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Premilla D'Cruz Megan Paull Maryam Omari Burcu Guneri-Cangarli

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Target experiences of workplace bullying: insights from Australia, India and Turkey

Premilla D'Cruz
Organisational Behaviour Area,
Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India
Megan Paull
Centre for Responsible Citizenship and Sustainability,
School of Business and Governance, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia
Maryam Omari
School of Business and Law, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia, and
Burcu Guneri-Cangarli
School of Economics, Izmir University of Economics, Izmir, Turkey

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore target experiences of workplace bullying across Australia, India and Turkey, uncovering cross-cultural convergence and divergence.

Design/methodology/approach – A questionnaire-based qualitative data survey of business school students with current/prior work experience ($n = 399$) was undertaken. In total, 114 respondents (57 Australian, 34 Indian, 23 Turkish) identified themselves as targets of workplace bullying. Close-ended data pertaining to sociodemographic details were analysed via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for descriptive statistics while open-ended data pertaining to experiences of bullying were thematically analysed against pre-figured categories derived from literature.

Findings – Manifestations of, etiology of and coping with workplace bullying were similar across all three countries, highlighting cultural universals. Clear variations in source of bullying behaviour and availability and use of formal interventions as well as more subtle variations relating to coexistence with category-based harassment, outcomes and bystander behaviour underscored the influence of national culture.

Research limitations/implications – Inclusion of a student population, notwithstanding their work experience, as well as reliance on the questionnaire as a tool pose limits in terms of external validity and communication congruence.

Practical implications – Understanding into the similarities and differences of workplace bullying across cultures facilitates the design of interventions tailor-made for a particular society, serving as inputs for international/multi-national and offshored business enterprises.

Originality/value – The study, focusing on multiple aspects of target experiences, not only draws on both dimensional and metaphorical cross-cultural frameworks but also includes geographically dispersed and socially diverse nations. Thus, it extends insights from previous cross-cultural explorations of workplace bullying which, apart from being few in number, are limited either by their frameworks, spatial range and/or thematic coverage.

Keywords Cross-cultural studies, Interventions, Targets, Workplace bullying, Cultural dimensions, Cultural metaphors

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Workplace bullying (also termed workplace emotional abuse or workplace harassment) encompasses subtle and/or obvious negative behaviours embodying aggression, hostility, intimidation and harm, generally characterised by persistence, displayed by an individual

and/or group to another individual and/or group at work, privately and/or publicly, in real and/or virtual forms, in the context of an existing or evolving unequal power relationship (adapted from D'Cruz and Noronha, 2013; Einarsen *et al.*, 2011; Tracy *et al.*, 2006). Described as unethical behaviour that violates basic norms of socially acceptability (Ramsay *et al.*, 2011), bullying is considered an extreme work-related stressor (Zapf *et al.*, 1996). Though the study of workplace bullying, originating in Scandinavia in the 1980s (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011), is now conducted worldwide (Branch *et al.*, 2013), a cross-cultural lens is largely missing (Escartin *et al.*, 2011; Loh *et al.*, 2010) despite the long-standing recognition that culture influences behaviour (Hoel and Salin, 2003). Indeed, while there is burgeoning research on workplace bullying which facilitates better understanding and management of the problem, generalised information devoid of context is detrimental to the endeavour (Omari and Paull, 2016), particularly since there is increasing incidence of the phenomenon worldwide, given the contemporary business environment (D'Cruz, 2015). Available literature includes three empirical quantitative inquiries influenced by dimensional cross-cultural models (namely, those of Hofstede and Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE)). Findings here emphasise that while workplace bullying is universally considered unwelcome, variations in acceptability, source, manifestations and outcomes due to power distance, humane orientation, performance orientation and future orientation are apparent (Escartin *et al.*, 2011 studying Spain and Costa Rica; Loh *et al.*, 2010 comparing Australia and Singapore; Power *et al.*, 2013 exploring 14 countries).

The present paper which reports a qualitative study of targets' experiences of workplace bullying comparing Australia, India and Turkey progresses this agenda on three fronts. First, targets constitute the most critical group in bullying, being the vulnerable party requiring assistance (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011). Cross-cultural insights add to existing literature on targets by providing sound bases for interventions customised for each societal context, drawing attention to an urgent but overlooked area (Paull and Omari, 2016). With Australia, India and Turkey being conventionally considered different, their inclusion in the inquiry was expected to extend both knowledge base and application approaches through the inherent divergence. Second, adopting a cross-cultural lens derived from combining dimensional (Steers *et al.*, 2013) and metaphorical (Gannon and Pillai, 2013) frameworks allows for a comprehensive understanding of each societal context. Instead of a single framework that limits the depth of insights possible (Gannon, 2009), an integrated perspective facilitates a realistic portrayal of cultural complexity, serving as an appropriate backdrop from which target experiences can be examined and interventions suggested. Third, qualitative methods provide well-grounded, rich, contextualised and holistic descriptions and explanations of experiences and processes, ensuring the preservation of complexity and the assessment of causality (Creswell, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The focus on respondents' sense-making deepens insights into cross-cultural influences by incorporating an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the problem (Bryman and Burgess, 1999).

