EXPLORING VICTIMIZATION EXPERIENCE AND CO-DEPENDENCY

Dr. Aruna Bala

Assistant Professor, HR, IMCU, Kengeri Campus

Introduction

Most often, deliberations on victimization shrinks to a case of sexual abuse between a man and woman. However, in reality, victimization comes in the form of physical (and sexual), verbal and emotional forms. Those who are exposed to repeated negative/aggressive acts for a period of time by making them powerless to defend their position are labelled as victim. An individual can get victimized in formal as well as informal settings; school, workplace, cyber space, family and romantic relationships, irrespective of gender.

Futility of existing legal approach to bullying and harassment urges to look for alternative solutions. A detailed examination of victimization experience is very much needed in this context. Hence, the present study views victimization through the concept of power and dependency (Branch et al., 2007). Drawing upon the aspect of power imbalance between the victim and perpetrator, a psychological construct, co-dependency, is adopted to explain the victims' role in victimization experience. The study investigates co-dependency as the principal factor underlying one's victimization. There are empirical studies which indicate the relevance of co-dependency as the major cause of domestic violence. Henceforth, it is reasonable to argue that, an individual's experience of victimization in other settings such as school and workplace also can be attributed to co-dependency.

The present study is anticipated to bring about strong implications with respect to actual practice and academic literature. Knowing co-dependency aids people in their pursuit of self-awareness and thus drives a self-directed change within them. It empowers victims to gain control over themselves, which in turn, help them to live their life to the fullest. Co-dependency is a variable which is not studied in the context of workplace, or in normal social settings.

Power imbalance in victimization experience

Power is the capability of an individual (A) to influence other individual (B) so that the B behaves in accordance with the wishes of A. Power requires dependence and not goal compatibility. Hence, this power can be exercised laterally, upwardly and downwardly. Robbins categorized bases of power as coercive power (based on fear), reward power, legitimate power, expert power and refer power (2006). Bullying occurs when there is an abuse of power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. Branch et al., (2007) propose a power and dependency approach in explaining bullying. Power has formal and informal sources, which means, powerlessness can be created beyond the notion of an abuse of authority. The targets' powerlessness has many underlying physical, psychological and legitimate causes.

Scholars have not consensually agreed on the definition of bullying as many argue that it is impossible to come up with a uniform definition. Bullying is an act that is intended to harm, that

takes place repeatedly, and with an imbalance of power between the aggressor and target (Farrington, 1993). To define in detail, bullying is a situation in which one or more persons systematically and over a long period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative treatment on the part of one or more persons, in a situation in which the person(s) exposed to the treatment has difficulty in defending themselves against this treatment (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2007). Two important aspects of bullying based on these definitions are, frequency of abuse and the existence of power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target/victim. Single instances of abuse cannot be considered as bullying as per this definition. Negative treatment relates to the occurrence and perception of significant, inappropriate, negative or unreasonable behaviours as opposed to trivial behaviours. Since the subjective perception of bullying might vary; this creates enough complexity in deciding what constitute bullying and what does not. Bullying incudes physical abuse (e.g. hitting, kicking or punching), verbal abuse (e.g. threatening, mocking, name-calling or spreading malicious rumours) and social isolation or exclusion in which a person is deliberately ignored (Monks et al., 2009).

Co-dependency

Co-dependency is a way of maintaining relationship where people involved is dependent to each other to the extent that is unhealthy and toxic to them. It is a specific condition that is characterized by pre-occupation and extreme dependence (emotionally, socially and sometimes physically) on a person or object (Subby and Friel, 1984). In the earlier times, co-dependency was viewed as a condition of chemical dependency. Later, scholars tend to view it as a psychological condition of people who are in relationship with alcoholics or drug addicts (Cermak, 1986).

Thus, the concept was used by drug and alcohol counsellors to describe those individuals, who make relationships with substance abusers, fail to leave them even after it becomes clear that the relationship is damaging one (Frank and Golden, 1992). The concept became popular in mental health literature towards the end of 1970s (Anderson, 1994) but its presence started fading of late.

Rice (2017) in the book on Co-dependency, restated Melody Beattie's (the author of "Co-dependent no more, 1987) list of co-dependency characteristics. They are; care taking, low self-worth, repression, obsession, controlling, denial, dependency, poor communication, weak boundaries, lack of trust, anger, sex problems and progressive issues such as emotional, mental or physical illness. The co-dependency is measured by dependency, obsession, care taking, repressed feelings, lack of trust, poor communication, low self-worth, control, denial and rigidity (Spann, 1989).

