

# Workplace Bullying and Employee Turnover in Sierra Leone's Public Sector

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**Abstract:** Workplace bullying poses significant challenges to employee well-being and organizational retention. This study examines the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intentions at the Makeni District Council, Sierra Leone. Using a descriptive research design, data were collected from 100 employees through structured questionnaires adapted from validated instruments. Findings reveal moderate to high prevalence of workplace bullying ( $M=3.37$ ), manifesting primarily through unrealistic deadlines, dismissal of ideas, and verbal abuse. Bullying significantly reduces employee job satisfaction and morale ( $M = 3.78$ ), with employees reporting high anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced motivation. Correlation analysis demonstrates a strong positive relationship between bullying and turnover intentions ( $r=0.742$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), with bullying explaining 55% of the variance in turnover decisions ( $R^2=0.55$ ). The study validates the applicability of the Job Demands–Resources Model and Conservation of Resources Theory in an African public sector context. Results underscore the urgent need for anti-bullying policies, leadership training, confidential reporting mechanisms, and employee support services to reduce turnover and enhance organizational effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Workplace Bullying, Employee Turnover, Job Satisfaction, Public Sector, Sierra Leone, Organizational Behavior.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A healthy organizational climate plays an important role in sustaining employee motivation and performance. When workers perceive their environment as supportive and respectful, they are more likely to remain committed to organizational goals [15]. Employees who experience recognition and fair treatment typically demonstrate higher levels of dedication and engagement in their work responsibilities. However, when employees are exposed to hostility, intimidation, or unfair treatment, the work environment can become psychologically unsafe. Such conditions often reduce morale, weaken engagement, and may eventually push employees to consider leaving the organization. This situation not only harms individual workers but also undermines the overall effectiveness, culture, and reputation of the institution [4].

Workplace bullying refers to persistent negative actions within the work environment that intimidate, humiliate, or undermine employees [7]. These behaviors may include verbal hostility, social exclusion, unfair criticism, or

excessive work pressure. When such conduct occurs repeatedly over time, it creates a hostile organizational climate that threatens employee well-being and professional dignity. The consequences of these behaviors are far-reaching, leading to psychological distress, reduced motivation, lower job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, and, most notably, high employee turnover [5, 16]. Victims of bullying often develop stress-related symptoms such as anxiety and depression, which may reduce their ability to perform effectively [3]. Over time, many choose to resign or transfer to avoid further mistreatment, thus contributing to higher turnover rates within the organization [12].

Employee turnover refers to the movement of workers leaving an organization and being replaced by new staff [1]. High turnover can generate significant challenges for institutions because it disrupts operations, increases recruitment and training costs, and reduces the continuity of institutional knowledge. Financially, organizations must allocate substantial resources to recruiting, selecting, and training new personnel to fill vacant positions. Beyond financial implications, the departure of experienced workers

leads to diminished organizational memory, weakened teamwork, and disrupted service delivery. In public institutions such as government councils, these challenges are especially critical because they can hinder the ability to deliver essential services and achieve development goals. When bullying is present, employees may view resignation as a coping strategy to escape a stressful or hostile work environment. A stable and satisfied workforce is, therefore, crucial for maintaining organizational efficiency and ensuring the continuity of public services.

#### ➤ *Background of the Study*

The Makeni District Council is one of the most important administrative institutions in Sierra Leone, entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring effective local governance and the provision of essential public services. It serves as a link between the central government and local communities, overseeing areas such as education, health, sanitation, infrastructure development, and community welfare. For the Council to fulfil its mandate, it requires a dedicated, skilled, and stable workforce.

Despite its importance, the Makeni District Council faces challenges in managing its workforce. Anecdotal reports suggest that employees sometimes experience dissatisfaction at work, and in certain cases, bullying behaviors have been mentioned. Workplace bullying, whether in the form of verbal abuse, unfair treatment, or deliberate exclusion, can undermine employees' morale and productivity. Such behaviors may push staff to resign, request transfers, or disengage from their responsibilities, thereby increasing the turnover rate.

#### ➤ *Problem Statement*

Workplace bullying has emerged as a significant organizational problem, with extensive empirical evidence from developed countries demonstrating its negative effects on employee well-being, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall productivity. Despite the growing global attention to this phenomenon, research on workplace bullying remains limited in many developing countries, including Sierra Leone. There is a noticeable lack of empirical studies focusing on workplace bullying within local government institutions, where hierarchical structures, power imbalances, and limited grievance mechanisms may increase employees' vulnerability to such behaviors.

At the Makeni District Council, persistent concerns have been raised regarding employee dissatisfaction, low morale, and frequent staff turnover. While these challenges are often attributed to factors such as limited resources, workload pressures, and administrative constraints, the potential contribution of workplace bullying has not been systematically examined.

#### ➤ *Research Gap*

Despite extensive research on workplace bullying in developed countries, empirical evidence within local government institutions in Sierra Leone remains scarce. Most existing studies have focused on healthcare, education, and corporate sectors in Western contexts, leaving a significant

gap in understanding how bullying manifests and impacts employees in African public sector organizations. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between workplace bullying and employee turnover intentions at the Makeni District Council, providing much-needed empirical evidence from a developing country context. The findings will contribute to the limited body of knowledge on workplace bullying in Sierra Leone and inform policy interventions tailored to the local government sector.