The paper proceeds through the twin frameworks of target experiences of workplace bullying built up from the substantive area and of cross-cultural perspectives integrating dimensional and metaphorical models per study country. The method, findings and discussion follow.

Target experiences

Workplace bullying embodies a target orientation where the bully singles out a colleague, abusing the latter to the point of victimisation and defencelessness (D'Cruz, 2012; Einarsen *et al.*, 2011). The direction of negative acts could be downwards,

horizontal, upwards (Tracy *et al.*, 2006) or cross-level co-bullying (D'Cruz and Rayner, 2013), indicative of source. Person-related manifestations include making insulting remarks, excessive teasing, spreading gossip or rumours, persistent criticism, intimidation and threats. Task-related manifestations include giving unreasonable deadlines or unmanageable workloads, excessive monitoring of work and assigning meaningless tasks or even no tasks (Einarsen and Hoel, 2001). Such displays which are overt and/or subtle (Samnani, 2013) and predatory or dispute-related (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011) may be carried out by one or more bullies towards one or more targets simultaneously or separately, being limited to just the protagonists involved or in full view of other colleagues, also known as bystanders/witnesses (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005).

Etiologically, workplace bullying is attributed to characteristics of the individual protagonists, namely, bullies and targets (Zapf and Einarsen, 2011), and to features of work organisations (Salin and Hoel, 2011). Bullies engage in abusive behaviours to protect their self-esteem, due to lack of social skills and as micropolitical behaviour, whereas targets experience harassment on account of personality factors, social skills and group dynamics (Zapf and Einarsen, 2011). Organisational antecedents encompass organisational culture and climate, leadership, job design and work organisation and organisational change (Salin and Hoel, 2011), and these operate either within the work-environment hypothesis where situational factors trigger bullying between individuals (Salin and Hoel, 2011) or the "organisation-as-bully" conceptualisation where bullying is embedded in organisational design (D'Cruz, 2012). Additionally, workplace bullying could be jointly enacted with category-based harassment to the point of being behaviourally conflated though conceptually distinct (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2013).

Targets experience severe physical, emotional and behavioural strain, indicative of poor health and decreased well-being (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012). Low self-esteem, self-hatred, sleep problems, anxiety, anger, depression, suspicion, bitterness, concentration difficulties, chronic fatigue, somatic problems and suicidal thoughts are common (Hogh *et al.*, 2011). Targets are usually unable to successfully apply problem-focused coping strategies, including intra-organisational grievance and complaint mechanisms, to ameliorate/resolve the situation and end up opting for emotion-focused, passive and avoidant strategies, often exiting the organisation (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2010; Omari and Paull, 2013; Zapf and Gross, 2001). Targets feel cornered, helpless and powerless over time, underscoring that bullying develops into a no-win and no-control situation for them (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2010). Yet, instances where targets display counter-aggression (Lee and Brotheridge, 2006), invoking reciprocal bullying (Omari, 2007), cannot be ruled out.

The breadth of issues included in available literature sets the direction for our inquiry, highlighting various aspects of targets' experiences that must be studied through a cross-cultural lens to ascertain similarities and differences across societies. By uncovering universal principles and cross-cultural variations undergirding source, manifestations, etiology, outcomes, coping, interventions and bystander behaviour, we explore the extent to which knowledge generated in one cultural setting is transferable to others (Escartin *et al.*, 2011) and organisations can develop not only their own protocol of conduct but also appropriate measures to prevent and manage workplace bullying in keeping with recent calls for global codes of business ethics and standards for human resources (HR) processes and practices (Power *et al.*, 2013).

Cross-cultural perspectives
Scholarship focusing on national culture has largely been dominated by dimensional or bi-polar approaches that reflect an etic or culture-general understanding which allows

for comparison of different societies on common parameters (Gannon, 2009). Hofstede's work and the more recent GLOBE project are most popular here (Steers *et al.*, 2013). Complementing the dimensional framework is the emergent metaphorical approach that reflects an emic or culture-specific understanding which allows for an appreciation of each society's particularities and paradoxes (Gannon, 2009). Considering the combination of these dual approaches as instrumental in ensuring a complete and accurate depiction of a society, we relied on their joint contributions to draw up profiles of the three study countries. Steers *et al.'s* (2013) integrated core dimensional model (see Table I (which subsumes Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, Hofstede, Hall, Trompenaars, Schwartz and GLOBE)) and Gannon and Pillai's (2013) country-specific metaphors were adopted to this end.

Australia

Steers *et al.* (2013) described Australia as individualistic, rule-based, egalitarian, mastery-oriented and monochronic. Gannon and Pillai (2013) capture this equality-matching society through its outdoor recreational activities. Apart from its wide international linkages and multi-cultural immigrant population, Australia maintains a distinct national identity combining natural history with material development, a contemporary outlook with respect for its original inhabitants and a unique linguistic tradition as well as individualism with mateship.

