



**BRK Global Healthcare Journal, 978-1-5323-4858-7**

**Volume 3, Issue 2, 2020**

# **Workplace Bullying and Incivility: Using Organization Development for Improving Healthy Work-life for Employees**

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### **Abstract**

Globally, a range of terms has been used to describe workplace violence at work such as bullying and incivility. Workplace bullying is an array of violent behavior in the workplace such as mobbing, assaults, emotional abuse, or incivility. Incivility is similar to bullying but more subtle and difficult to identify including behaviors as rudeness or inconsiderate. Bullying is different from aggression in that aggression may involve a single act, and bullying involves repeated acts of these ongoing patterns. The employees are the cornerstone of the organization, and management needs to work on the quality of work-life for their employees to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Therefore, workplace bullying, and incivility need to be addressed to promote a culture of trust and respect. When dealing with violence in the workplace, it must take time to improve organizational effectiveness. Therefore, Organizational development would be useful in dealing with bullying and incivility in the organization.

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**Key Words:** Bullying; incivility; workplace violence; quality of work-life; organizational development; OD practitioner; organizational culture.

## **Introduction**

In the 1970s, the impetus for bullying was studied by researchers (Smith & Brain, 2000). Globally, a range of terms has been used to describe workplace violence at work such as workplace bullying, mobbing, undermining incivility, workplace harassment, workplace deviance, social undermining, emotional abuse, abuse supervision, and antisocial behavior (Kennedy, 2020). Bullying is different from aggression in that aggression may involve a single act, and bullying involves repeated acts of these ongoing patterns (Kennedy, 2020).

The organizational culture consists of the processes, policies, norms, history, and practices that influence what and how individuals and groups in the organization behave (Elewa & El Banan, 2019). Therefore, the organization's culture grows through interactions between members over time.

The culture of the organization is impacted by the leadership style, professional growth, internal communication, work stability, work satisfaction, incentive system, and organizational performance (Bahrami et al,2012; Elewa & El Banan, 2019; Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Manley et al., 2011). The employees are the cornerstone of the organization, therefore, to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness, the administration needs to work on the quality of work-life for this group. A positive culture in the workplace impacts retention, motivation, loyalty, and engagement (Bahrami et al. ,2012; Elewa & El Banan, 2019; Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Manley et al., 2011). Therefore, workplace bullying, and incivility need to be addressed to improve the quality of work-life impacting better outcomes to include patient outcomes, customer satisfaction,

productivity, etc. Employees need a culture of trust and respect to achieve the organizational goals and objectives (Mase & Tyokyaa, 2011; Elewa & El Banan, 2019; Koc & Yazıcıoğlu, 2011; Mase. & Tyokyaa, 2014). A healthy work environment impacts employees being more productive and working as a team.

### **Definition**

Workplace bullying is an array of violent behavior in the workplace such as mobbing, assaults, emotional abuse, or incivility (Reknes et al., 2014). It can encompass such behavior in the workplace as criticism, allocating unfair workloads, and social exclusion (informally or formally). Asking a person to handle low status, personal abuses, withholding opportunities for professional development, facial expression (e.g., glaring, rolling eyes), and undermine the authority (Reknes, et al., 2014). Other negative behaviors of workplace violence include offensive, intimidating, or humiliating behavior that degrades, ridicules, or insults another person at work.

For the bullying to be labeled or applied to a particular activity or process, it must occur repeatedly and regularly and over a period from 2 weeks until 6 months (Kennedy, 2020; Zapf & Einarsen, 2001.) However, in the workplace, bullying does not necessarily involve a supervisor. Examples of bullying in the workplace are as follows: (a) unwarranted or invalid criticism; (b) blame without factual justification; (c) being treated differently than the rest of the workgroup; (d) being sworn at; (e) exclusion or social isolation; (f) being shouted at or being humiliated; (f) being the target of jokes; (g) excessive monitoring; (h) ridiculing people; (i) constant eyes on another's work; and (h) questioning a professional

ability (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Incivility is similar to bullying but on a lower level of rudeness or inconsiderate behavior. However, incivility can be very subtle and difficult to identify in organizations.