#### ➤ *Research Objectives*

The main aim of this study is to explore the relationship between workplace bullying and employee turnover at the Makeni District Council. The specific objectives are:

- To examine the prevalence and forms of workplace bullying within the organization
- To investigate the impact of workplace bullying on employee job satisfaction and morale
- To analyze the relationship between workplace bullying and employee turnover intentions
- To identify strategies organizations can implement to reduce workplace bullying and minimize employee turnover

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace bullying has been extensively studied in developed countries, with substantial evidence linking it to negative employee and organizational outcomes. However, research in developing countries, particularly within public sector institutions, remains limited. This section reviews the conceptual and theoretical foundations of workplace bullying, its impact on job satisfaction and morale, and its relationship with employee turnover.

#### ➤ *Theoretical Framework*

This study is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory.

- **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model:** The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework explains how workplace conditions influence employee well-being and performance [2]. According to this perspective, job demands refer to aspects of work that require sustained physical or psychological effort, while job resources are elements that help employees accomplish tasks and maintain motivation. Workplace bullying can be understood as a demanding stressor that consumes emotional resources, leading to fatigue, dissatisfaction, and a higher likelihood of withdrawal behaviors such as turnover intentions.
- **Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory:** Conservation of Resources (COR) theory suggests that individuals strive to obtain and protect valuable personal resources, including self-esteem, social support, and job security [6]. When these resources are threatened or depleted, individuals experience psychological stress. In the context of workplace bullying, employees may perceive

repeated hostility as a loss of dignity and emotional safety. As a result, they may attempt to restore balance by disengaging from the environment or seeking employment elsewhere.

Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding how workplace bullying functions as a stressor that depletes employee resources, undermines well-being, and increases turnover intentions.

#### ➤ *Empirical Studies on Workplace Bullying*

Earlier research has documented the prevalence and forms of workplace bullying across various organizational contexts. Common forms include verbal abuse, social exclusion, intimidation, unfair criticism, and deliberate sabotage of work [4, 18]. Research indicates that bullying is more prevalent in hierarchical organizations with poor leadership, weak anti-bullying policies, and cultures that tolerate aggressive behavior [7, 17].

Earlier research indicates that workplace bullying significantly reduces job satisfaction and employee morale [10, 16]. Employees who experience bullying report higher levels of emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and depression, which negatively affect their performance and commitment [11, 12]. Furthermore, strong positive correlations have been found between bullying experiences and turnover intentions, with bullied employees being significantly more likely to leave their organizations [5, 13].

#### ➤ *Workplace Bullying in Public Sector Organizations*

The public sector presents unique characteristics that may influence the prevalence and impact of workplace bullying. Hierarchical structures, bureaucratic processes, and limited accountability mechanisms can create environments where bullying behaviors persist unchallenged [14]. Studies in public sector organizations have documented higher rates of bullying compared to private sector counterparts, attributed to factors such as job security, political interference, and organizational cultures that prioritize seniority over merit [8]. Recent systematic reviews confirm that public sector employees face elevated bullying risks, with interventions requiring organizational culture change and leadership accountability [19].

In developing countries, public sector employees face additional challenges including resource constraints, inadequate training, and weak enforcement of labor regulations [15]. These contextual factors may exacerbate the effects of workplace bullying, making employees more vulnerable to psychological distress and turnover intentions [20]. Research in African contexts specifically highlights how organizational culture interacts with traditional hierarchies to either enable or prevent bullying behaviors [21]. However, empirical research examining these dynamics in African local government institutions remains limited, highlighting the importance of context-specific studies.

#### ➤ *Workplace Bullying and Employee Turnover*

The relationship between workplace bullying and employee turnover has been well-established in international

literature. Bullying creates a hostile work environment that undermines employees' psychological contracts with their organizations, leading to withdrawal behaviors including absenteeism, reduced engagement, and ultimately, resignation [9]. The costs of bullying-related turnover are substantial, encompassing recruitment expenses, training investments, lost productivity, and diminished organizational knowledge [1].

Research indicates that the decision to leave an organization due to bullying is mediated by factors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived alternatives [17]. Employees who experience severe or prolonged bullying are more likely to actively seek alternative employment, even in contexts where job opportunities are limited [18]. This pattern has been observed across various sectors and cultural contexts, suggesting that bullying is a universal driver of employee turnover.

#### ➤ *Contribution of this Study*

This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on workplace bullying in a local government institution in Sierra Leone, a context that has received limited scholarly attention. By examining the prevalence, forms, and impacts of bullying within the Makeni District Council, the research addresses a significant gap in understanding how this phenomenon manifests in African public sector organizations. The findings will inform evidence-based interventions to reduce bullying and improve employee retention in similar institutional contexts.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive quantitative design to investigate the relationship between workplace bullying and employee turnover intentions within the Makeni District Council. A structured survey approach was selected because it enables the systematic collection of standardized data from a group of employees and allows statistical techniques to be applied in examining patterns and relationships among variables.