India

As per Steers *et al.'s* (2013) model, India is collectivistic, relationship-based, hierarchical, mastery-oriented and polychronic. Highlighting India's predominantly Hindu traditions through the dance of Shiva and contemporary diversity via a kaleidoscope, Gannon and Pillai (2013) underscore the contradictions inherent in this country. Inequality, prejudice, patriarchy, deprivation and corruption coexist with familism, spiritualism, tolerance, materialism and modernity in a state of dynamic evolution.

Turkey

Viewed from Steers *et al's* (2013) perspective, Turkey is collectivistic, relationship-based, hierarchical and polychronic, combining mastery and harmony. Gannon and Pillai (2013), invoking the coffee house to represent Turkish authority-ranking culture, describe its emphasis on both Islam and secularism, its reflection of a male-dominated culture, its provision for communication, recreation and community integration and its ubiquitous presence across the country notwithstanding different material manifestations.

Core dimension	Attributes
Power distance – distribution of authority in society	Hierarchical or egalitarian
Social relationships – basic building block of society	Individualistic or collectivistic
Environmental relationship – link with social and natural environment	Mastery-oriented or harmony-oriented
Time and work patterns – organisation and management of work and non-work activities	Monochronic or polychronic
Uncertainty and social control – degree of uniformity versus uniqueness in society	Rule-based or relationship-based
Source: Derived from Steers *et al.* (2013, pp. 417-429)	

Table I.
Steers *et al.'s* (2013) core dimensions of culture

The presence of workplace bullying has been earlier established in all the study countries (D'Cruz, 2015, 2016; D'Cruz and Rayner, 2013; Guneri, 2008; Guneri-Cangarli, 2016, Omari, 2007, Omari and Paull, 2013, Paull and Omari, 2015). Legislation specifically addressing bullying is present in Turkey and Australia but is yet to be initiated in India where laws against category-based harassment exist. In Turkey, the prevention of bullying mandate, issued in 2011, underlines the responsibility of management for prevention but does not specify sanctions. In Australia, amendments to the Fair Work Act 2009 applied from January 2014 to include workplace bullying but these do not pertain to all work settings.

Method
The inquiry aimed at understanding target experiences of workplace bullying in terms of source, manifestations, etiology, outcomes, coping, interventions and bystander behaviour within a cross-cultural framework to determine areas of convergence and divergence. The focus on respondents' subjective perceptions warranted an exploratory and a qualitative approach which emphasises the depiction of social phenomena from the point of view of the people studied (Bryman and Burgess, 1999), bringing an interpretive and naturalistic angle (Creswell, 1998) and allowing for holism, complexity (Creswell, 1998), causality and chronology (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

An open-ended questionnaire capturing individual experiences as qualitative data were developed and administered via SurveyMonkey® to respondents in the three study countries. This facilitated understanding these individuals' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations, as expressed in their own words. Apart from sociodemographic characteristics, respondents' detailed experiences of being targets of workplace bullying were supplemented with a few closed-ended questions on the source of bullying, the option of filing formal complaints and the presence of bystanders.

Respondents were business students in Australia, India and Turkey recruited from two universities in Australia, one management school in India and one management school in Turkey, following ethics clearance at all four institutions. Respondents received the survey link via e-mail after an open invitation shared by each researcher in a range of mainly postgraduate classes. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, based on informed consent, confidentiality of the respondent's identity and choice of withdrawal.

Whereas sociodemographic characteristics and close-ended responses were computed as frequencies via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, thematic analysis of qualitative data informed the study findings, capturing respondents' perspectives as targets. Though major themes (namely, source, manifestations, etiology, outcomes, coping, interventions and bystander behaviour) were pre-determined from the substantive area, themes and sub-themes emerged from the data facilitating the inductive component integral to qualitative approaches. In developing sub-themes and themes, the researchers "immersed" themselves in the data (Crabtree and Miller, 1992) thereby identifying emergent categories and patterns (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Linkages between patterns and categories were used to develop sub-themes. Sub-themes which held together in a meaningful yet distinct way were grouped into themes. After country-specific thematic analyses following the foregoing process, comparison between the three study countries was undertaken to establish universal and variable aspects of targets' experiences.

Each of the researchers on the team undertook the analysis independently for all the countries involved, going through the phases described above. Once completed, the researchers shared their individual analyses. Differences were resolved by reverting to

the data for clarity. Investigator triangulation, peer debriefing, self-reflexivity and prolonged engagement with the data facilitated trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1999). After the findings were agreed upon, the researchers jointly worked towards cultural explanations drawing on each one's country-level expertise.

The findings section, beginning with a description of sociodemographics, elaborates on source, manifestations, etiology, outcomes, coping and bystander behaviour. Interventions are subsumed partially under outcomes (professional help) and partially under coping (complaints process and union action) and are presented as such below.

Respondent sociodemographics

Whereas 399 students (30 per cent from Australia, 30 per cent from Turkey and 40 per cent from India) participated in the inquiry, 114 (29 per cent) reported having been targets of bullying at work, forming the final sample. The experiences of this group (also referred to as respondents henceforth) are presented in the findings section along with illustrative vignettes (quotes represent each country and exemplify the range of themes/sub-themes; AUS indicates Australia, IND indicates India and TUR indicates Turkey).

