spending and stress.

Furthermore, Chirila (2020) states that conflict theory can be understood through the stages of the escalated conflict theory, which are useful for explaining the manifestation of psychological aggression. The first stage is rationalisation, which occurs when an individual tries to solve the differences in a rational manner. The second stage is when the bitterness in social relations escalates, resulting in distrusting innocent intentions, disrespect, and hostility towards the aggressor. The third stage involves the concrete manifestation of the aggression by the aggressor, causing the targeted individual to feel pressured to leave their job (Chirila, 2020). Workplace bullying can be triggered by work-related conflicts, which in some cases sour the social climate, escalating into harsh personified conflicts and office wars (Einarsen, 1994). The

conflict has numerous definitions and factors that provide more clarity about its causes and the ways of effectively managing it.

2.2. CONFLICT AND ITS FACTORS IN THE WORKPLACE

When a group of people work together or collaborate, conflict always arises, whether positive or negative. Leung (2010) highlights that there is no single definition of conflict, as individuals act and think differently from others in a similar situation.

Omisore and Abiodun (2014) mention that conflict is an inseparable aspect of people's lives and organisations. It can be described as the process where an individual's interest is opposed by another party (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). Conflict in the workplace is often linked to the employee's background for example (childhood experiences, family conflicts), personality (jealousy, lack of empathy and laziness) friends, (values and beliefs) workplace performance (employee turnover, absenteeism, productivity, and profitability decline) and work experience (mistreatment from previous workplace from former colleagues or management (Makamu, 2022; Johannes & Pillay, 2020). Some people view conflict as something that pushes them for growth, while others see it as a demotivating factor.

Thomas (2005) defines conflict as the disagreement of opinions among a group of people due to differences in needs, values, and attitudes. The differences leading to conflicts within the workplace include work experiences, peer groups, personalities environments, and situations (Thomas, 2005). Often, conflict within the workplace occurs when employees or management disagree on certain ideas to reach a certain shared goal (Laton, 2008). The resolution of conflict often depends on the factors and circumstances surrounding it. According to Makamu (2022), workplace conflict can be beneficial if it is constructive, because it serves as a wake-up call for those involved, encouraging them to reassess their opinions. When effectively managed, conflict promotes the generation of various ideas and promotes peace among employees within the workplace (Makamu, 2022).

The factors contributing to workplace and bullying vary based on how employees perceive and understand conflict. In some workplaces, conflict is regarded as a normal occurrence, and newly appointed employees are often perceived as weak (Shakoor et al., 2020). In many cases, these factors may relate to the experiences of female employees who compete for work, material possessions, or individual characteristics. Unresolved workplace conflicts can escalate to higher levels if not effectively addressed.

2.3. CAUSES OF CONFLICT WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

The causes of conflict in the workplace can be competition, lack of resources, conflict management skills, power, status, and communication. It is important to note that the causes of conflict differ and can be perceived differently by everyone, often contributing to workplace bullying. Omisore and Abiodun (2014) state that conflict can be positive or negative. The conflict regarded as negative should be addressed because it might result in a toxic workplace. Omisore and Abiodun's (2014) study also reveals that conflict can result from competition for supremacy, the leadership style, and the scarcity of common resources. Riaz and Junaid (2011) added that workplace conflict may arise due to scarce resource such as time, status, and budget. This includes values such as political preferences, beliefs, religion, moral and social values, personality differences misinterpreted facts, perceptions, and world views. In addition, Valdes (2023) mentioned that communication problems, such as lack or poor communication, differing goals, and objectives with different ideas of achieving them, and personal differences such as values and beliefs, are the leading causes of workplace conflict.

Isa (2015) identified the causes of conflict in the workplace as poor communication, unfair treatment of employees, favouritism, nepotism, a lack of resources, unequal sharing of resources, stress, and sexual harassment. Conflict also adds to reduced productivity and a lack of employee retention capacity. Shakoor et al. (2020) mentioned that conflict occurs due to tension between individuals, society, poor governance, and the historical and socioeconomic background. This includes differences in personality backgrounds, autonomy, status, and ignorance in another employee's achievement.

Makamu (2022) highlights that it is crucial to determine the causes of conflict before attempting to manage it. The sources of conflict can be both internal and external. Internal conflict within the workplace includes opposing views among the employees. While external conflict, originates from sources outside the workplace (Makamu, 2022). Additionally, conflict can be structural or arise from the personal factors and occurs in most workplaces, resulting in negative consequences such as dysfunctional teamwork, a decrease in production, and increased employee turnover (Lowry, 2013).

A study conducted by Omisore and Abiodun (2014) reveals that if conflict is not timely managed, it can lead to low production and poor service delivery. Omisore and Abiodun (2014) also highlight the negative consequences on both individuals and the workplace such as a lack

of interest in work, alienation from others, anxiety, and job dissatisfaction. Behavioural responses include smoking excessively, alcoholism, lack of teamwork, and competition over work resources. Furthermore, physiological responses include different illnesses such as persisting headaches, breathing problems, peptic ulcers, and uncontrollable running stomach (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014)

Conflict can be classified as harmful when left unresolved, as it may lead to affected employees becoming violent, creating an unsafe workplace environment. This indicates that among female employees within the workplace, the causes of conflict can demotivate individuals, cause harmful effects to service delivery, affecting the workplace's reputation. This can further increase excessive sick leave, absenteeism, and turnover leading to a toxic workplace. Managing conflict effectively, including encouraging the use of occupational social work services, can provide solutions that benefit the employee and the workplace.

2.4. MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

McKinney (2019) highlights that conflict management refers to ways of fairly and efficiently identifying as well as dealing with the conflict.

Mokgolo (2017) mentioned that the Human Resource (HR) department is well-suited to resolving workplace conflicts. However, not all employees are willing to utilise its services, and some conflicts go unreported due to fear, intimidation, or being discouraged from addressing the issue. Some employees believe they can resolve conflicts on their own, while others think that avoiding conflict is the best approach. However, fostering respect, practising effective communication, adopting a problem-solving mindset, and empathy can be useful in addressing workplace conflicts (Omisore, 2014).

Raising awareness about employee health and wellness programmes is an advantage for the HR department, especially when conducted constantly. Although female employees might be aware of the services, regular reminders and effective social marketing can improve their utilisation. According to the Department of Social Development [DSD] (2017a), the employees have access to face-to-face as well as the telephonic employee health and wellness programme. This programme helps them cope with any occupational stress including conflict, where they must learn conflict management (DSD, 2017a). Therefore, it is crucial to ensure the utilisation of these programmes to assess if they provide the expected solutions. Masango (2020) states that there has been a general trend in seeking professional help through counselling. Social

workers are found to be reluctant when seeking professional help, as they are afraid of being identified as being weak (Masango, 2020). Regardless of the social workers feeling embarrassed, weak, and mistrusting the counsellor, it cannot be ignored that conflict happens daily in every workplace.

Conversely, Omisore and Abiodun (2014) highlight that when conflict is professionally managed, it produces positive results. Conflict does not only affect an employee's work performance, but also gives rise to psychosomatic disturbances which undermine individuals' health (Isa, 2015). The benefits of conflict management include motivated employees, satisfaction of psychological needs, and provision of creative and innovative ideas that can bring change to the workplace and improve communication among employees (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014).

Taur et al. (2022) mentioned that conflict needs to be resolved effectively. However, it is not important to only ensure that the conflict is resolved but also to consider the emotional well-being of involved all parties, ensuring they do not experience any form of emotional stress during the resolution (Taur et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Lowry (2013) reveals that training in conflict resolution skills can result in improved teamwork, employee satisfaction, and an increase in productivity. Makamu (2022) adds that conflict management helps to promote healthy relationships. Conflict management increases productivity, decreases aggression, minimises the risk of violence, and sabotage among employees (Makamu, 2022).

The problem-solving approach is another effective method of managing conflict. Research shows that a problem-solving approach can be defined as evaluating the measures taken with the intention to solve the problem (Karakaya &Yilmaz, 2013). This section outlined how the adoption of conflict management strategies can assist the department in managing conflict among female employees. This section further indicated how conflict management can be help in avoiding burnout, stress, and low productivity.

2.5. SUMMARY

This chapter outlines the conflict theory that is underpinning the study. The discussion is based on the description of the conflict theory aimed at providing more clarity on conflict. In addition, there is a discussion divided into three sub-topics, where conflict was explained, its several

factors, and the causes within the workplace. The chapter concludes by discussing different approaches to how conflict can be managed within the workplace. The next chapter presents the literature review.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3. INTRODUCTION

This literature review focuses on discussing previous studies' focus and highlights the existing literature gaps which act as the current study's background. The first part of the literature review specifies bullyism within the workplace among female employees. The second part highlights the impact of bullying on an employee and an organisation. The third part discusses the discourses on gender and bullying within the workplace. The last part of the chapter discusses the importance of the HR departments in implementing techniques to prevent workplace bullying and encouraging victims to report bullying behaviours.

3.1.BULLYISM IN THE WORKPLACE AMONGST FEMALE EMPLOYEES

According to Botha (2019), bullying in the workplace is one of the unwanted behaviours with varying consequences for employees' performance at work (Botha, 2019). Bullying is perceived as a crucial social issue in the contemporary society. In addition, it is often associated with the child's developmental issues and is expected to improve as they mature into adulthood. However, in most cases, bullying persists into adulthood, affecting individuals at their workplace. Traditionally, bullying has been researched in different social contexts and on various populations, but there is less research on women and their experiences of workplace bullying (Misawa et al., 2018).

Omar (2017) mentioned that numerous factors influence workplace bullying in organisations and social contexts. The two types of bullying noted in Omar (2017) are related to disputes and predatory behaviours. The disputes related to bullying can be in three forms: aggressive behaviours stemming from interpersonal conflicts, tactical actions, and resentment towards the wrongdoings or the unfair treatment by others (Omar, 2017). Conversely, predatory bullying refers to incidences where the victim did not provoke the bully. However, the bully abuses their power over the victim, resulting in exploiting their vulnerability (Omar, 2017).

Workplace bullying can be initiated by the management and colleagues to another employee, leading to negative consequences. However, researchers consider bullyism within the workplace as a sensitive issue experienced daily in various workplaces. Additionally, bullyism does not choose career, class, or gender. Therefore, various definitions will help in comprehending bullying and how sensitive it can be to a victim. van Schalkwyk et al. (2011)

refer to workplace bullying as a silent epidemic. They note that only two countries, Sweden, and Norway, have recognised the importance of developing specific legislation to address workplace bullying. However, it is evident that South Africa and other countries have not yet considered the specific legislation to prevent bullying within the workplace.

According to Botha (2011), bullying has received more attention in the past decade. Researchers proved that in many countries, organisations experience workplace bullying, and South Africa was found to be one of those countries. Botha's (2011) study was conducted to find measures that can be implemented to ensure the effective management of bullying behaviour. Furthermore, Badenhorst and Botha's (2022) study aimed to encourage awareness against workplace bullying and empower employees to report situations they find themselves as victims to. The findings of the study revealed that there is a need for company policies that offer appropriate protection for employees against workplace bullying (Badenhorst & Botha, 2011).

Workplace bullying has many definitions, some focus on certain categories such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and disability (Calitz, 2022). Turkey et al. (2022) define workplace bullying as a form of systematic mistreatment which occurs repeatedly, where targeted individuals struggle to defend themselves due to a power imbalance between the parties involved. Saunders et al. (2007) emphasise that workplace bullying is a form of harassing behaviour that can affect employees at any stage of their career. In addition, bullying can affect any individual regardless of one's socioeconomic status (Saunders et al., 2007). Similarly, Conco et al. (2012) define workplace bullying as repeated, unwanted actions or practices specifically directed at a worker.

Bullying can also stem from the management or even groups harassing an individual or a group of others. Botha (2011) highlights that workplace bullying can involve actions by an individual or group targeting another person with aggressive behaviours, leading to the feelings of degradation, and negatively affecting the targeted employee's mental state. Moreover, Mangolothi and Mnguni (2021) specify that the types of bullying vary according to factors such as excessive workload, and the removal of key responsibilities. Bullying also includes unreasonable deadlines, withholding of information, interference with another individual's work, excessive work monitoring, ignoring, or overlooking others' contributions, isolation, and belittling (Keashly & Neuman, 2010).

