

# Exploring Workplace Bullying and Turnover Intention among Registered Nurses in Tertiary Hospitals, Lahore, Pakistan

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## Abstract

**Background:** Workplace bullying is common all over the world. However, the medical field is one such field where bullying is more frequent than any other field. Specifically, nurses in the hospitals are identified to be more exposed to workplace intimidation as compare to other health members, yet underreported. Workplace bullying is one of the principal factors following turnover intention among nurses.

**Purpose:** This survey aims to explore the prevalence of workplace bullying and its association with the intent to leave the job among registered nurses.

**Methods:** A Cross-Sectional survey was conducted from September 2019 to April 2020. A convenience sample of 242 nurses employed in two public and two private teaching hospitals of Lahore had been selected for the study. Data analysis was done using the latest version of SPSS 25. Descriptive statistics mean, median and standard deviation were used for the description of data.

**Results:** The prevalence of workplace bullying was 8.02% among nurses. A significant relationship was found between workplace bullying and nurses' turnover intention. The study found diploma nurses with less age experienced more workplace bullying.

**Conclusions:** It is suggested that workplace bullying is highly rampant in our health care system and is significantly associated with the nurse's turnover intention. There is an immense need to establish new policies that can control bullying and upsurge nurses' retention. Further education plays a role in workplace bullying.

**Keywords:** Workplace bullying, Nurses, Turnover intention

## Introduction

Workplace bullying delineates conditions that encompass the harassment of an individual by another person or a group frequently and throughout a long period. Consequently, the person suffers from physical,

psychological, and emotional disruptions. Workplace bullying among nurses is the intention of giving physical, psychological, and emotional abuse range from humiliating, disrespecting, ignoring, yelling, swearing, and throwing things to control them and interrupt their performance of duties <sup>1</sup>. Bullying behavior is thought different from regular encounter as it intends to expose someone to social isolation, ruin the personal dignity, lower self -esteem and dropping its productivity at work. Bullying is considering a workplace stressor <sup>2</sup> that is significantly related to negative consequences of absenteeism, insecurity, loss of commitment, and

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intentional turnover from the organization<sup>3</sup>.

Workplace bullying is common all over the world. However, the medical field is one of such fields where bullying is more frequent than any other field. Specifically, nurses in hospitals are identified to be more exposed to workplace intimidation. It refers to the harassment behavior by nurses of the same standing. Globally, 20-30% of nurses are suffering from workplace bullying in their careers<sup>4</sup>. In the United Kingdom, every one out of 6 nurses stated that they had suffered bullying in the last twelve months. In the United States, more than half of the nursing population reported that they watched their colleagues being bullied<sup>3</sup>.

Turnover intention is a deliberate and planned desire to leave the organization. The worker's turnover intention is a primary mental predecessor of their final turnover actions before they leave the organization. It is evident that high intentional turnover negatively affects organization growth and development. It leads to a shortage of staff and excessive burden on existing staff leading to burnout and expensive consequences in the future<sup>5</sup>. The main objective of the health care delivery system is to provide excellence in care that cannot be possible without the qualified and quantified number of health care professionals<sup>6</sup>. Quality is compromised due to the deficiency of prepared, competent health professionals while quantity address with the shortage of staff is the principal obstacle in the provision of quality care.

Bullying in nurses is not reported only in European countries but it is also found in the Asian Region. Pakistan is one of those countries that are facing an acute shortage of nurses. It is reported that there are 1 million nurses needed in the country. While the government indicated that there are 60,000 more nurses needed in the country<sup>7</sup>. Pakistan is a country with having male dominance culture. Here nurses are more bullying by their male members of the health team. But reporting of such cases is scary due to feelings of embarrassment in front of others and fear of social stigma in particular<sup>8</sup>. Several factors influence on intention to turn over in which bullying is also a major factor<sup>9</sup>.

Previous studies find an association between workplace bullying and turnover intention<sup>10</sup>. However, In our culture like Pakistan, there is a gap in knowledge about the prevalence of bullying at the workplace as many cases are under-reported due to cultural hinders<sup>11</sup>. The managers cannot make strategies and can't focus on the problem if they do not know the existence of the problem and its correlation to the nursing shortage. Although sufficient literature is available regarding bullying and intention to turnover. There is little published literature that investigates the problem in the context of Pakistan. While there is a dire need to explore the exact picture and its association with intention to job turnover<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, this survey aimed to determine the prevalence of bullying among nurses and its association with the intent to leave the job.

## Material and Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was used to assess the experience of bullying among registered nurses working in 2 public and 2 private teaching hospitals of Lahore, Pakistan. A sample size of 242 nurses was selected through convenience sampling. The data collection tools comprise three types of the questionnaire; the demographic form contains information regarding age, sex, gender, marital status, experience, education, type of facility, and nursing licensure. The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) is a 22 items scale focusing on various types of behaviors that may be professed as bullying if they arise regularly<sup>13</sup>. Turnover intention measure is a two-item scale and ranging from 0 to 7<sup>14</sup>. The items observed respondents reflect about abandoning their job and if they are looking for other jobs through visiting other places. The data collection was done after the approval of the ethical institution Committee. Data collection was conducted from September 2019 to April 2020 and included registered nurses from all educational levels as well as both genders. Nurses, with less than 6 months of experience had excluded. Complete anonymity was observed. A system of numbers identifying the non-responders known only to the researcher was used. Data analysis is done by using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) 25. Cross tabulation was done and Chi-Square was applied to determine the level of significance.

