Causes & Consequences of Interpersonal Conflicts: A Survey of Labor in Public Sector of Baluchistan, Pakistan

Zainab Bibi[*], Jahanvash Karim[**], Shafiq-ur-Rehman[***] & Siraj ud Din[****]

Abstract

The main focus of this study was to investigate and compute the relationship between uncivil and discriminatory behavior of public sector employees to their interpersonal conflicts. A structured questionnaire was developed by capitalizing on the existing literature which was then used as a survey tool. The target population was public sector employees in Baluchistan. The main hypothesis was 'interpersonal conflict is both the result as well as a cause of mistreatment and discrimination.' The result of the study showed a significant and positive correlation between mistreatment and interpersonal conflict (r = 0.399) however, surprisingly, discrimination was having no relation with interpersonal conflict (r=0.001). Implications for the managers are also given to manage the conflict in the organizations.

Keywords: Interpersonal conflict; Mistreatment; Discrimination.

Introduction

'Interpersonal conflict is also known as dyadic conflict, refers to the disagreement or incompatibility between two or more organizational members of the same or different hierarchical levels or units' (Rahim, 2002, 216).

Varied meanings are attached with the concept of conflict due to its uses in many different disciplines. It can be used to express disputes like a bloody skirmish in a war or a personal dispute. Conflict in the organization can usually be viewed as either antagonistic interaction or antagonistic psychological relations (Ohiwerei & Omo-Ojugo, 2008).

[*] Dr. Zainab Bibi, Institute of Management Sciences, University of Balochistan, Quetta.
[**] Dr. Jahanvash Karim, Institute of Management Sciences, University of Balochistan, Quetta.
[***] Dr. Shafiq-ur-Rehman, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. Email: Shafiq64@yahoo.com
[****] Dr. Siraj ud Din, Department of Management Sciences, Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak.

Interpersonal conflict is an unavoidable phenomenon in any organization. Organizations with little or no conflict generally fall to stagnation and too much conflict is also detrimental to the organization (Rahim, 2011).   Research shows that interpersonal conflict is very common to organizations (Ongori, 2009). A survey in 9 countries found that almost 85% employees deal with conflict to some extent and 29% are involved in dealing with it most often (CPP, Global human capital report, 2008). It is documented that managers spend 40% of his/her time in resolving conflict (see e.g, Curtin & Belak). Research reveals that some conflicts generate more negative results than positive which may be due to its nature, size and also how manager deal with it.

Interpersonal conflicts are universal at the workplaces irrespective of their type, size, nature and location. Management has to be aware and capable of handling interpersonal and other conflicts in a timely and effective manner. However, it depends on the 'accuracy of understanding the interpersonal conflict as a psycho-intellectual process in a particular situation and the conflicting parties.' There are several models to view the issue including one that portrays interpersonal conflict both as the 'Result' of 'Mistreatment & Discrimination' as well as the 'Cause' of these two factors. This paper reports the 'Application of this model' to explicate these behavioral pattern (interpersonal conflict, mistreatment and discrimination) practiced by employees of public sector organizations.

Therefore, conflict management strategies need to be so designed that they promote organizational learning, which is in turn expected to lead for achieving long-term effectiveness. In order to attain this objective, conflict management strategies should be designed to enhance critical and innovative thinking to learn the process of diagnosis and intervention in the right problem (Rahim, 2002).

Literature Review

Mistreatment
Mistreatment is a harmful behavior in which one person harms another, whether intentionally or not (Barsky, 2002). Mistreatment refers to several behaviors like incivility, violence, and aggression (Pearson & Porath, 2005). Workplace incivility is considered as less intense at the mistreatment continuum because such acts are less extreme and less forceful. They are believed to have a lower negative reactivity than other forms of mistreatment. Such actions or behaviors are perceived less 'harmful' or 'serious' as compared to other forms of organizational mistreatment: violence and aggression (Vickers, 2006).