### **Incidence and Prevalence**

In the workplace, people with higher authority are more likely to engage in bullying or incivility toward employees in lower positions (Berry et al., 2016; Kennedy, 2020). Women are typical targets of abuse in the workplace (Kennedy, 2020; O'Moore, Lynch & Nic-Daeid, 2003). Also, women are more likely than men to be targets of bullying (Kennedy, 2020; O'Moore, Lynch & Nic-Daeid, 2003). The highest incidents of abuse occur in women dominated organizations and lower when the men and women are even (Kennedy, 2020; O'Moore, Lynch & Nic-Daeid, 2003).

Victims have been reported as general females, shy, introverted, fears of retaliation in the workplace (Kennedy, 2020; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). The personality traits of victims vary such as less independent and less extroverted, less stable, and more conscientious than non-victims (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Other sources identify victims as cooperative, enthusiastic staff, with notable achievements and a high level of commitment to achieving results, and a degree of naivety relating to the intentions of others (Kennedy, 2020; Westhues, 2006). Perpetrators tend to be described as authoritarian, manipulative, lacking people skills, insensitive, evil, sadists, and psychopaths (Kennedy, 2020).

Approximately, 80% of the workplace consists of harassment and mistreatment in the United States (Kennedy, 2020). Bullying is acceptable in

most organizations to include health services organizations. It may be the management of employees.

Many bullies are in the supervisor position consisting of 72% in the workplace (Kennedy, 2020). Executive managers may promote management to target employees in the organization. In some cases, bullies are managers following the orders of upper management. Often, the employees are afraid to confront the bully who may be the boss or the boss 's favorite.

Approximately, 40% of victims of bullying never tell their employees (Kennedy, 2020). Often bullying is labored as a conflict in an organization or differences in personality styles instead of a form of violence. These labels minimize the impact of bullying of employees in organizations.

### **Corporate/Institution Bullying**

Corporate/Institution bullying is the unhealthy culture of bullying in the workplace (Department of Labor Industrial, 2008; Kennedy, 2020; Nwobia & Aljohani, 2017). Individuals are less likely to participate in bullying if the organization does not tolerate bullying and perpetrators of bullying are reprimanded. The symptoms of corporate/ institutional bullying are as follows: (a) places unrealistic expectations on employees to include making their work-life unpleasant and dismissing others who object; (b) dismissing employees who are stress and avoiding dealing with work-related stress in the workplace, and (c) encourage other employees to fabricate about other colleagues with promising of promotion or other disciplines (Department of Labor Industrial, 2020;

Kennedy, 2020). The signs of corporate/organizational bullying consist (a) failure to meet organizational goals; (b) increased frequency of grievances, resignations, or requests for transfers; (c) increased absenteeism and sickness; and (f) increased disciplinary actions (United States Department of Labor, 2020). The corporate/institutional bullying, specific factors that increase the risk of bullying in the workplace are as follows (a) organizational change (e.g., major internal restructuring, technological change); (b) worker characteristics (e.g., age, gender, parental status, apprentice or trainee); (c) workplace relationships (e.g., inadequate information flow between organization levels, lack of employee participation decision); and (d) workplace (e.g., lack of policies about behavior, high rate and intensity of work, staff shortages, interpersonal conflict, organizational constraints, role ambiguity, and role conflict) (Kennedy, 2020; United States Department of Labor, 2020).

Often, the Human Resource Department implements conflict resolution not identifying the actual problems and providing appropriate solutions (Kennedy, 2020). In some cases, senior management may be bullied by employees because of potential lawsuits and the inability to confront them out of fear. In the workplace, bullying may involve the use and misuse of power. The bully usually intimidates, degrades, or humiliates an employee in front of others. Bullying impacted the cost to the organization (Kennedy, 2020; United States Department of Labor, 2020). Victims of bullying experience significant physical and mental problems.

