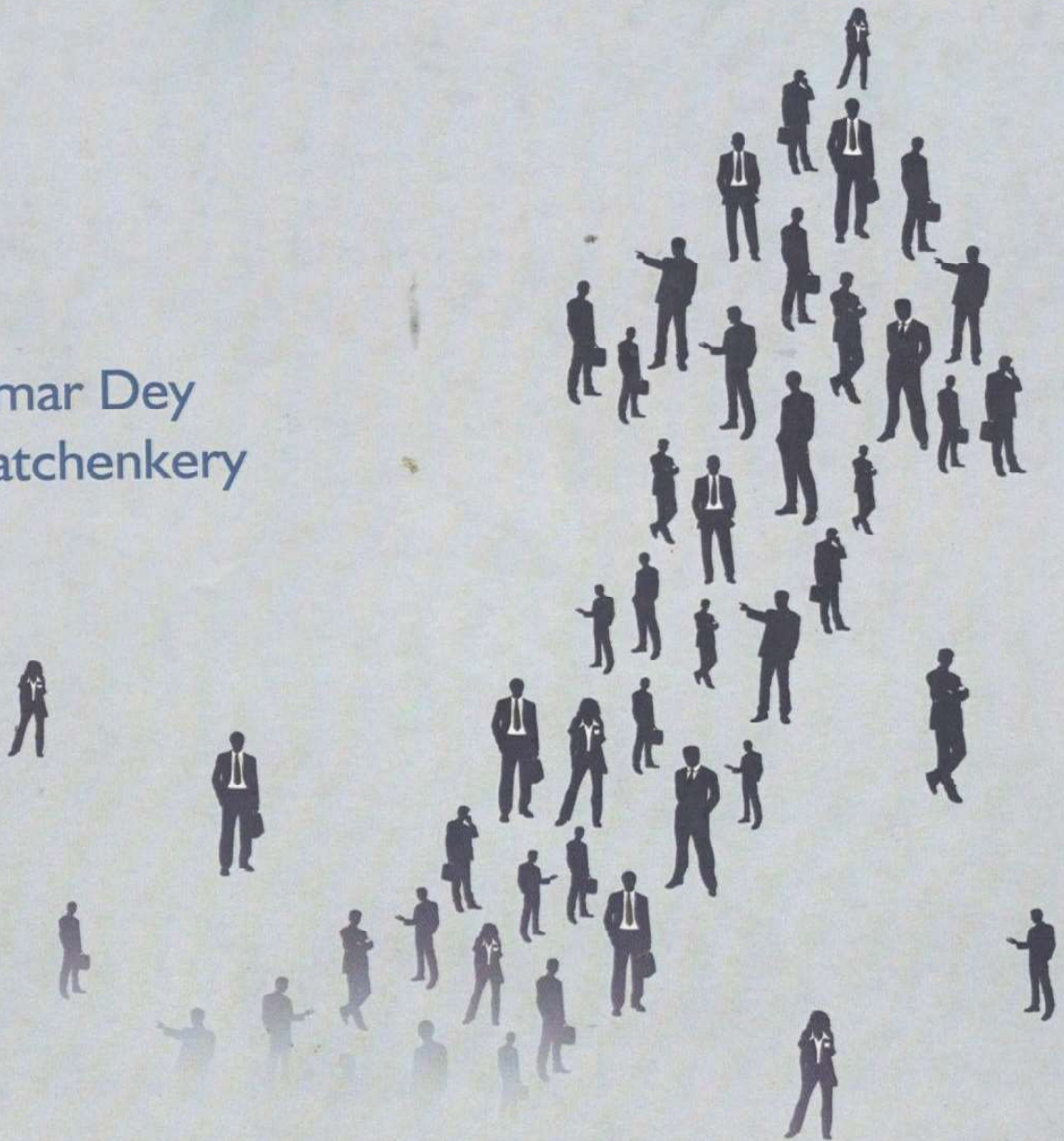


ADVANCES IN SOCIAL CHANGE, LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL DECISION MAKING

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Facets of Bullying in Higher Echelons

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ABSTRACT

Bullying has been a matter of concern for many organizations across the world. It is known to have adverse effects on target(s)' health and well-being. Although bullying is present in all levels of organizational hierarchy, focus on the top management is seldom seen. This study aims to explore the phenomenon of workplace bullying at the higher levels of the organization. A constructivist grounded theory study using semi-structured interviews with 13 top executives reveal that the higher echelons are equally exposed to bullying as is the lower levels. Four categories were found that explained the experiences of these targets. Peer bullying found to be majorly prevalent over leader bullying. The four categories emerging from the study included the following: (1) being ethical or being liked, (2) targeting the performer, (3) politicking peers, and (4) threatening to the leader.

Keywords: Constructivist Grounded Theory, Qualitative Method, Top Management, Upper Echelons, Workplace Bullying

“The power vested upon you is so intensified that you forget the limits of ethical boundaries, your ego becomes your guiding light and humility goes out the window” (Participant 3[P-3]).

“It’s like walking on the eggshells” “the vultures are eyeing on you, one wrong move and you become the target of a slow death” (Participant 2[P-2])

Bullying is quite often seen as a downward phenomenon where the perpetrator is usually a superior in the organization (Hoel & Salin, 2003; Zapf et al., 2003). Also, power has played a major role in this phenomenon (Hodson et al., 2006; Salin, 2003). Power imbalance seems to have an omnipresence in bullying studies (Samnani & Singh, 2012; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011). But, what if the bullied and the perpetrator are equally powerful?

The earlier-quoted statements were mentioned by the two participants who were interviewed for the current study, participant 3 (P 3) and participant 2 (P 2), which gives some insights into the views of the top management executives. Studies show that superiors aren’t safe from bullying

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