Cortina et al (2001) report an evidence of relationship between interpersonal mistreatment and psychological health of American

employees. Other researchers found that employee victims felt upset and confused, embarrassed and low self-esteem. They also suffered from different chronic psycho-somatic diseases (Blasé & Blasé, 2003).

Discrimination

Workplace discrimination is conceptualized as a form of unequal treatment involving decisions that directly affect the employment status of individuals or their treatment in relation to their terms and conditions of employment (Redman & Snape, 2005). The phenomenon is termed as discrimination when an employee feels being treated as unfair/ unfavorable and this treatment, he perceive is not due to his job performance or qualifications or personality rather his/her belonging to a race, religion, nationality, disability or other generally.(allbusiness, 2007).

Discrimination is not always illegal or immoral, as anti-discrimination laws can permit more favorable treatment for members of disadvantaged groups and reserving some position for male only, which is discriminatory on sex grounds (Banton, 1998). Furthermore all discrimination is not against the law (Education Australia, 2002), for example, children, women and weaker has to be discriminated against the normal people.

*Causes & Consequences of Interpersonal Conflict*

Researchers are conducting studies on aggression and violence due to conflicts in the workplace (Luthans, 2005: 387). Several reasons or causes, or sources of conflict have been identified by the researchers. For example, personality differences, insufficient information, role incompatibility and environmental stress (Whetten & Cameron, 1991; Fred Luthans, 2005: 391). Another researcher have explored that interpersonal conflicts arise from a variety of sources: organizational change, value differences, threats to status, lack of trust, personality clashes, incivility (Newstrom, 2007: 255-56). Similarly many scholars argue about the workplace discrimination as a major cause of workplace conflict and violence (Jones, 2010, Grace, 2010) and CPP survey (2008) found that 10% of employees identified perceived discrimination as a cause of workplace conflict.

However, it is argued that these are reasons for activating mistreatment and discrimination among the employees. When there is mistreatment and discrimination, it results into real-world and practical conflict. Some writers argue that interpersonal conflict is a dependent variable and is an effect of uncivil and discriminatory behavior (See for example, Greenberg & Baron, 1997; Health Weekly magazine, article 1999; Schwartz, 1997; Discrimination, n.d.; Vickers, 2006; Cortina et al

2001; Johnson & Indvik, 2001; Ramsey, 2005; Education Australia, 2002; Jones, 2010; Grace, 2010).

Once conflict prevails, it demonstrates again in the form of increased mistreatment and discriminatory behavior on the part of all the parties in the conflict. Some of the authors treat it as an independent variable and argue that interpersonal conflict is a cause of discrimination and incivility at workplace (see for example, Pearson & Porath, 2005; Johnson & Indvik, 2001, Comeau, 2010). Thus, conflict (such as interpersonal conflict) works both as consequence as well as cause of mistreatment and discrimination.

Keeping in view the above discussion, we drew a following model on the relationship of these three variables Figure 1 Showing the Schematic Diagram of the Theoretical Framework
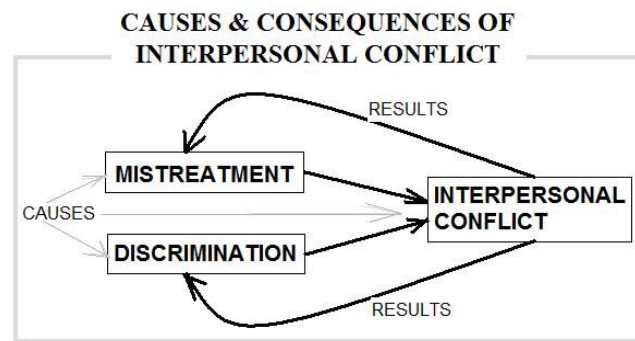
Hypotheses
1. All Three Variables are Highly Correlated. [H^1]
2. Mistreatment & Discrimination Predicts INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT. [H^2]
3. Interpersonal Conflict Results into MISTREATEMENT. [H^3]
4. DISCRIMINATION is determined by Interpersonal Conflict. [H^4]

Research Design

Survey
Survey is the most widely used method of data collection in social sciences (Babbie, 1993: 256-257) especially when the focus is respondents' attitudes measurement regarding some aspect of organizational behavior. Therefore, survey is the most popular approach, which has been excessively used by the researchers on conflicts (see for example, Volkwein & Kelli, 2000; Friedman et al., 2000; DeDreu & VanVianen, 2001; Medina et al., 2002; Slabbert, 2004; Guerra et al.,

2005; Ohiwerei & Omo-Ojugo, 2008; Ongori, 2009). The same has been used in this project.