#### ➤ *Research Design*

A quantitative research approach is adopted using a cross-sectional survey design. This design is appropriate for:

- Assessing the current state of workplace bullying
- Examining relationships between variables at a single point in time
- Collecting data from a large sample efficiently
- Enabling statistical analysis and generalization of findings

#### ➤ *Population and Sampling*

The target population consists of all staff members of the Makeni District Council across various departments including Administration, Finance, Education, Health, and other support services. A sample of 100 employees is selected using simple random sampling to ensure every staff member had an equal chance of participation. This sample size was determined to be adequate for statistical analysis while being feasible within the study's time and resource constraints.

➤ *Data Collection*

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from validated instruments including the Negative Acts Questionnaire–Revised (NAQ-R) and the Turnover Intention Scale (TIS). The questionnaire comprised five sections:

- Section A: Demographic information (gender, age, department, position, length of service)
- Section B: Prevalence and forms of workplace bullying (6 items, 5-point Likert scale)
- Section C: Impact on job satisfaction and morale (6 items, 5-point Likert scale)
- Section D: Turnover intentions (5 items, 5-point Likert scale)
- Section E: Strategies to reduce bullying (5 items, 5-point Likert scale)

The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 15 employees to assess clarity and reliability. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire scales. All constructs recorded acceptable reliability values: workplace bullying scale ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ), job satisfaction scale ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ), and turnover intention scale ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), indicating high internal consistency.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Makeni Research Ethics Committee (Approval No: UNI-MAK/REC/2024/045) prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants after explaining the study’s purpose, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality measures. Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process.

➤ *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The analysis included:

- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations)
- Correlation analysis to examine relationships between variables
- Regression analysis to determine the predictive relationship between bullying and turnover intentions
- Thematic analysis of open-ended responses

**IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

This section details analytical findings derived from data gathered from 100 Makeni District Council employees. Results are structured according to study objectives, commencing with respondent demographic characteristics, proceeding through workplace bullying prevalence findings, effects on job satisfaction and morale, associations with turnover intentions, and concluding with recommended intervention strategies.

➤ *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

The demographic analysis revealed that 58% of respondents were male and 42% were female. The majority of participants (45%) were in the 26-35 age group, followed by 36-45 years (32%), 18-25 years (15%), and 46 years and above (8%). Departmental representation showed that 28% were from Administration, 22% from Finance, 20% from Education, 18% from Health, and 12% from other departments. Regarding length of service, 35% had served for 1-3 years, 30% for 4-6 years, 20% for less than 1 year, and 15% for above 6 years.

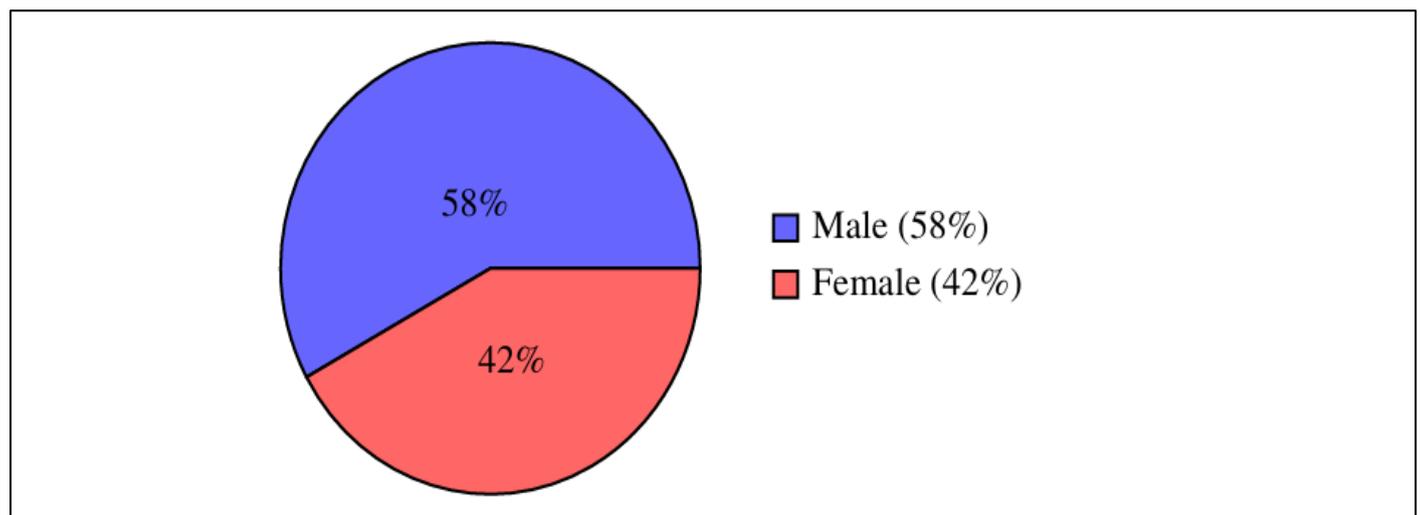


Fig 1 Gender Distribution of Respondents (N=100).

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 1 illustrates the gender distribution, showing a relatively balanced representation with a slight male majority.

