



Unrevealing the mystery of Bullying at workplace: Exploring Burnout through Psychological Stress and Perceived Organization Support

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ABSTRACT

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The work environment significantly impacts employee relationships and workplace dynamics. A positive environment promotes collaboration, teamwork, job satisfaction, and recognition, while a negative one can lead to tension and disengagement. Open communication, well-organized spaces, diverse environments, and opportunities for personal and professional growth strengthen bonds. This research paper explores the relationship between bullying at work place and burnout through psychological stress and the buffering effect of perceived organizational support. Study provides a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which bullying at work place effects employee burnout and explores the potential protective role of perceived organizational support in alleviating burnout symptoms. This study works on a quantitative research methodology and collects data from employees working in miscellaneous industries. Questionnaire has been circulated via online mode and through google form to 300 employees from numerous industrial sectors. The findings indicate positive association between bullying at workplace and burnout signifying that those individuals who are working in such organizations or those who have experienced bullying at work place leave the organization at its earliest.

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1.0 Introduction

Positive work environment plays a crucial and important role for organizational success, as it promotes employee well-being, motivation, and engagement, resulting in higher job satisfaction and retention thereafter. Conversely, an undesirable work environment leads to psychological stress, burnout, bunking off, and turnover, adversely impacting organizational performance and reputation. Hence, organizations should strive to create an environment that fosters employee well-being, growth, and development. Organizational work environment and working conditions in the healthcare industry are often characterized by changes such as interpersonal fights, pyramid, , rotations frequently and stress at its peak (Ofori et al., 2020). Among all industries, the hotel sector has greatest percentage of reported cases of bullying and harassment (Ram, 2018). An Australian trade union called United Voice said that 86% of respondents to a poll of workers in the hospitality sector, they felt insecure at work (Hughes et al., 2023).

Bullying at workplace is one of the most important and significant issue and most pervasive and confusing concept too. Bullying at the workplace is considered to be a repetitive and cumulative phenomenon with systematic patterns of abusers. Their negative behaviors increases their power over the victims and on other subordinates (Amini et al., 2023). Actually, workplace bullying is a widespread issue that disturbs employee comfort and job satisfaction, ultimately impacting organizational performance. It involves persistent negative behaviors, such as verbal abuse or social exclusion, directed at individuals or groups within the organization. Its presence can foster a culture of fear that results in dropped morale, job dissatisfaction, and increased absenteeism (Birkeland & Valvatne, 2018).

Bullying at work place has adverse effects on mental and physical health, job satisfaction, commitment, and productivity. Bullying at the workplace is a consequence of emotional tiredness, harassment and offending attitude. It negatively affects organizations across the industries, leading to reduced customer satisfaction and loyalty. Bullying also causes emotional tiredness and psychological suffering. This implies that exposure to bullying at workplace can induce psychological distress in employees, which, in turn, contributes to emotional exhaustion over time (Allen et al., 2014). Bullying at workplace is a state in which someone who is isolated or excluded from society or their job and the values of his/her efforts decline, and he/she is threatened, about all those negative behaviors that cause fatigue, frustration and stress. Bullying at workplace has become a serious social problem. Global economic conditions have created an immense competition at the work place, and this competition has increased the phenomena of bullying at workplace. Supervisors, colleagues, subordinates bully one another to create such a havoc that effect the performance of the other individual (Kim et al., 2019). In 1909, an article about nursing directors abusing their rights published in New York Times. Those rights that publicly mistreat the nurses, which drew attention to workplace harassment in the nursing profession. Bullying at workplace is one of the most researched topic from the last couple of decades (Fan et al., 2023).