Population & Sample
The target population was comprised of all the workforce of public sector organizations in Baluchistan. The sample population from which the sample for the study was drawn included:

1. GSO (Grid System Operation) and Central Circle of Quetta Electric Supply Company (QESCO);
2. Phones & Telegraphs Zones of Pakistan Telecommunication Corporation Limited.
3. The number of originally sampled employees was 299 to whom questionnaires were distributed however, 254 returned filled questionnaires thereby giving 85% of return rate.

Table 1: List of the Samples and Return-Rate

Organization	Circle	Original Sample	Rate of Return	Response Rate (%)
QESCO	Central	99	88	89%
	GSO	60	60	100%
PTCL	Phones	42	32	76%
	Telegraph	98	74	76%

Tools for Data Collection and Analysis
Topic was defined and formulated through the literature review on interpersonal conflict, mistreatment and discrimination along with their mutual relationships (secondary data). The extracted concepts were then operationalized into variables and attributes for preparing a structured questionnaire to assemble first-hand (primary) data on the topic. More precisely, the theoretical model developed from the literature was used to collect field data for analysis. The analysis were undertaken to test the hypotheses that were generated from the literature.

Findings of the Study

Testing of Hypotheses
Hypothesis 1: All Three Variables are Highly Correlated (H[1]).

Table 2: Correlations between Variables (n=254)

		Mistreatment	Discrimination
Mistreatment	r	1	
	p-value	.	
Discrimination	r	.454(**)	1
	p-value	.000	.

Interpersonal Conflict	r	**.399(**)**	**.001**
	p-value	.000	.990

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

i). There is significant correlation between Mistreatment and Discrimination (r = .454).

ii). The relation between Mistreatment and Interpersonal Conflict is strong (r = .399)

iii). However, there is no correlation between Discrimination and Interpersonal Conflict (r = .001 with *p-value* of 0.99).

Hypothesis 2: Mistreatment & Discrimination Predicts Interpersonal Conflict (H^2).

Table 2: Regression of Mistreatment & Discrimination on Interpersonal Conflict

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
.448(a)	.201	.194	.98065	31.491	.000(a)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.197	.529		2.263	.025
Mistreatment	1.295	.163	.503	7.936	.000
Discrimination	-.560	.156	-.227	-3.591	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Discrimination, Mistreatment
b. Dependent Variable: Interpersonal Conflict

Table 2 reports the regression of mistreatment and discrimination as the causes of interpersonal conflict. As the table shows about 20% (R^2 = .201) of variation in dependent variable is explained by the independents. Furthermore, both the independent variables have p-values of .000 showing powerful influence.

Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal Conflict Defines Mistreatment (H^3).

Table 3: Regression of Interpersonal Conflict on Mistreatment

R	R^2	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
.399(a)	.160	.156	.38965	47.826	.000(a)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.604	.082		31.607	.000
Interpersonal Conflict	.155	.022	.399	6.916	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Interpersonal Conflict
b. Dependent Variable: Mistreatment

Table 3 tells that Mistreatment is explained by interpersonal conflict. The degree of determination is 16% (R^2 = .160). The *p*-value of 0.000 suggests the 100% significance of interpersonal conflict as the predictor or cause of mistreatment.

Hypothesis 4: Interpersonal Conflict Explains Discrimination (H^4).