Co-dependency is hence a psychosocial condition manifested through a dysfunctional pattern of relating to others. This dysfunctional pattern of relating is characterized by; extreme focus outside of self (dependency, obsession and caretaking); lack of open expression of feelings (repressed feelings, lack of trust and poor communication) and because of low self-worth, attempts to derive a sense of purpose and meaning through relationships with others (control, denial and rigidity). Schaef briefly outlined the characteristics of co-dependent people (1986)

1. External referencing, relationship addiction, cling-clung relationships, lack of boundaries, impression management, not trusting own perceptions
2. Care taking, making yourself indispensible, being a martyr
3. Self-centeredness, loss of morality, dishonesty

4.   Control issues, gullibility, fear, rigidity and judgmentalism

Spann (1989) to make a scale for co-dependency, also attempted to collate the literature done on the dimensions of co-dependency which demonstrates that the scholars have increasingly agreed on the dimensions of co-dependency.

Literature review

Scholars have contributed enough on bullying and co-dependency constructs, which lays the foundation of the present study. Understanding these previous studies aids us in getting a clear picture about the possible connection between those two constructs.

Studies on bullying

Smith, 2004 found that those who are bullied at school are at great risk of being victimized at workplace too. Literature on work place victimization claims that there is a personality profile which makes people being a target of aggression repeatedly (Acquino and Thau, 2009). Research on the relationship between personality factors from the Big five reveals that victimized individuals are more conscientious and are emotional unstable (Coyne et al., 2000). People who are low in self esteem and those who adopt accommodative conflict management styles get bullied frequently (Bowling and Beehr, 2006).

Co-dependency and related constructs

The literature shows the co-dependent behaviour is associated with identity based on care taking and excessive responsibility for others' behaviour (Schaef, 1986). This identity is formed out of the experience of powerlessness, which is forged out as an adaptive necessity of compromise, appeasement and covert manipulation (Anderson, 1994). Historically, it has been identified as feminine malady (Fisher and Beer, 1990), although, there are men who shows excessive co-dependent behaviours. Co-dependency is found to be related to the constructs such as sex role orientation, social desirability, locus of control and self-esteem (Spann, 1989). Some of the fundamental characteristics of co-dependency such as extreme focus outside of self through dependency, obsession and caretaking are reflected femininity dimensions of sex role orientation. Social desirability is the tendency of the people to obtain approval by responding in a culturally appropriate and acceptable manner (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960 from Spann, 1989). This aspect of social desirability is shared with the construct of co-dependency, where they constantly seek approval of others. Locus of control holds that people acquire a generalized expectation about the source of reinforcement for their actions (Ashkanasy, 1985). The notion of locus of control is relevant to co-dependency in that co-dependent people try to have and believe they can have control over other individuals, suggesting that external forces can have an effect on others' behaviours. Some of the characteristics of co-dependency are indicative of tendency for external locus of control is lack of trust, low self-worth and controlling behaviour. According to Whitley (1983), global self-esteem comprises a person's self-evaluation across a number of areas, such as feelings of adequacy and worth, feelings of being a good or bad person, physical appearance, personal skills and sexuality. Self-esteem and co-dependency are in inverse relationship (Spann, 1989).

Co-dependency and workplace bullying

The paper adopts the psychological concept of "co-dependency" to explain the powerlessness and dependence the victim has in abusive relationship. In the case of abusive supervision, the perpetrator usually finds his/her side kick to influence and make them work according to the wishes of perpetrator. The person, who acts like side kick, must be lacking self-esteem, lack of trust in oneself and in need of approval on career front. The perpetrator misuses the vulnerability of the victim. Victim develops a pattern of painful dependency on compulsive behaviour and approval seeking in order to gain safety, identity and self-worth (Frank and Golden, 1992). The victim maintains a dysfunctional pattern of relating to the perpetrator with a extreme focus outside of oneself, lack of expression of feelings and personal meaning derived from relationships with others (Fischer and Spann, 1991). Co-dependency results in sticking to an abusive partner and defines their identity by being associated with the toxic individuals. The prefix of "co" implies shared responsibility for the abuse (Frank and Golden, 1992). The theme of victimization is pronounced in co-dependent literature. The assumption is that the victims internalize a set of rules which are adaptive in abusive situations during their childhood and they recreate the same in workplace abuse. Co-dependence converges with another construct called love addition, coined by Robin Norwood (1986). Scholars sometimes use love addiction and co-dependency interchangeably, although, the latter refers to more general pattern of behaviours of taking responsibility for others whereas love addiction is about over involvement in dyadic relationships. Love addict is a definite co-dependent but a co-dependent may not necessarily be a love addict.