Cunniff (2011) conducted a quantitative study to determine the prevalence of workplace bullying in a sample of South African employees. The results reveal that workplace bullying is a prevalent issue in the country, where 4% of employees reported perpetrating, while 31% often experienced being victims of bullying (Cunniff, 2011). Therefore, the current study seeks to clarify bullyism within the workplace, focusing on bullying against female employees in Gauteng.

3.1.1. OCCUPATIONAL CHALLENGES LEADING TO BULLYISM ON EMPLOYEES.

Workplace can be identified as an environment with various challenges emanating from personal views, environment, resources, and conflicts among employees (Calitz, 2022 According to Omar (2017), workplace bullying can be identified as the stressor faced by an employee within their work environment. The transactional model indicates that the stress usually occurs when an individual is faced with the demands that exceed the available resources which can be used to deal efficiently with those demands. Furthermore, the stress is identified as a separate phenomenon resulting from the transaction between the person and the situation they are facing (Omar, 2017). In essence, it is important to study workplace bullying experienced by female employees because they face various challenges in their work environment.

However, Thomas (2020) emphasises that bullying within the workplace can be better understood when investigated in two categories: the individual and organisational characteristics. For an individual employee, bullying in the workplace occurs due to being emotionally immature, lack of intra and interpersonal skills, less effective handling of workplace responsibilities, engaging in fights, and undermining their colleagues managing their work (Thomas, 2020). In organisational or occupational level, workplace bullying is linked to employee's organisational commitment, team cohesion, limited resources, creativity, job satisfaction, work environment, and employee engagement. If not properly addressed, bullying can escalate into a significant issue, resulting in decreased productivity and a collapse of the entire organisation (Badenhorst and Botha, 2022). Makamu (2022) reveals that limited resources, diversity, goal differences, roles and expectations, passive aggression, and poor communication serve as occupational challenges that lead to workplace bullying.

3.2. THE IMPACT OF BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE ON FEMALE EMPLOYEES AND ON AN ORGANISATION

Maidaniuc–Chirila (2020) defines workplace bullying as one of the social stressors with negative effects on the members of the organisation. The research study conducted reveals that bullying within the workplace has a negative impact on the employee's well-being and the organisational day-to-day running, further negatively impacting production as well as employee wellness (Maidaniuc–Chirila, 2020).

Workplace bullying can be regarded as something common within an organisation. Bullying has a negative financial impact on an organisation due to; turnover rates, low productivity, absenteeism, compensation claims, grievances, and legal processes (Thomas, 2020). Moreso, workplace bullying can be highlighted as one of the factors contributing to low productivity, and performance of an organisation. Workplace bullying may also lead to negative outcomes such as absenteeism, reduced job satisfaction, high employee turnover, and sudden resignations (Chua & Yazdanifard, 2014). While organisations bear the consequences of workplace bullying, it is the victims who suffer the most damage (Upton, 2010).

Literature demonstrates that some employees who experience bullying struggle to understand its impact on their personal lives, and their work performance, as some find ways to save their jobs. Wu et al. (2020) highlight that anxiety leads to employees showing different behaviours. Individuals respond to bullying and anxiety differently, either through passive resistance or by internalising the insults. Omar (2017) states that bullying can result in employees experiencing low self-esteem and anxiety.

Furthermore, Davhana and Maubane (2023) express that bullying in the workplace includes different kinds of unwanted behaviours such as belittling, intimidating, humiliating, offending as well as disempowering. This kind of behaviour escalates to cumulative purposes of causing harm, to an employee's health, reputation, career success or development which further affects their ability to perform (Davhana & Maubane, 2023). This kind of unwanted behaviour leads to humiliation, distress, and offence, negatively impacting work performance and creating an unconducive work environment (Conco et al., 2012).

Tuckey et al. (2022) report that several studies conducted worldwide found that bullying within the workplace leads to various illnesses for the victims, such as cardiovascular disease, suicidal thoughts, and insomnia, especially if they do not receive the necessary support. Additionally,

Conco et al. (2012) emphasise that the impacts of workplace bullying can be felt at individual and organisational levels. Individuals experience physical problems including somatic or musculoskeletal disorders, and several mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, psychological distress, as well as suicidal thoughts. At an organisational level, workplace bullying can be associated with decreased work motivation and commitment, a decrease in job satisfaction, absenteeism, and an increase in turnover (Conco et al., 2012).

The impact of workplace bullying can be processed differently by each employee, leading to varying outcomes in terms of physical and emotional problems. However, van Schalkwyk (2011) in a study conducted on South African employees, including superiors and colleagues, found that the most common response to workplace bullying is resignation. This not only affects an employee but also incurs significant costs for the organisation. The lack of perceived organisational support (POS) in most organisations contributes to a higher intention among employees to leave. Conversely, organisations that provide strong support experience lower turnover intentions from their employees (van Schalkwyk, 2011).

Therefore, this study seeks to understand the impact of bullying on female employees and the organisation they are currently employed in. There are few studies that have been conducted on understanding the effects of workplace bullying which happens between female employees, in a female-dominated workplace.

3.2.1. CONSEQUENCES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Workplace bullying can lead to employees suffering from psychological and physiological issues and lifetime changes in their personality. Bernstein and Trimm (2016) highlight that the psychological effects include increased levels of anxiety and fear, low self-esteem, self-efficacy as well as belief in their professional competence. Mabasa (2021) states that workplace bullying presents a significant challenge to the employees and an organisation. Workplace bullying is a real and impactful experience for employees, often extending beyond the workplace (Mabasa, 2021). Mental health, often referred to as the "silent killer," has no boundaries, affecting individuals regardless of their status or position in both the workplace and the community.

Chua and Yazdanifard (2014) highlight that victims of extensive exposure to workplace bullying usually suffer from insomnia, which affects their productivity. These employees' resort to taking sleeping pills, drugs, and alcohol to maintain their productivity, especially when

compared to those who have not experienced bullying (Chua & Yazdanifard, 2014). Bernstein and Trimm (2016) assert that workplace bullying is one of the causes of mental health problems such as depression, post-traumatic disorder, or even suicide. The study also highlights that employees who are bullied, often find themselves suffering from health-related problems and experience poor psychological well-being (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). The constant pressure from bullying causes an individual to lose confidence in their capabilities and abilities, leading to a loss of motivation and an increase in self-doubt (Thomas, 2020).

This section discussed the consequences of mental health on the female employees resulting from the workplace bullying. These consequences affect the employee's ability, leading to significant damage to their performance.

3.3.GENDER AND BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE.

Gender is regarded as an important factor of socio-demographic influence within the workplace (Leigh et al, 2014). Several studies on gender and bullying in the workplace tend to focus on comparing the experiences of men and women, often displaying men as the perpetrators of bullying (Botha 2016; Badenhorst & Botha; 2022; Cunniff, 2011; Mangolothi & Mnguni, 2021). However, there are few studies specifically examining bullying between individuals of the same gender, such as females against females or males against males. Nenzhelele (2020) states that conducting research on workplace bullying on female employees will enable them to share their experiences. Nenzhelele's (2020) study aimed to explore their coping strategies and how the labour policy can be influenced to protect those vulnerable to workplace bullying.

The bullying implications are mostly reported by female employees, with many suffering from severe consequences, including, loss of life due to workplace competition, materialism, and being labelled as spies to the management. A recurring issue in research is that bullying is often recognised when it happens or is displayed by the opposite gender. This suggests that workplace bullying among female employees might be considered as acceptable. In such cases, the victim may be seen as weak if they report bullying from another female.

Chan et al.'s (2019) study that focuses on workplace bullying in higher education institutions in Malaysia, found that most females were bullied compared to their male counterparts. Yet, another study conducted within the South African workplace, reveals that there is no significant relationship between gender and workplace bullying (Botha & Badenhorst, 2022).

Rosander et al. (2020) study on gender, workplace bullying, and mental health, found that gender differences are inconclusive. Furthermore, the study reveals the importance of future research to focus on understanding the significance of gender in bullying (Rosander et.al, 2020). In various workplaces that have both genders, it is often observed that when a female employee receives a promotion to a managerial or supervisory position, she is likely to be compared to her male counterparts in terms of salary, performance, and expectations. However, Leigh et al.'s (2014) study which focused on South Africa assessing nationwide workplace bullying cases. The study indicates that in 62% of the cases, male managers were perpetrators of bullying while 58% of women were victims. Comparatively, in 80% of the cases females were reported to be bullies whose victims were other females while 55% of male bullies target men. Therefore, a gender-focused and contextual understanding of workplace bullying is crucial.

However, within the female-dominated workplace, females are threatened by another's individual growth and career changes, leading to competition. Individuals in managerial positions often find themselves lacking support from other female colleagues, who may start to question their decisions. This type of workplace bullying can create divisions among female employees, leading to a culture of competitiveness and distrust. Furthermore, based on gender stereotypes, authority, and leadership become mostly associated with male individuals. Booysens and Nkomo (2010) report on the prevalence of gender stereotype motto that states "think manager", and "think male" maxim.

Workplace bullying becomes difficult to understand, especially between females. It can also be experienced when a female in an authoritative position displays bullying signs to other colleagues. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how gender and bullying within the workplace are perceived, when it happens between females as the stigma of bullying is mostly linked to men. The current study aims to understand the effects of workplace bullying from a female employee's perspective working in a female-dominated workplace in Gauteng.

3.3.1. THE IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER, CULTURE, AND DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE BULLYING

According to Leigh et al. (2014), women are always regarded as the weaker sex, categorised as vulnerable, defenceless, exposed to abuse, and victimisation (Leigh et al., 2014). Workplace bullying is often considered important for intervention when it is linked to a certain gender.

Gilbert et al. (2013) found that women are often abused and affected by workplace bullying. However, studies have not provided clarity on what happens when women attempt to defend themselves. Workplace bullying is often associated with different socio-demographic characteristics such as the length of employment in the workplace, work production experience, age, and the marital status (Badenhorst & Botha, 2022).

Furthermore, a study conducted in South Africa to understand the implications of age and workplace bullying reveals that younger employees are often more bullied than the older employees ((Cunniff & Mostert, 2022). The study included various organisations, including government sectors, but it excluded the gender of the employees who participated. However, the study notes that for female employees in organisations, age often leads to competition on how they can perform at work.

The work experience of female employees can also contribute to workplace bullying. Leigh et al.'s (2014) study reveals that differences in work experience among employees often lead to instances where one employee feels humiliated by others. In addition, Thomas (2020) highlights that an employee who is bullied due to work experience is regarded as underperforming, dragging the team to a low scale of production. However, this study aims to examine the implications of gender in workplace bullying and its impact on the productivity of female employees.

3.4.HUMAN RESOURCE AND WORKPLACE BULLYING

Bernstein and Trimm (2016) argue that workplace bullying among employees leads to anxiety, stress, and anger, significantly affecting the victim's job satisfaction. Bernstein and Trimm (2016) study revealed that victims often refrain from reporting incidents or provide little information to the HR department. This reluctance stems from experiences of being sent back and forth without resolution and the perception that HR practitioners are more likely to believe the bully than the victim (Bernstein & Trimm (2016).

Gill's (2018) two-decade study on HR management, proposes the Michigan human resource management (HRM) model. The Michigan model is often associated with workforce management for organisations. It is also known as the "hard" HRM or utilitarian instrumentalism. HRM focuses on short-term objectives and often encourages high-control practices that prioritise competitive advantage, cost-effectiveness, and reliable outcomes over outstanding performance. Conversely, another Harvard model, known as the "soft HRM or

developmental humanism" emphasises the importance of employees. Employees serve as the source of distinctive and sustainable competitive advantage through their commitment, adaptability, high-quality skills, and performance (Gill, 2018).

Bernstein and Trimm (2016) argue that the soft HRM or the developmental humanism in organisations is more verbal than practical. However, it is more likely for the organisations that adopt the soft HRM approach to find a way of assisting bullied employees compared to those using the hard HRM practices. The soft HRM emphasises on leadership and practices that are more employee centred. Therefore, future research needs to assess both these practices with regards to workplace bullying (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016).