Table 4: Regression of Interpersonal Conflict on Discrimination

R	R^2	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
.001(a)	.000	-.004	.44461	.000	.990(a)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.148	.094		33.487	.000
Interpersonal Conflict	.000	.026	.001	.012	.990

a. Predictors: (Constant), Interpersonal Conflict
b. Dependent Variable: Discrimination

Unlike regression of interpersonal conflict on mistreatment, Table 4 shows that interpersonal conflict does not explain the variation in discrimination. There is .001 of correlation between the two variables. So, interpersonal conflict is not playing any role as a cause of discrimination.

Table 5: Summary of all the Results from Regression Analysis

Independents	Dependents	Statistic	Effects
Mistreatment & Discrimination	Interpersonal Conflict	R^2= 0.201 (20%)	2/2 p-val of .000
Interpersonal Conflict	Mistreatment	R^2= 0.160	p-val = .000
	Discrimination	R^2= 0.000 (0%)	p-val = .99

Discussions
This study investigated the relationship of interpersonal conflict with incivility and discriminatory behavior. The relationship between incivility and interpersonal conflict was found positive and significant. These findings support the prior researches that found some form of mistreatment as cause of interpersonal conflict (c.f, CPP global human capital report, 2008). The survey results revealed that 13% reported mistreatment as cause of workplace conflict. The present study found no relationship between interpersonal conflict and discrimination. These results may be due to the complex nature of discrimination depending on the cultural context. It is also possible that employees did not understand the concept of discrimination based on protected characteristics or they may be suffering from some other form of discrimination. Some

discriminations are so veiled that identifying these are difficult which are termed as micro-inequities (Mary T. Rowe,1990)

But in spite of its minor nature its effects are devastating. According to Pearson et al., (2000), the complexity of relationship facilitated by technologies, stress due to work and information over load which lead to time pressure and faddish corporate initiatives such as employee diversity, downsizing, budget cuts, pressure for productivity, and the part time and temporary employees who have weaker connection to the organization – all serve as potential causes to increase workplace incivility. And these disruptive behaviors results in workplace conflict. Johnson & Indvik (2001) note that in a multicultural workplace, workers of different backgrounds and languages react very differently to the same behavior and also the chance of misunderstanding increases, giving rise to conflict.

Some forms of conflicts always generate negative outcomes regardless of their occurrence rate. These include personality focused conflicts and argumentations over things that are hard to change. For example, sometimes conflict is stimulated for self-serving purposes or using it as a natural, legitimate organizational process for contrived, illegitimate personal purposes (Whetten & Cameron, 1991). Conflict is not always bad and all conflicts are not bad( ), .rather, it can either be productive or nonproductive depending on the situation and management strategies (Newstrom, 2007:257).

Conclusions
The study has examined the relationship between interpersonal conflict and mistreatment and discrimination. The results showed positive and strong correlation between interpersonal conflict and mistreatment. The study found no relationship between interpersonal conflict and discrimination. Therefore, further research is needed to find out the real causes of this unexpected result. Mistreatment and discriminations are negative phenomena associated with interpersonal conflict. It is therefore indispensable that a proper diagnosis of interpersonal conflicts should focus on the intensity of the conflict, the type, the size, the handling styles, sources of conflict, and most importantly its effectiveness (Rahim, 2002). Since interpersonal conflict is nearly inevitable therefore management has to search for ways in which any kind of conflict can be diverted into constructive outcomes (Newstrom, 2007:257).

Recommendations
Keeping in view the strong relationship between mistreatment and interpersonal conflict, the management of an organization should be on constant watch that conflict should not turn from task to personality clashes because it is argued that personality conflict is almost always

dysfunctional. Second, there are different styles of dealing with conflicting situation. Management should know which styles will be more suitable and when intervention is necessary. Third, mistreatment in any form should not be borne by management and there should be zero tolerance policy it. Mistreatment whether low intensity like incivility or of major form like aggression and violence, are equally dangerous for workplace environment. Finally, Managers should be trained in conflict management so that they may be able to diagnose, analyze, and manage it in more productive way. The training should also be given regarding workplace etiquettes. Furthermore, research is needed on workplace discrimination to know whether respondents clearly understand the concepts of discrimination.

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