Conceptual framework

Based on the literature review, the present study conceptually link co-dependency with victimization experience to test empirically (Figure 1).
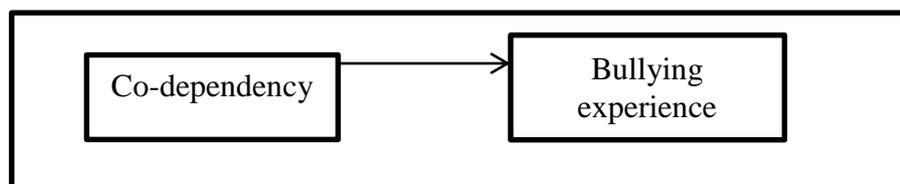

Figure 1: Conceptual model

Methodology

Sample: The sample consists of 87 students from MBA, IMCU, Kengeri campus. The sampling method adopted was convenient sampling, as it was important that, people should be comfortable sharing their information about relationship pattern and the past victimization experience. The sample consisted of 50 females and 37 males. The sample is not diverse with respect to marital status as majority of them belonged to student population. Although all students may not have enough experience with respect to workplace bullying, it is assumed that they would have had some experience of bullying in any other settings.

Instrument: The study used Fischer, Spann and Crawford scale to measure Co-dependency (Fischer and Spann, 1991) and victimization scale (Aquino and Bradfield, 2000) for measuring the experiences of victimization of any kind.

Methods: To begin with, a factor analysis was done to understand co-dependency dimensions and five factors were generated. Based on the factor scores, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict its relationship to workplace victimization. Gender comparisons were conducted using t-tests.

Results and Discussion

The exploratory factor analysis is conducted with the 15 item scale of co-dependency data. The Bartlett's test of Sphericity is significant and KMO measure of sampling adequacy is also in the acceptable level of 0.69. Six factors are generated and their rotated component matrix is given below to explain the factor loadings. Factor loadings above 0.50 are acceptable and are retained in the rotated component matrix.

The exploratory factor analysis generated five factors, with a factor loading above 0.50 (Table 1). The five factors are explained below;

Factor 1: Three items such as " I tell myself that things will get better when the people in my life change what they are doing;" "I seem to have relationships where I am always there for them, but they are rarely for me;" and "I seem to get into relationships that are painful for me." The dominant theme emerges out of these three items would be **external focus**, where relying on external factors to keep things working for them.

Factor 2:   Four items such as "It is hard for me to accept compliments graciously", "When I do something nice for myself, I usually feel guilty", "Sometimes I get focused on one person to the extent of neglecting other relationships and responsibilities" and "I don't usually let others see the "real" me" together reflects the theme of **silenced self**.

Factor 3: Three items that loaded in the factor three are "It is hard for me to make decisions", "it is hard for me to say NO" and "When someone upsets me, I will hold it in for long time, but once in a while I explode". The theme which evolves from these items is **passivity.**

Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Indecisiveness			.671		
Hard to say NO			.627		
Hard to accept compliments		.762			
Intolerance to emptiness					
Over caring					-.725
Guilty self-love		.733			
Lack of worries (negative)				.895	
External focus	.718				
Wrong choice of people	.838				
Exorbitant focus on others		.566			
Painful relationships	.790				
Fake self		.517			
Procrastinated anger			.639		
Conflict aversion					.623
Impending anxiety				.648	

Table 1:Rotated component matrix
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Factor 4: Two items loads in this factor and they are "I do not worry much" which is a negative item and "I often have a sense of dread and impending doom" which is positive. The items reflect the consistent negativity prevails in the mind of co-dependent people. Hence, **negativity** is labelled for the factor 4. However, the negative item should have received a negative factor loading. Positive factor loading for a negative item must be indicating a problem with the item, where it doesn't measure what it is supposed to measure. Care will be taken while reusing the item again for further data collection.

Factor 5: This involves two items; one is a negative item "I usually do not do things for other people that they are capable of doing for themselves" and a positive item which is "I will usually go to any lengths to avoid open conflict." The negative item has obtained a negative factor loading as well. The theme emerges from these two items are **agreeableness**.

Thus, there are five factors which are; external focus, silenced self, passivity, negativity and agreeableness. The factor scores generated will eventually be the independent variables for the multiple regression analysis. That is, workplace victimization will be regressed to the factor scores on these five factors.