Policies and procedures for workplace bullying should be communicated to enable employees to take active steps when bullied. However, Cunniff (2011) argues that 50% of the employees who participated in their study were unaware of the workplace bullying policies. Therefore, the policies and reporting structures should be clearly stated to empower employees to report the bullying behaviour (Cunniff, 2011).

The employer has a duty to ensure that complaints from the victims of bullying are given due consideration. This includes providing a safe environment for victims, conducting investigations impartially, and distinguishing between bullying and interpersonal conflict (Gilbert et al., 2013). According to Upton (2010) organisations have a role to play in preventing workplace bullying. Hence, it is the organisation's responsibility to put policies and procedures in place and conduct awareness that encourages employees with the zero tolerance for bullying behaviour. In addition, an organisation should emphasise the consequences of defying the organisation's values and standards (Upton, 2010).

3.5.SUMMARY

The literature review discusses workplace bullying through different themes and sub-themes with the aim of highlighting its challenges and impact. The review explores the workplace as well as behaviours and actions within it that can be identified as bullying. The review also discusses occupational challenges that can lead employees to bully one another, often without realising that these challenges stem from organisational factors. This discussion leads to the impact of bullying within the workplace on female employees and on an organisation. Furthermore, the review explores the consequences of workplace bullying and mental health. Gender and bullying in the workplace were also discussed, including the implications of

gender, culture, and diversity in workplace bullying. The literature review concludes with discussing the importance of the HR department in addressing workplace bullying and the responsibility of encouraging employees to report such behaviours. The next chapter outlines the research methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study is to understand the effects of workplace bullying against female employees working in a female-dominated workplace in the Department of Social Development, Regional Office, Gauteng. This chapter presents the research methodology adopted for this study. Hassan (2024) defines research methodology as the systematic and scientific approach used to conduct research, where the investigation of the problem and data collection is conducted (Hassan, 2024). The chapter discusses the study population, sample, and sampling procedures, research instruments, method of data collection, and data analysis. Furthermore, the chapter includes trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and study's limitations.

4.2. RESEARCH APPROACH

The qualitative approach is employed for this study. This research approach was suitable in all stages of the study, which aims to understand and interpret the effects of bullying among female employees. Weiten (2021) states that qualitative approach allows a researcher to collect and explore rich data. It enables the researcher to better understand people's subjective experiences. The qualitative approach relies on small sample sizes, with data typically collected through open-ended interviews, field notes, and observations. The collected data is analysed using patterns and themes (Weiten, 2021).

Qualitative research approach is suitable for studies that aim to reveal the nature of situations, settings, processes, relationships, systems, and individuals. Through the collected data, the researcher gains new insights on a particular phenomenon and can develop a concept or theoretical perspective (Leedy & Ormord, 2020). The qualitative approach enables the researcher to interpret and make sense of the observed phenomena, which is critical for understanding social phenomenon. Qualitative approach does not seek to uncover a single, definitive truth. Instead, it acknowledges that there are multiple perspectives, held by different individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The advantage of using qualitative research approach is its effectiveness in outlining specific information about people's culture, social context, values, opinions, and behaviours. In

addition, qualitative research can provide a researcher with an in-depth knowledge which is impossible when using the quantitative approach (Pope& Mays 2020). Qualitative research approach was deemed relevant for the current study as it observes diversity within various female employees. However, Leedy and Ormord ((2020) argue that the qualitative approach has its limitations such as, that its findings cannot be generalised. The sample size is normally small and does not represent the broader population. Another limitation is that it is subjective when compared to the objective and quantitative approach (Weiten, 2021).

Denzin (2000) states that, despite its limitations, the qualitative research approach is regarded as one of the most adaptable research approaches as it saves time for the researcher. Therefore, with the adoption of the qualitative research approach, the researcher was able to gain in-depth data which she deeply analysed to gain in-depth information regarding the effects of bullying on female employees (Pope& Mays 2020).

4.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The use of the phenomenological research design in the study enables the identification of core aspects of human experiences, as described by participants. Therefore, the researcher must understand what the participants have in common based on the narratives that they provided during data collection (Denzin, 2020). 000). The phenomenological study's main purpose is to ensure transparency and set aside biases, to avoid preconceived assumptions about people's experiences, and feelings while focusing on participants' responses to a particular situation (Weiten, 2021). A phenomenological study is rooted in a philosophical framework and involves specific methods and procedures, focusing on a small group of subjects. This approach requires extensive and prolonged engagement to uncover patterns and relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The phenomenological design enables the researcher to ask straightforward questions for example, "What was it like when the incident of bullying first occurred to you?" This emphasises that the subjective experience is essential when conducting a phenomenological study (Weiten, 2021). In addition, the phenomenological research design in a qualitative study differs from that in quantitative research, as it focuses on providing answers to questions of interest, to establish cause and effect relationship. Hence, the research design is aimed at providing answers to the research question (Richardson, 2005).

The current study uses the phenomenological research design to gain a subjective understanding of the experiences of bullying among female employees working in a female-dominated workplace. The phenomenological research design helps the researcher achieve the study's aim and objectives.

4.4. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

This study focuses on the effects of bullying among female employees working in a female-dominated workplace. According to Salkind 2021), a research population is a group of potential participants who have shared experiences regarding the research question (Salkind, 2006). Kumar (2005, p.42) emphasises that this is part of the research project that provides answers to questions such as "Who makes up the study of the population and will be sample or the total of the population be studied and how the sample will be selected?"

The research population for the current study consisted of female employees working in a female-dominated workplace at the Department of Social Development, Gauteng Province, aged between 30 and 45 years, and with a work tenure ranging from 2 to +5 years. The Department of Social Development, Gauteng province, consists of cluster offices that provide social services to communities within their areas. Therefore, this study focuses on Gauteng regional office and three cluster offices in Soweto. This population was relevant as they could provide rich data about workplace bullying experiences that some of it hindered their career growth and affected their work performance. Furthermore, they shared data about workplace bullying incidents involving current or former colleagues who ultimately left the organisation due to such experiences.

4.5. SAMPLE AND SAMPLE SIZE

A sample can be defined as a subset of a population selected when conducting a study (Denzin, 2000). Creswell and Creswell (2022) believe that a sample is part of a group of people, objects, or items selected from a larger population whose experiences and behaviours are crucial for a study. The sample of the study must be a representative of the population to ensure that the findings are generalised from the research sample to the population (Creswell and Creswell (2022).

From the sample, there is a sample size which can be described as the specific number of participants included in a study. The current study focuses on a sample of female employees

working in a female-dominated workplace. Summer (2010) specified that in a study, it is crucial to outline the inclusion and exclusion criteria, which are used to specify the participants The sample for this study included of 10 female employees who were social workers aged 30 to 45 years with 2 to +5 years of work experience in the Department of Social Development. The study's exclusion criteria were female employees working in the departments such as HR, and Head office. This includes the female securities, cleaners, and transport offices working in the Department of Social Development regional and cluster offices. Pseudonyms were used to replace the participants' real names to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality.

Therefore, in the current study information was shared using pamphlets that had the researcher's contact details. The pamphlet was also posted on the Department's notice boards, where the interested employees had a chance to voluntarily contact the researcher. The researcher stated the modes of communication that could be used to ensure privacy for the employees who were willing to participate.

4.6. SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Purposive sampling was adopted to recruit the participants for the study. It is known as judgemental sampling, regarded as the non-probability technique effective for the researcher to study a specific cultural area as well as the domain that has experts (Tongco, 2017). Patton (2002) mentions that the purposive sampling technique can be used to select participants who will provide appropriate information about the phenomenon (Patton, 2022). In addition, purposive sampling can be used in either qualitative or quantitative research. It is also perceived as the most common sampling strategy that assists in grouping participants according to the preselected criteria relevant to the research question. Purposive sampling proves to be highly effective especially when data analysis is conducted concurrently with data collection (Pope & Mays 2020).

Nyamongo (2023) defines a recruitment strategy as a project-specific plan designed to identify and enrol individuals who will participate in the study. The study adopted the volunteer sampling procedure. This procedure highlights the specific criteria for how potential participants will be screened, the specific location where the study will be conducted, and the research approach that will be employed. Therefore, in the current study, the researcher approached the Head of the HR department in the Department of Social Development, to request permission for conducting the study. The researcher introduced herself and the study's

purpose, with the HR practitioner assisting in addressing employees about the study. The researcher further created the pamphlets containing her details, contact number, and the research question. These pamphlets were handed to the female employees, social workers and further posted on the department's notice boards for the employees who were interested to reach out.

According to Pope and Mays (2020), the participant recruitment strategies can be determined by the characteristics of the research population as well as the type and amount of data that the researcher intends to collect. However, it is crucial to note that the criteria for selecting the participants might change if the subpopulation struggles to answer the research question (Pope & Mays, 2020). The researcher should observe the research principles that are essential when recruiting participants. The researcher should also observe the introductory guidelines that will enable potential participants to take part in the study, as well as being sensitive to cultural and social context. The study adopted all the research guidelines that are part of the participant recruitment strategy.

4.7. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The research instrument for this study was the interview guide. However, according to Creswell and Creswell (2022) in a qualitative study, the researcher is regarded as the critical instrument. This is due to the researcher being the one to interview participants and take notes. Therefore, the researcher serves as the device used to collect (Creswell and Creswell, 2022).

In a qualitative study, interview guides are useful for asking participants questions. During the interviews, the researcher should listen to participants even if they are recording and filming the responses (Pope & Mays, 2020). According to Abawi (2013), there are four types of interviews that the researcher can choose from namely:

- Structured interviews
- Semi structure interviews
- In-depth interviews and research questions
- Focused group discussion

This study employed the semi-structured interviews, where a set of planned questions was used as the guide for the interview. Abawi (2013) highlights that semi-structured interviews have few questions, and the researcher has the right to exercise the freedom of adjusting the wording

and to re-arrange the order of questions when conducting the interview.

For semi-structured interviews, the interview guide can be used by the researcher to ensure that all important information that comes out of the conversation is collected (Nyamongo, 2001). The interview guide using semi-structured interviews was effective in reaching the main aim and secondary objectives of the current study as it focused mostly on the dynamic experiences of the participants. The interview guide allowed the researcher to explore unanticipated themes, which strengthened the research findings.

4.8. PRE- TESTING

Pre-testing is the process of evaluating the research instrument on a small sample of participants before conducting the actual study. The aim of conducting pre-testing is to highlight challenges that might occur in the actual study such as language barriers, cultural beliefs, and words that might be unclear. It is also used to consider the time frame set for the research instrument (Denzin, 2020). According to Salkind (2021), in qualitative research, pretesting can be described as the way of administering the interview to a certain group of individuals who have the same characteristics as the target population. However, the pretesting technique should be conducted in the same way that will be used in the main data collection interviews, where all the key material for the study including consent forms, should be used (Salkind, 2021).

For the current study, the researcher conducted one pre-test interview with the individual who met the criteria and possessed similar characteristics as that of the target population. Conducting the pre-test allowed the researcher to identify any challenges that could hinder the process of conducting the study. It also enabled the researcher to refine the interview guide by determining whether the questions were clear, and answerable. Additionally, it helped the researcher to monitor any challenges that might occur with the language and the approach used for the interviews. The researcher highlighted that the questions were clear and answerable however, they were submitted to the supervisor who provided feedback on the pre-test interview and guidelines on how the interviews could be conducted with the main participants

4.9. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The study employed face-to-face in-depth interviews as the primary method for data collection. Weiten (2021) defines primary methods of data collection as the direct form of gathering data which includes interviews, questionnaires, surveys, and experiments. However, it is crucial to

note that the methods differ and depend on the used research approach (Weiten, 2016). For example, questionnaires and tests can be used in quantitative research while qualitative research may utilise interviews and observations. Face-to-face interviews have both advantages and disadvantages. Some of the advantages include enabling the researcher to gain rapport with participants and their cooperation. In addition, they enable the researcher to clarify ambiguous answers and if appropriate, seek follow-up information from the participants (de Vos et al., 2021).

