WORKPLACE BULLYING IN TURKEY AND AUSTRALIA: A PRELIMINARY COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION

Burcu Guneri Cangarli - burcu.guner@ieu.edu.tr
IZMIR UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS
Megan Paull - m.paull@murdoch.edu.au
MURDOCH UNIVERSITY
Maryam Omari - m.omari@ecu.edu.au
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

SIG: INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT
TRACK: INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT GENERAL TRACK
Workplace bullying in Turkey and Australia: A preliminary comparative investigation

ABSTRACT

This study compares victim conceptualisation of bullying and witness reactions to the behaviour in Turkey and Australia. Data was collected from 139 university students from Business disciplines in the two countries. Findings suggest that there are many similarities in bullying scenarios across the two cultures, however, differences in themes and witness responses were identified. Further analysis suggests that these differences are attributable to cultural factors. This study contributes to the literature by increasing understanding of the complex dynamics of workplace bullying in cross-cultural and diverse contexts. Findings also offer insights to managers, human resources practitioners and policy makers in devising culture-appropriate prevention and intervention strategies.

Keywords:
Workplace bullying in Turkey and Australia:
A preliminary comparative investigation

ABSTRACT
This study compares victim conceptualisation of bullying and witness reactions to the behaviour in Turkey and Australia. Data was collected from 139 university students from Business disciplines in the two countries. Findings suggest that there are many similarities in bullying scenarios across the two cultures, however, differences in themes and witness responses were identified. Further analysis suggests that these differences are attributable to cultural factors. This study contributes to the literature by increasing understanding of the complex dynamics of workplace bullying in cross-cultural and diverse contexts. Findings also offer insights to managers, human resources practitioners and policy makers in devising culture-appropriate prevention and intervention strategies.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, cross-cultural comparisons, Turkey, Australia

INTRODUCTION
In an era of globalisation, workplace differences necessitate an increasing need for diversity tolerance. A key to tolerance is mutual understanding facilitating appropriate conduct, including between cultures. Given the proliferation of research on workplace bullying from different continents and countries, it can be surmised that bullying is not a country or culture specific issue.

There are a limited number of cross-cultural studies on workplace bullying (e.g. Anderson and Bushman, 2002; Escartin, Zapf, Arrieta and Rodriguez-Carballeira, 2011; Loh, Restubog and Zagenczyk, 2010), however, researchers accept that behaviours classified as bullying, as well as their antecedents and outcomes vary across cultures (Escartin, Zapf, Arrieta and Rodriguez-Carballeira, 2011; Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell and Salem, 2006). It is apparent that cross-cultural studies will increase our understanding of workplace bullying by identifying the effect of culture on perceptions, understandings and behaviours, to help develop more
effective prevention and intervention strategies. This will also be benefits for multicultural societies such as Australia, and in Europe and North America.

This paper aims to identify differences and similarities in victim and witness perceptions of, and reactions to, bullying in two different cultural contexts: Turkey and Australia. Results will inform scholarly investigations of workplace bullying. The findings will also be of use to practitioners in developing better prevention and intervention strategies through refinement for ‘fit’ in different cultural contexts.

BACKGROUND

Workplace Bullying

There are contested elements to a definition for workplace bullying. One definition from Einarsen and Rakness (1997) describes bullying as all repeated actions and practices that are directed to one or more workers, unwanted by the victim, done deliberately or unconsciously, clearly causing humiliation, offence and distress. Other definitions highlight the frequency, severity and impact of behaviour labelled as bullying.

Workplace bullying has been found to have adverse effects on victim performance, job satisfaction, and overall psychological and physical well-being. The behaviour has been found to lead to depression, post traumatic stress syndrome and even suicidal tendencies (e.g., Björkqvist, Österman and Hjelt-Bäck, 1994; Brousse et al., 2008; Einarsen, Matthiesen and Mikkelsen, 1999; Leymann, 1996; Soares, 2002). Although these effects are sufficient to classify workplace bullying as a serious problem, its negative effects extend beyond the individual to significant others and even society at large (Omari, 2007). Bullying harms organisations by damaging work climate, team spirit and productivity (Hoel et al., 2003;
Quine, 1999). It is not only victims, but also witnesses of bullying who suffer negative effects. Research shows that witnesses who are exposed to indirect or passive bullying are affected by the general negative climate in the workplace (e.g., Loh et al., 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Soraes, 2002; Vartia, 2001) and report higher level of stress than employees who work in organisations where bullying is not a problem. Accordingly, where bullying is not well managed absenteeism and turnover are significantly higher (Keashly and Jagatic, 2000; Vartia, 1993). The sum effect is that that bullying is also harmful for societies. It leads to lost working days, early retirements and unproductive work (Hoel et al., 2001). Moreover, achieving the target of having a healthy population becomes almost impossible if bullying is prevalent in a society since it creates myriad of psychological and physical health problems (Leymann, 1996).