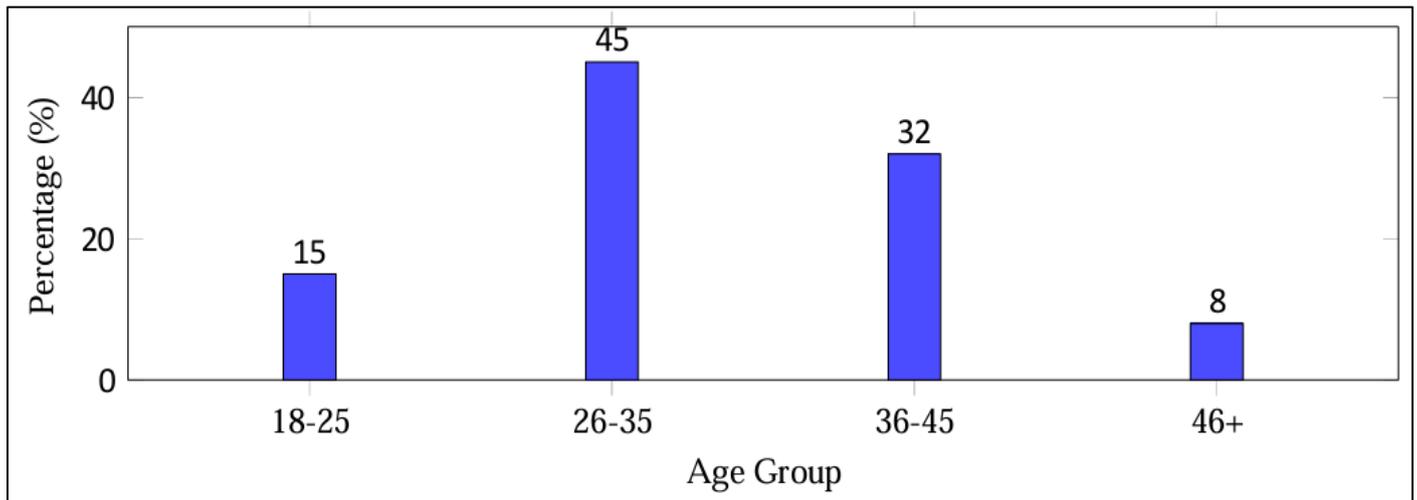


Fig 2 Age Distribution of Respondents (N=100).  
Source: Field Survey, 2024

As shown in Figure 2, the workforce is predominantly composed of young to middle-aged employees, with the 26-35 age group representing the largest segment.

➤ *Prevalence and Forms of Workplace Bullying*

Table 1 presents the prevalence of different forms of workplace bullying at the Makeni District Council.

Table 1 Prevalence of Workplace Bullying Forms (N=100)

Form of Bullying	Mean	SD
Verbal abuse/insults	3.42	1.15
Social exclusion	3.28	1.22
Unrealistic deadlines	3.65	1.08
False rumors	2.98	1.31
Dismissal of ideas	3.51	1.18
Intimidation by colleagues	3.35	1.25
<b>Overall Bullying</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>0.98</b>

Scale: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always

Results demonstrate that workplace bullying occurs with moderate to high frequency at the Makeni District Council, reflected in an overall mean score of 3.37 (SD=0.98). This score positions employee experiences between "sometimes" and "often" on the measurement scale, revealing a troubling prevalence that necessitates institutional action. The most common form was unrealistic deadlines (M=3.65),

followed by dismissal of ideas (M=3.51) and verbal abuse (M=3.42). These patterns suggest that bullying at the Council manifests primarily through work-related pressures and professional undermining rather than overt personal attacks. False rumors were the least common form (M=2.98), though still occurring with notable frequency, indicating that even less prevalent forms of bullying remain problematic.

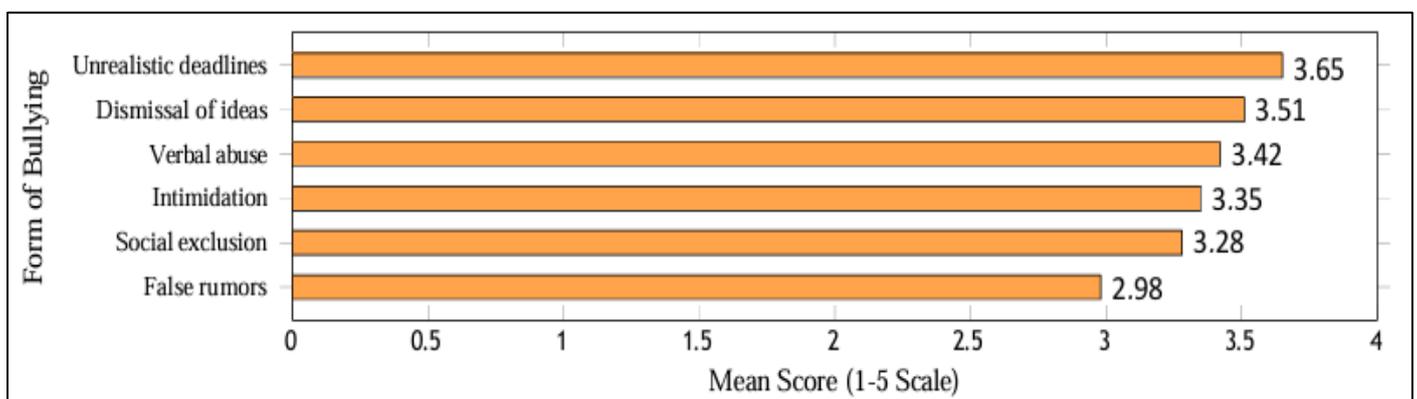


Fig 3 Prevalence of Workplace Bullying Forms by Mean Score.  
Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 3 visually represents the prevalence of different bullying forms, clearly showing that unrealistic dead-

lines and dismissal of ideas are the most frequently experienced forms of workplace bullying.