Weiten (2021) argues that a key advantage of face-to-face interviews is the participants' physical presence, which fosters direct communication. This interaction is more personal, creating a warmer atmosphere which allows the researcher to gather more detailed information from the participants.

However, Leedy and Ormrod (2001) highlight the disadvantages of face-to-face interviews which are the impracticality of conducting the process when the sample is bigger. Face-to-face interviews are also time-consuming and costly. The current study used face-to-face in-depth interviews as the method of data collection. These interviews were conducted in a private office known by the participants and the researcher. This enabled the researcher to collect rich data on the experiences of workplace bullying for female employees. The researcher utilised audio recordings, with prior permission obtained from the potential participants, to record the interviews. This approach ensured the accuracy of the data collected (see Appendix D).

4.10. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data for this study was analysed using the thematic data analysis method Braun and Clarke (2021) defined thematic data analysis as an effective method for identifying, analysing, and reporting the patterns within the collected data. In addition, thematic data analysis helps to minimise and organise the data to further assist in interpreting the aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Miles and Huberman (2020) state the model that led to the development of the thematic analysis. This model consists of connected three stages, namely: data reduction, data display, and data verifying or data conclusion. Using various data analysis stages offers a significant advantage by enabling clear descriptions of the comparisons and similarities. This approach enhances the overall reliability of the study and contributes to its validates for future researchers. The aim is to present findings and provide evidence that supports and validate the

interpretations. This leads to the final stage of the data analysis where the processes are linked. Moreover, it is crucial to recognise the identical as well as the contradictory data (Miles & Huberman, 2020).

This method of data analysis was appropriate for the study because of its qualitative nature, and the incorporation of semi-structured face-to-face interviews as the method of data collection. The current study adopted the six-step thematic data analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021).

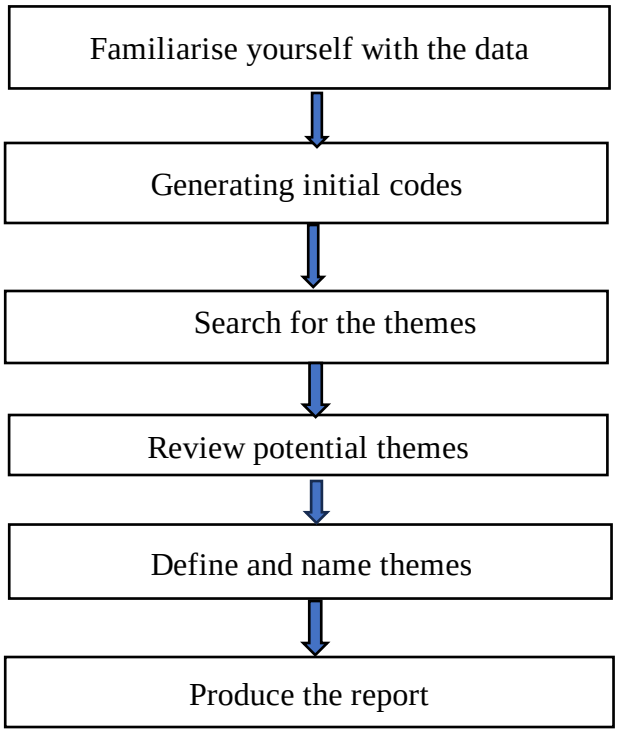


Figure 1. The six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021)

The six steps include (1) identifying the items of potential interest, (2) generating the codes, (3) generating the themes, (4) reviewing the initial themes, (5) defining, and naming of the themes, and (6) producing the actual report of the study – this dissertation.

The researcher implemented all six steps involved in the process of data analysis. In the first step of data analysis, the researcher listened to the tape-recorded data while transcribing it to the individual transcripts. Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021) mentioned that the process of transcribing can be seen as time-consuming, boring, frustrating, and meaningless however it is regarded as the best way to start familiarising yourself with the data. The researcher further

immersed herself in the data to the extent of familiarizing herself with the depth and content of the collected data. This included reading the repeatedly, searching for meanings, patterns, and making notes.

Secondly, the step occurring after familiarising with the data involves generating the codes from the data. According to Miles and Huberman (2020), the process of generating codes is the part of data analysis where the researcher organises the data into meaningful groups. The researcher used the color-coded idea to highlight the recurring patterns and significant views. The themes were generated as the next step where the different codes were sorted in different themes.

Some codes were identified to fall on the main themes while some fell on the subthemes. The researcher on the reviewing of themes step, carefully refined all the themes and considered that each theme has enough data to support them. On the defining and naming of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022) identifying the essence of each theme and what it entails while determining the aspect of the data that each theme captures.

Therefore, the researcher arranged and named the themes ensuring the sequence further indicated the subthemes merged under main themes where necessary. The researcher should ensure that the theme is responsive to the aims and objectives of the research (Naeem et al., 2023). The researcher moved to the sixth step of producing the report where sufficient evidence of the themes was provided within the data. The production of the report through thematic analysis allows the researcher to tell the complicated story of the data and convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

4.11. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness also known as rigor, refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretations, and methods used to ensure the quality of the study (Connelly, 2016). To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, four principles were incorporated, these are credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability, all of which are discussed below.

4.11.1. CREDIBILITY

Shenton (2004) describes the confidence of the researcher in the study's findings. Studies with high credibility are those where the researcher successfully convinces and demonstrates the validity and reliability of the overall argument of the study. Through this principle, the

researcher should be able to defend the research design and the methodology adopted in the study, regarding the current knowledge and the theory of the field of study (Bless, 2013). In the current study, the researcher aimed to maintain clarity and transparency in the use of research methods while confidently presenting findings that are accurate and trustworthy.

4.11.2. CONFIRMABILITY

This principle refers to the neutrality or the degree of findings that are consistent and can be repeated. Confirmability can be demonstrated by providing an audit trail that outlines the details of each step in the data analysis process, and showing whether the researcher was biased or not when interpreting the findings (Connelly, 2016). In the current study, the researcher ensured that the audit trail provides accurate data collected from the participants without being biased.

4.11.3. DEPENDABILITY

Dependability refers to the consistency of findings even if the study is repeated in the same context, with the same sample (Connelly, 2016). According to Shenton (2004), the study should be consistent and repeatable. This means the researcher is required to provide detailed descriptions and adhere strictly to the outlined research strategy (Shenton, 2014). In the current study, the researcher aimed to establish dependability by thoroughly reviewing and examining the research process and data analysis, ensuring the findings are consistent and can be repeated.

4.11.4. TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability measures whether the research findings can be generalised or transferred to another context. Transferability can be compared to external validity. Hence it refers to the extent by which the results can be applied to other studies similar to the current study (Connelly, 2016). Qualitative research provides rich insights into the context, location, and participants being studied, while maintaining transparency in analysis and trustworthiness (Amankwaa, 2016). In this dissertation, the researcher provides thick descriptions to ensure that the findings can be generalised or transferred to other contexts.

4.12. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Salkind (2021) states that ethical issues refer to the standards or norms considered when conducting a study, which helps to distinguish between right and wrong. Ethical consideration determines the acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Salkind, 2021). According to Babbie (2020), the fundamental ethical rule of social research is to bring no harm whether physical or emotional to participants regardless of their status or position within a society. Therefore, the researchers need to evaluate the risks against the benefits of the study (Babbie, 2020). Researchers have two basic categories of responsibilities when conducting a study. These are the responsibility to human and nonhuman participants, and the responsibility to the discipline of science, which is to be accurate and honest in the reporting of the study's findings (de Vos et al., 2021).

The ethical issue can also be resolved by encouraging the researchers to adopt embodied ethics, caring, as well as emotionally reflexive approaches when conducting research on humans (Olson, 2021). The current study adopted the following ethical considerations. These guidelines involve transparency to explain to potential participants that their participation will be voluntary (Denzin, 2020).

4.12.1. AVOIDANCE OF HARM

The avoidance of harm is a fundamental ethical principle in social research. Researchers must prioritise the safety and well-being of participants by preventing both physical and emotional harm during the study (de Vos et.al, 2021). The collection of the data for the current study presented a low risk to the participants. However, the researcher was prepared to refer to the Department of Social Development Employee Health and Wellness Program (EHWP), any participant whose participation in this study could have caused any emotional distress. EHWP offers psychological and emotional support to the employees on both telephonic and face-to-face counselling services at no cost and is available 24/7. The Employee Health and Wellness Solution can be contacted on the toll-free number, 0800 444 660. The number was given to the participants who needed any support during the study.

4.12.2. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in a study always be voluntary (Babbie, 2010). However, opinions differ regarding participation, as some researchers argue that requesting permission for a study can led to contaminated results. They believe that participants may behave differently if they know what is being studied (Abawi, 2013). Therefore, some researchers believe that they should only

share the study's aim (de Vos et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the current study utilised the voluntary participation ethical principle to ensure that participants were not forced to take part, enabling them to openly share their experiences.

4.12.3. INFORMED CONSENT

The Ethics in Health Research, Principles, Processes, and Structures (2015) defines informed consent as an ethical principle that respects the individual and serves as evidence of their voluntary decision to participate in a study. This principle is based on providing participants with sufficient information, enabling them to make an informed decision. Salkind (2021) argues that ethical principles ensure that potential participants understand what it means to be part of the study and that it is their choice to participate (Salkind, 2021).

Weiten and Hassim (2016) emphasise that the language used in the informed consent form should be understandable, clear, and simple for the participants (Weiten and Hassim, 2016). In the current study, the researcher, verbally informed the potential participants about the study, as well as in writing as shown in the participant information sheets (Appendix B). Thereafter the researcher provided the participants with the consent forms to sign which indicated that they had agreed to participate in the study and be audio recorded (Appendix C).

4.12.4. VIOLATION OF PRIVACY, ANONYMITY, AND CONFIDENTIALITY

De Vos et al. (2021) identify violation of privacy, the right to self-determination, and confidentiality as being synonymous. Every individual has the right to privacy, which includes the right to decide when, where, to whom, and to what extent their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours will be revealed. This principle can be violated; hence it is essential for the researcher to safeguard the participants' privacy and identity.

Confidentiality refers to the agreement between individuals that restrict others from accessing private information. Anonymity, on the other hand, means that no one, including the researcher, can identify the subject after the study (de Vos et al., 2021). According to Weiten (2021), anonymity is a practice of ensuring that the research data that is collected and analysed, keeps the participants' identities anonymous, by not exposing the personal identities of the participants such as names and addresses. In the current study, participants were allowed to choose pseudonyms of their choice, to hide their real identities.

4.13. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

Limitations can be defined as uncontrollable constraints in or about the study, based on the research methodology and design. The study limitations outline the weaknesses and boundaries, while delimitations serve as the restrictions on which the researcher decides on what to include and exclude (Barker, 2008). In general, when identifying limitations, the researcher needs to consider factors such as the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments, the generalisability of the sample to the broader population, access to data, ethical concerns, and the ability to control extraneous factors in the environment and among the respondents (de Vos et al., 2021).

Miles (2019) highlights that limitations can be beyond the researcher's control and involve factors such as time, funding, and access to a population of interest. Furthermore, limitations include the withdrawal of participants and a sample that might not sufficiently representative of the research population. Therefore, it is important to recognise the limitations and how to restrict them (Chetty, 2016).

However, delimitations are more concerned with the scope of the study in its description or establishing parameters. Additionally, delimitations are factors that prevent the researcher from claiming that the findings of their study apply to all participants, in all the places, and at the same time. Delimitations define the boundaries of the study and arise from the limitations in the scope of the research (Miles & Scott, 2017). The limitations of the current study include obtaining the desired sample as female employees who had bullying experiences might not be willing to participate. Furthermore, the sample of the study included 10 female social workers who work in the Department of Social Development regional and cluster offices.