Respondents included 53 per cent men and 47 per cent women, mainly between 26 and 34 years of age (47 per cent). With 59 per cent being employed during data collection, all respondents had previous or current work experience. Sector-wise, respondents were largely from retail (16 per cent), education (14 per cent) or government administration/defence/civil services (14 per cent). About 49 per cent of the sample belonged to organisations whose headcount exceeded 200 people while approximately 51 per cent were from national or international/multi-national organisations. Entry-level/junior positions were held by the largest number of respondents (27 per cent of the sample). Country-wise, Australia accounted for 50 per cent ($n = 57$) of the respondents while India and Turkey accounted for 30 per cent ($n = 34$) and 20 per cent ($n = 23$), respectively.

Findings

Targets' experiences of workplace bullying, presented below under the major themes of source, manifestations, etiology, outcomes, coping and bystander behaviour, highlight points of convergence and divergence across the three study countries (see Table II for a summary).

Source and manifestations

While superiors remained the source of bullying for most Indians (85 per cent) and Turks (82 per cent), Australians indicated both superiors (58 per cent) and peers (44 per cent). In addition, subordinates were referred to by six Australian respondents. The hierarchical, authority-ranking nature of Indian and Turkish societies *vis-à-vis* the egalitarian, equality-matching nature of Australian society may account for these cross-cultural differences. Earlier work in Australia (Branch *et al.*, 2004; Omari, 2007), where significant horizontal and upwards bullying has been reported, echoes these findings.

Targets largely reported experiences of verbal abuse, often involving shouting/screaming/yelling, confronting, using rough language (including expletives) and mocking, displayed in various person-related and task-related forms. Ignoring, excluding and isolating were also described. A small number of targets spoke of threats of physical abuse. Accusing, spreading lies, gossiping, maligning, making unfavourable comparisons with others, name calling and stalling career development

Theme	Australia	India	Turkey	Convergence or divergence
Source	Superiors and peers	Superiors	Superiors	Divergence
Manifestations	Person- and task-related bullying	Person- and task-related bullying	Person- and task-related bullying	Convergence
Coexistence of category-based harassment	Gender-based harassment	Gender-based harassment	Gender-based harassment	Convergence
	Racial discrimination linked to inward migration (including international students)	Racial discrimination reported by respondents with expatriate experiences	Racial discrimination reported by respondents with expatriate experiences	Convergence (variation in underlying context)
		Religious and regional harassment		Divergence (caste in India and region of origin in Turkey did not emerge due to sample characteristics)
Etiology	Protagonist- and organisational-related factors, reflecting predatory and dispute-related bullying	Protagonist- and organisational-related factors, reflecting predatory and dispute-related bullying	Protagonist- and organisational-related factors, reflecting predatory and dispute-related bullying	Convergence
Outcomes	Adverse emotional and physical impact	Adverse emotional and physical impact	Adverse emotional and physical impact	Convergence
	Loss of job-linked morale and motivation	Loss of job-linked morale and motivation	Loss of job-linked morale and motivation	Convergence
	Self-reproach (tempered by national anti-bullying strategies)	Self-reproach	Self-reproach	Convergence (variation in underlying context)
		Resigned acceptance		Divergence
	Gains experienced from overcoming adversity	Gains experienced from overcoming adversity	Gains experienced from overcoming adversity	Convergence
Formal interventions	Professional psychiatric and psychological help reported			Divergence
	Filing complaints not a preferred option	Filing complaints not a preferred option	Filing complaints not a preferred option	Convergence

(continued)

Table II.
Summary of findings

Theme	Australia	India	Turkey	Convergence or divergence
		Absence of grievance procedures in some workplaces	Absence of grievance procedures in some workplaces	Divergence
	Union intervention reported			Divergence
Coping	Intrapsychic responses, informal support and quitting	Intrapsychic responses, informal support and quitting	Intrapsychic responses, informal support and quitting	Convergence
Bystander behaviour	Mostly indifferent – limited and covert support reported	Mostly indifferent – limited and covert support reported	Mostly indifferent – limited and covert support reported	Convergence (Indian data more pronounced)

Table II.

were person-related manifestations. Criticising, misrepresenting, micromanaging, assigning irrelevant/trivial/dirty or unmanageable work, questioning competence, forcing people out of the organisation, disregarding views and opinions, disallowing sharing of views and opinions, forcing employees to engage in wrong/unethical/corrupt practices, taking credit for others' work, withholding information or payments and bypassing authority were task-related manifestations. Rudeness, nastiness, hostility and intimidation marked target experiences. With these experiences being common across all three countries, targets described feelings of being undermined, disrespected, degraded and abused, as indicated by Einarsen *et al.* (2011):

> AUS: I had an extremely heavy workload and pressure to perform to deadlines was very high. I was working alone undertaking a new role to the business. I was working from 7:30am till 10:30 at night. I was made to feel isolated and not to speak about my issues with anyone. I was told I was going to stop someone getting a bonus, I had very little support higher up, I had people in the same role who could sympathise but could not do anything. In the end, I changed roles and then left some months after the ordeal.