## **Types of Bullying**

The bullying in an organization may be overt or covert among employees (Edmonson & Zolonka, 2019; Kennedy, 2020). The obvious or observable bullying in an organization is called *overt bullying*. The overt bullying consists of: (a) abusive behavior towards another employee (e.g., threatening gestures); (b) aggressive abusive or offensive language (e.g., threats or shouting); (c) demeaning remarks; and (e) constant unreasonable and unconstructive critics. *Covert bullying* may be overlooked by others in organizations (Edmonson, & Zolonka, 2019 ; Kennedy, 2020). Bullying which is not obvious to others in organizations is called *covert bullying*. Some of the behaviors of covert bullying are as follows: (a) deliberate exclusion, isolation, or alienation of employee from normal work interaction (exclusion from meetings; (b) allocating of work unequal for some employees; (c) unreasonable ignoring the employee; (d) undermining another employee, including encouraging others to gang up on the employee; (e) deliberately withholding information that a person needs to exercise his or her role or entitlements to the organization; and (f) repeated refusal of requests for leave or training without inadequate explanation and suggestion of alternatives. Also, *microaggression* is considered a form of covert bullying consisting of disintegrating a person's race, religion, or membership in a marginalized group (Edmonson, & Zolonka, 2019).

## **Reasons People Bully and Effects on Others**

A person may bully for various reasons in an organization (Kennedy,



2020). A perpetrator of bullying may have certain characteristics to include (a) Low self-esteem or self- concept; (b) trouble childhood or problematic childhood history; (c) dysfunctional family system; and (e) ear of shortcomings being recognized.

### **Impact of Bullying on Victim**

The victims of workplace bullying experience stress following the incidents of bullying (Kennedy, 2020). They also have more absenteeism and the lack of a decision- making, lower work performance, and more work errors. Bullying in the workplace will have a major impact on victims, also, to the organization. Some effects of bullying in the workplaces are as follows: (a) health problem of the victims; (b) problem with recruitment and retention; (c) increase violence in the workplace with legal implications; (d) decrease productivity and patient outcomes (e) increase cost to the organization because of productive.

### **Outcomes of Bullying**

Workplace bullying is a form of conflict in which intensifies negatively affecting the target person (Ibrahim et al., 2020; Zapf, 2004). An incident of bullying such as a verbal attack may produce a lasting effect on the victim). Coworkers who witnessed workplace violence are affected almost severely as the victims (Mayhew et al., 2004). Research has reported high levels of stress in coworkers who witnessed the violence in the workplace (Ibrahim et al., 2020). A climate of fear is developed in the workplace impacting the morale of employees, loyalty of staff impacting on chronic absenteeism, and retention of employees. Increase absenteeism and employees leaving the job place more demands on

existing employees resulting in low morale, increase work conflict, and high levels of stress-producing a culture of an abusive work environment (Kivimaki, Elovainio & Vahtera, 2000).