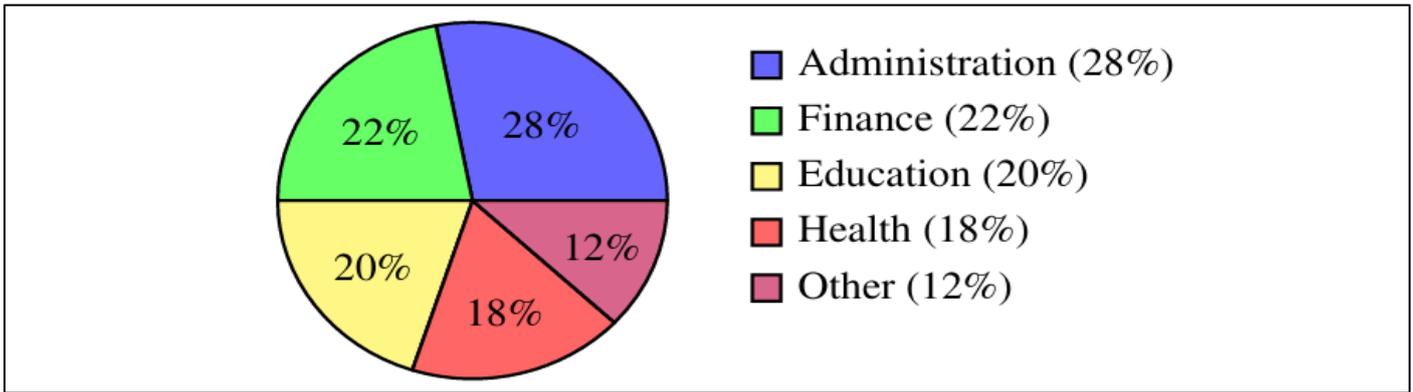


Fig 4 Departmental Representation of Respondents (N=100).  
 Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 4 shows the distribution of respondents across departments, indicating good representation from all major departments of the Council.

➤ *Impact on Job Satisfaction and Morale*

Table 2 presents the impact of workplace bullying on employee job satisfaction and morale.

Table 2 Impact of Bullying on Job Satisfaction and Morale

Impact Indicator	Mean	SD
Reduced motivation	3.78	1.12
Emotional exhaustion	3.92	1.05
Reduced commitment	3.65	1.18
Anxiety/stress at work	4.05	0.98
Lowered confidence	3.71	1.15
Dissatisfaction with management	3.58	1.22
<b>Overall Impact</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>0.89</b>

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

Data reveal that workplace bullying substantially undermines job satisfaction and morale (M=3.78, SD=0.89), with mean scores persistently exceeding the scale midpoint. This pattern confirms strong agreement with negative impact statements, demonstrating that bullying inflicts considerable psychological and emotional damage on employees. Employees reported particularly high levels of anxiety and stress (M=4.05), the highest impact indicator, suggesting that workplace bullying creates a psychologically

threatening environment that triggers stress responses. Emotional exhaustion (M=3.92) and reduced motivation (M=3.78) were also prominent, indicating that bullying depletes employees' psychological resources and undermines their engagement with work. These findings suggest that bullying substantially undermines employee well-being and organizational commitment, creating conditions conducive to turnover.