4.14. SUMMARY

This chapter provides the research methodology adopted in the current study. The research approach and the research design are also discussed. In addition, the population, sample procedures, and research instruments are discussed. The method of data analysis was also presented. The trustworthiness of the study, the ethical considerations, and the limitations were also considered. The next chapter presents and discusses the study's findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.1.INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the study's findings on understanding the effects of workplace bullying experienced by female employees working in the female-dominated workplace at the Gauteng Department of Social Development, Regional and Cluster Offices. This chapter begins by outlining the demographic information of the participants, followed by the themes and subthemes that emerged during data analysis. The final section of the chapter discusses the study's findings, linking them to the objectives of the study.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHICS PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants' demographic information was presented in a tabular form with the aim of providing a clear description of the sample. There were 10 participants, who all of them were social workers, working at the regional and the cluster offices of the Department.

Table 1 contains the demographic information including age, sex, and the number of years of experience.

Factors	**Category**	**Number**
Gender	Female	10
Age	30 – 45	10
Occupation	Social Workers	10
Years of experience in The Department of Social Development	2-5	8
	6- 7	2

The study participants were aged between 30 to 45 years. Additionally, participants had 2 to +5 years of work experience. All participants having more than two years of working experience, gave the researcher confidence to interview them, as they possessed enough experience, or might have witnessed workplace bullying within the Department.

5.3 THEMES GENERATED FROM THE DATA

Themes	Subthemes
1. Female employees' experiences of workplace bullying in a female-dominated workplace. 1.1. Bullysim and its consequences	1: The importance of understanding your workplace. 2: Understanding workplace bullying and its consequences. 3: Female employees and workplace bullying 4: Individual experiences of workplace bullying 5: Bullyism and the organisation. 6: Bullyism and the employee experiences
2. The strategies of dealing with challenges of workplace bullying experienced in a female-dominated workplace	1: Females as the victims of the nature of bullying 2: Females bullying exposed to workplace bullying 3: The Social Workers bullying mechanisms
3. The impact of workplace bullying	1: The impact on the female employee as the social worker 2: The impact on the department when it is exposed to workplace bullying.
4. The strategies for how to deal with workplace bullying	1: The Social Workers ideas about creating an anti-workplace bullying

5.3.1 THEME 1 – *FEMALE EMPLOYEES' EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING IN A FEMALE-DOMINATED WORKPLACE*

It is essential to discuss the female-dominated workplace, as this is the environment that the study focused on. Few studies have explored the female-dominated workplaces, without comparing the experiences of different genders. According to Ross (2019), a female-dominated workplace can be defined as the pink-collar profession, where females are considered less respectable as compared to other fields of work.

5.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: The importance of understanding your workplace.

A workplace can be defined as a setting where different occupations are served. Understanding a workplace is important as this promotes accountability in the provision of services. Therefore, in this subtheme, presents participants' participants understanding of their female-dominated workplace. In the subtheme, participants offered various definitions of the female-dominated workplace. Some participants defined it as a workplace that consists of more females than males. They responded as follows: *Female-dominated workplace is where women are in control or form the majority at the workplace* (Refiloe, female, 5 years of work experience).

Similarly, *"my understanding of female-dominated workplace can be referred to a company that consists of the majority which is a woman"* (Belinda, female, 7 years of work experience). However, one participant could not define the workplace. Another participant defined it and aligned it to her work. She shared that, *"The female-dominated workplace it's the place where I am working as there are more females than males"* (Thoko, female, 5 years of work experience).

Similarly, Mbali M. demonstrated her understanding of the workplace as follows:

> *"The female-dominated workplace is mainly dominated by females than males, in our offices the ratio is most females than males, so the common denominator is that females are dominating the workspace"* (Mbali M., female, 3 years of work experience).

The above participants' responses illustrate the general understanding of the female-dominated workplace. Furthermore, the responses highlight the role they play within the workplace as females compared to males. This includes different values such as leadership, respect,

protection, non-judgmental attitude, human dignity, and ensuring service delivery.

5.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Understanding workplace bullying and its consequences.

This subtheme presents participants' understanding of workplace bullying and its consequences. Some of the participants used examples to report on workplace bullying as something they observed. One participant highlighted that, *"The intimidation that is placed on other employees at work"* (Bluecorn, females, 6 years of work experience).

Another participant's definition includes an in-depth explanation of the workplace bullying and its consequences, as follows:

> *"I understand workplace bullying as the negative acts that occur within the workplace which may include, but are not limited to intimidation, unconstructive criticism, deliberate sabotage, and demeaning feedback to name a few. These actions can result in the development of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, long-term stress, and demotivation to name a few"* (Mbali D., female, 4 years of work experience).

Refiloe (female, 5 years of work experience) said that *"Workplace bullying is the negative acts directed toward employees for example intimidating, undermining employees, setting them up for failure and constantly reminding them of old mistakes."* In addition, another participant shared the consequences of workplace bullying related to females by stating that:

> *"Where the dominant is females the kind of identified bullying is emotional not physical. Emotional can be seen in a gangsterism form of groups and use of name-calling to identify you for example body shaming. Attaching the name to the character or personality"* (Goodness, female, 4 years of work experience).

While Mbali M. highlights the process to be followed in addressing workplace bullying, as:

> *"If someone treats you unfairly or probably bullies you in the way that person makes you feel uncomfortable and for the fact that we have a code of conduct and ethics. So, if somebody bullies you obviously the code of conduct and ethics were not followed in the way and it's something that we do on the personal matter cause it's not professional to bully someone at work"* (Mbali. M., female, 3 years of work experience).

Belinda's response included the experience or observation within the workplace, as follows:

> *"I do understand bullying, we do experience bullying in the workplace more especially by managers in the workplace. It can be gossiping with other officials; it can be by demeaning other officials and by failing to credit the work that is done by the employees or the officials"* (Belinda, female, 7 years of work experiences).

Workplace bullying can be both direct and indirect. Hence, some individuals might struggle to identify it. Nonduduzo highlighted that she could see when she was bullied. When asked if she understood workplace bullying, she responded:

> *"I, myself had been the victim previously. Workplace bullying is basically when you have colleagues who taking advantage of you, who I can give examples, like having colleagues wanting you to do things that are not within you work scope or forcing you to do their work. Speaking with you in the language or terms that are not professional just because for instance in my case, my age, so they took advantage because of my age"* (Nonduduzo, female, 4 years of work experience).

The researcher probed on her response for clarity on whether her experience of workplace bullying was about work, physical character, or just a personal matter which happened within the organisation. She responded:

> *"Both, people have insecurities, when you portray a certain character, dressing in a particular, you know so not everyone will like you and they will always look for something to bring you down"* (Nonduduzo, female, 4 years of work experience).

The above findings showcase participants' knowledge regarding workplace bullying. Upton (2010) argues that bullying is a form of violence, which can be emotional. Hence, it is important to identify various types of violence (Upton, 2010).

5.3.1.3 Subtheme 3: Female employees and workplace bullying

Cunniff (2011), highlights that workplace bullying often leads to potential conflicts, resulting in employees confronting or acting out against each other. Female employees can be associated with workplace bullying, where some may intentionally perpetrate it, while others might not be fully aware of its impact on their behaviour. In this regard, participants shared mixed reactions. Three participants highlighted that they did not think female employees understand

workplace bullying. Nono's response was as follows:

> *"I don't think they understand workplace bullying but some women do understand it. For example, at work, we might be joking around about this other employee not noticing that how this female employee feels about what we are saying or what we are doing to her. Then this will make this employee feel so small and to have low self-esteem"* (Nono, female, 2 years of work experience).

In addition, Belinda shared that:

> *"No, I don't think they understand it to the full context, I am saying this because a person would do something to you that is regarded as bullying, but we would not know that they are bullying you. So, I don't think it's understood by a lot of females because it is also something that is not taught, we teach out to our clients, but we are also experiencing it, but we are not conscious when that happens"* (Bluecorn, female, 6 years of work experience).

These responses indicate the dangers associated with the lack of knowledge when the female employees struggle to understand workplace bullying. While the other three participants shared mixed reactions to their responses, for instance, Goodness (female, 4 years of work experience) responded: *"...some do, and some don't understand it and long service becomes part of the workplace bullying."* The response by Belinda (female, 7 years of work experience) was that: *"Some they do and some they don't because people do report such cases, some will just keep quiet not understanding what they are going through which is bullying."*

Mbali D.'s response below demonstrates how mixed reactions may affect other female employees. In her response she stated that:

> *"I do think that there are female employees that understand workplace bullying. However, I do acknowledge that some females who may have been subjected to workplace bullying may not be able to understand that their experience is workplace bullying because some actions can make one question themselves, especially in instances where gaslighting is also involved. These female employees may see their experiences of workplace bullying as generally just being disliked by the perpetrator without any form of justification"* (Mbali D., female, 4 years of work experience).

However, five participants indicated that although females possess knowledge about workplace bullying, various reasons prevent them from applying this knowledge in practice. Mbali M. asserted that:

> *"I think they do; we understand it but because of the behaviour sometimes that we are subjected to, we don't define professionalism and personal space. We merge the two then it becomes so hard to separate the professional platform and the place where you can do whatever you want that is not guided by ethics and a code of conduct. Most of the people they forget when they come to work that they should act in a certain way that is the problem"* (Mbali M., female, 3 years of work experience).

The findings in this subtheme highlight the confusion that can arise from certain behaviours, which may cause harm to others.

5.3.1.4 Subtheme 4: Individual experiences of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying leaves lasting scars on individuals, often leading to various decisions made in anger. Participants connected some of these reactions to the previous theme, while others shared differing insights. Below is Noxolo's response:

> *"It's one of two things its either they become bullies themselves or they retract, and they do not work as effectively as they would if they were not in an environment that is prone to toxicity and bullying"* (Noxolo, female, 12 years of work experience).

Furthermore, participants highlighted that the workplace bullying may result in psychological consequences, as Refiloe (female, 5 years work experience) responded, *"An individual who experiences workplace bullying he or she can have an increased stress, low self-esteem, feeling of anxiety and depression."* Similarly, another participant Thoko (female, 5 years of work experience) added that, *"stress as she is living with it."*

An individual's experience or person-related bullying can be described as stress-inducing, with the potential to negatively impact workers' health, leading to psychological to physical symptoms. This includes the psychiatric disorders such as anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In addition, bullying behaviours include public humiliation, ignoring, bad-mouthing, insulting, gossiping, or spreading of lies, intruding, and belittling (Yahaya et al., 2012).

1.1BULLYISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Participants recognised the importance of sharing their understanding and knowledge about bullyism. This theme is divided into two subthemes that report on participants' views based on their understanding, of the causes and the instigators of bullyism. The subthemes enabled participants to highlight if bullyism comes from within an organisation or it results from employees' different experiences. Bluecorn expressed that:

> *"The number one thing is work experience people who have been in the workplace for the longer time turn to think that they know it all and they've got an advantage of being in the workplace for the long time. Then when these new comes they threaten and do these things to them"* (Bluecorn, female, 6 years of work experience).

While Mbali M. stated that:

> *"I think the workplace bullying may be caused by the clash of personalities, people just being bullies in general and bringing that side of themselves to the workplace, so you are bully, and you cannot separate the personal from the professional. It may also be because female likes competition and jealousy in the workplace where people feel the need to put others down just so they can feel better about themselves. I also think that people are generally going through a lot in their personal lives such that they bring that negative energy to work"* (Mbali M., female, 4 years of work experience).

5.3.1.5 Subtheme 5: Bullyism and the Department as an organisation

The participants expressed different views related to bullying, sharing insights about its causes. Despite the differences in their views, there were notable similarities, particularly in highlighting how employment-related factors are linked to the causes of bullyism. Refiloe (female, 5 years of work experience) shared that, *"I think it power imbalance where one person holds authority over the other and sometimes an inadequate leadership."*.

However, the organisation was also mentioned as adding to bullyism where Nonduduzo expressed that:

> *"The Department has an impact; we work under pressure we are Social Workers we*

are always running around; we have deadlines sometimes the things we are expected to do they are almost impossible to do but because you are a social worker sometimes you are afraid to lose your job. Those pressures can also lead for instance if my supervisor is working under pressure because she wants a,b and c from me she might find herself bullying me unaware maybe seeing me as not being productive when doing my job but that only causes more damage to me as the supervisee" (Nonduduzo, female, 4 years of work experience).