With the aim of developing suitable intervention and prevention approaches, as well as offering valid coping strategies for victims, researchers focus on different aspects of bullying. There have been attempts to understand when and how conflict turns into bullying and to identify the trigger mechanisms (Hoel and Salin, 2003; Salin, 2003; Vartia, 1996). It is well established that organisational climate and culture are antecedents of workplace bullying in organisations (e.g. Omari 2007). It also follows that research findings from different cultures lead to different interpretations of bullying scenarios (Loh et al., 2010). This draws attention to the impact of the cultural context of bullying from an organisational, as well as national culture perspective.

The fact that culture has an impact on bullying is not surprising for researchers as understanding any behavioural issue requires addressing the influence of culture (Triandis, 1992). Hofstede’s well-known, and sometimes hotly debated, work on the comparison of
societies shows that societies vary in terms of their cultural values. Hofstede’s framework groups cultural values under the following dimensions: power orientation, social orientation, goal orientation, time orientation, and uncertainty orientation (Hofstede 1993; Griffin and Pustay, 2013; Minkov and Hofstede, 2011). When the role of cultural dimensions in social relationships is applied to workplace bullying, it can be argued that they have a strong impact on victim conceptualisations of bullying as well as the ways in which they prefer to cope (Escartin et al., 2011). Moreover, cultural dimensions are likely to affect perceptions and behaviours of other parties such as witnesses and perpetrators in bullying scenarios.

Cultures vary on their acceptance of unequal distribution of power; referred to as power orientation (Griffin and Pustay, 2013). This difference may have an impact on victim conceptualisation of bullying as it is directly linked with levels of tolerance of supervisor abusive behaviours (Tyler, Lind and Huo, 1995). Accordingly, in high power distance cultures, victims may perceive aggressive and abusive behaviours of supervisors as normal, although the same behaviours may be labelled as bullying in low(er) power distance cultures. This will affect not only conceptualisation but also the way the victims try to cope with supervisor bullying. In high power distance cultures, the expected reaction of victims may be despair, doing little, if anything, to solve the issue. Alternatively, and more hazardously, they may try to rationalise supervisor behaviours and blame themselves for being exposed to aggressive and abusive acts (Loh et al., 2010). In low power distance cultures, however, victims are aware that abusive supervisor behaviours are not acceptable, and believe they have a right to act (Einarsen, 2000; James, 1992). Accordingly, they may utilise formal mechanisms in order to stop the bully and may make formal complaints.
Witness and perpetrator perceptions and behaviours may also be affected by power distance orientation. In high power distance cultures, witnesses - similar to victims - may believe that supervisors have every right to show aggressive and abusive behaviours, and those behaviours are a natural part of work. Thus, they may not perceive anything unusual when they observe supervisor bullying, and think that there is no need to intervene. This situation will give more power to the perpetrator and create further disadvantage for the victim. From the perpetrators’ perspective, if they have supervisory positions, they perceive their abusive behaviours as normal in the management of subordinates. Thus, without feeling any guilt, they continue to perpetrate bullying behaviours. When compared to low power distance cultures, cultures in which higher power distance orientation is prevalent may create a more bullying tolerant, or even conducive, environment by influencing victim, witness and perpetrator perceptions and behaviours (Loh et al., 2010).

Similar to power orientation, differences in collectivism – individualism, the relative importance of group compared to individual well-being (Hostede, n.d.), may affect victim and witness reactions. In individualistic cultures, individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families. In contrast, collectivism represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hostede, n.d.). It is known that victims may be bullied due to their norm-breaking attitudes and behaviours (Zapf and Einarsen, 2003: 178). In collectivist cultures, the likelihood of being bullied due to the norm-breaking behaviours and attitudes may be higher than in individualist cultures. In such cultures, people are expected to sacrifice their own well-being if it is necessary for the group, and those who do not conform to this rule are perceived as being deserving of some form of social punishment or isolation (Hofstede, n.d.). A famous Japanese
proverb states: “the nail that sticks out must be hammered”. This shows no tolerance for non-conforming behaviour in the highly collectivist Japanese culture. It may also be argued that perpetrators may follow a strategy of making norm-breaking behaviours of victims more visible to influence and gain support from witnesses. In individualistic cultures, however, higher value is placed on the rights of individuals, and individuals do not have to be part of any group to gain respect. In this vein, it might be argued that collectivist cultures would promote different types of bullying based on turning attention to behaviours which break group norms. Research has shown, however, that norm breaking behaviour attracts the attention of bullies in individualist cultures as well; ‘diversity’ in the broadest sense has been linked to workplace bullying (e.g. Omari, 2007).