## Results

There were 242 male and female nurses who participated in our study. Out of 242, there were 53 male and 189 female nurses. Study participants were divided into five age groups from 20 years to more than 60 years of age. The highest number of participants was from the 20-30 years of age group followed by the 41-50 years of age group. Out of 242 nurses, 135 were married while 107 were unmarried. Qualification of study participants was also assessed and divided into three categories,

diploma, graduate, and a postgraduate qualification. The highest number of participants were from the diploma (113) followed by graduate qualification (75). Participants were asked about their work experience and divided into four categories. The highest number of participants fall in 1-5 years of experience (76) followed by 6-10 years of experience (65).

Mean and standard deviation were calculated of gender, marital status, age, level of education, and years of experience, and values are given in table 1.

**TABLE 1: MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION WERE CALCULATED OF GENDER, MARITAL STATUS, AGE, LEVEL OF EDUCATION, AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE.**

Variables	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Level of Education	Years of Experience
Mean	1.78	1.44	2.12	1.76	2.30
Std. Deviation	.414	.498	.972	.796	1.109

### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEVEL OF EDUCATION WITH BULLYING

Cross tabulation was done for level of education with bullying and results were found significant for which p-value resulted in 0.000. Of those who were scored less than the median, 36% were having a diploma and 29.8% were from graduation. Respondents securing equal to or more than the median score 10.7% of them were having diploma qualification. For person-related bullying, those

who were scored less than the median, 22.3% were having a diploma and 18.6% were from graduation. Respondents securing equal to or more than the median score 24.4% of them were having diploma qualification. For physically intimidating those who were scored less than the median, 20.7% were having graduation and 18.6% were from the diploma. Respondents securing equal to or more than the median score 28.1% of them were having diploma qualification as shown in table 2.

**TABLE 2: CROSS TABULATION OF LEVEL OF EDUCATION WITH BULLYING**

Level of Education	Work-Related Bullying		Chi-Square Value
	Less than 28	More than 28	
Diploma	87 (36.0%)	26 (10.7%)	X <sup>2</sup> = 16.1, df = 2, p-value = 0.000
Graduation	72 (29.8%)	3 (1.2%)	
Post-graduation	50 (20.7%)	4 (1.7%)	
Level of Education	Person Related Bullying		Chi-Square Value
	Less than Median (53)	Equal or more than the median (53)	
Diploma	54 (22.3%)	59 (24.4%)	X <sup>2</sup> = 40.9, df = 2, p-value = 0.000
Graduation	45 (18.6%)	30 (12.4%)	
Post-graduation	3 (1.2%)	51 (21.1%)	
Level of Education	Physically Intimidating Bullying		Chi-Square Value
	Less than the median (12)	Equal or more than the median (12)	
Diploma	45 (18.6%)	68 (28.1%)	X <sup>2</sup> = 58.5, df = 2, p-value = 0.000
Graduation	50 (20.7%)	25 (10.3%)	
Post-graduation	0 (0%)	54 (22.3%)	

There was a calculated **Prevalence** of bullying among the given 4 hospitals and it was **8.02% (152/1894 × 100)**. Out of 242 participants, 169 participants were thinking about quitting their jobs while 73 were not. Out of 242 participants, 180 participants were exploring new jobs while 62 were not.

#### **Relationship of Bullying with Thinking About Quitting Job and Exploring Other Opportunities:**

Participants were asked to think about quitting their jobs in a relationship with bullying. Bullying was divided into three categories, work-related bullying, person-

related bullying, and physically intimidating bullying. Results of work-related bullying were statistically significant. The majority of participants said yes there is work-related bullying and that's why we want to quit our job (59.5%). Results of person-related bullying were statistically insignificant. A large number of participants said yes there is person-related bullying and that's why we want to quit our job (39.7%). Results of physically intimidating bullying were statistically significant. The majority of participants said yes there is physically intimidating bullying and that's why we want to quit our job (40.9%) as shown in Table 3.

**Table:3 Thinking about quitting and bullying**

Thinking about quitting your job?	Bullying		Chi-Square Value
	No	Yes	
	Work-Related Bullying		
No	65 (26.9%)	8 (3.3%)	X <sup>2</sup> = 13.2, df = 1, p-value = 0.05
Yes	25 (10.3%)	144 (59.5%)	
Yes	Person Related Bullying		X <sup>2</sup> = 6.4, df = 1, p-value = 0.06
	29 (12%)	44 (18.2%)	
No	73 (30.2%)	96 (39.7%)	
Yes	Physically Intimidating Bullying		X <sup>2</sup> = 21.5, df = 1, p-value = 0.00
	25 (10.3%)	48 (19.8%)	
No	70 (28.9%)	99 (40.9%)	

#### Exploring Other Job Opportunities by Checking Job Listing and Bullying:

Participants were asked to explore other job opportunities concerning bullying. Results of work-related bullying in relationship with exploring other job opportunities in checking job listings were statistically insignificant. The majority of participants said yes, we are exploring other job opportunities but not because of bullying (64.5%).