> IND: My boss yelling at me in front of my colleagues.

> TUR: The perpetrator suddenly started to ignore me. First, I thought that this would be an unconscious behaviour, however, over time, I realised that this is exactly deliberate.

The conflation of bullying and category-based harassment was reported by 16 respondents across the countries. While gender-based harassment (which included a physical aspect in Australia) was common to all three countries, race-based bullying provided interesting insights. In Australia, the experience was reported within the country, linked to the multi-cultural nature of this strongly immigration-based nation. Indian and Turkish targets often described these experiences in relation to work undertaken overseas, when they worked as expatriates abroad. Intra-national ethnic-linked harassment associated with religion and region was indicated by some Indians, showing that diversity here does not necessarily embrace pluralism (Beteille, 2006):

> AUS: My boss calling me "f**king Indian bastard".

> IND: About the gender and having less capability and strength as compared to men. Draw at par pay with men but not executing the duties at par.

TUR: It was in a company I worked for in England. There were only 7 female employees working in the office other than me. When I first joined the company, two of them made my life miserable. They made nasty comments. They were quite hostile. One of them was a designer and she refused to do anything for the customers I was in charge of. They did not share any information with me. I do not know if it was because I was a foreigner or because I was a newcomer or both.

Etiology
Protagonist-related factors and organisational features were the triggers for workplace bullying, reflecting predatory or dispute-related misbehaviour, being common across all the three countries and mirroring existing knowledge in the substantive area (Salin and Hoel, 2011; Zapf and Einarsen, 2011).

Respondents opined that bullies misbehaved towards them for various reasons. Personally, bullies' traits, promotion of self-interest, category-linked biases including patriarchal attitudes and cultural prejudices, orientation of favouritism, faulty social skills and inability to ascertain the nature and outcomes of their behaviour played a role. Work-wise, bullies' perceived threat from target competence, desire to assert power, position and superiority, cover-up for inferiority and poor self-esteem, ineffective managerial and leadership skills, misuse of authority, displacement of work-related stressors or of previous experiences and resentment of target's resistance about being unethical were relevant.

Across the entire sample, becoming a target was seen as an outcome of one's gauged competence, observed physical/financial/intellectual/spiritual weakness, perceived challenge/difference to the bully in terms of principles and ideas, ajudged popularity, trusting nature, lack of assertiveness, introverted demeanour leading to distance from colleagues and misunderstanding, vulnerability due to nature of employment/organisational position, lack of knowledge/skill and lack of experience.

Employers contributed through poor corporate culture, indifferent top management and weak HR ideology and practice which allowed or failed to prevent bullying, giving rise to circumstances where the bully knew he/she could get away with misbehaviour. Focus on organisational success, particularly in very competitive industries or during times of organisational change, as well as organisational politics were equally important:

AUS: Bullying comes into existing [existence] when you [target] are weak. Four dimensionally, that is, financially, physically, intellectually and spiritually.

IND: The insecurity of the bully made him do it.

TUR: It was about the organisational culture. They did not know how to behave.

Outcomes
Adverse emotional and physical outcomes were common to targets across all three countries, reflecting earlier inquiries (Hogh *et al.*, 2011; Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012). Shock, dread, anxiety, anger, depression, unhappiness, humiliation, loneliness, isolation, withdrawal, hurt, distrust, betrayal, diffidence, loss of focus and direction, helplessness and powerlessness constituted the affective aspect. Health-wise, respondents reported insomnia, weight gain/loss, heart ailments and respiratory and digestive problems.

Implications for work and workplaces were also described, with targets losing job-related morale and motivation. Work became associated with meaninglessness, being relevant only instrumentally as a route to livelihood:

AUS: I was afraid of her. Felt disempowered and helpless.

AUS: I dropped 2 kilos in about a week. I could not eat, sleep, socialise, my relationships started to fall.

IND: It led to low efficiency in my work.

TUR: I lost my self-confidence, and as [a] result, I made more mistakes.

In contrast to Indians and Turks, who did not speak of such interventions, some Australians referred to professional help through counsellors and psychiatrists to facilitate their coping. Three factors of equal importance account for this variation. First, the availability of such services within and outside workplaces may be uneven across different societies (Wang *et al.*, 2007). Second, stigma is commonly linked to seeking professional assistance in India and Turkey (Patel and Thara, 2003; Sahin, 2013). Third, targets in high power distance cultures like India and Turkey may be more tolerant of negative behaviours, accepting them as a natural part of work life (Guneri-Cangarli, 2016; Power *et al.*, 2013).

Self-reproach was expressed by some Indian and Turkish respondents, who held their own inadequacies responsible for the bullying experience. Self-blame is a common universal target response, though anti-bullying strategies in Australian workplaces (and schools) aim at removing the notion of target responsibility (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011). Further, Indian and Turkish targets' responses may possibly arise from the spiritual leanings and social connectedness associated with these nations (Gannon and Pillai, 2013) which trigger reflective and inward-looking stands.