Societies also vary in terms of uncertainty orientation (Griffin and Pustay, 2013) which is defined as the degree to which members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. If uncertainty avoidance is high, there is a need for laws, rules and frequent use of rituals in order to minimise anxiety (Hofstede, n.d.). Further, during change and restructuring periods, individuals experience greater levels of stress and anxiety than in societies with low uncertainty avoidance. Since the bullying literature reports that work environments characterised by stress and anxiety are more prone to bullying (Aquino and Lamertz, 2004; O’Moore, Seigne, McGuire and Smith, 1998; Rayner, Sheehan and Barker, 1999; Vartia, 1996), it is expected that the level of uncertainty avoidance influences workplace bullying. Based on this, it can be argued that the role of organisational change in triggering workplace bullying is greater in societies where uncertainty avoidance is higher. This argument is consistent with empirical research showing that the risk of being bullied is higher in those societies (Moreno-Jimenez, Rodriguez-Munoz, Salin and Benadero, 2008).
The goal orientation dimension (Griffin and Pustay, 2013) of culture has also been referred to as masculinity versus femininity. Hofstede (n.d.) defines cultures with a strong preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success as masculine; considered to be aggressive and competitive (Griffin and Pustay, 2013). Femininity, a more passive, consensus oriented approach, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life (Hofstede, n.d.). Masculine cultures are logically more open to bullying stimulating competition instead of cooperation, harmony and nurturing. Accordingly, people may deliberately bully others in order to outperform them (Guneri Cangarli, 2009), or they may not be aware of their abusive behaviours due to the competitive work environment, and they may think that what they do is the norm. The former alternative increases the risk of being bullied for high-performers, while the latter for low-performers (Aquino and Lamertz, 2004; Rayner et al., 1999). In feminine cultures, protecting the well-being of others is more important than job performance; as a result, the expected prevalence rate of bullying is lower.

The last cultural dimension which is expected to affect bullying is time orientation (Griffin and Pustay, 2013); that is, variances in societal perception of long term or short term approach to time. Long term oriented cultures treat time as endless and the focus is on making investments for the future. Short term oriented cultures generally exhibit a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and have a focus on achieving quick results (Hofstede, n.d.). It can be argued that the prevalence of bullying may be higher in short term oriented cultures as bullying may provide quick advantages for perpetrators, despite damage to long term relationships. Power et al. (2011) showed that acceptability of bullying is negatively related to long term orientation as people who live in such cultures believe that making investments in long term relationships is very important. Therefore, we can claim that time orientation affects
victim, perpetrator and witness perceptions and reactions, and societies with short term orientation may be more prone to bullying.

The summary, culture is likely to be an important indicator for determining conceptualisation of, and reactions to bullying. There are some contradictions between the dimensions, and no one culture can be said to fit all of the dimensions, but societies with high power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, collectivism and short-term orientation may be more likely to experience bullying. It is important to observe that in addition to culture there are many other variables that may affect perceptions of, and reactions to workplace bullying. For instance, socio-economic development (e.g. unemployment rate and education level) and the existence of comprehensive laws against power abuse, have an impact on victim, witness and perpetrator reactions to workplace bullying (Yamada, 2003: 410). It is apparent that in a country where the unemployment rate is high and laws against power abuse are minimal, the prevalence and tolerance of bullying is likely to be higher. In such contexts, perpetrators feel free to abuse their power with a belief that victims have no other option but to live with the situation, and witnesses do not dare to intervene.

**Workplace Context - Turkey**

Turkey is one of only two countries situated in both Asia and Europe. Its geographical location serves as a bridge between East and West in terms of culture, politics, society and economics. As a result of hundreds of years of interaction with Eastern and Western cultures, Turkish society has achieved a cosmopolitan structure where modernity, tradition and Islam are the main elements (Kabasakal and Bodur, 2002). Although, 99% of the population is constituted by Muslims, Turkey was founded as a secular state after the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Since its foundation, many reforms that aim to close the gap between
Western societies and Turkey have been realised. With the effect of reforms, Turkey has been accepted as a candidate for entry to the European Union (EU enlargement, 2005). In recent times, Islam has seen increasing popularity, bringing with it a different lifestyle for many Turks. The defenders of the Islamic lifestyle offer a totally new position for Turkish foreign policy, and claim that Turkey should build closer ties with other Islamic countries (Kabasakal and Bodur, 2002).

The socio-economic outlook for Turkey indicates that it has a relatively young population with an average age of 28.9 (TUIK, 2012a). Participation in the workforce is relatively low; 50.7% with 8.8% unemployment rate (TUIK, 2012b). In 2011, income per capita was calculated as 10.498 USD (The World Bank, 2011a) with a moderate to high unequal distribution of income (OECD, 2011). According to Hofstede (n.d.), Turkey can be characterised by high power distance (66), collectivism (37), high uncertainty avoidance (85) and a moderate score in masculinity/femininity (45). Therefore, hierarchy, group well-being and unquestioning loyalty are very important in this society.

The ideal supervisor is a father figure directing employees at all times. Rules may be used to reduce tensions due to high uncertainty avoidance, however, in Turkey traditions and religious rituals are more likely to be in use rather than formal mechanisms (Hofstede, n.d.). Turks live for the short-term, and long-term planning is quite rare. This is supported by the GLOBE study, which indicates that future orientation is low (Kabasakal and Bodur, 2002).