Results of person-related bullying were statistically significant. A large number of participants said yes there is person-related bullying and that's why we are exploring other opportunities (43.8%). Results of physically intimidating bullying were statistically significant. The majority of participants said yes there is physically intimidating bullying and that's why we are exploring other job opportunities (45.5%) as shown in Table 4.

**Table:4 Exploring other job opportunities by checking job listing and bullying**

Exploring other job opportunities	Bullying		Chi-Square Value
	No	Yes	
	Work-Related Bullying		
No	53 (21.9%)	9 (3.7%)	X <sup>2</sup> = 3.9, df = 1, p-value = 0.07
Yes	156 (64.5%)	24 (9.9%)	
Yes	Person Related Bullying		X <sup>2</sup> = 9.1, df = 1, p-value = 0.00
	28 (11.6%)	34 (14%)	
No	74 (30.6%)	106 (43.8%)	
Yes	Physically Intimidating Bullying		X <sup>2</sup> = 20.3, df = 1, p-value = 0.04
	25 (10.3%)	37 (15.3%)	
No	70 (28.9%)	110 (45.5%)	

## Discussion

In the last decades, nursing research emphasized the immoral impact of workplace bullying on employees' performance and health care systems<sup>15</sup>. The turnover rate in the nursing profession is problematic. There are many other factors but workplace bullying is also one of the principal factors. It is reported that 19.0 to 86.5 % of nurses experience workplace bullying in their duty hours<sup>16</sup>. Workplace bullying not only having physical, psychological, and emotional consequences. Even it is associated with high job turnover intention among professional nurses.

The study was conducted in 2 public and 2 private tertiary hospitals of Lahore, Pakistan. The results showed that females comprise 189 (78.09%) as compared to males 53 (21.9%) were the major part of the total sample. These results are following the study conducted in the General hospital in Seoul, Gyeonggi, and Chungnam. The study observed the relationship between workplace bullying with staff burnout, professional quality of life, and turnover intention. The study reported the same results that male participants were less as compared to females<sup>17</sup>.

The study reported that the highest number of participants was from the 20-30 years of age group. The results were in accordance with the study conducted in the General hospital of South Korea for exploring factors associated with nurses' turnover intention. The study also reported that the majority of the participants 64.6% were in the 26 to 29 year age group<sup>3</sup>.

The study showed that the prevalence of bullying was 8.02% among nurses working in both public and private hospitals. The result was contradictory to the study conducted in emergency nurses of five hospitals in Amman, Jordan. The objective of the study was to determine the occurrence of bullying and its prevention in association with personal and organizational aspects. The study reported a high level of prevalence of bullying 90% among nurses. This difference maybe because of the small sample size of study<sup>18</sup>.

Another important association was found between age, level of education, and workplace bullying for which the p-value was 0.000. The results are following the study conducted on 404 nurses working in Polish

health care facilities. Data was collected through the online system and the study's basic aim was to determine risk factors for workplace bullying. The study reported a significant association between age, level of education, and work-related bullying<sup>19</sup>.

The study reported that out of 242 participants, 169 participants were thinking about quitting their jobs. While 180 participants were exploring new jobs. The study found a significant association between work-related bullying and turnover intention as 59.5 % of participants agree that due to work-related bullying, they want to quit their job. The results were in the same line as the study conducted in Korea at five public hospitals. The study objective was to determine the association between workplace bullying, organizational obligation, and turnover intention. The study reported a significant association between workplace bullying and intent to leave the job<sup>20</sup>.

The study showed 39.7% of participants showed that there is person-related bullying and that's why we want to quit our job. These results are comparable with the study conducted among 135 newly registered nurses selected from five different nursing schools of Northwestern in the period between 2007 to 2010. The study's objective was to identify bullying and its association with work. The study reported that workplace bullying present among newly registered nurses and 29.5% had reported leaving the profession due to bullying<sup>21</sup>. The majority of participants in our study said yes there is work-related bullying and that's why we want to quit our job (59.5%). The results are following the study conducted among 270 nurses of the general hospital. The study objective was to analyze workplace bullying, burnout, and turnover among registered nurses. The study reported workplace bullying was significantly associated with burnout and nurses' intentional turnover<sup>22</sup>.

## Conclusion

The study concluded that workplace bullying is highly prevalent in health care facility included both public and private hospitals. Consequently, leading to turnover intention and looking for a new job opportunity. Therefore, need adequate strategies to reduce workplace bullying and enhance nursing retention in the profession.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends making and Implement new strategies while upgrading existing policies regarding a better workplace. Introduce a reporting system to report such incidents that cause physical, psychological, and emotional disturbance during the work environment

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**Ethical Clearance-** Taken from Institutional Review Board of the University of Lahore with reference No: IRB-UOL-FAHS/723/2019.

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**Conflict of Interest -** Nil

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