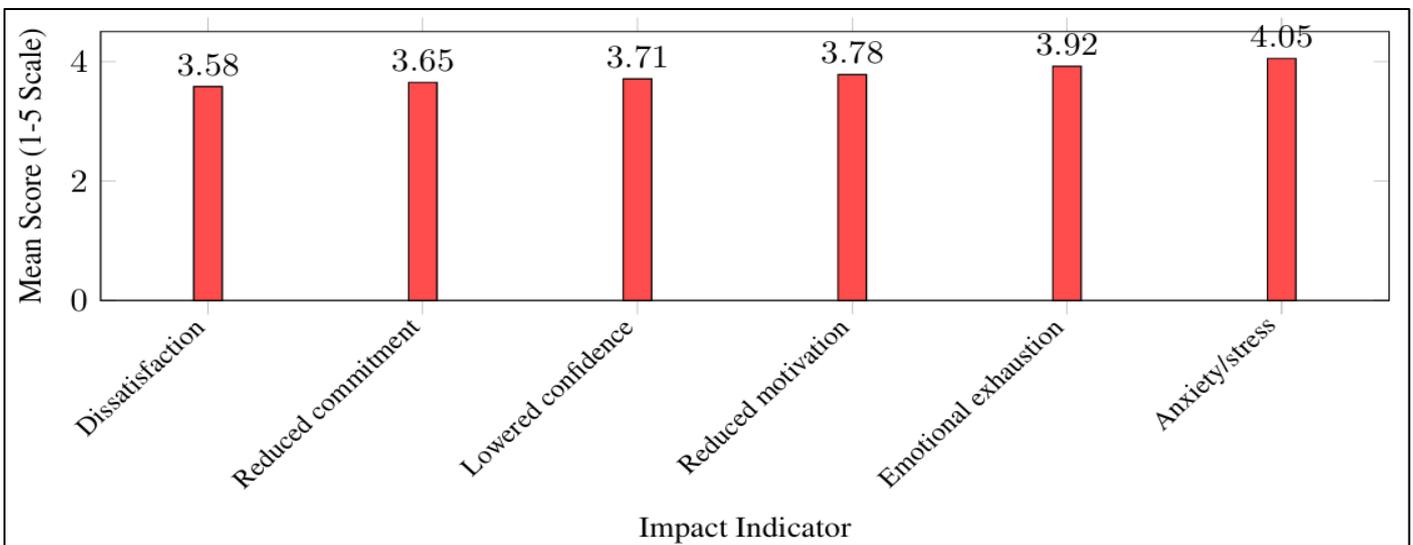


Fig 5 Impact of Workplace Bullying on Job Satisfaction and Morale.  
 Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 5 demonstrates the varying degrees of impact, with anxiety/stress and emotional exhaustion showing the highest mean scores, indicating these are the most severe consequences of workplace bullying.

➤ *Relationship Between Bullying and Turnover Intentions*

Correlation and regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between workplace bullying and employee turnover intentions. Table 3 presents the correlation results.

Table 3 Correlation Between Bullying and Turnover Intentions

Variable	Correlation (r)	p-value
Bullying & Turnover Intention	0.742	<0.001***
Bullying & Job Satisfaction	-0.685	<0.001***
Job Satisfaction & Turnover	-0.698	<0.001***

\*\*\*p<0.001 (Highly Significant)

Analysis reveals a robust positive correlation ( $r=0.742$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) between workplace bullying and turnover intentions. This coefficient demonstrates that elevated bullying experiences correspond with markedly increased turnover intentions among employees, establishing a substantial linear association between these variables. The correlation is statistically significant at the  $p<0.001$  level, providing strong evidence that this relationship is not due to chance. Additionally, bullying was negatively correlated with job satisfaction ( $r=-0.685$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), indicating that increased bullying experiences are associated with decreased job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was also negatively correlated with turnover intentions ( $r=-0.698$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), suggesting that employees with lower job satisfaction are more likely to intend to leave the organization.

Regression modeling demonstrates that workplace bullying serves as a significant predictor of turnover intentions, yielding a standardized beta coefficient of  $\beta=0.68$  ( $p<0.001$ ). The coefficient of determination ( $R^2=0.55$ ) confirms that workplace bullying accounts for 55% of variance in employees' departure intentions, establishing a considerable predictive association. This means that more than half of the variation in turnover intentions can be attributed to workplace bullying experiences. The remaining 45% of variance may be explained by other factors such as salary, career development opportunities, or personal circumstances. These findings confirm that bullying is a major driver of employee turnover at the Makeni District Council.

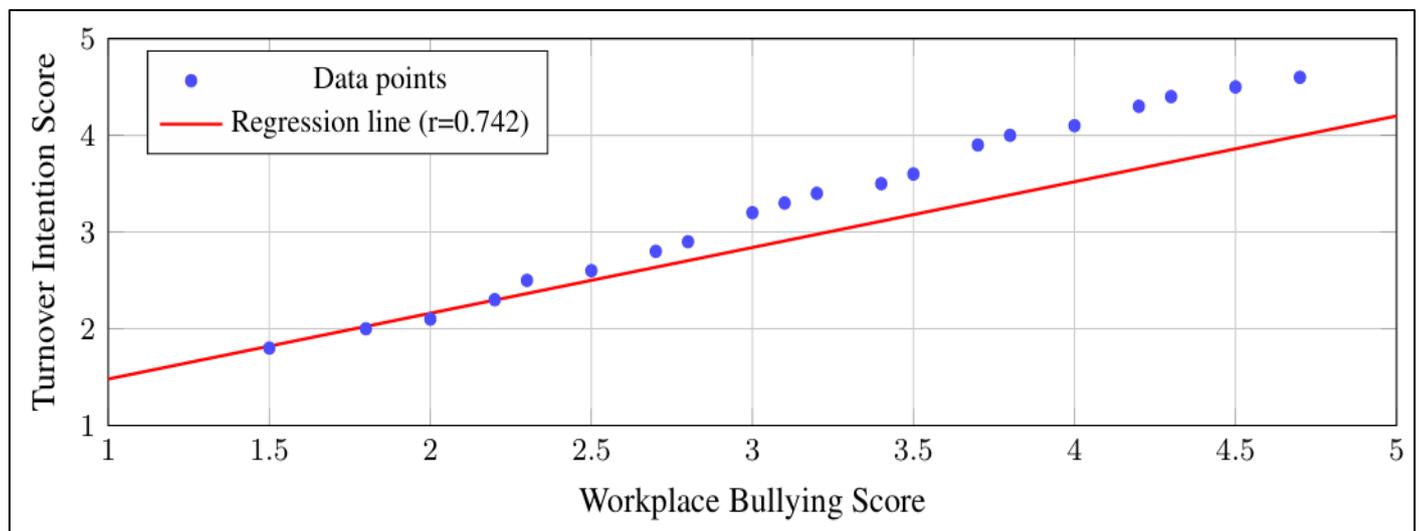


Fig 6 Scatter Plot: Relationship Between Bullying and Turnover Intentions.