**Workplace Context - Australia**

Australia, in the other hand, represents a different profile from Turkey in terms of cultural, economic and social dynamics. Australia is located in the Asia Pacific region, however, it is
Western in history. Australia’s Aboriginal people are thought to have arrived by boat from South East Asia during the last Ice Age, at least 50,000 years ago (Australian Ministry of Tourism, 2012). With the arrival of many European sailors to the coasts of Australia in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, life in the continent changed dramatically; different cities were established mainly by the British. During late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, gold mines were discovered attracting many people to the continent, increasing the cultural diversity of the population. In 1901, Australia’s constitution established the different states a single nation (Australian Ministry of Tourism, 2012). During the 20\textsuperscript{th} century the Australian economy was seriously affected by the world wars, however, thereafter it grew significantly attracting another wave of immigrants from around the world. With rich natural resources and major economic and social reforms, Australian economic and social dynamics were shaped and have since grown and prospered with several significant waves of immigration for economic growth. Currently, people from more than 200 countries live in Australia creating considerable diversity within its population and workforce (Australian Ministry of Tourism, 2012).

The population of Australia has been reported at around 22.7 million in October 2012. Australia’s population, like that of most developed countries is ageing as a result of sustained low fertility and increasing life expectancy (average age 36.8 years) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). Increases in population are not only due to birth rate, but also due to continued immigration. According to statistics, each year almost 200,000 immigrants arrive in Australia. Unemployment rate is relatively low (4.9\%) with 67\% of the population in the workforce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b). World Bank data shows economic wellbeing in Australia is high with 60.642 USD income per capita (The World Bank, 2011b), although there are inequalities in income distribution (OECD, 2011).
Australia as a multicultural society has a range of different values and lifestyles; Hofstede’s (n.d.) country profile indicates low power distance (36), individualism (90), masculinity (61), short term orientation (31) and pragmatism in terms of uncertainty avoidance (51). Within Australian organisations, hierarchy is established for convenience, hiring and promotion decisions are largely based on merit, superiors are usually accessible and managers rely on individual employees and teams for their expertise. Employees are expected to be self reliant and display initiative, and innovative ideas are usually welcome. Individuals strive for quick results within the workplace (Hofstede, n.d.).

**Comparison**

Turkey and Australia have different dynamics in economic as well as social issues. Compared to Turkey, Australia represents a Western style developed country profile where income level is higher and job alternatives are plenty. In terms of cultural characteristics, the main differences between Turkey and Australia are along the power orientation, goal orientation and social orientation dimensions. Moreover, these two countries have different profiles in terms of the existence of laws against bullying. In Australia, bullying has recently been recognised as a workplace problem to the extent that the State of Victoria has enacted anti-bullying legislation under the Criminal Code, and in 2012 there was an inquiry ordered by the Prime Minister into the phenomenon. There have been some high profile cases in the media, and many organisations have anti-bullying codes of conduct. In Turkey, legislation encompassing bullying is new. Although court decisions in favour of victims gain media attention there is still a limited understanding of the phenomenon (Gun, 2011). In both countries, some inroads have been made into understanding, prevention and management of workplace bullying, however, there is still evidence that more needs to be done.
THE STUDY

Cross-cultural comparisons of workplace bullying mainly compare prevalence and victim perceptions of the behaviours that constitute bullying (e.g. Escartin, Zapf, Arrieta and Rodriguez-Carballeira, 2011; Power et al., 2011). In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of workplace bullying it is necessary to compare not only prevalence or victim conceptualisation of bullying, but also coping preferences and styles.

With the aim of understanding the differences and similarities in conceptualisations of bullying as well as comparing victim and witness reactions across cultures, this qualitative study was designed for participants to freely share their experiences. Data was collected in Turkey and Australia where different socio-economic, cultural and legal dynamics affect workplace relationships. In line with the aims of the study, a series of research questions were formulated:

• How might conceptualisation of workplace bullying differ in the two societies?
• What are the differences and similarities in victim reactions in Turkey and in Australia?
• What are the differences and similarities in witness reactions in Turkey and in Australia?
• What contribution can cross cultural understanding make to effective prevention strategies?

Participants and Procedures

University business students in Turkey and Australia were asked to reflect on their workplace experience and contribute their perspectives on bullying. Participants were recruited from two universities in Australia and one in Turkey following ethics clearance at all three universities. Data was collected through an instrument administered via SurveyMonkey®. Participants received the survey link via email after an open invitation in classes. Questionnaires began
with an explanation of the study and consent of the participants. Participation was voluntary and respondents were not able to be identified.

At the end of three months of data collection, 139 students participated in the study; 68% of the respondents completed the survey in Turkey, 59% were female. Around half of the respondents indicated that they were between 22 and 25 years of age, and a further third were 26 to 34. Turkey was recorded as the place of birth of 66% of respondents, with 11% identifying Australia and the remaining 23% falling in the ‘other’ category. Respondents in this category came from places such as Ethiopia, India and China, with the majority of these being in from the Asia Pacific region, reflecting a highly diverse international student body in Australian business schools. More than two thirds of the respondents were postgraduate students, with 67% currently in employment, mostly full-time. There was a broad spread of industry sectors from retail to the public sector. Of the respondents, 31% worked in education. Approximately one third of respondents reported that they worked in national or international/multi-national organisations. The majority of the respondents reported working in junior roles including as trainees, interns or research assistants. Over half of the respondents indicated that they worked in organisations of more than 200 people.