Resigned acceptance was displayed by a few Indians, who described having come to terms and hence living with the experience over time by considering it part of a larger plan for their life. Holding that this experience had come to them for a particular reason, these respondents were clear that they would not "pass it on" to others especially when they were in positions of authority. A spiritual outlook, informed partially by fatalism and triggering paternalism, appeared in place, in keeping with the country profile offered earlier.

Across all three countries, few respondents maintained that they had benefited from the difficult experience. Consistent with D'Cruz and Noronha (2012), respondents indicated how they were able to tap their inner strengths, understand and attempt to overcome their weaknesses and become worldly wise while still staying true to their principles. Handling challenges, learning from mistakes, working hard and being cautious marked their responses. Cultural differences were not apparent here, as the sense of achievement in overcoming adversity appears to be universal.

Coping
Filing formal complaints to resolve the bullying situation was avoided by most respondents (64 per cent from Australia, 83 per cent from India, 68 per cent from Turkey). Multiple reasons undergirded their choice, categorised into target-related factors, bully-related factors, bystander-related factors, organisational-related factors and extra-organisational factors as elaborated below. Interestingly, a few Indian and Turkish respondents reported the absence of grievance procedures in their workplaces, pointing to gaps in employment relations practices.

Target-related factors circled around three broad areas, namely, job and career considerations, uncertainty and reputation. Respondents spoke of their need for a job, fear of career prospects and nature of employment and security as relevant influences. Apprehension that their anonymity and image would be compromised, that professional relationships would be damaged as well as being timid and/or not wishing to draw attention to self and get caught in controversy and/or abhorring conflict and trying to avoid it were described. Being new to the organisation and hence unsure of its culture and its procedures, being young and inexperienced in the workforce, being a foreigner and hence unaware of the local ethos and mechanisms indicated respondents' misgivings. That the situation would not be resolved but worsen despite expending time and effort and lack of evidence was commonly cited. A few targets expected matters to settle down or decided to quit anyway.

Bully-related factors comprised organisational position, power and reputation of the bully, the bully being the HR/line manager to whom the matter was to be reported and similar mindsets of top management and the bully.

Bystander-related factors referred to the absence or unwillingness of witnesses to provide evidence. This is of significance given that bystanders can play a crucial role in empowering targets (see major theme on bystander behaviour for details).

Organisational-related factors encompassed an organisational culture that encouraged/ facilitated bullying and discouraged questioning/complaints/resolution, support between top management, managers and HR, nature of workplace relationships such that the firm was family staffed or the bully was affiliated to a senior manager, lack of mentors to guide targets through the process and unavailability of grievance procedures.

Extra-organisational factors alluded to the dynamics of the job market, accentuated due to the global economic recession:

AUS: Young, inexperienced and did not know the procedure.

AUS: Because the person I was dealing with [bully] was the general manager's sibling and he was covering for him, so there was no point.

IND: If I would complain, my job security would become an issue.

TUR: Because they [superiors] were very powerful.

TUR: I thought that nothing would change.

A couple of respondents in each country who contemplated such an option were discouraged by their colleagues. The latter advised them not to show the department in a bad light, not to stir trouble in the organisation or not to hamper their career. In some of these cases, informal intervention resolved the situation.

Given the constraints associated with the formal complaints path, intrapsychic emotion-focused coping and informal support were the most frequent target coping responses, with respondents indicating that they "suffered out the situation" till better employment alternatives (delayed in a few cases because of tight labour market conditions due to the global financial crisis) became available and they could quit their current job. Exiting was considered positively because it offered a fresh start and/or the new job was more attractive:

AUS: I left my job and am changing careers because of it. It left me with no confidence in my working abilities and caused me to be very emotional.

IND: It demotivated [me] and in the end made me to shift [sic] the organisation.

TUR: I was angry with myself because of not shouting back at him. I quit after 6 months and I was angry with myself because of bearing these kinds of behaviours for months. To be honest, it affected me in a good way because thanks to him, I searched for a new job and I am much satisfied with where I am now.

Cognitive restructuring, maintaining calmness and purposeful forgetting were the first set of responses. The second set comprised covert emotional and informational (to get another job) support from colleagues in many cases (including physical protection for some Turkish respondents) as well as informal interventions from superiors/peers in a few cases either through discussions with the bully/the manager, building up appropriate behavioural repertoire in the target or mediating between the two protagonists. The latter measures were reported to be successful only by Australian and Indian respondents, who referred to the social skills and/or hierarchical position of the superior/peer.

A few respondents in each of the countries adopted problem-focused coping approaches which were effective in ending the bully's misbehaviour. Threatening to file a formal complaint, confronting the bully and adopting identical behaviours formed target strategies. Whereas only Australians spoke of resorting to union intervention to facilitate their coping, an Indian sought and was granted a transfer to another department which helped him to avoid the bully. Neither Indians nor Turks alluded to union action, reflecting the industrial relations climate of their countries (Lordoglu, 2004; Noronha and Beale, 2012).