Stress is an avoidable, normal and necessary result of being alive. Stress can be physical, mental or emotional (Pitt & Tapia, 2017). However, certain occupations are associated with an

increased risk of stress and burnout. Professionals face increased work stress and challenges across the industries like academia, human services and health care, such as social workers, law enforcement and police officers. It is of great surprise that among all the professions, teaching profession is having highest rate of stress and burnout (Naseer et al., 2018). Employees' perception of organizational support means the provision of all necessary facilities that can help employees in fulfilling their job responsibilities. These facilities help in increasing job performance and engagement. Organizational support encourages employees to put more effort into their roles (Wang, 2015; Ahmad et al., 2020). Perceived organization support refers employees perception of the support provided by organization and relates to the extent to which employees feel that the organization/employers value their contributions and well-being (Afshari, 2020). On the basis of the reviewed literature, current study has explored the relationship of bullying at work place and burnout through psychological stress with the buffering effect of perceived organizational support (Gupta & Bakhshi, 2018; Said & Tanova, 2021).

2.0 Literature Review

Bullying at work place occur between individuals in different roles within an organization. Supervisors engage in bullying behaviors towards their subordinates, such as constant criticism, public belittlement, or unfair blame for mistakes. Colleagues can also bully one another. Work places also witness bullying in upward direction when subordinates bully their supervisors by refusing to follow their instructions (Nielson & Einarsen, 2015). Another common phenomenon among employees is burnout and exhaustion. (Amini et al., 2023). Bullying at workplace is associated with many adverse physical and psychological effects like reduced satisfaction, absenteeism, dissatisfied workforce, high turnover, reduced output, reduced devotion and performance in the organizations (Amini et al., 2023). Previous studies have shown that continued exposure to a traumatic environment that produced by bullying at work place can easily create the risk of hypertension and heart diseases among employees of different sectors. Bullying at work place cause physical problems such as distress, anxiety, and tiredness as well as mental health problems (Schoville & Aebersold, 2020). Work related problems such as reduced employment, job satisfaction, poor job performance, impaired the association between workplace environment and burnout and it'll help in rising revenue trends leads by bullying at workplace (Kim et al., 2019).

Burnout is a common and negative phenomenon in the workplace that stems from stress at work and is observed in all occupations. Researchers argue that continual stress leads to psychological exhaustion or depression. Bullying at workplace is leading cause of burnout which can have significant impact on mental and physical health of workers (Satisfaction, 2023). Its presence can foster a culture of fear, resulting in dropped morale, job dissatisfaction, and increased emotional domination (Gupta et al., 2017). To better understand the nature of the connection between bullying at workplace and employee happiness, researchers have turned to moderation studies, examining the variables that affect the strength of the association among the predictor and the outcome (Dawson, 2014). On the basis of reviewed literature bullying at the workplace significantly affect employees' mental health, stress and anxiety (Fitzpatrick & Dulin, 2010).

H1: There is a positive relationship between bullying at workplace and Burnout.

Bullying in the workplace has been considered a thrilling form of social stress. Workplace bullying has been constantly linked to psychological stress among workers. Psychological stress which refers to the fatigue and tiredness. This implies that workplace bullying can induce psychological distress in employees, and create stressful work situations. The recent studies have shed light on the association between WB and psychological stress. In previous research, they have taken bullying and it leads to intent job stress. (Oh et al., 2016).

Different and difficult economic conditions have placed intense demands on organizations. Previous research or studies has highlighted the stressful conditions take heavy peal on employees where interactive violence, rude co-workers, that can affect their norms, values and belief. (Naseer et al., 2018).

In different researches related to bullying and stress in the hospital sector, Nursing has the highest rate of violence and bullying compared to with other professions, and evidences complete proof this bitter reality related to bullying in mostly nursing students and it creates psychological stress in Nurses (Lalonde & Hall, 2016).

Moreover, it has been seen that in hospitals there may be different type of challenging situations may be faced by nurses that can be personal and organizational needs that affect their jobs, and their performance as well as their health and that's why Nursing has the highest rate of violence and bullying (McDonald, 2016). These studies inclusively emphasize the significant impact of Bullying at the workplace and it creates employees psychological stress that can effect emotional well-being and emphasize the significance of organizational efforts to prevent and address workplace bullying, thereby reducing the risk of psychological stress among employees.