Data collection and analysis

The survey was in five parts, collecting information on: demographics, experiences of bullying, experience as a witness, personal stories and respondent perceptions. The survey contained both closed and open-ended questions and collected stories of workplace bullying. Responses were received in both Turkish and English. Respondents were asked to:

1. Share a bullying experience with details - vertical (by supervisors or subordinates) or horizontal (by peers)
2. Explain why they considered the experience to constitute bullying
3. Outline their reaction, and explain this; and
4. Describe any witness reactions and offer an explanation of the behaviour.

Qualitative data was analysed employing a thematic approach. The data was coded according to the emerging themes which researchers identified, and clusters formed to allow further examination (Creswell, 2013). Early clusters tended to be formed along the lines of the survey as it had been constructed, but analysis was also conducted across the data, and within and between the categories outlined in the survey questions. By employing an iterative process whereby assignment of codes was undertaken by the different researchers, the coding moved away from the survey questions, and highlighted the key themes which were present throughout the responses provided by survey participants. Once themes were identified the data was revisited to draw out any anomalies. This preliminary examination of the data identified a range of themes, which were then examined according to the country in which the data was collected to enable a cross-cultural comparison. The discussion will turn to the themes which emerged, after first examining the exposure of respondents to workplace bullying.

**FINDINGS**

Almost half (48%) of the respondents identified as having been subject to bullying, with the vast majority (63%) of these at work. Of these incidents 73% were classified by the respondent as ‘verbal’, and 51% involved the supervisor with workplace peers also well represented. Data indicated that males were more often identified as perpetrators.
The frequency and duration of incidents varied from one-off and sustained through to multiple and daily. Of the respondents, 77% indicated that they did not make a formal complaint, although 83% reported that others witnessed the incident/s. In addition, 35% of respondents reported having witnessed bullying behaviour themselves, and of these 36% had taken action.

**Cross-cultural comparison of Prevalence Rates and Emerging Themes**

Of the Turkish sample, 44% indicated that they had been subjected to bullying, and more than half of the incidents (58%) took place at work. Consistent with the overall findings, a verbal form of bullying was more prevalent in Turkey with a rate of 68%. Supervisors were identified as perpetrators in 51% of the incidents. In addition to supervisors and peers, 17% of respondents complained about being bullied by clients, suppliers or subordinates. Males were more often identified as perpetrators, either alone (42%) or in concert with females (24%). In Turkey, only 10% of the incidents that were reported as bullying were one-off events. The remaining 90% lasted days, weeks or months with different frequencies. Only 21% of the respondents indicated that they made a formal complaint. The most cited reason for not making a formal complaint was that the abusive behaviours were coming from the supervisor, and respondents indicated that there was no other avenue to lodge a complaint. Data also showed that the majority of perpetrators do not feel the need to hide their abusive behaviours, as only 16% of the incidents took place in private. Not surprisingly, one third (33%) of the Turkish sample reported that they have witnessed bullying incidents, however, only 25% of the witnesses had taken action.

In the Australian sample, the prevalence rate was quite also high and quite similar at 56% with majority of these at work (74%). Of these, 83% of incidents were classified as verbal. Around half (52%) of the incidents involved supervisors. Interestingly, half of the supervisor
bullying incidents also involved peers as perpetrators. In contrast to the Turkish sample, male dominance was not apparent in Australia as only 17% of the perpetrators were male, and 26% of the respondents were bullied by both genders. Similar to Turkey, participants perceived systematic power abuse as bullying; only one Australian participant reported a one-off incident as bullying. Of the respondents 26% reported that they made a formal complaint. The main reason for not making complaint was explained by respondents as a fear of making the situation more complex or worse. Almost half of the bullying incidents (47%) took place both in public and in private, perhaps elements of the bullying behaviour were made worse by covert actions. Of the Australian sample 41% reported that they have witnessed bullying, and more than half of these witnesses (53%) took action. This higher figure may be attributable to tighter regulation around acceptable workplace behaviours in Australia.

Cross-cultural comparison of the data is made complex by the diversity within each of the national groupings, as both Turkey and Australia have dominant cultures with multi-cultural elements. It is this very multi-cultural flavour that was evident in the stories provided by respondents, in that some reported bullying targeting their ‘difference’. Stories of exclusion or being targeted based on gender, age, dress, status, seniority and capability clearly showed the human need for belonging (fitting-in); these stories emanated from both countries. Probably due to its multinational environment, race based bullying was more apparent in Australia. In the stories below TR represents responses from Turkey and AU Australia.

TR: I had a serious argument with security guys due to my different clothing style.

AU: Insults due to appearance... People making sniggering remarks when entering a room or conversation... Overhearing comments made about me.

AU: Working in a male oriented work place as the only female I was often called a stupid girl or blamed for things that I hadn’t done.