Interestingly, of those respondents whose situation was resolved, most quit anyway as they remained unhappy with the organisational culture or felt that their experience tarnished their view of the employer.

Apart from adding to the literature by uncovering a comprehensive set of impediments that determine targets' choice regarding the complaints process, respondents' preference for more passive coping mechanisms is consistent with previous research (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2010).

Bystander behaviour

Whereas respondents reported the presence of witnesses (85 per cent for Australia, 70 per cent for India and 73 per cent for Turkey), most bystanders ignored the situation and did nothing, being particularly pronounced in India (71 per cent compared to 46 per cent in Australia/59 per cent in Turkey). Fear of being targeted and fear of job loss were attributed as the underlying reasons across all three countries. Indian respondents added that these bystanders either enjoyed observing the misbehaviour or failed to fathom the impact on targets. In one instance in India, the common ethnic group of the bully and bystanders influenced the latter's indifference:

AUS: They just stayed quiet, afraid of losing their jobs.

IND: Ignored the whole situation.

TUR: They just watched!

Covert emotional and informational (to get another job) support provided by bystanders to targets was reported across all the countries though it was less frequently spoken of by Indians. Physical protection was described by a few Turks. Bystanders in this group operated in subtle ways instead of openly advocating for the target:

AUS: Sympathised. They did, however, suggest I go to my union and I think this helped me. I also seeked [sic] counselling from professionals.

IND: They told me not to take such things seriously and that such things are a part of life and we must learn to live with them.

TUR [from a respondent whose experience of workplace bullying combined sexual harassment]: Two of the workers did not go to lunch and stay [sic] at the branch in order to not leave me alone with [the] manager.

Whereas providing evidence to support the target was indicated by few Australians and Indians, others described informal intervention through speaking to the bully/ manager, coaching the target with relevant skills or mediating between the two parties such that the abuse abated. Turkish bystanders, though equally well-meaning, were either too weak to make a difference or advised against doing so by a superior.

Some respondents, across all the three countries, spoke of bystanders who joined the bullies or who were targets themselves and hence could provide only covert support.

The high degree of similarity in bystander behaviour in terms of indifference or covert support across the three countries shows that most employees worldwide prioritise their job security and well-being, reinforcing existing findings (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2011; Paull *et al.*, 2012).

Discussion

Comparing target experiences of workplace bullying through a qualitative inquiry, conducted in Australia, India and Turkey, the dimensional and metaphorical cross-cultural lens of the present study addresses an important gap in the substantive area. That workplace bullying at its core shares numerous identical aspects across the globe stems both from the uniformities underlying the essence of human life and nature and from the general and work-specific convergence emerging from globalisation. These similarities are particularly evident in manifestations, etiology and coping in the three study countries as well as the extant literature. Person- and task-related negative acts, triggered by protagonist- and organisational-linked factors, and tackled via intrapsychic means, informal support and quitting appear to typify bullying situations worldwide. Differences, more clearly apparent in source and formal interventions and more subtle in coexistence with category-based harassment, outcomes and bystander behaviour, not only bring out the role of national culture but also emphasise its nuanced, dynamic and complex influence (see Table II). Culture persists, notwithstanding the innumerable common bases of human life and nature and the reach of globalisation and cannot be overridden by primordial equivalence or workplace ethos.

A hierarchical versus an egalitarian orientation in national culture, reflecting power distance (Gannon and Pillai, 2013; Steers *et al.*, 2013), accounts for the variation in the source of bullying behaviours. India and Turkey therefore report downwards bullying compared to the downwards and horizontal bullying evident in Australia.

Formal and institutionalised avenues of support and intervention such as professional psychological and psychiatric help, grievance mechanisms and union action to address workplace bullying were available in Australia rather than India and Turkey, despite each country's differing legal position on the issue. Australia's egalitarian, rule-based, mastery-oriented culture, which values mateship in spite of individualistic leanings and which maintains a progressive outlook (Gannon and Pillai, 2013; Steers *et al.*, 2013) in matters of human rights and employee well-being, appears to account for this. India and Turkey with their more collectivistic and relationship-based approaches seem to indicate preferences for more informal measures, though the

efficacy of these attempts can be constrained by hierarchical and mastery-oriented outlooks, given India's complex kaleidoscopic and Turkey's authority-ranking character (Gannon and Pillai, 2013; Steers *et al.*, 2013).

Sociodemographic attributes within a country account for the concomitant presence of category-based harassment. Australia, being a multi-cultural immigrant nation, evidences racial discrimination within its borders. Indians' and Turks' parallel experiences arose as expatriates abroad. The presence of religious and regional harassment in India underscores that the multiple identities which inform Indian society are hierarchically rather than democratically organised (Beteille, 2006), with strong ingroup-outgroup alignments (Sinha, 2015), thereby restricting tolerance and inclusion. Two points may be noted here. One, while caste did not appear as an underlying factor within the Indian data, this could be for two reasons including the largely higher caste profiles of students at the management school in question and the possible reluctance of lower caste students, if any participated, to self-identify as such. Two, region of origin (linked to *hemsherilik*) did not surface in the Turkish data since students from the university in question had similar backgrounds. The pervasive influence of patriarchy worldwide (McDonald, 2012), underlying gender-based harassment, could be seen in the findings.