Psychological stress commonly arises from stress and is connected with different output such as reduced job satisfaction, declined organizational commitment, and amplified rate of turnover intention. Within the workplace, psychological stress can lead to burnout, where employees intentionally engage in activities that negatively impact service quality and create issues for customers. These actions have serious repercussions for organizations, through declining the customer satisfaction, and reducing customer loyalty.

Several studies have examined the occurrence of bullying and its potential consequences, particularly the relationship between bullying at workplace and symptoms or factors of bullying at the workplace. Bullying at workplace is widely associated with psychological distress and complaints, including experience of burnout (Giorgi et al., 2016). Job stress contributes to the negative outcomes. (Lee et al., 2021). Researchers have demonstrated the link between psychological stress and burnout among employees in various industries, including hotels, healthcare, and airlines. These findings emphasize the need for organizations to address and mitigate psychological stress to minimize their negative effect of bullying.

H2: Psychological Stress mediates the relationship between bullying at workplace and Burnout.

Previous research or studies has highlighted the main role of the perceived organizational support as a valuable source that can defend employees additional resources loss in the case of

bullying at the workplace (Naseer et al., 2018). Mostly, bullying at workplace lead to burnout when employees don't connect supportive relationship with their organization. In other words, the perceived organizational support can provide the necessary services, needed to deal with harassment in the workplace thus keeping personal resources. Therefore perceived organizational support mediated this association between WB and BO (Afshari, 2020). Another study of (Malik & Younas, n.d.) Tried to check the consequences of bullying amongst employees of the textile industry in Pakistan and established that the World Bank actively and PR significantly predicts workplace deviance. Employees are aware that their organizations that take care about their welfare and much interested to get the support from their organization to compensate for resource depletion when bullied (Afshari, 2020).

According to a one more research related to burnout, Burnout has been linked to psychological health problems such as anxiety and depression and low quality of life. Moreover burnout contribute to negative work related outcomes such as increased absenteeism and reduced job satisfaction (Roeser et al., 2013).

Overall, these studies indicate that psychological stress serves as a significant predictor of burnout among employees. Our contribution to the existing literature focuses on the influence of workplace bullying on the relationship between perceived organization support and burnout. As a result, we hypothesize that workplace bullying will impact the association between perceived organization support and burnout.

H3: Perceived organizational support moderates the relationship between psychological stress and Burnout, such that the strength of the relationship will vary based on the level of Perceived organizational support.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

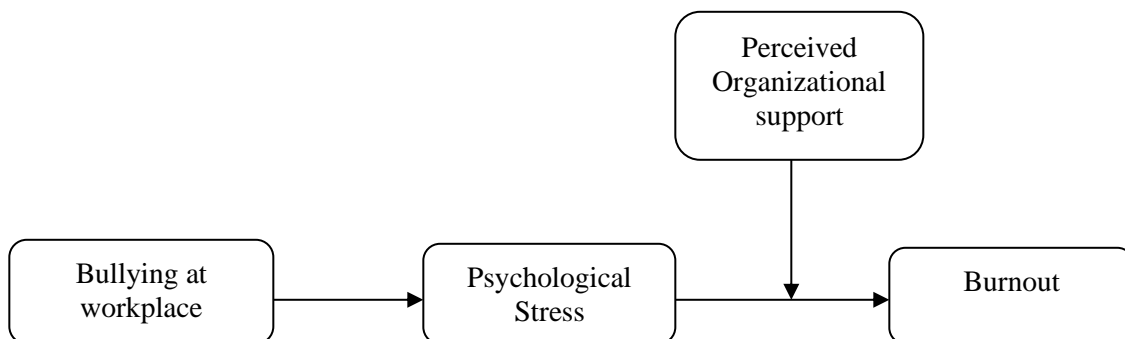


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework.