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 6 illustrates the strong positive linear relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intentions, with the regression line showing the predictive trend ( $R^2=0.55$ ).

reporting systems ( $M=4.42$ ,  $SD=0.75$ ), promoting supportive leadership ( $M=4.38$ ,  $SD=0.79$ ), and offering employee counselling services ( $M=4.25$ ,  $SD=0.85$ ).

➤ *Recommended Strategies*

Respondents strongly endorsed several strategies to reduce workplace bullying and turnover. The most supported strategies included: establishing clear anti-bullying policies ( $M=4.35$ ,  $SD=0.78$ ), providing training on respectful communication ( $M=4.28$ ,  $SD=0.82$ ), creating confidential

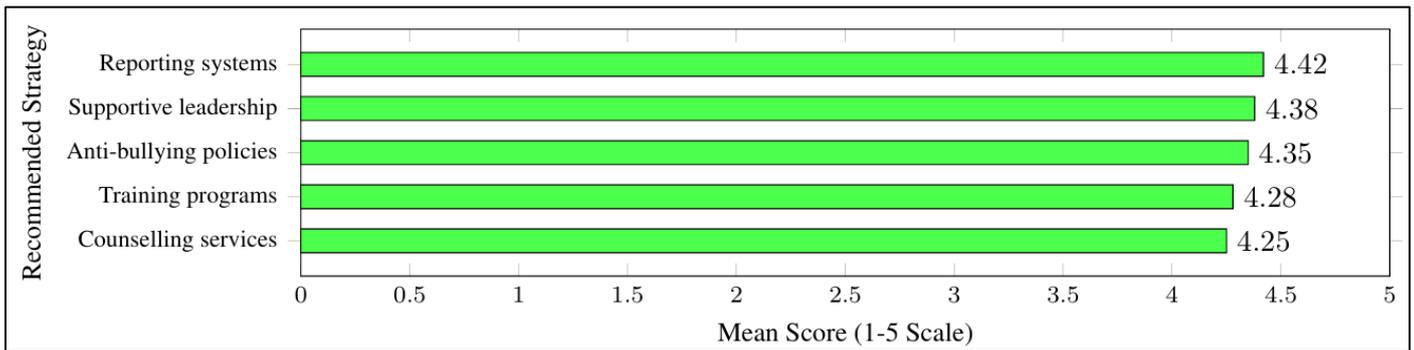


Fig 7 Recommended Strategies to Reduce Workplace Bullying.

Source: Field Survey, 2024

As shown in Figure 7, all recommended strategies received strong endorsement ( $M > 4.25$ ), with confidential reporting systems and supportive leadership being the most highly rated interventions.

## V. DISCUSSION

This investigation furnishes empirical evidence demonstrating that workplace bullying pervades the Makeni District Council and substantially drives employee turnover intentions. This section interprets the results in relation to the study objectives, compares findings with existing literature, discusses theoretical implications, practical applications, and acknowledges limitations.

### ➤ Interpretation of Findings

The moderate to high frequency of workplace bullying ( $M = 3.37$ ) establishes that bullying constitutes a critical concern within the organization. The most common forms—unrealistic deadlines, dismissal of ideas, and verbal abuse—align with the JD-R Model's conceptualization of bullying as a chronic job demand that depletes psychological resources [2]. These findings suggest that employees face persistent stressors that undermine their capacity to perform effectively and maintain well-being.

The strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.742$ ) between bullying and turnover intentions supports the COR Theory's prediction that resource loss motivates withdrawal behaviors [6]. Employees experiencing bullying perceive a threat to valued resources such as dignity, psychological safety, and job security, prompting them to consider leaving as a coping mechanism. The regression analysis further confirms that bullying is a significant predictor of turnover, explaining 55% of the variance in turnover intentions. This substantial effect size demonstrates that addressing workplace bullying should be a priority for organizational retention strategies.

### ➤ Comparison with Earlier Research

These results align with international scholarship showing that workplace bullying diminishes job satisfaction and elevates turnover intentions. Einarsen et al. (2011) and Nielsen & Einarsen (2018) reported similar patterns in Scandinavian organizations, where bullying was associated with increased psychological distress and withdrawal behaviors [4, 12]. Giorgi et al. (2017) found comparable

correlations between bullying and turnover in Italian healthcare settings, while Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007) documented similar effects in American workplaces [5, 9]. The uniformity of these patterns across varied cultural and organizational settings confirms the strength of the bullying-turnover association.

This investigation advances the literature by furnishing evidence from a developing nation setting, particularly within a Sierra Leonean local government institution. The prevalence rates ( $M = 3.37$ ) and effect sizes ( $r = 0.742$ ,  $R^2 = 0.55$ ) observed are comparable to those reported in studies from developed countries [8, 14], suggesting that workplace bullying is a universal organizational problem that transcends cultural and economic boundaries. This finding challenges assumptions that workplace bullying is primarily a Western phenomenon and demonstrates that employees in African public sector organizations face similar challenges. The similarity in patterns also suggests that interventions developed in Western contexts may be adaptable to African settings, though cultural modifications may be necessary.