AU: As an apprentice and early in my career as a young engineer I was commonly asked to do the most dirty and horrible jobs and mocked.
Analysis of free response data has revealed many commonalities. There is convergence in that themes of competition, conflict, power, politics, perpetrator characteristics, target diversity, target vulnerability and current events in the organisation emerged in both countries. Interestingly, similar ‘over the top’ or extreme management styles were described by participants in both societies and labelled as bullying.

AU: Our store manager yelling at us when we complained about his favourite manager and her treatment of us. He called us a bunch of whining bitches and if we don't like it we can go and work at [company identifier deleted]


TR: One of my managers was speaking disrespectfully towards people whenever he was angry. In addition, once, after a terrible quarrel with another manager, he shouted at everybody at the office and humiliated people. After that, I quit.

TR: One of the managers was always shouting to the subordinates.

There is divergence within the common themes with respect to victim perceptions of the reasons they were being bullied. As explained above, Australia is characterised as a masculine culture which values power, achievement and assertiveness. Therefore, a more competitive climate is expected in Australian workplaces. In line with these expectations, competition was perceived by respondents as one of the main motives of the perpetrators. Victims declared that they were perceived as threats to the career of their supervisors and peers, and that is why they were being bullied.

AU: Undermined...Verbally aggressive... Withholding information... Intimidation... I'm a woman that is knowledgeable. A quiet achiever. I've been informed several times that I'm a threat.

AU: I was the youngest member of the team however had the most experience, I would sometimes suggest new ideas to the manager which I thought would improve the Cafe however it felt to me that she always dismissed my ideas without consideration.
Another main cultural difference between Turkey and Australia is their power distance scores. Turkey (66) rates much higher on Hofstede’s dimension of power distance when compared to Australia (36) (Hofstede, n.d.). This difference reflected itself in stories provided by participants. Although respondents from both societies reported being bullied by peers and even by subordinates, when they were asked to share the most severe bullying incident that they had experienced, Turkish respondents wrote about only supervisor bullying incidents. In Australia, however, peer bullying was also evident among the most severe incidents that victims had experienced. As previously discussed, in high power distance cultures autocratic and paternalistic leadership styles are seen as suitable for managing people; this increases the likelihood of subordinates being bullied by supervisors. On the other hand, in Australia where power distance is much lower, there is less difference between the perceived power bases of peers and supervisors, and the two groups may overlap in terms of notions of control and power, leading to more peer-based or horizontal bullying. The example below illustrates a Turkish manager’s reaction to a perceived loss of power to subordinates.

TR:  *We had such an important project established in the company and I was the project manager for technical related objectives. The customer delivered not only an ... agreement with good annual sales revenue but also the reputation as they were one of the major producers in our industry. The whole organization was very happy with the news the company owner however felt the important decision making privilege he has was slipping out of his hands.... Although he was the boss and he should be happier than anybody in the company he started to act like insane, hardly said hello to anybody in the company, never spoke to the executive team who established the project even to congratulate us for the success. As a result of the attitudes, we started to feel unhappy and in a way we started to think we failed in the project although that was not the case. And in time some of my colleagues resigned from their job one by one.*

Turkey’s high score on uncertainty avoidance showed itself in victim stories describing stressful events and organisational change periods as the reason for being bullied. However, in line with expectations, in the Australian sample there was no specific mention of change as stimulating bullying.
Following restructuring in my organization, the new supervisor started to ignore and humiliate me... It was uncertain to me that how to communicate with him.

In the organizing committee of an event, I was insulted.

The last difference that appeared as an emerging theme was sexual harassment. Evidence from the Turkish data reveals that forms of sexual harassment are seen by respondents as part of the spectrum of bullying behaviours. This is likely to be due to sexual harassment legislation being relatively new in Turkey, having been enacted in 2005; whereas in Australia such behaviours have been the subject of separate harassment legislation as early as the 1970s and therefore separate from bullying as an issue.

Invitation to dinner ... Proposing to stay in a hotel room together... Touching, sharing his sexual fantasies...

Victim Responses in Turkey and Australia

Comparison of victim responses is as important as comparing prevalence rates or emerging themes to gain a comprehensive understanding of bullying due to the fact that it is an escalating process where victim responses play significant roles (Björkqvist, 1992; Zapf and Gross, 2001). Analysis of victim stories yielded many commonalities in terms of coping strategies both in Turkey and Australia. Accordingly, the source of bullying played an important role in victim reactions. When the perpetrator was seen as a superior authority, most of the victims believed that there was nothing they could do. With the effect of perceived powerlessness, they did not make formal complaint.

He was the branch manager, and I was a trainee in the branch.

It was our top manager that did it.

I am just a receptionist and she is my supervisor. I do not want to lose my job!
Another similarity between two societies was about the ineffectiveness of procedures. They were perceived as time consuming and complex, and victims had no confidence in them, so motivation for making formal complaints was quite low.

TR: Because I would have had to spent lots of time and effort. I thought that it would be a long process although I could not be sure that I would get a response from the authorities.

AU: Young, inexperienced and didn't know the procedure.