3.0 Methodology

This research aimed to examine the association among bullying at workplace, psychological stress, burnout and perceived organization support. The study was conducted in different industries located in Punjab, Pakistan. A sample of 300 employees from various industries was selected for data collection. Convenient sampling was employed to gather the data.

To collect the data, researcher reached out to managers through emails and phone calls, seeking permission to collect data from the workers in their respective industries. In-person visits were also made to personally request their approval for data collection. The administrators have provided the desired information about objectives of the study and assured that data collection would be conducted confidentially and anonymously.

3.1 Definition of the variables:

Table 3.1 Definition of the variables

Sr. No	Variable	Definition	Reference
01.	Bullying at Workplace	Bullying at the workplace is considered a repetitive and cumulative phenomenon with systematic patterns of abusers and their negative behaviors increases their power over time over the victims and on other subordinates and complicates victim tries to protect himself.	(Amini et al., 2023).
02.	Psychological Stress	Stress is an avoidable, normal and necessary result of being alive. It can be physical, mental, psychological or emotional.	(Pitt & Tapia, 2017).
03.	Burnout	Burnout describes about response to persistent stress. It is renowned as a three-dimensional theoretical model created on a psychological point of view work burnout about the meaning of the work and feeling unsuitable for work. Moreover, burnout contribute to negative work-related outcomes such as increased absenteeism and reduced job satisfaction	(Amini et al., 2023)
04.	Perceived Organizational Support	Perceived organization support refers employee's perception of the support provided by organization and relates to the extent to which employees feel that the organization/employers value their contributions and well-being.	(Afshari, 2020).

3.2 Measurement of the Variables

Table 3.2 Measurement of the variables

Sr. No	Variable	Measurement	Reference
1.	Bullying at Workplace	Bullying at work place is assessed using a five-point Likert scale consisting of 5 items adapted from the scale developed by Einarsen et al. (2009). An example item is "I have experienced humiliating remarks or jokes directed at me in the workplace."	Einarsen et al. (2009)
2.	Psychological Stress	Psychological stress includes the Job Stress Scale that is measured using a five-point Likert scale with four items. The scale was developed by House and Rizzo (1972). An example item is "I often feel frustrated by my job."	House and Rizzo (1972).
3.	Perceived Organizational Support	POS is measured using a five-point Likert scale with seven items adapted from the Perceived Organization Support Scale. The scale was developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). An example item is "The organization strongly considers my goals and values"	(Adan Gok et al., 2017).
4.	Burnout	Burnout is measured through ten-items from Burnout Measure Scale (BMS) that was developed by Malach-Pines (2005). An example item is "I feel emotionally drained and exhausted at work".	Malach-Pines (2005)

BW: Bullying at Work place, PS: Psychological Stress, POS: Perceived Organizational Support.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Data Analysis

Data collected from the sample of 300 respondents through online google form. The data was analysed using IBM SPSS software. Overall correlation, regression, mediation, moderation, and reliability analysis were performed on the data to investigate the results in light of the proposed hypothesis. Correlation analysis was used to assess the impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable or to determine any potential relationship between the two. Regression analysis was also performed with the goal of determining how much change occurs in the dependent variable as a result of the effect of the independent variable. The mediation analysis test was used. While moderation was also checked, run the PROCESS v3.5 for SPSS. (Baron & Kenny, 1986) mediation analysis test. The assumptions were tested using regression analysis and the manoeuvring route analytic method. Confirmatory factor analysis with AMOS was employed to weaken construct validity. The goodness of fit indices indicate that the values are compatible with the researchers' recommendations. To have a better model fit, the RMSEA value should be less than .08, with TLI and CFI values above .90 and it is explained in table 3.3

below:

Goodness of Fit Indices Table 3.3:

Goodness of fit Indices	Desirable Range	Measurement Model
Absolute Measures		
χ^2	Null	469.88
NC	≤ 5	2.45
GFI	≥ 0.80	.865
AGFI	≥ 0.80	.807
RMSEA	≤ 0.06	.065
Incremental Fit Indices		
NFI	≥ 0.80	.937
CFI	≥ 0.90	.923
TLI	≥ 0.90	.943

To elucidate the relationship of bullying at work place and burnout regression analysis was run (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Results confirm the existence of significant relationship between bullying at work place and burnout. The results in Table 3.4 indicate that bullying at work place has positive and significant relationship with burnout ($\beta = .4278, p < .05$). Process model 4 has substantiated the mediating effect of psychological stress on bullying at work place and burnout relationship. Results ($\beta = .4656, p < .05$). To examine the interaction effect of psychological stress and perceived organizational support on burnout, run process model 7. The findings show that despotic leadership and core self-evaluation have a strong moderating effect on interpersonal deviance, which is mediated by state self-esteem. The study explores the impact of psychological stress and perceived organizational support on burnout, revealing that significantly effect by bullying at the workplace.

Workplace bullying is a significant predictor of burnout, as it creates a hostile work environment that leads to psychological stress, intensifies the effects of bullying, exacerbating feelings of helplessness and mental fatigue. In this scenario, perceived organizational support acts as a protective buffer against the negative consequences of bullying. High organizational support can weaken the mediating role of stress, while low support can exacerbate the effects of bullying. In conclusion, workplace bullying triggers burnout through psychological stress, but it can be significantly moderated by perceived organizational support.

Table 3.4 Direct, Moderation and Mediation effect analysis

Hypothesis	β	SE	t	P
H1	0.4278	0.0603	7.2527	0.0000*
H2	0.4656	0.0575	5.0678	0.0002**
H3	0.2645	0.0745	7.2635	0.0001**

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Current study has significant theoretical contributions; first, it proposes a model that links bullying at workplace, emotional exhaustion, and service sabotage behavior by providing insights into the complex relationships between organizational culture and performance (Yul et al., 2024), second this study explores the perceived organization support as a potential moderator in the relationship between psychological stress and burnout that can help in minimizing the negative effect of bullying at workplace. This study also demonstrates that bullying at workplace directly influences service sabotage behavior through psychological stress, highlighting the actual need and importance to consider multiple pathways and mechanisms in understanding the effects of bullying at the workplace on burnout. In practical perspective by gaining an understanding of the association between bullying at workplace and burnout, organizations can implement effective interferences to prevent or mitigate these issues. It will help to lead to a healthier work environment, increased productivity, job satisfaction, and overall well-being of employees.

Addressing bullying at workplace not only improves the mental and physical health of employees but also creates a safer and more supportive work environment. Similarly, tackling burnout can enhance the quality of customer service, therefore contributing to the success of the organization. By understanding the causes and consequences of bullying at workplace, it enables organizations to ensure legal compliance, minimize legal liabilities, and maintain a positive ethical standing. Organizations that prioritize a positive work environment and treat their employees well often enjoy favorable response from customers, investors, and the general public. By addressing bullying at work place and burnout, organizations can enhance their reputation, attract talented personnel, and foster employee retention. This research, like any other, has its own limitations. The cross-sectional design used in this study limits the ability to determine causality or the direction of relationships between variables. Future studies employing longitudinal designs could provide more insights into the causal relationships between workplace bullying, psychological stress and burnout. It should also look into individual characteristics, cultural and industry contexts, remote and hybrid work settings, and intervention options. Psychological stress is a major mediator of bullying and burnout, although social support, job satisfaction, and work-life balance may also play a role. Furthermore, understanding how organizational change affects bullying dynamics and exhaustion can help managers promote healthier work environments. These future directions will help us better understand the relationship between bullying and burnout, as well as inform the development of more effective policies and interventions

Sana Mukhtar: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Ariba Ramzan: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Sajid Mushtaq: Methodology and Revision

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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