### ➤ Practical Implications

The findings have important implications for human resource management and organizational policy at the Makeni District Council. First, the Council should develop and implement clear anti-bullying policies with defined consequences for perpetrators. Second, leadership training programs should emphasize respectful communication, conflict resolution, and the creation of psychologically safe work environments. Third, confidential reporting mechanisms should be established to enable employees to report bullying without fear of retaliation. Fourth, employee counselling and support services should be made available to help victims cope with the psychological effects of bullying.

Implementing these strategies can reduce bullying, improve job satisfaction and morale, and decrease turnover rates, ultimately enhancing organizational effectiveness and service delivery to the community.

### ➤ Limitations

This study has several limitations:

- The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences about the relationship between bullying and turnover

- Self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias or recall errors
- The study focused on one district council, limiting generalizability to other contexts
- Other factors influencing turnover (e.g., salary, career advancement) were not comprehensively examined

#### ➤ *Future Research Directions*

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships between bullying and turnover. Comparative studies across multiple district councils in Sierra Leone would enhance generalizability. Additionally, qualitative research could provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of bullying victims and the organizational factors that enable or prevent bullying behaviors.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This investigation examines the association between workplace bullying and employee turnover at the Makeni District Council in Sierra Leone. The study fills a substantial literature gap by furnishing empirical evidence on workplace bullying within a developing country's local government institution.

#### ➤ *Key Findings*

Results confirm that workplace bullying pervades the Makeni District Council, materializing chiefly through unrealistic deadlines ( $M=3.65$ ), dismissal of ideas ( $M=3.51$ ), verbal abuse ( $M=3.42$ ), and social exclusion ( $M=3.28$ ). The investigation establishes that bullying markedly diminishes employee job satisfaction and morale ( $M=3.78$ ), with victims reporting elevated anxiety and stress levels ( $M=4.05$ ), emotional exhaustion ( $M=3.92$ ), and decreased motivation ( $M=3.78$ ). Most critically, a robust positive correlation ( $r=0.742$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) emerged between workplace bullying and turnover intentions, with bullying accounting for 55% of variance in employees' departure decisions.

#### ➤ *Research Contributions*

This study makes several important contributions to the literature:

- **Empirical Contribution:** This is the first systematic empirical study examining workplace bullying in a Sierra Leonean local government institution, providing baseline data for future research and policy development in the region.
- **Theoretical Contribution:** The study validates the applicability of the Job Demands–Resources Model and Conservation of Resources Theory in an African public sector context, demonstrating that these Western-developed theories have cross-cultural validity.
- **Methodological Contribution:** The study demonstrates the feasibility of conducting rigorous quantitative research on sensitive workplace issues in developing country contexts, providing a methodological template for future studies.
- **Contextual Contribution:** By examining bullying in a local government setting, the study highlights how hi-

erarchical structures and limited accountability mechanisms in public sector organizations may facilitate bullying behaviors.

#### ➤ *Policy Implications*

The findings have urgent policy implications for the Makeni District Council and similar institutions:

- **Immediate Actions:** The Council should immediately develop and disseminate clear anti-bullying policies with defined reporting procedures and consequences for perpetrators. A zero-tolerance stance must be communicated from senior leadership.
- **Institutional Reforms:** Confidential reporting mechanisms should be established, potentially including external ombudspersons to ensure independence. Regular climate surveys should monitor bullying prevalence and employee well-being.
- **Capacity Building:** Mandatory training programs on respectful workplace behavior, conflict resolution, and psychological safety should be implemented for all staff, with specialized training for supervisors and managers.
- **Support Services:** Employee assistance programs offering counselling and psychological support should be established to help victims cope with bullying's effects and facilitate recovery.
- **Performance Management:** Leadership evaluation criteria should include measures of team morale, employee retention, and creation of respectful work environments, incentivizing positive leadership behaviors.

#### ➤ *Recommendations for Future Research*

Future research should:

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Employ longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships and track the long-term effects of bullying on employee careers and organizational outcomes.
- **Comparative Research:** Conduct multi-site studies across different district councils in Sierra Leone to identify contextual factors that exacerbate or mitigate bullying.
- **Qualitative Exploration:** Use qualitative methods to explore the lived experiences of bullying victims, organizational cultures that enable bullying, and barriers to reporting.
- **Intervention Studies:** Evaluate the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions in Sierra Leonean contexts, identifying culturally appropriate strategies.
- **Economic Analysis:** Quantify the financial costs of bullying-related turnover to build the business case for intervention investments.

#### ➤ *Final Remarks*

Workplace bullying represents a serious threat to employee well-being and organizational effectiveness at the Makeni District Council. With bullying explaining 55% of turnover intentions, addressing this issue is not optional but imperative for organizational sustainability. By implementing evidence-based anti-bullying interventions, the Council can improve employee retention, enhance service delivery, and

create a workplace culture characterized by dignity, respect, and psychological safety. This study provides the empirical foundation needed to catalyze these essential reforms and contributes to the growing body of knowledge on workplace bullying in developing countries.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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#### ➤ Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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