Indian targets' apparently resigned acceptance of workplace bullying emerging from "looking at the larger picture" and "gauging a bigger purpose" points to the spiritual orientation that coexists with materialistic self-interest (Gannon and Pillai, 2013). The extent to which spiritualism is an end in itself or a means to coping remains to be determined. Interestingly, spiritual-linked resigned acceptance did not render targets into docile subjects submissive to an external locus of control, as respondents also reported problem-focused coping strategies.

The passive stance of Indian bystanders qualifies collectivistic and relationship-based claims (Steers *et al.*, 2013) associated with this society, to underscore not only the importance of category-linked ingroups (Sinha, 2015), but also the significance of mastery orientation, particularly in a resource-poor environment where self-interest assumes primacy (Misra and Tripathi, 2004). Individualism exerts its presence through this maze.

The ineffective and informal support of Turkish bystanders including the lack of provision of proof can be attributed to the country's authority-ranking culture (Gannon and Pillai, 2013). That bystanders are willing/try to intervene attests to collectivistic and relationship-based influences aiming to balance mastery and harmony (Steers *et al.*, 2013). Yet, their dissuasion by superiors and/or failure to deliver evidences the power dynamics at play, accentuated by the fragile labour market (Ersin, 2014; Morgan Stanley, 2013).

Implications for research and practice
Workplace bullying literature is dominated by Western perspectives given the main hubs of research in Europe (especially Scandinavia), North America and Australia. Studies from Eastern countries, from the developing world and of a cross-cultural nature are few and far-between (Omari and Paull, 2016). Caution should therefore be exercised in the direct transfer of relevant theories and hypotheses to various contexts. Nonetheless, the recognition of heterogeneity within a society is also pertinent. Given that local approaches and responses may be quite different to what is expected in the wider country setting, research and practical implications of these levels of divergence cannot be ignored. In keeping with the extent of diversity present, we call for more

studies of workplace bullying in varying cultural contexts. Equally important is an acknowledgement of the fluid nature of culture (Hill, 2014), linked to dynamic influences at individual, group, community, local, national, regional and global levels. Based on this perspective, we recommend inquiries into the interface between workplace bullying and cultural change. Further research on both these counts will allow for a better appreciation of contingency factors and nuances associated with this complex phenomenon.

Though similarities in workplace bullying across cultures have positive implications for the development and implementation of intervention strategies applicable to regions where little research exists (Escartin *et al.*, 2011), overlooking fine differences renders such measures redundant. Blueprints drawn from other societies must be tailor-made for the particular country in question, following rigorous inquiry into the latter's cultural influences. This holds true for all business enterprises particularly international/multi-national organisations or offshored units. Indeed, global calls for a uniform code of business ethics and a standard set of HR processes and practices (Power *et al.*, 2013), while guided by universal principles, must necessarily acknowledge the mandatory need for customisation to account for country-specific cultural variations.

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About the authors

Premilla D'Cruz, PhD, is a Professor of Organisational Behaviour at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) where she teaches Micro Organisational Behaviour and Workplace Creativity to postgraduate and doctoral students and industry practitioners. Her research interests include workplace bullying, emotions at work, self and identity, organisational control, and ICTs and organisations. Premilla has been a Visiting Scholar at leading European and Australian universities and has been awarded (along with Ernesto Noronha) prestigious multi-lateral and bi-lateral research grants. She is currently a President of the International

Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment (IAWBH). Premilla D'Cruz is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: pdcruz@iima.ac.in

Megan Paull, PhD, is a Postgraduate Research Director and Senior Lecturer in the School of Business and Governance at Murdoch University in Western Australia. She is also a Co-Director of the Centre for Responsible Citizenship and Sustainability at Murdoch University. An academic of some 20 years' experience, Megan teaches in the areas of organisational behaviour, HRM and research methods. Her research includes behaviour at work, volunteering and non-profit organisations, and corporate social responsibility.

Maryam Omari, PhD, is an Associate Professor and a Dean of the School of Business and Law, Edith Cowan University, in Perth, Western Australia. She has held Senior Academic Leadership positions including Programme Director Master of Business Administration and Graduate Studies, Associate Dean International and a Director of Undergraduate Studies. She has over 17 years of work experience in various human resources capacities. Maryam's research interests lie in dignity and respect at work, cross-cultural management, quality of work-life issues, bullying in the workplace, and flexible work practices.

Burcu Guneri-Cangarli, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Izmir University of Economics' Business School. She has taught management, organisational behaviour and strategic management courses at undergraduate and graduate level since 2006. Burcu likes to be part of management counselling projects as well as executive education programmes. Her research area of interest includes workplace bullying, counterproductive work behaviours, leadership, and health care management.