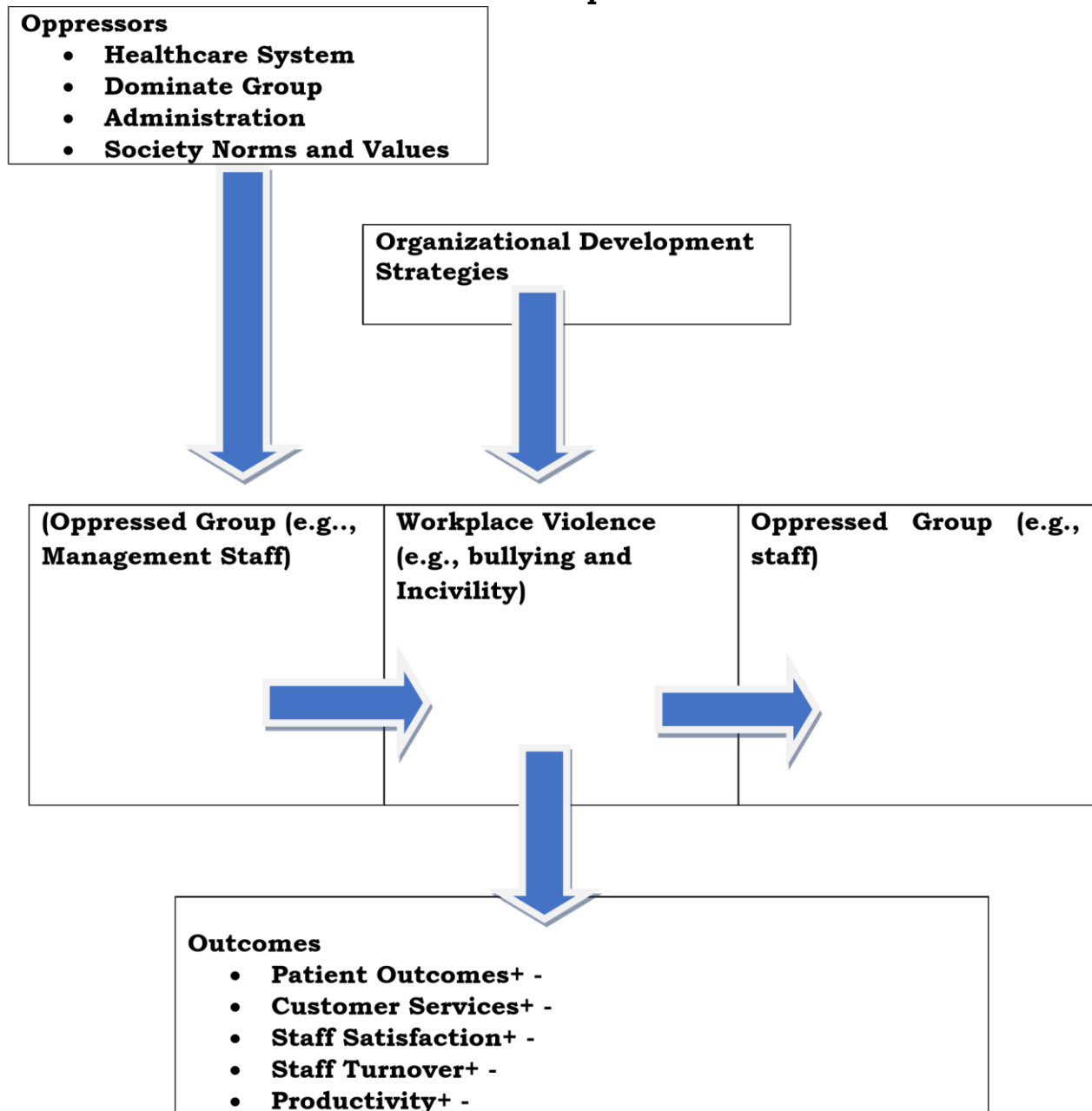
Organizations, whereas managers use a bully approach to leadership are ineffective (Kennedy, 2020). Typically, this organization has a high turnover of sick leave, low morale, and productivity. Employees will have high levels of stress, depression, and physical health problem resulting in time away from the job, loss of productivity, and increase cost in the organization (Luthans & Avolio, 2014; Rabenu, Yaniv, Elizur, 2017). The results of bullying often end in health problems leaving victims with a sense of helplessness and a negative emotional state among employees. Because of low self-esteem and a negative cultural environment, there will be less creativity in employees and less quality of work. Also, because of the lack of trust in a bully environment, employees may fail to contribute to new ideas (United States Department of Labor, 2020; Kennedy, 2020). Complaints of bullying in the organization may lead to retaliation or reprisal. Victims of bullying are reluctant to use the internal process for grievance.

### **Organizational Development Strategies for Improvement**

Organization Development started in the late 1940s at MIT and is deeply rooted in the pioneering work of applied social scientists of Kurt Lewi (Brown, 2011; Nwobia & Aljohani, 2017; Martin, 2016). The term organization development is widely attributed to Robert Blake and Jane Mouton. OD, or planned organizational change, that is the deliberate attempt to modify the

functioning of the total organization or one of its major parts to bring about improved effectiveness (Brown, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2000). Organizational development is a useful strategy in dealing with many of these forms of violence in the workplace. *Figure 1: Workplace Violence and Organizational Development and Organization Development Strategies in the Workplace.* displays the use of organizational development in addressing violence in the workplace:

**Figure1: Workplace Violence and Organizational Development Strategies in the Workplace**



Violence in the workplace occurs in organizations with poor management that lacks conflict resolution skills and awareness of workplace violence behavior (Cowie et al., 2002; Einarsen, 2000; Tutar, 2004). For example, management will utilize mobbing or bullying tactics to eliminate staff despite the damaging

effects of individuals (Cowie, et al., 2002; Einarsen & Mickkelsen, 2003; Tutar, 2004). The lack of assessment of the organization by a manager for common symptoms of, violence to include the morale of staff, customer services. chronic absenteeism, turnover, poor productivity, poor quality of patient care, poor customer services, etc. contribute to negative organizational effectiveness. Top management needs to promote ongoing improvement in the competencies of staff. Also, these same outcomes will occur if upper management does not hire or assess the competencies of managers.

