

Employee Mistreatment as a Response to Voluntary Workplace Behaviors: A Victim-Centric Study in Sri Lanka

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Employees who engage in Voluntary Workplace Behaviors (VWBs) often anticipate positive responses and recognition within the organization due to the benefits these behaviors offer to the overall workplace environment. However, real-world and literature evidence proved that engaging in these VWBs occasionally results in mistreatment. Addressing this anomaly, this exploratory study delved into the mistreatments experienced by employees engaging in VWBs from the victim's perspective. The study pursued three research objectives: firstly, to identify diverse forms of mistreatment experienced by employees engaged in VWBs; secondly, to examine, the reactions of victims to these various forms of mistreatment; and thirdly to explore the (3) perceived reasons behind the mistreatments encountered by the victims. Grounded on the Interpretivism paradigm, this study employed an inductive approach using qualitative research methodology. Multiple case studies were adopted as the research strategy. Employing purposive and snowballing sampling methods ten employees were selected from both Sri Lankan private and public sector workplaces who experienced workplace mistreatment due to their VWBs. Subsequently in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data were analyzed using content analysis. Outcomes of the initial objective revealed that mistreatments encompassed instances where the victim experienced the perpetrator's inactive attention, undermining, false accusative acts, suspicion, unbearable work stressors, interruptions, exclusionary acts, verbal harassment, hidden mistreatments, and inactive collaboration. According to the findings of the second objective behavioral reactions, psychological reactions, and other reactions such as reactions according to the situations and based on intuitions were found as the main reactions of victims. Individual-level factors, group-level dynamics, and organizational-level elements were found as the perceived reasons for mistreatments. The current study enhances the literature because this is a novel endeavor that examined three aspects; forms, reasons, and reactions of employee mistreatment in a single study, and this is a fresh perspective for organizations to look into VWBs.

Keywords: *Employee mistreatment, Victim, Voluntary workplace behaviors*