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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE BULLYING, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ORGANISATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL WELLBEING

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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE BULLYING,
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ORGANISATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL
WELLBEING**

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA Masters (Industrial Psychology) in the Faculties of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned hereby declare that the work presented in this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not in part or in whole, been previously submitted for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Signed

Cara-Lisa Sham

Date

15/12/2012

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ABSTRACT

The research discussed here forth pertains most dominantly to the moderating effect demonstrated by four different sources of social support on individual and organisational wellbeing in the presence of workplace bullying. Given the turbulent tensions cemented within a South African Apartheid past, bullying, particularly within the workplace, is a likely outcome channelled by conflicting sensations towards diversity. The foundational framework of the presented research was derived from the individual level factors depicted in Einarsen's conceptual framework of the study and management of workplace bullying, and was implicitly modelled according to Cox and Mackay's (1978, as cited in Cox & Mackay, 1985) transactional model centred on stressor-strain relationships coupled with associated buffers that may ameliorate the outcomes thereof. A plethora of research suggests that social support serves to operate effectively as a moderator within such a relationship, sufficing thus as a deciding factor in the formulation of the present study, where the stressor was conceptualised as workplace bullying, and the strain took the form of the potential adverse effects imposed on psychological wellbeing (individual wellbeing) and intention to leave (organisational wellbeing). Research has further provided evidence for organisational support from supervisors and colleagues, and external support from friends and family to be common instruments of assistance; the current study thereby sought to assess whether colleague, supervisor, friend, and family support would moderate the relationship between perceptions of bullying, psychological wellbeing and intention to leave. The present study further aimed to examine direct effects by assessing the existence of a relationship between perceptions of bullying, psychological wellbeing, intention to leave and these four sources of social support. Additionally the associations that exist between psychological wellbeing, intention to leave and the sources of support under observation were examined.

Correlative analyses and moderated multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to decipher the nature of the relationships outlined above. Results yielded through moderated multiple regressions demonstrated that perceived social support from both colleagues and supervisors moderated the relationship between perceptions of bullying and intention to leave. It was additionally established that when analysed as a single variable, friends and family social support was able to demonstrate a significant inverse interaction effect on intention to leave in the presence of workplace bullying.

Correlative analyses revealed that perceptions of bullying demonstrated an inverse association with supervisor support, suggesting thus that higher levels of supervisor support are associated with lower perceptions of bullying, and simultaneously that higher perceptions of bullying are associated with lower levels of supervisor support. Both colleague and supervisor support appeared to demonstrate inverse main effects for psychological wellbeing and intention to leave. Perceptions of bullying predicted the degree of variance

explained in intention to leave. Therefore higher levels of bullying were found to predict higher levels of intention to leave.

The present research therefore provided evidence for the buffering effect of social support, particularly support obtained from supervisors within the workplace, on psychological wellbeing and intention to leave, and colleagues for intention to leave in the presence of perceived workplace bullying. Additional individual-level factors worthy of future consideration, as detected by the current study included the function of childhood attachment, race, gender leadership, proximity, reciprocity, relational value and context specificity of the type and source support, propensity to seek support and coping.

In conjunction with individual-level factors, organisational-level factors such as such as company culture, climate, context and industry, are essential factors to consider in the attempt to grasp a holistic understanding of the complexities that may function as precedents of the workplace bullying and social support process. The current study consequently recommended that future research account for the suggestions provided with regard to the limitations, theoretical and practical implications and potential resources utilisable in the subsistence of this process. In so doing, future research may aid in expounding an understandings of the severe experiences to which 'victimised' individuals are exposed, alongside the nature and function of various forms of support most effective for workplace difficulties. The responsibility to ensure that an organisation is functioning at optimum levels of productivity rests in the hands of Human Resources practitioners and industrial psychologists working within the organisation. The implications of failing such responsibility are severe; therefore it is necessary for such practitioners to grasp a holistic perspective of the underlying relational elements that operate within the workforce, and to consequently ensure the cultivation of a positive and productive work environment that is conducive to the nurturing of positive and productive employees. This may be aptly achieved through perpetual monitoring of both internal and external environments so as to detect and eradicate negative acts such as bullying, and thereby prevent the escalation of such events.

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