When dealings with violence in the workplace, it must take a period to improve organizational effectiveness (Brown, 2011). Many organizations use education on workplace violence, individual empowerment, assertiveness training, and conflict resolution in handling the problem of violence such as verbal abuse or conflict. However, these strategies are effective in handling specific problems in the organization. For example, assertiveness training will be useful for the employee to feel empowered to identify the abuse and verbalize his/her feelings about the abuse. However, these strategies fail to deal with culture, social rules, and norms within the organization. However, these strategies may be used as interventions for an OD program.

Organization development (OD) comprises the long-range efforts and program aimed at improving an organization's ability to survive by changing its problem-solving and renewal process (Brown, 2011). The solving of problems usually involves the introduction of change. When improving the effectiveness of an organization, the introduction of change must occur. For example, OD is

not just a single technique such as teaching assertiveness or conflict resolution for a specific problem(e.g., bullying). OD will use a variety of techniques in promoting a healthy organizational culture.

Change efforts need to focus on the fundamental unit of an organization, team, or workgroup, as means for improving the organization's effectiveness (Brown, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2000). For example, workplace violence must move away from just targeting staff relationships but must address the levels of the entire relationships of the organization from top to down. The culture such as norms, values, artifacts, rituals, etc. of the organization needs to be addressed. Also, the relationships between the different layers of the organization and staff relations must be diagnosed. These relationships do not need to be dealt with in isolation. Often, the lower-level staff relationships are target more in organizations because the symptoms of violent behavioral patterns are more visible in the workplace. The staff- on- staff violence behavior is often used as a scapegoat instead of examining the real problem or diagnosing the organization.

### **Individual Effectiveness**

The promotion of individual staff competencies and development needs continuous improvement in an organization (Brown, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2000). However, management may not promote the competency of managers or staff. Managers who are supervising employees must evaluate the competencies of staff continuously. Also, incompetent managers may have a negative outcome on organizational productivity and outcomes. Managers that use bullying as a leadership approach will be ineffective. Employees will experience a high level of

stress, depression, and physical health problem resulting in time away from the job, loss of productivity, and cost increase to the organization (United States Department of Labor, 2020; Kennedy, 2020). In some cases, executive managers may promote management to target employees in the organization. Bullies may consist of managers following the orders of top managers.

### **Team Effectiveness**

Change efforts may also focus on the fundamental unit of an organization, team, or workgroup, as means for improving the organization's effectiveness (Brown, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2000; Nwobia & Aljohani, 2017 ). For example, in health services organizations, lateral violence must move away from just targeting staff-staff relationships but must address the level of the entire relationships from top-down. The culture such as norms, values, artifacts, rituals, etc. of the organization needs to be addressed. Also, the relationships of the different layers of the organization and staff relationships must be diagnosed such as manager, manager and staff, and staff and customer, etc. These relationships do not need to be dealt with in isolation. Often, staff-staff relationships are target more in organizations because the symptoms of violent behavioral patterns are more visible in this group in the workplace. The bullying in organizations is often labored as a conflict in an organization or differences in personality styles instead of a form of violence in organizations. This behavior or adequate labeling interferes with team effectiveness.

Cognitive rehearsal programs have been effective in addressing bullying in the workplace (Griffin & Clark, 2014; Kang, Kim., & Yun, 2017; Razzi, &

Bianchi, 2019; Stagg et al. 2011). Griffin and Clark (2014) proposed that education and cognitive rehearsal are critical when addressing bullying in the workplace. Cognitive rehearsal is the use of didactic instruction, identifying and rehearsing specific phrases to bullying, and practicing the phrases to become skillful in using them. This evidence-based approach is useful for the emotional and physical well-being of nurses to better serve patients. Kang et al., (2017) reported the usefulness of CRP in improving interpersonal relationships and decreasing turnout. Also, a research study by Stagg et al. (2017) reported that when nurses were equipped with strategies, they felt more adequately prepared for handling workplace bullying.