Regression analysis

These factors were tested for its prediction with respect to workplace victimization. The model is fit with an F-value of 7.06 which is significant at 0.05 level. External focus and passivity predicted significantly workplace victimization, where external focus is significant at 0.01 level (Table 2).

Variable	Std. β
External focus	0.42***
Silenced Self	0.03
Passivity	0.34**
Negativity	0.09
Agreeableness	0.04
Adj.R^2	26.9
F Value	7.06***

Table 2: Regression results

It is rather surprising to find that silenced self, negativity and agreeableness do not predict significantly workplace victimization. The nature of sample would have impacted the result as the sample comprised of students. They would have struggled to understand the real meaning of silenced self, negativity and agreeableness, which in turn reflects in the final regression results. Perhaps, a further research with a different population will enable us to conclude on this matter. Series of t-tests were conducted to investigate the impact of gender on workplace bullying and these five factors of co-dependency. The results came out insignificant except in the case of passivity, where women tend to be more passive compared to male counterparts.

Conclusion

The study was an original attempt to understand how co-dependency makes a person prone to get victimized. Considering the initial and exploratory phase of this kind of study, results are promising and urge to look further into it. The present study gives enough possibilities for further research such as examining the same relationship in workplace settings and including more variables other than co-dependency. The study comes with the practical implication; it aids us designing suitable interventions for workplace victimization. Workplace victimization has lot of negative consequences which brings lot of bad reputation to the organization. Hence, it is absolutely essential to propose an intervention.

Reference

1. Anderson, S.C., 1994. A critical analysis of the concept of codependency. *Social Work*, *39*(6), pp.677-685.
2. Aquino, K. and Bradfield, M., 2000. Perceived victimization in the workplace: The role of situational factors and victim characteristics. *Organization Science*, *11*(5), pp.525-537.
3. Aquino, K. and Thau, S., 2009. Workplace victimization: Aggression from the target's perspective. *Annual review of psychology*, *60*, pp.717-741.
4. Ashkanasy, N.M., 1985. Rotter's internal-external scale: Confirmatory factor analysis and correlation with social desirability for alternative scale formats. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *48*(5), p.1328.
5. Bowling, N.A. and Beehr, T.A., 2006. Workplace harassment from the victim's perspective: a theoretical model and meta-analysis.
6. Branch, S., Ramsay, S. and Barker, M., 2013. Workplace bullying, mobbing and general harassment: A review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *15*(3), pp.280-299.
7. Cermak, T.L., 1986. Diagnostic criteria for codependency. *Journal of psychoactive drugs*, *18*(1), pp.15-20.
8. Coyne, I., Seigne, E. and Randall, P., 2000. Predicting workplace victim status from personality. *European journal of work and organizational psychology*, *9*(3), pp.335-349.
9. Farrington, D.P., 1993. Understanding and preventing bullying. *Crime and justice*, *17*, pp.381-458.
10. Fischer, J.L. and Spann, L., 1991. Measuring codependency. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, *8*(1), pp.87-100.
11. Fisher, D. and Beer, J., 1990. Codependency and self-esteem among high school students. *Psychological Reports*, *66*(3), pp.1001-1002.
12. Frank, P.B. and Golden, G.K., 1992. Blaming by naming: Battered women and the epidemic of codependence. *Social Work*, *37*(1), pp.5-6.
13. Matthiesen, S.B. and Einarsen, S., 2007. Perpetrators and targets of bullying at work: Role stress and individual differences. *Violence and victims*, *22*(6), pp.735-753.
14. Monks, C.P., Smith, P.K., Naylor, P., Barter, C., Ireland, J.L. and Coyne, I., 2009. Bullying in different contexts: Commonalities, differences and the role of theory. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *14*(2), pp.146-156.
15. Norwood, R., 1986. *Women who love too much: When you keep wishing and hoping he'll change*. Simon and Schuster.

16. Rice, J.S., 2017. *A disease of one's own: Psychotherapy, addiction and the emergence of co-dependency*. Routledge.

17. Schaef, A.W. (1986). *Co-dependence: Misunderstood- Mistreated.*San Fransisco: Harper & Row.

18. Smith, P.K., 2004. Bullying: recent developments. *Child and adolescent mental health*, *9*(3), pp.98-103.

19. Spann, L.A., 1989. *Developing a scale to measure codependency* (Doctoral dissertation, Texas Tech University).

20. Subby, R. and Friel, J., 1984. Codependency, An Emerging Issue. *Popano Beach, Florida: Health Communications*.

21. Whitley, B.E., 1983. Sex role orientation and self-esteem: A critical meta-analytic review. *Journal of Personality and Social psychology*, *44*(4), p.765.