Probably due to the lack of confidence in formal procedures, victims were afraid that if they made a formal complaint, the situation would get worse. Therefore, they preferred not to use formal mechanisms or even not to share what they faced. Unfortunately, due to this reaction perpetrators may gain more power without facing any challenges.

AU: Scared that it would be blown out of proportion... Possible repercussions for work environment.

TR: I did not make any formal complaint because I was afraid of damaging my professional/business relationship with them.

TR: Not to make things worse

Although there were many commonalities a feeling of vulnerability was more visible in the Turkish data most probably due to tighter economic conditions of the country; respondents were often afraid of losing their jobs if they made a formal complaint or shared the incidents with other parties.

TR: Fear of losing job, and thought that nothing would change.

Witnesses Reactions

The argument that different cultural profiles of Australia and Turkey had an influence on witness behaviour was another factor investigated. Witness reactions were sought in two different parts of the questionnaire. Participants as victims declared witness reactions, if any, and participants also shared their experiences if they witnessed any bullying incidents.
Contrary to expectations, answers from the two societies yielded many commonalities. First, witnesses who chose to stand with the perpetrator and be involved the incident were reported, but rare in both societies. As supported by the literature, these witnesses made the incidents more serious for the victims; in extreme cases their reactions triggered a conflict turning into bullying (Coyne, Seigne and Randall, 2000).

TR: They also verbally attacked me!

TR: They did not do anything to support me. But they also humiliated my job performance, especially how slow I was doing the job.

AU: The witnesses?? Sometimes they laughed thinking that it was funny...

Moreover, witnesses or groups that did nothing during the bullying incidents were apparent in both societies. They and the victims declared many reasons for their inaction ranging from being fearful or not knowing what to do. Although they were not directly harming the victims, witness indifference clearly increased victim desperation.

TR: They did not say anything at all. They tried to object but then we realized that this would not change anything, so they kept silent.

AU: Nothing - nobody knows where to go to do anything.

AU: Not much as they were fearful for themselves.

Besides the silent witness group, there were other witnesses who tried to support the victim but not publicly. In other words, they tried being supportive or to do something to stop the bully, however, their action did not help the victims. Ineffectiveness of their reactions may be due to their fear of the bully and the power they hold. For this reason these witnesses said comforting words to victims behind closed doors or just showed victims that they were also sorry. Those reactions probably meant more to victims than doing nothing as the victims felt that they were not entirely alone.

TR: They did nothing just talk with me behind closed doors.
AU:  Felt sorry for me.

Finally, a witness group that was able to provide active support to victims, and in fact resolve the problem effectively was reported in both societies. They intervened by showing that the victim was not alone or, more effectively, they reported the incident to related authorities and insisted on getting an answer from them. This latter action offered the most to the victim. Fortunately, their existence was reported as frequently as passive supporters or silent witnesses.

TR:  Two of the workers did not go to lunch and stay at branch in order to not leave me alone with manager.

TR:  I warned the department manager and human resources manager

AU:  I intervened and stopped the behaviour; I removed the victim from the situation and placed them in another area permanently. The victim was given support and allowed to build their confidence and have become successful in their profession. The bully was performance managed and went under training and support.

The witness profiles offered in the stories collected here, are consistent with the typology and some of the profiles of bystanders postulated by Paull, Standen and Omari (2012) and are worthy of further investigation.

**CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The paper reported on a study devised to compare the prevalence of workplace bullying, victim conceptualisations and witness reactions to the behaviour in different cultural settings: Turkey and Australia. The main aim of the study was to increase the understanding of how workplace bullying varies across cultures and contexts.

Comparison showed the verbal nature of bullying was apparent in both societies; 68% in Turkey and 83% in Australia. When it comes to systematisation, majority of the participants
labelled systematic incidents (lasting for a period of time and happening with some frequency) as bullying, indicating another similarity. Workplace bullying was perceived by participants both in Turkey and Australia as more a psychological phenomenon which takes place in a systematic manner, consistent with scholarly definitions of bullying (Einarsen and Raknes, 1997). The strong similarity in conceptualisation may be due to the efforts of scholars and the media to increase awareness of workplace bullying. Moreover, as shown in the findings, respondents from both societies reported behaviours which can be placed on a continuum from subtle disrespect to shunning, abuse, humiliation, manipulation and aggression. Power was a central theme in many settings with antecedents at the individual and organisational levels.

The commonalities were not limited to conceptualisations of bullying, but were also apparent in victim reactions. Making a formal complaint as a way to cope with bullying was preferred by a very small proportion of victims in both societies; 21% in Turkey and 26% in Australia. This was clearly against our expectations since due to the differences in cultural and legal structures; there was an expectation of higher formal complaint rates in Australia. However, deeper analysis of victim stories yielded further insights. Besides culture and the existence of laws and regulations against bullying, victims were of the opinion that regulatory procedures were too complex in both countries particularly as respondents appeared to be more junior in status. More importantly, the victims had no confidence in having a fair hearing and achieving objective results if they made a formal complaint. This finding once again indicates that while having laws is important, it is unfortunately not sufficient as a preventative mechanism. This is an area for further investigation, as it is apparent that legislation and policies alone are insufficient.
Although there were many commonalities in prevalence rates, victim responses and conceptualisations of bullying, victim experiences were divergent. For example, the masculine nature of the Australian culture showed itself in stories as victims declared that they were being bullied due to the competitive nature of workplace and due to being perceived as threats. Moreover, change periods were described by victims as stimulating bullying in Turkey where the culture can be characterised by high uncertainty avoidance.