### **Implementing Change**

When implementing change in an organization, the focus needs to be on the total organizational system (Brown, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2000). OD provides an array of activities aiming at improving the effectiveness of structural, technical, or managerial subsystem change (Brown, 2011). For victims of violence, continuous contact with the abuser is a source of stress. Regardless, if the abuser is a co-worker or a customer, there will be an increase in the stress level of victims. For example, the occurrence of mobbing comprises of larger involvement in the process of bullying in the workplace. Management and unions may not understand the entire dynamics of violence and withdraw the support of victims participating unknowingly in attacking the victim. Often coworkers are afraid resulting in non-involvement or actively participating in the process of bullying. However, healthy organizations promote protecting their



employees from the infectious process of workplace violence such as mobbing or bullying.

The OD consultant would be useful in assisting the organization in improving the organization's effectiveness (Brown, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2000; Kennedy, 2020). The total organization may be examined whereas in some cases a climate survey would be useful. Planned change programs are then designed to deal with the specific problem areas identified in the survey. However, changing a corporate culture is not easy. Culture emerges out of the shared behavior and the working relationships of organization members that have developed over time. As mentioned, bullying is a behavior that develops in an organization over time. Organizational change strategies are more likely to succeed if the factors that shape the culture can be identified and managed (Brown, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2000). For example, employees must build effective collaboration instilling core values such as respect of trust, and professionalism in the work environment. The lack of collaborative relationships between administration and staff is a barrier to excellent customer satisfaction. The key competence of collaborations is a need for respect, trust, and dismissing inaccurate professional stereotyping, status inequalities, limited open communication, and lack of education related to teamwork (Pullon, 2009). Therefore, bullying in an organization needs to be eliminated. The culture of an organization has contributed to inequalities of professional status (Berry et al., 2016; Nwobia & Aljohani, 2017). Often, administrations are placed at higher status because of the legal and financial responsibilities for the workplace

(Lindeke & Sieckert, 2005; Longo, 2010). When the manager displays disruptive behaviors such as bullying and if the organization, does not intervene but ignore this behavior, this unhealthy practice will become part of the system (Longo & Sherman, 2007). This behavior is accepted as the norm in an organization by the administration which does not intervene regarding changing the workplace environment. This behavior impacts cost and productivity in the workplace.

Organizations need to provide early interventions to address violence in the workplace promoting prevention and a healthy work-life for employees (Kennedy, et al., 2000; Kennedy, 2020). For example, workplace violence training needs to be a part of the orientation process and mandatory reviews. The grievance process needs to include a timely investigation process to include mediation processes, disciplinary sanctions, employees' assistance programs, and other resources for assistance (McCarthy & Mayhew, 2005). It would be useful if an organization would use ethnic committees to address cases of workplace violence.

A consultant would be useful in working with groups in attaining collaboration through respecting the competence of others (Kennedy et al., 2000; (Kennedy, 2020). Group work will result in interprofessional trust of team members (Pullon, 2009). However, forming a collaborative relationship will require time to bring about change over time (Lindeke & Sieckert, 2005; Pullon, 2009).

### **Future Strategies**

Future strategies are needed to improve interprofessional collaboration among workers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kennedy, 2020). Workforce administrators must create a healthy work environment. Strategies need to be developed to eliminate violence in the workplace. Administrators must do their part by instituting zero-tolerance policies addressing violence and educating and making staff aware of violence in the workplace and promoting a healthy work environment. Managers can do their part by enforcing established policies and creating a safe place for reporting any abuse. Employees need to be empowered to report and advocate against violence. However, managers may not always be aware of the violence permeating their organization focusing on the symptoms such as decreased cost, chronic absenteeism, decrease productivity, etc. An external consultant would be useful in improving organizational effectiveness.

Culture is not only indicative of race but the way the person is raised (Kennedy, 2013; Kennedy, 2020). Also, culture is defined as the integrated patterns of behavior that includes thoughts, speech, action, and artifacts and depends upon the human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generation (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Therefore, workplace organizations need to focus on cultural diversity (Kennedy, 2020). Selfawareness is key in dealing with transcultural issues. The awareness of our own culture influences our perceptions and behavior, also, to the culture of others which will impact on working with others in the organization.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, managers must eliminate bullying in workplace organizations. The results of bullying in the workplace are (a) lower work morale, (b) increase in workplace conflict, and (c) stress to the targeted victims, and (d) creating an abusive work environment and culture. Workplace bullying has a negative direct and indirect impact on employees as victims and those who witnessed the abuse. When dealing with violence in the workplace, it must take time to improve organizational effectiveness. Therefore, the OD would be useful in dealing with bullying and Incivility in the organization.

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