5.3.1.6 Subtheme 6: Bullyism and the employee experiences

Under this theme, participants highlighted bullyism as something that stems from employees' different experiences. Refiloe expressed that:

"I think it comes from the employee's different experiences because I believe that when you are employed you are an employee, you are an adult you know what you are employed for, so you just have to deliver and render the services that you have been employed to do. So, if one knows what she is there for I don't think there would be a problem. It can be a problem maybe if you are challenging your managers or supervisors maybe they can end up feeling intimidated and therefore that's where the bullying will start to show power imbalance like to show you that they are in control or something" (Refiloe, female, 5 years of work experience).

In addition to employees' different experiences as the cause of bullyism, Mbali M. shared that:

"A wounded person can't bring love to others, if you hurt and scarred that will be your output. Most people are who hurt inside they turn to revenge so that is why this thing won't stop because they do not adhere to their pain instead, they feel it's better to hurt other people to make them feel the way they are feeling instead of accepting and seeking help for their pain" (Mbali, M., female, 3 years work experience).

Noxolo and Mbali D. shared the same sentiments in their responses about the combination of the subthemes. When asked about the causes of bullyism, Noxolo indicated that:

"It is both the organisations and the experiences. Organisations develop cultures or systems that promote bullying, and they do not promote how to settle bullying in the workplace. It is an individual that come to the Department with their experiences and

stresses wherever they come from and try to influence others in a way. So, both, the organisation and an individual or employee have equal issues when it come to that" (Noxolo, female, 12 years of work experience).

Mbali D. also highlighted that:

"I believe it's a combination of both. With organisations, workplace bullying can be indirectly endorsed by means of HR or management failing to address the bullies when victims report such cases. Some organisations only pay "lip service" around issues of workplace bullying intolerance and mental health care. These issues are only documented in organisational policies but are rarely actioned when such issues arise. When it comes to employee's different experiences, I would just say people are different, some are more resilient than others. Those who are more resilient may be able to "cope" with the bullying and the sensitive ones may not, thus making them more prone to having a much more negative response to the bullying. Therefore, is the combination of people's personality and how the organisation responds to reports of workplace bullying" (Mbali D., female, 4 years of work experience).

The findings revealed varying perspectives on these subthemes, with some participants distinguishing between the two subthemes as distinct causes of workplace bullyism. However, both the organisation and an employee, were found to be adding to the workplace bullyism consequences.

5.3.2. *THEME 2 – THE STRATEGIES OF DEALING WITH CHALLENGES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING EXPERIENCED IN A FEMALE-DOMINATED WORKPLACE*

A previous study found no significant difference between male and female workplace bullying experiences but reported that South African females are more vulnerable to workplace bullying than men (Cunniff, 2011). The participants were asked to share their perceptions about bullying towards females compared to males, as it has often been viewed as the norm that females are more likely to be the victims of bullying. Three subthemes were used to provide clear distinctions on the perceptions.

5.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: *Females as the victims of the nature of bullying*

According to Botha (2006), in most cultures, males have more access to positions of public power and influence compared to females. This could result in women, who are striving to assert themselves and take on leadership roles, being either bullied or regarded as bullies. Therefore, nine participants shared that females were more bullied than men due to society's stereotypes. Refiloe indicated how it is for women in general. She stated that:

> *"Yes, females are more bullied than males I think it's because of the society, you know in the olden days there were stereotypes where the society believed that women only belonged in the kitchen and take care of the children and husbands whereas men believe to be the provider and breadwinners of the family. But since the dawn of democracy things have changed even women now can be the providers and breadwinners of the family and you also see other women leading in the high face posts it is no longer the case"* (Refiloe, female, 5 years of work experience).

The researcher probed Refiloe's view by asking *"Why women are bullying each other as you explained that they know their state in the society."* Refiloe responded by stating that:

> *"As a woman as much as you are an employee you are also when you get home you are mother, you are husband's wife, you are a sister, you wear different caps so the reason maybe can be that at home maybe the male figures they don't understand what this woman is doing in the workplace since they believe that the women place is in the kitchen. So those people when they talk to her, they cause stress, and she ends up taking that to the workplace as she wants to make sure that in the workplace no one is telling her anything therefore they end up behaving in a manner not aware that she has some stuff that she needs to sort out. Also, to differentiate that now I am at work or now I am at home you need to differentiate where you are and what are always your responsibilities"* (Refiloe, female, 5 years of work experience).

Below is Thoko's view:

> *"Yes, as females we are, there are many personalities which clash so we end up being jealous. Males can be jealous, but they can't show you but as females it is happening that is why we end up calling it bullying"* (Thoko, female, 5 years of work experience).

A different response was shared by Goodness who mentioned that:

> *"It's equal to men and its more attractive to the public than to females, employees are not aware of the female bullying but with males it is easy to see them bullying each other and report it to the management. It's easily understandable and with females it's a bit silent as it is more of the actions speaking. Some take it is a norm of how women or females behave"* (Goodness, female, 4 years of work experience).

According to Gilbert et al. (2013), women often face a narrower range of acceptable behaviours compared to men. This implies that women are expected to navigate a behavioural "tightrope" conforming to societal expectations regardless of the situations they encounter. In essence women, in most cases, found themselves to be unjustly blamed even when they were harassed or assaulted. The findings highlight that women are exposed to workplace bullying and it is something acceptable as well as a norm within societies.

5.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Females bullying exposed to workplace bullying.

Ross (2019) emphasises that societies need to recognise the value of female-dominated professions based on their impact and importance, rather than on the perceived value of women performing the work. Mbali M. shared how bullying can be identified in the workspace, as follows:

> *"Yes, females are expected to be at home, to be a housewife and just imagine a couple enters and they want to be assisted they found you as their social worker. you are young unmarried, and you are a female. Mostly when they are assisted by males, they don't come to that conclusion they accept the service as it is but if you are a female there a lot of things that they discriminated against us. So, we experience a lot of bullying from clients, and colleagues it's all around us"* (Mbali M., female, 3 years of work experience).

However, some participants indicated that females become bullies when they are in power. One participant highlighted that:

> *"Yes, I think women are more bullied than men, especially in female-dominated workplaces because most women who are in power tend to misuse their positions to oppress other females. I also think that women in general tend to be less supportive and tolerant of each other, they enjoy gossiping and demeaning one another unnecessarily so, therefore; those who have a much softer and calm personality are more targeted*

than those with strong personalities. The same applies as to why women tend to be bullied more than men, I think most men display stronger personalities than women, thus making them less prone to being targets of workplace bullying" (Mbali D, female, 4 years of work experience).

Therefore, this finding highlights the bullying behaviours exhibited by females, which encompass how they perceive themselves and how they are expected to behave in both their communities and the workplace.

5.3.2.3 Subtheme 3: The Social Workers' bullying mechanisms.

Bullying experienced from a co-worker creates a situation where the relationship becomes strained, leading to negative impacts on the job satisfaction (Bernstein & Trimm, 2019). A similarity in responses was observed, as participants reported using their strength-based initiatives to address workplace bullying. Five participants specifically mentioned confrontation as an effective solution for them. Belinda (female, 7 years work experience) shared that *"The strategy I use is that of confrontation is very good if ever you experience bullying, confront the person and tell them straight that their behaviour is not acceptable, yes that strategy works for me."* Thoko (female, 5 years work experience) also stated that, *"It's not every time with me but it once happened, I noticed that this one is bullying me, but I confronted her although it ended up being a conflict between me and my colleague."*

Furthermore, Noxolo's was:

"Okay, one thing that did work for me personally was confrontation. I did a confrontation with a certain colleague that I felt was bullying me at that particular moment and another way was me reporting it to my supervisor, my superior and we discussed the issue as individuals. So, there was a mediation between us" (Noxolo, female,12 years of work experience).

The researcher probed on Noxolo's experience to understand if this mechanism worked for her. She responded by saying, *"Yes, it helped although we got separated from offices".* However, it is important to acknowledge that individuals are not the same, and not everyone uses the confrontation method. For instance, Mbali D. shared that:

"In instances where the bullying was direct and coming from someone I once reported

to (a former supervisor) I kept quiet, I remained respectful and did what was expected from me. I tried reporting the matter multiple times, but I was not taken seriously until I had suffered depression to a point of giving up. I left the organisation unit where the bullying was occurring however, at the end I suffered consequences of an act that initiated by me because I got left behind and the perpetrator continued with their lives without being held to accountable" (Mbali D, female, 4 years of work experience).

The findings reveal that professional and department strategies are also employed to address challenges when they arise. This was highlighted by two participants who mentioned the use of EAP and HR reporting routes as effective solutions. In line with this finding, Refiloe (female, 5 years of work experience) said, *"You need to talk to the bully or report the bully at HR unit."*

Mbali M. also highlighted her own coping strategy, which relates to what the department offered. She reported:

"My strategy usually is that, we have the EAP, the counselling online, those kinds of platforms but they are hard to use because it's like you believe to be a therapist, you take yourself as healer, as the change agent and for you to pick up a phone and ask for help it's so difficult it's not easy so for me personal I usually destress with music, music calms me" (Mbali M., female, 3 years of work experience).

Nonduduzo shared a different response indicating her own mechanism by saying:

"I have learnt to establish boundaries and communicate them very loud. The colleagues who used to bully me don't anymore because I communicate my boundaries very loudly, I think sometimes when you lack boundaries people will see that as a weakness and start overstepping that. So, my strategy is that I communicate my boundaries if someone does not communicate with respect, I do not entertain them when I see that there's this conflict maybe due to bullying and I am struggling to come to a common ground I communicate to the supervisor for conflict management" (Nonduduzo, female, 4 years of work experience).

This theme also includes strategies implemented by colleagues, where one colleague's approach can serve as a helpful solution for others facing similar challenges. The participants highlighted those colleagues who experienced bullying and followed the formal department routes when reporting. Nonduduzo expressed one method used by her colleagues to address

bullying as follows:

> *"Some colleagues end up verbally fighting most of the time because everyone wants to be heard, everyone wants to have the final say so my colleagues end up being involved in the verbal fight and the supervisor has always been the final solution. When we are struggling ourselves to resolve an issue it is taken to the supervisor"* (Nonduduzo, female, 4 years work experience).

5.3.3. *THEME 3 - THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING*

Workplace bullying has negative impacts on both the workplace and employees' wellbeing (Thomas, 2020). This theme, reports on the impacts of workplace bullying that were felt by the participants. Their responses were highlighted through the following subthemes.

5.3.3.1 Subtheme 1: The impact on the female employee as the social worker

The participants shared their views about the impact of workplace bullying on female employees. Nono (female, 2 years of work experience) stated that, *"This person will end up losing control and not be able to do work."* While Belinda (female, 7 years of work experience) said, *"It can lead to depression, anxiety, and work-related suicide and also production can be affected."* Bluecorn further explained that:

> *"The effect includes a number of factors on the psychological part the person becomes withdrawn sometimes it even reflects in how they dress; the person starts to dress anyhow because they have been made to be inferior. Then psychologically the person won't cope with on their workload you will see discrepancies in what they like the reports could not be how they were before the bullying started and socialisation, the person might not want to socialise with other females or just everybody because they are made to feel small"* (Bluecorn, female, 6 years of work experience).

Victims may put an extra effort in their work due to feelings of inadequacy and persistent criticism that they face (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). Nonduduzo's reflection on the role of a social worker as a female employee, stated:

> *"It brings you down, motivation to go to work falls off, performance at work falls off, emotional you become affected and psychological you become affected. The effects are greater if you think about it imagine you go to a place you were emotionally and*

psychologically then you have to see a therapist who will do damage control on what the colleague has done to you" (Nonduduzo, female, 4 years of work experience).

The findings suggest that participants have seen or witnessed the impacts through their experiences of workplace bullying as social workers. A study by Thomas (2020) discusses the effects of negative behaviour such as occupational stress. This is due to workplace bullying resulting in psychological and behavioural changes. In addition, it affects production due to reduction in work performance, health issues, and job performance (Thomas, 2020).