Finally, when victims were asked to share the most serious bullying incident they had experienced, Australian respondents provided stories about both supervisor and peer bullying, however, Turkish respondents shared only supervisor bullying incidents. This may be due to high power distance orientation which gives supervisors excessive power. Findings indicated that supervisors abused their power in both societies with a higher frequency in Turkey. Due to the influence of high power distance, it was expected that the supervisor’s abusive and aggressive behaviours were not perceived as bullying by their subordinates in Turkey. Findings indicated that similar management styles were perceived as bullying in both Turkey and Australia. Although this was different to expectations, the possible explanation may be that the Turkish sample consisted of young people, with a different value system to previous generations (Kuran, 2011). It can be concluded that possibly due to the effects of globalisation and cultural convergence due to the influence of popular media and travel, younger people have lower tolerance levels of aggressive behaviour of supervisors than the previous generations. It can be postulated that the supervisors were more senior and older and therefore behaving in line with traditional cultural values and expectations (e.g. aggressive behaviours, serious criticisms, not delegating power).
Analysis of witness responses identified many differences. Although the responses of witnesses in both societies showed a similar distribution, the number of witnesses who took action was higher in Australia than in Turkey. Australia provides a cultural context with low power distance and individualism which, on the surface, would make intervention by a witness more likely. Therefore, more witnesses were able to take action than in Turkey.

**Managerial Implications**

The main focus of the current study is to identify the differences and similarities in conceptualisations of bullying, and victim and witness reactions rather than comparing only prevalence. Results which yield many similarities in conceptualisations of bullying between the two societies show that bullying is a global workplace problem which creates serious detrimental effects for victims, organisations and society. Workplace bullying is influenced by the cultural and legal context in which it takes place. Therefore, in order to be able to develop comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies, these differences should be taken into consideration. For instance, seeing Australia has a masculine and more competitive work environment specific prevention strategies are required. Having cooperation and organisational citizenship behaviours be rewarded may be helpful to soften a tough competitive climate and decrease the likelihood of being bullied. On the other hand, Turkey’s cultural characteristics that trigger workplace bullying are more about its high uncertainty avoidance and power distance. In relation to uncertainty avoidance, it is obvious that well defined procedures and effective use of communication channels are required during organisational change in order to decrease employee anxiety and in turn risk of bullying behaviour. Finally, specific training programs that aim to close the gap between different groups (e.g. gender related, generations and cultural norms) by addressing employee expectations will be useful in decreasing the prevalence of supervisor bullying in both
countries and contexts. As expected, implications are not limited to Turkey and Australia but can be extended to societies which are characterised by masculinity, high uncertainty avoidance and high power distance; either one or all of them. These culture specific intervention and prevention strategies are also important for multi-national companies. In such companies, managers and human resource practitioners may be able to intervene effectively, however, culture specific issues may be forgotten due to different dynamics.

Furthermore, the outcome of the prevention strategy may differ according to culture. In low power distance and individualistic cultures (e.g. Australia) where the rights of individuals are valued and people are less afraid of hierarchy, strategies that assign some responsibility to witnesses may provide more effective results than in high power distance and collectivist cultures. Therefore, the fact that effective ways for intervening in bullying varies across cultures, making one type of intervention effective in one culture, and very improper in another, should be taken into consideration.

Aside from the effect of culture in developing and implementing prevention and intervention strategies, the current study clearly identifies that actions that increase people’s confidence about the procedures are very important and required in both societies. This indicates once again the responsibility of management for decreasing prevalence of bullying in workplace.

**Future Directions**

This study used a convenience sample which consisted of undergraduate and graduate students in three universities. Therefore, some respondents were in junior positions and had very limited work experience possibly decreasing their likelihood of being bullied or observing bullying. Moreover, samples composed of university students may not represent the
value systems of entire societies. Therefore, although they shared many experiences regarding workplace bullying, conducting the same study with a comprehensive sample may provide different results in terms of emerging themes and reactions.

The findings were limited to two societies having different cultural and socio-economic structures. To make the research more comprehensive, extending the study to different societies will be helpful to increase the understanding of cross-cultural dynamics that affect workplace bullying. Finally, this study examined issues from victim and witness perspectives being silent on the (alleged) perpetrator views. Thus, in a future study, perpetrator motives and strategies may be compared across cultures.

REFERENCES


Vartia, M. 1993. “Psychological harassment (bullying, mobbing) at work”. In K. Kauppinen-Toropanien (Ed.), *OECD Panel group on women, work and health*. Helsinki; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.