5.3.3.2 Subtheme 2: The impact on the department when it is exposed to workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying affects the workplace culture, often leading to unhealthy changes (Thomas, 2020). This study's participants demonstrated awareness of workplace bullying and its impact on organisational dynamics. To demonstrate their understanding, participants shared that:

"Well also my inability to do my work effectively affects the organisation as a whole because it means whatever goals that were set by our President to our organisational goals to what we are supposed to achieve to the personal one when I write my IDP's it means I am not going to be able to achieve those. The inability to achieve those means I am affecting the organisation as a whole" (Noxolo, female,12 years of work experience).

Another participant highlighted that, *"The impact of workplace bullying in an organisation may be high staff turnover so people may resign, low staff morale and decreased productivity among employees"* (Mbali D., female, 4 years work experience). Thoko and Lerato shared the same concerns regarding the department's service delivery. Thoko mentioned that:

"On the Department it's a huge impact as the service delivery is affected like for an example here at work we are working with people, individuals and, families who needs attention but when I'm bullied, I don't think I will render effective service delivery towards them" (Thoko, female, 4 years of work experience).

Lerato added that:

"It becomes the place where one does not want to go to, one won't have a good reflection about DSD if you have been bullied maybe after a year sometimes you move

to another organisation, they won't have anything good to say about DSD. It won't have a positive effect it will have an impact on the Department meeting its mandate. Our greatest mandate is to make sure that service delivery is met. Then if the person is not okay then they won't be able to be effective in terms of delivery service" (Bluecorn, female, 6 years of work experience).

The impact of workplace bullying can also be observed in the loss of production due to absenteeism, employee turnover, and legal costs resulting from unfair and constructive dismissals. These consequences represent severe economic costs for the organisation (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). These findings indicate that participants possess knowledge of how to maintain dignity and uphold the goals of the department by practising and behaving ethically, even though they are aware of the existence of workplace bullying.

5.3.6. *THEME 4 - THE STRATEGIES FOR HOW TO DEAL WITH WORKPLACE BULLYING*

This theme was introduced to provide employees with an opportunity to share their ideas on ensuring that the department maintains an anti-bullying workplace. The subtheme below captures diverse views, by participants about how the department addresses workplace bullying. Four participants expressed a lack of knowledge of how the department addresses workplace bullying. Belinda responded by stating that *"I don't have knowledge of what they do in terms of bullying"* (Belinda, female, 7 years of work experience). Furthermore, Thoko shared that:

> *"For our department there is no strategy except that if you feel stressed, they will remind you to contact the Department tools they talk about wellness, but I don't know what type of wellness because they will be talking about that if only, they see that you are emotional. They do not deal with you as the person"* (Thoko, female, 5 years of work experience).

While Bluecorn believed that the department focuses on other things as she said, *"I think the Department is more focused on ensuring that our clients get service not much is done for us as employees"* (Bluecorn, female, 6 years of work experience). Five participants shared similar views regarding the department's way of addressing workplace bullying. Goodness stated that,

"The Department always speaks about the protocol" (Goodness, female, 4 years of work experience). Mbali mentioned the grievance procedure, indicating uncertainty about how it operates:

> *"Those grievances forums I believe they are the ones that handle the grievances and make sure that all the parties are happy and satisfied with the conclusion. There is that kind of forums and actions in place for those kinds of things, they do exist though and so far, they minimise stress because if something is there even though it's not productive but as long as it's there at least in black and white it's a start"* (Mbali M., female, 3 years of work experience).

Noxolo's response differed from others, where she shared that:

> *"Well, not too sure I know that they do a lot of awareness campaigns there is a lot of emails that come through for our Social Dev (Department of Social development communication email platform) that actual discuss issues of workplace bullying and ethics basically ethical most of the things I think are organised by the unit themselves"* (Noxolo, female, 12 years work experience).

Based on the study's findings, some participants could not share any knowledge on the strategies to reduce workplace bullying.

5.3.6.1 Subtheme 1: The Social Workers'ideas about creating an anti-workplace bullying.

This subtheme encourages female employees to take initiative and exercise their rights within the department. Therefore, participants had the opportunity to share their views on what measures the department could implement or make visible to encourage communication about anti-bullying in the workplace.

There were similar comments highlighted by six participants. These participants highlighted how awareness can assist in adhering to the workplace bullying policies. Furthermore, one participant suggested that this awareness could be conducted periodically and promptly:

> *"If they can have awareness in the form of sessions with the EAP unit, the HR, our managers where all females are called in one area and then we are taught the impact of bullying. We can even invite experts in that area to come and teach us to what bullying does to a female person. The awareness must not be a once of thing it must*

continue every 2 months or every quarter, we must have that awareness" (Bluecorn, female, 6 years of work experience).

Other participants highlighted the importance of having an effective team from the EAP who can work on addressing the issues. They emphasised that research findings on workplace bullying should be combined to develop effective solutions. Noxolo shared a different view by highlighting the importance of proper reporting channels and constant checks on social workers through counselling sessions conducted once in three or six months:

> *"So, EAP is highly important or needed to prevent workplace bullying because our personal issues are affecting our work issues and now affecting other employees in the same way. So that can make us bully people less if you deal with your own stress, it means we don't transfer, we don't do transference. We usually use transference, and we block. So, us dealing with our own issues and us having proper EAP counselling and supervision session will assist to limit the load so that people can work effectively and get the support that they need from the organisation as well as personal support"* (Noxolo, female, 12 years of work experience).

The findings on this theme highlight the need for awareness to promote workplace policies and an anti-bullying environment. The HR department has the duty to address workplace bullying and promote a positive culture. Bullying should be perceived as something that is gendered rather than gender-neutral (Leigh et al., 2014).

5.4. SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the perceptions of 10 female employees who are social workers at the department of Social Development, regional and cluster offices. The data was collected using semi structured interviews, connecting the questions with the study's objectives. The next chapter discusses the main findings, conclusion, as well as the recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX: MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Several previous studies focus on bullying that happen between males and females within workplaces. However, the current study focuses on workplace bullying directed to female employees in a female-dominated workplace. The reviewed literature reveals that no study has particularly focuses on female employees in a female-dominated workplace. According to Masango (2020), if an organisation responds to its employees' wellbeing needs, it helps them to know their worth, and feel accepted, resulting in commitment to an organisation. Furthermore, organisations must assist employees in dealing with the negative consequences associated with workplace bullying. When conducting research, it is necessary to first understand and acknowledge that workplace bullying exists within the work environment (Omar, 2017). Therefore, the researcher found it essential to conduct this study to understand the effects of workplace bullying among females in a female-dominated workplace.

6.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Makamu (2022) highlights that effective conflict management encourages job satisfaction, and relationships among employees, bringing peace and harmony in the workplace. Therefore, managing conflict allows employees to work in a conducive and healthy environment. In this study, the researcher answers the research question: What are the effects of bullying faced by female employees in a female-dominated workplace? The approach adopted by the study was based on empowering employees to understand the factors and the importance of employees' health and wellbeing (Calitz et al., 2014). Workplace bullying can be highlighted as a common occurrence in organisations and can cause degradation of the employees physical and mental health (Badenhorst and Botha, 2022).

The main aim of the study is to explore the effects of workplace bullying against females in a female-dominated workplace. The objectives of the study are: (1) to explore the challenges that female employees experience in a female-dominated workplace, (2) to understand how female employees deal with these challenges, (3) to examine the impact these challenges have had on their productivity, and (4) to make recommendations on strategies to address workplace

bullying. In what follows is a discussion on how the researcher addressed these research objectives.

6.2.1 *TO EXPLORE THE CHALLENGES THAT FEMALE EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCE OF WORKPLACE BULLYING IN A FEMALE-DOMINATED WORKPLACE*

In addressing this objective, the researcher observed that the participants understood the type of workplace they were in and the challenges that were embedded within it. The participants shared their personal experiences regarding the female-dominated workplace. Cunniff (2011) indicated the contradictions in the findings of gender differences and bullying in South Africa. However, it was reported that South African females in the health sector are the most vulnerable to workplace bullying. They also highlighted that workplace bullying among females is undermined, as it is perceived to be expected from men. The findings indicate that while females are aware of workplace bullying, the challenges and pressure within their work scope often expose them to situations where they either become perpetrators or victims of bullying. Calitz's (2014) study, which focused on social workers, indicates that occupational stress can be caused by the internal environment (individual), external factors (work or environment), or the nature of work. These factors include poor working conditions, low compensation, lack of resources, a lack of support, and the increasing demand for service delivery. Bernstein and Trimm (2016) mentioned that victims of bullying suffer from psychological well-being, which causes an increase in the level of anxiety and fear, lowered self- esteem, and efficacy with lowered belief and confidence in their professional competence. Therefore, social workers experience stress, bullying, a decrease in job satisfaction, burnout, and a lack of job engagement due to these stressors. However, the findings indicate the need for intervention in the form of support for employees in a female-dominated workplace to avoid toxicity.

6.2.2 *TO UNDERSTAND HOW FEMALE EMPLOYEES DEAL WITH THE CHALLENGES THAT THEY EXPERIENCE IN THE FEMALE-DOMINATED WORKPLACE*

Participants shared how they perceived themselves as victims of bullying as a vulnerable group in societies. In addition, they highlighted how competition and jealousy among themselves lead to bullying each other and finding it difficult to protect each other. According to Mokgolo (2022), workplace bullying can be regarded as an extreme and persistent form of workplace

emotional abuse which is achieved through verbal and non-verbal communication. This is related to the feminist theory which is often used to understand the root cause of females' vulnerabilities within societies. Hooks (2015) identifies situations of female bullying females as the "enemy within" which refers to internalised sexism.

Mangolothi and Buthelezi (2021) mentioned that South Africa can be defined as a patriarchal, classed, and racially polarised society. Females have consistently been aware that they were socialised under patriarchal ideologies, leading them to view themselves as inferior to men and often in competition with one another for patriarchal approval. Hence, females tend to view each other with jealousy, hatred, anxiety, anger, and fear. While sexist views lead to judgemental and harsh treatment of each other. Workplace bullying can be regarded as highly stressful which can lead to employees feeling anxious and easily triggered by anger (Cunniff & Mostert, 2011). The current study's participants lacked knowledge regarding mechanisms put in place by the department to address workplace bullying. Furthermore, participants highlighted that they rely more on their personal coping mechanisms such as confrontation, bullying, and avoidance, preventing them from exploring ideas that can eliminate competition amongst each other. According to Mokgolo (2017), the victims of workplace bullying tend to accept being bullied because they need the job, feel embarrassed and, think its unprofessional to complain. The findings reveal the need for the department to provide training to standardise suitable mechanisms for female employees to be able to support and promote their solidarity.

6.2.3 *THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING*

The findings reveal that the impact of workplace bullying influences both the organisation and the female employees. The participants shared the psychological and physiological factors that hinder productivity within the workplace as a result of workplace bullying. Omar (2017) reviewed that workplace bullying can be identified as an extreme social stressor that leads to psychosomatic, psychological, and physiological issues. Resultantly, employees end up having low self-esteem, and anxiety whenever in social activities. Workplace bullying negatively affects not only individuals but also organisations, as bullied employees often show lower job satisfaction and reduced motivation in conducting their work or duties. Cunniff (2012) stated that the victims of workplace bullying suffer from mental breakdown and physical health. In an organization, workplace bullying could lead to ineffective teamwork, which tampers productivity and efficiency and further leads to financial implications.

Participants further indicated the impact of workplace bullying in an organisation where the Department of Social Development's Batho and Bana Pele principles cannot be achieved. The findings highlight the need to support female employees as this will boost their morale. In addition, the findings reveal that while social workers are therapists, they are also individuals carrying their own burdens from outside the workplace, which can impact them when exposed to workplace bullying. For the organisation, participants acknowledged the organisational goal, which employees can collectively contribute to achieving.

6.2.4 *THE STRATEGIES ON HOW TO DEAL WITH WORKPLACE BULLYING*

Bernstein and Trimm (2016) outlined two strategies to cope with bullying, active and passive strategies. Active strategies include seeking help which requires the inclusion of others while assertiveness required an individual to rely on their own resources to resist bullying. Passive strategies include avoidance and doing nothing with the hope that the bully will back down and change their behaviour. These strategies are designed to address the significance of workplace bullying by meeting the needs of participants within the workplace. According to Masango (2020), the Department of Social Development utilises the service delivery model to provide the employee health and wellness program that was implemented and aligned with the employee health and wellness programme strategic framework. These strategies aim to promote employees' health and well-being, ultimately increasing productivity and job satisfaction. The study's participants lacked knowledge of workplace bullying policies and indicated that the department never shared the workplace policies. According to the occupational social work model, the promotive intervention focuses on "social functioning and the well-being of the clients."

The main emphasis of the position includes prevention, education, and development (Van Breda & Du Plessis, 2009). The current study's participants suggested that the department should utilise the communication channels, and available platforms to spread the knowledge and prevent workplace bullying. In addition, social marketing can be useful to promote knowledge to the employees about workplace bullying through pamphlets, boards, posters, flyers, electronic media, oral presentation to allow employees engagement (Masango, 2020).

Mokgolo (2017) mentioned that it is the role of human resource practitioners to address workplace bullying as this allows an organization to gain insight into how workplace bullying has negatively affected employees. Furthermore, the engagement of human resources

practitioners allows an organisation to develop strategies that will equip the employees with the dangers of workplace bullying. Eight participants suggested that conducting awareness programs could be an effective strategy for the Department of Social Development to implement. These programs would provide female employees with valuable knowledge about workplace bullying. Hooks (2015) argues that sisterhood is possible and powerful. Females can achieve self-actualisation and be successful without dominating each other. The participants highlighted that through the awareness programmes they can be able to share their challenges and help them to feel supported. Two participants indicated the importance of setting up the department's EAP wellness unit team that will be on the ground to spread knowledge on workplace bullying either weekly or quarterly. Masango (2020) added the importance of conducting awareness about the employee health and wellness program as this will increase utilization. This includes visibility and accessibility where the Department should consider initiating the office-based employee wellness program strategy where the employees will engage with professionals at any time.

The findings suggest that awareness programmes could empower female employees to effectively address workplace bullying among themselves. These initiatives could also contribute to increased productivity and reduce issues such as limit the abuse of sick leave, presenteeism, absenteeism, and excessive employee turnover.

6.3 SUMMARY

The study's aims to understand the effects of workplace bullying against female employees working in a female-dominated workplace in Gauteng, Department of Social Development Regional and Cluster Offices. The study participants were 10 social workers. They demonstrated an understanding of a female-dominated workplace and were aware of the workplace bullying as a challenge that hinders productivity. However, they were unaware of the Department of Social Development workplace bullying policies, which limits the adoption of such policies. Most participants relied on personal mechanisms to cope, such as confrontation and non-verbal attitude.

Although personal mechanism helps in resolving the disputes, the impact of workplace bullying remains unsolved. For example, the personal mechanism can limit social interactions among female employees, increase avoidance, and encourage bullyism. The findings suggest one of the ways that participants used to address workplace bullying, which is establishing boundaries

and open communication. However not all female employees may possess the confidence or ability to set such boundaries, as some rely on colleagues for support in managing their workload, which can lead to bullying.

The current study highlights that females are often assigned marginal and insignificant roles in a society, contributing to frustration. This frustration can sometimes manifest as petty behaviour or misdirected anger toward other females. Social work encourages teamwork; therefore, the current study highlights the need of continuous support in form of awareness, visibility of EAP unit teams, and social marketing of anti-workplace bullying, which could be in form of daily reminders shared via emails.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.4.1 *RECOMMENDATION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT*

It is recommended that the Department should prioritise female employees, particularly social workers, as the dominant group in the workplace, by implementing visible and effective communication about workplace bullying and acknowledging its occurrence within the Department's offices. Furthermore, the Department should conduct workplace bullying awareness to educate and boost female employees' morale. Workplace bullying awareness among female employees will help reduce workplace bullying and its consequences within the Department, enabling the Department to achieve its goals more effectively.

6.4.2 RECOMMENDATION TO FUTURE RESEARCHER

The study was conducted on workplace bullying among females who are employed as social workers, working in a female-dominated workplace, at the Department of Social Development. Research on female employees has been marginalised, yet workplace bullying exists in female-dominated workplaces. Therefore, future studies should consider exploring other female-dominated workplaces, addressing the challenges of bullying faced by female employees, and encouraging the visibility of policies.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The study explored the effects of workplace bullying among female employees working in a female-dominated workplace, focusing on social workers. The objectives of the study were successfully accomplished. The study identifies the lack of knowledge on workplace bullying,

the visibility of Department of Social Development, Gauteng policies, the lack of the standardised coping mechanism, and ignoring some of workplace bullying cases. The lack of awareness among female social workers hinders them from utilising support mechanisms provided by the department, causing them to rely on their own coping strategies to remain productive. It is critical to address the awareness, as it will help uplift social workers' morale, boost the social work profession in general, enhance productivity, reduce excessive turnover, address mental health challenges, and curb the abuse of sick leave and absenteeism.

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APPENDIX B:

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Title: Effects of workplace bullying against female employees who work in the female-dominated workplace in Gauteng, Department of Social Development Regional and Cluster Offices

Good day,

My name is **Lungisile Simelane,** and I am a postgraduate student registered for the degree Master of Arts in Social Work in the field of Occupational Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research regarding the effects of workplace bullying against female employees who work in the female-dominated workplace in Gauteng. Understanding the effects through information gathered from the female employees it is hoped that it could assist in outlining that the workplace bullying that has been occurring amongst females and there are not many studies that has been published about it. In addition, the information gathered will display the challenges that the female employees experience and how those challenges can be dealt with.

I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study because I would like to see the voices of female employees being heard about workplace bullying through the research study and that will encourage the future researchers too and those females who has been experiencing the workplace bullying. If you accept my invitation, your participation will be entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. There are no consequences or personal benefits to participating in this study and the interviews venue will be private to you and the researcher based on your favourite time and scheduled appointment. If you agree to take part, I will arrange

to interview you at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview will last approximately one hour. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time and you may also refuse to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with answering. If you decide to participate, I will ask your permission to audio-record the interview. No one other than the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study. A copy of your interview transcript without any identifying information will be stored permanently in a locked cupboard at the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand and may be used for future research.

Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report. The results of the research may also be used for academic purposes (including books, journals, and conference proceedings) and a summary of findings will be made available to study participants on request.

Counselling will be provided by the Department of Social Development, Employee Health, and Wellness Solution (Careway) which is provided telephonically and is available for 24 hours. The counselling service will be made available as the support structure in terms of sensitive information that might results into emotions triggered leading to the feelings of discomfort.

If you have any questions during of afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below:

- Contact number: 073 138 1778 and Email address: 1539092@students.wits.ac.za

or

- My supervisor: Professor Thobeka Nkomo Email address: Thobekankomo@wits.ac.za

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27 (0)11 717 1408, email hrec-medical@wits.ac.za.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in the study.

Yours Sincerely,

Lungisile Lorraine Simelane

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

Research Title: Effects of workplace bullying against female employees who work in the female-dominated workplace in Gauteng. Department of Social Development Regional and Cluster Offices

I ……. hereby consent to participate in the research study. The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me.

I understand and agree to the following:

(Please circle on the option that is relevant to you)

My participation in this study is voluntary. YES NO

I may withdraw from the study without being disadvantaged in any way. YES NO

I may choose not to answer any specific questions asked, if I do not wish to do so. YES NO

There are no foreseeable benefits or risks associated with participation in this study. YES NO

My identity will be kept strictly confidential, and any information that may identify me will be removed from the interview transcript. YES NO

A copy of my interview transcript without any identifying information will be stored permanently in a locked cupboard at the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand and may be used for future research. I understand that my responses will be used in the write-up of a master's research report and may also be presented in conferences, book chapters, journal articles or books. YES NO

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO-RECORDING OF THE INTERVIEW

Research Title: Effects of workplace bullying against female employees who work in the female-dominated workplace in Gauteng.

I …… hereby consent to the audio recording of the interview.

I understand and agree to the following:

(Please circle on the option that is relevant to you)

The recording will be stored in a secure location (a locked cupboard or password-protected computer) with restricted access to the researcher and the research supervisor.	YES NO
The recording will be transcribed and any information that could identify. me will be removed.	YES NO
When the data analysis and write-up of the research study is complete, the audio recording of the interview will be kept for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study.	YES NO
The transcript with all the identifying information directly linked to my research participation will be removed and stored permanently and may be used for future research.	YES NO
Direct quotes from my interview, without any information that could identify me, may be cited in the research report or other write-ups or presentations of the research.	YES NO

Name of the participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Name of the researcher: Lungisile Lorraine Simelane

Contact Number: 073 138 1778 Email address: 1539092@students.wits.ac.za

Date: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide on participants perceptions on lived experiences.

Research Title: Effects of workplace bullying against female employees who work in the female-dominated workplace in Gauteng, Department of Social Development Regional and Cluster Offices

1. Workplace bullying in a female-dominated workplace.
   (a) What is your understanding of the female-dominated workplace?
   (b) What is your understanding of workplace bullying?
   (c) Do you think female employees understand workplace bullying? Please support your answer.
   (d) What do you think happens to an individual who has experienced workplace bullying?
2. The causes of the bullysim in the workplace.
   (a) What do you think might be the cause of the workplace bullying?
   (b) With regards to what you have mentioned in question (a) do you think those causes come from the organisations or employee's different experiences?
3. Based on your understanding do you think females are more bullied when compared to males?
   (a) If, so what makes you think that females are more bullied than males?
   (b) What are the things you can highlight that speak to females as being more bullies than males?
   (c) What makes you say females are more bullied than males?
4. Workplace bullying impact on an organisation and an employee.
   (a) What do you think is the impact of workplace bullying on a female employee?
   (b) What do you think is the impact of workplace bullying in an organisation?
5. Strategies of dealing with workplace bullying.
   (a) What are the strategies that work for you whenever you experience workplace bullying from your female colleague/s?

(b) What strategies that you ever heard of or evidence that a colleague has used to deal with workplace bullying?

6. Majors or ideas to stop workplace bullying, especially from female to female in the female-dominated workplace.
   (a) Do you have any knowledge of how the Department deal with workplace bullying when it occurs against female employees?
   (b) What do think your organisation can do to stop workplace bullying?
   (c) What suggestions do you think your organisation can implement to prevent workplace bullying against female employees?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER

GAUTENG PROVINCE
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Enquiries: Ms D Mukhathi
Tel: 011 355 7758
Cell: 079 891 5883
File no: 23/08/2024

Dear Lungisile Lorraine, Simelane

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Thank you for your application to conduct research within the Gauteng Department of Social Development.

Your application for the research titled ***"Effects of workplace bullying against female employees who works in the female dominated workplace in the Department of Social Development Regional Office, Gauteng"*** approved by *University of the Witwatersrand has* been considered and approved for support by the Department as it was found to be beneficial to the Department's vision and mission. The approval is subject to the Department's terms and conditions as endorsed on the 13th of November 2019.

You have permission to interview departmental officials and beneficiaries, conduct observations and access relevant documents where necessary.

May I take this opportunity to wish you well on the journey you are about to embark on. We look forward to a value adding research and a fruitful co-operation.

With thanks

Mr Sicky Makunyane
Director: Monitoring & Evaluation
Date: 26/08/2024

APPENDIX E

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: SW24/02/01**
PROJECT TITLE	Effects of workplace bullying against female employees who works in the female dominated workplace in the Department of Social Development Regional Office, Gauteng
INVESTIGATOR	**SIMELANE L**
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SOCIAL WORK
DATE CONSIDERED	18 JUNE 2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	APPROVED UNCONDITIONALLY
RISK LEVEL	MINIMAL RISK
EXPIRY DATE	30 June 2027

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 8 JULY 2024 **CHAIRPERSON** (DR L PETERSEN)

cc: Supervisor: PROF T NKOMO

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Simelane
Signature

08/07/2024
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES