

Curtailing Job Insecurity and Counterproductive Work Behaviours as Bullying Effects in Pakistani Academia: Work Engagement as a Moderator

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Abstract

Judging from persistent changes, drive for performance and widespread uncertainty that characterize the Pakistani higher education system, this study sought to confirm whether workplace bullying – a by-product of relentless change – triggers job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours in the bullied faculty, and whether these damaging outcomes are moderated by work engagement. Using convenience sampling, we sought data from 337 faculty members from the higher education sector. Analysis confirmed that bullying triggers job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours while mixed findings emerged for the hypothesized moderation effects of work engagement. The study mainly stresses infusing work engagement within a work environment where bullying prevails. Managers may design jobs to augment engagement in a pressurized work environment with an aim to curtail job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours for sustained performance in a changing work environment.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, psychological capital, work engagement, job insecurity, counterproductive work behaviours, higher education, Pakistan.

Introduction

The academic system within Pakistan has been pressurized to link up to the global system of science, research, and knowledge focus since long (Nasir & Bashir, 2012; Shaikh & Khoja, 2011). These transformations have pressurised higher education faculty as they face consistent reorganisation, multiple performance criteria, politics, status disparity amid professional rankings, while funds fluctuate and job contracts are short-term (Hollis, 2015; Keashley & Neuman, 2010). While education institutions are considered ripe bullying grounds, (Barratt-Pugh & Krestelica, 2019) empirical investigations conducted within

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Pakistani higher education (Hussain, Gulrez, & Tahirkheli, 2012; Kashif, Ali, & Kelly, 2013) indicate prevalence of bullying practices in the sector.

Multiple studies (Ashraf & Khan, 2014; Baillien, Bollen, Euwema, & De Witte, 2013; Balducci, Fraccaroli, Schaufeli, 2011; Mawritz, Folger, & Latham, 2014) have clearly confirmed workplace bullying as a worldwide organisational practice with detrimental employee outcomes. Literature suggests that bullied employees suffer decreased worker satisfaction, sleep disturbances, psychological disorder, inferior performance, and lowered worker morale, (Niedhammer et al., 2009; Woodrow & Guest, 2014) pointing to its unconstructive role for employees and organisations. Job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours are two possible, detrimental outcomes of workplace bullying that have received little attention within the Pakistani higher education sector. Albeit, a good number of studies have indicated existence of job insecurity within the Pakistani work context (Aslam, Javad, Nokandeh, Sharifi, Jalalian, & Lodhi, 2012; Baraldi, Kalyal, Bernston, Naswall & Sverke, 2010; Halai, 2013; Khalid, Irshad, & Mahmood, 2012). Besides job insecurity, it is likely that pressurized workers within Pakistani academia resort to revengeful, malevolent, counterproductive acts to hurt the organisation or their co-workers, where they face bullying.

Research must, therefore, suggest methods to minimize work bullying effects from the work environment. Given unwanted effects of job insecurity (Debus, Probst, Konig, Kleinmann, 2012; Sverke, Hellgren & Naswall, 2002), it is crucial to strategically manoeuvre so as to reduce this threat for employees. Likewise, counterproductive work behaviour must also be minimised to inhibit employee and organisational loss, as documented unwanted effects of counterproductive work behaviour include work stress, revengeful acts at work, workplace conflicts, inefficient work pace (Bolton, Becker, & Barber, 2010; Fida, Paciello, Barbaranelli, Tramontano, & Fontaine, 2014).

Having explained effects of workplace bullying practices and having provided evidence for existence of high job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviour within the Pakistani academia, it is imperative to devise strategies to curtail damaging workplace bullying outcomes, specifically job insecurity, and counterproductive work behaviour for sustained organisational competitiveness (Pandey & De, 2013). The few studies related to counterproductive work behaviours conducted in Pakistan (Fatima, Iqbal, & Imran, 2013; Khan, Qurutulain, & Crawshaw, 2013) fall short of examining a possible relationship between workplace bullying and counterproductive work behaviours, which calls for investigating this relationship in the Pakistani context. Without such constructive steps and interventions, job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours within bullying-prone work environments are liable to continue, resulting in pessimistic work environments and derailed work output.

While Naseer, Raja, Syed, & Bouckenoghe (2018) examined perceived organisation support, a contextual variable, we examine work engagement, an individual level positive employee strength to minimise bullying effects on job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviour. Additionally, Nel (2019) showed that bullied employees who are high on emotional intelligence, a concept close to positive psychology, experience higher well-being than bullied employees with lower emotional intelligence. This calls for further investigation of positive individual-level variables for minimizing bullying effects. Secondly, while workplace bullying and its unwanted outcomes have evolved within the workplace, the literature positive organisational behaviour has grown alongside. Despite good evidence that work engagement is likely to prompt sought-after employee behaviours (Park & Ono, 2016; *Salminen, Makikangas, & Feldt, 2014*), scant studies have examined its utility within workplace bullying and employee outcomes relationships. This study aims to bridge this shortage in literature by empirically testing if workplace bullying prompts job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours in bullied employees, and if work engagement moderates these relationships.

Operational Definitions

Workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is defined as “..... harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process, it has to occur constantly and repeatedly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months).” (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011, p. 15).

Job insecurity. Sverke, Hellgren, and Naswall’s (2002) defined job insecurity as “(*job insecurity*).....reflects the subjectively experienced anticipation of a fundamental and involuntary event” (p. 243).

Counterproductive work behavior. Robinson and Bennett (1995) defined counterproductive work behaviours as “...voluntary behaviour that violates significant organisational norms and in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organisation or its members, or both” (p.556).

Work engagement. Bakker, Schaufeli, Demerouti, and Euwema (2007) defined work engagement as “...a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind in its own right that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (p. 229).

Theory and Hypotheses

Workplace Bullying and Job Insecurity Relationship

Subordinates may be bullied through voiced insults, defamation, unwarranted disapproval, undue reprimand, undermining work tasks, ostracising employees, tossing things or yelling, and deliberately or un-deliberately overlooking consequences of such

acts on the subordinate's work (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013). Such infuriating acts are likely to harm the bullied worker's mental, emotional, and psychological well-being as an unjust employment relationship triggers hostility and adversely affects individual (Geurts, Schaufeli, & Rutte, 1999; Baillien & De Witte, 2009). Shin and Hur (2019) concluded that job insecurity offsets emotional exhaustion, and this relationship is strongest when co-worker incivility is high. Based on these findings, we argue that a bullied employee will perceive unfairness in the superior-subordinate relationship, and experience job-related ambiguity. The following hypothesis is thus suggested:

H1: Supervisor perpetrated bullying (at work) will positively affect job insecurity in employees.

Workplace Bullying and Counterproductive Work Behaviour Relationship

A two-dimensional taxonomy of counterproductive work behaviour comprising of interpersonal deviance and organisational deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) is well-known. Interpersonal deviance includes detrimental acts aimed at co-workers and peers and includes making offensive remarks and jokes, physical harm, and deliberate humiliation. Organisational deviance is directed at the organisation and includes deliberate tardiness, taking extra time out from work, ignoring inaccuracy and work-related problems, organisational thefts, unnecessary absenteeism, and harming physical surroundings (Bolton, Becker, & Barber, 2010).

Counterproductive work behaviours are unconstructive psychological and behavioural responses triggered in response to factors surrounding work situations that hamper a worker's goals (Ghazo, Suifan, & Alnuaimi, 2019). Ill-treated employees experience melancholy, overtiredness, powerlessness, irritation, reduced self-belief and motivation, and alcohol-related problems (Keashly & Neuman, 2005; Richman, Flaherty, & Christensen, 1992). Earlier studies have also concluded negative correlations between workplace bullying and stress-related, unconstructive variables including workplace hostility, low self-esteem, and negative affectivity (Aquino & Bradfield, 2000; Le Blanc & Kelloway, 2002). Given the stress-triggering, adverse nature of workplace bullying, a vengeful response in a bullied individual is likely to get triggered, as literature on workplace bullying is a damaging work stressor and offsets stress in bullied workers, which in turn triggers counterproductive work behaviours in bullied employees. The following hypothesis thus proposed:

H2: Supervisor perpetrated bullying (at work) will positively affect counterproductive work behaviours in employees.

Work Engagement as Moderator of Relationships of Workplace Bullying with Job Insecurity and Counterproductive Work Behaviour in Light of the Social Determination Theory (SDT)

We draw upon the SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) to explain how intrinsic motivation, through psychological needs of autonomy, competence, growth, and well-being shape human interactions. We reason that the positive psychological state of work engagement acts as an intrinsic, motivational influence during demoralising bullying experiences as it offers an inner energizing and inspirational mechanism that refutes negative effects of destructive bullying acts. When faced with bullying acts, the bullied employee, through work engagement develops the appropriate beliefs, perspectives, motives and behaviours that work to minimise, even invalidate detrimental bullying outcomes as it acts as a defensive mechanism to protect against triggering of job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours. Work engagement assists the bullied employee in self-determination by regulating planned work goals and appraisal of external (bullying) events, thus enabling the bullied employee to adhere to earlier set work goals. In this way, a bullied employee who perseveres engagement in work, will experience lesser insecurity about their job and will indulge in lesser revengeful, counterproductive work behaviours. The stronger the bullied employee's work engagement, the superior the adherence to goal setting and steadfastness during adverse experiences of workplace bullying.

Work Engagement as Moderator

Organisations require responsible, lively, engaged workers (Alcaro & Edwards, 2010; Halbesleben, 2010) as such employees can create their own resources to boost their work-related capacity. A positive role of work engagement for work-related aspects has been established earlier (Bakker & Albrecht, 2019; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). We argue that work engagement is a possible moderator of the workplace bullying and job insecurity relationship, based on the following argument. Bosman, Rothmann, and Buitendach (2006) reported that high job insecurity predicted low levels of work engagement. Likewise, there is additional evidence that an inverse relationship exists between work engagement and job insecurity (De Spiegelaere, Gyes, Witte, Niesem, & Hootegem's, 2014). On the other hand, high work engagement is related with low job insecurity (Lu, Wang, Ly, Du, & Bakker, 2014) and that workplace bullying and work engagement are negatively related (Glaso, Bele, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2011). Taking these findings together, it may be argued that if employees are highly engaged in work, they will not appraise their job as being insecure even when faced with workplace bullying while employees with low work engagement will appraise job insecurity in a bullying context. Hence, we argue that work engagement will weaken

the workplace bullying and job insecurity so that the relationship will be weaker when employee work engagement is high and stronger when employee work engagement is low. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Work engagement will moderate the positive workplace bullying – job insecurity relationship such that the relationship will be strong when employee work engagement is low and weak when employee work engagement is high.

Ansari, Maleki, and Mazraeh (2013) found that work engagement had direct, negative effects on drug abuse, theft, and sabotage – components of counterproductive work behaviour. Another study by Clerkcq, Bouckennooghe, Raja, and Matsyborska (2014) showed that work engagement was negatively related with counterproductive work behaviour, implying that highly engaged employees were less inclined towards counterproductive work behaviour, while lowly engaged employee were likely to exhibit counterproductive work behaviour. Moreover, organisational citizenship behaviour, a concept centrally opposed to counterproductive work behaviour (Klotz & Bolino, 2013) is strongly, positively related with work engagement (Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2014) suggesting that work engagement is likely to relate negatively with counterproductive work behaviours.

We argue that, under bullying conditions, employees who develop vitality, cognitive connection, and absorption during work will not develop a resentful mind-set towards work, thus they will not perform harmful acts at work. Therefore, we suggest that work engagement will buffer the relationship between workplace bullying and counterproductive work behaviour such that this positive relationship will be weaker for highly engaged bullied employees and stronger for lowly engaged bullied employees. The following hypothesis is thus suggested:

H4: Work engagement will moderate the positive workplace bullying – counterproductive work behaviour relationship in such a way that the relationship will be stronger when employee work engagement is low and weaker when employee work engagement is high.

Methodology

Data Collection Procedures and Study Sample

Employing convenience sampling method, specialised data collectors were hired and personal acquaintances were used to approach nine public and private sector higher education universities located in the Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, Quetta, and Peshawar. A cover letter clarified the study purpose, ensured anonymity and confidentiality for unbiased data and sought voluntary participation in the academic survey. The self-report research instrument and the cover letter was disseminated to teaching and research faculty designated as lecturer and assistant professor and

excluded higher ranks as perceptions of supervisor bullying were meant to be captured. Four hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed to 180 public sector and 270 private sector faculty and staff, while 142 and 195 complete and usable replies were received respectively, a total of 337. The response rate was 78.89% and 72.23% respectively for public and private sector higher education universities and degree awarding institutions. The study sample comprised of 52% lecturers, 33% assistant professors, and 15% non-teaching staff. Respondents were mostly men (74%) belonging to the 30-40 years ($SD=\pm 3.4$) age bracket. The average organisational tenure was 4.76 years ($SD=\pm 4.10$) and 63% respondents had an MS or equivalent degree, while 37% had a PhD degree.

Research Instruments

Workplace bullying. We used Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers' (2009) 22-item Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) that comprises of three dimensions of work-related, person-related, and physical intimidation forms of bullying. The NAQ assesses the victims' perceptions of supervisor bullying behaviour perpetrated over previous six months using a 5-point frequency scale ranging from 'never' (1) to 'daily' (5). Sample items include: 'someone withholds information which affects your performance', 'being ordered to do work below your level of competence'. Internal consistency for the NAQ was acceptable ($\alpha=.88$; Nunnally, 1978). A second-order confirmatory factor analysis was performed to confirm whether workplace bullying dimensions of work-related bullying, person-related bullying, and physical intimidation bullying would significantly load on workplace bullying, the higher-order factor. The resultant single-factor model loaded significantly on the latent factor ($p<0.01$) and showed sufficient model fit ($\chi^2=93.67$, $df=45$; $RMSEA=.06$, $CFI=.91$, $GFI=.96$) with factor loadings above 0.5 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Andersen, 2010).

Work Engagement. Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker's (2002) 17-item Work Engagement Instrument comprising of three dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption on a 6-point Likert type scale ranging from 'never' (0) to 'almost every day' (6) was used. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was $\alpha=.85$.

Job insecurity. The 17-item Job Insecurity Scale (JIS) by Ashford, Lee and Bobko's (1989) instrument that measures perceived job loss threat and powerlessness along a 5-point Likert type importance scale ranging from 'very unimportant' (1) to 'very important' (5) was used. Sample items of the JIS are: (*I feel insecure in relation to*) 'my geographical location', 'my potential to get ahead in the organization'. A first-order confirmatory factor analysis to test whether the factor structure would hold for our study sample revealed a single-factor model with good fit ($\chi^2=96.77$, $df=60$;

RMSEA=.05, CFI=.94, GFI=.91) and significant factor loadings above 0.5 ($p < .05$). Internal consistency for the JIS scale was acceptable ($\alpha = .85$).

Counterproductive Work Behaviour. Bennett and Robinson (2000) original 19-item Workplace Deviance Measure that assesses interpersonal deviance and organisational deviance along a 7-point Likert type agreement scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘strongly agree’ (7). The scale demonstrated adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$).

Control Variables. We used age, organisational tenure, organisation type (private/public) as control variables. We coded gender as ‘0’ for male and ‘1’ for female, ‘1’ for age 35 years or younger and ‘2’ for 35 years or older, and ‘3’ for public and ‘4’ for private organisation type.

Results

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for study variables. Workplace bullying correlated positively with both job insecurity ($\gamma = -.40, p < .05$) and with counterproductive work behaviour ($\gamma = .20, p < .05$). Workplace bullying had negative correlations with work engagement ($\gamma = -.21, p < .01$) and forgiveness ($\gamma = -.23, p < .01$). Job insecurity had weak, negative correlations with work engagement ($\gamma = -.21, p < .05$) and with forgiveness ($\gamma = -.13, p < .05$), while job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviour correlated positively with each other ($\gamma = .22, p < .05$). Counterproductive work behaviour had negative correlations with work engagement ($\gamma = -.14, p < .05$) and with forgiveness ($\gamma = -.18, p < .05$), while work engagement and forgiveness correlated positively with each other ($\gamma = .31, p < .05$). All correlations were in line with expectations, showing initial support for study hypotheses.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations among Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.10	.30	-						
2. Age (years)	34	3.4	-.8**	-					
3. Organization type (public/private)	1.2	.242	-.10*	.27**	-				
4. Workplace bullying	2.83	.47	-.11	-.07	-.17*	(.88)			
5. Work engagement	4.42	.71	-.02	-.05	-.04	-.21*	(.85)		
6. Job insecurity	4.43	.61	-.05	.04	.12**	.40**	-	(.85)	
7. Counterproductive work behaviour	4.26	.57	-.06	.04	.18**	.20**	-.21**	.22**	(.87)
							.14**		

Note: $N = 337$; Cronbach’s alpha for each scale are shown in parenthesis.

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$.

Workplace bullying, job insecurity, and counterproductive work behaviours

Hypotheses 1 and 2 had premised that supervisor-perpetrated bullying would positively impact job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours in bullied employees. To test both main effects separately, first, gender, age, organizational type as control variables were entered in step 1, followed by workplace bullying as predictor in step 2. Results of tests for hypotheses 1 and 2 are presented in Table 2. As may be seen, workplace bullying had a significant, positive relationship with job insecurity ($\beta=.43, p<.05$) and with counterproductive work behaviour ($\beta=.54, p<.05$), offering full support for hypothesis 1 and 2.

Table 2 Hierarchical Regression Analysis to test Direct Effects of Workplace Bullying on Job Insecurity and Counterproductive Work Behaviours and test Work Engagement and Forgiveness as Moderators

Predictor	Job insecurity				Counterproductive work behaviour			
	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F
Step 1: Control variables								
Gender								
Age	-.03				-.12*			
Organisation type (public/private)	-.04	.01		33.43	-.03	.04*		16.21
	-.02				-.14*			
Step 2: Main effects								
Workplace bullying	.43**	.33*		52.67	.54**	.45		78.91
Work engagement	-.21**				-.05**			
Step 3: Interaction effects								
Workplace bullying* work engagement	-.28*	.36*	.03**	48.2	.48**	.03*	12.4*	117.2

* $p < .000$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .005$.

Note: $N=337$.

Work engagement as moderator

Work engagement was tested as moderator of relationships of workplace bullying with job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours using three causal paths (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). In step 3 of the hierarchical regression, we entered a standardized interaction term of workplace bullying and the hypothesized moderator (Frazier, Tix, & Baron, 2004). We plotted regressions of the criterion on predictor at various values of the moderator to examine if simple slopes for different

values of the moderator were different from each other and to clarify the direction of the moderation effect (Dawson, 2014).

H3 and H4 had predicted that work engagement would moderate relationships of workplace bullying with job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours. Table 2 shows that the product term of workplace bullying and work engagement was significant for job insecurity ($\beta = -.28, p < .01$) and for counterproductive work behaviours ($\beta = -.19, p < .005$). Next, simple slope analysis was performed to test the direction of moderation of work engagement on relationships of workplace bullying with job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours (Figures 1, 2 respectively). It may be seen that work engagement moderated the workplace bullying – job insecurity relationship in such a way that the relationship was more strongly positive for those bullied employees who had higher work engagement levels, and less strongly positive for bullied employees with low work engagement levels. Likewise, work engagement moderated the workplace bullying – counterproductive work behaviour relationship such that the relationship was more strongly positive for bullied employees with higher work engagement levels, versus those with low work engagement levels, in which case it was less strongly positive. These results offered full support for H3 and H4.

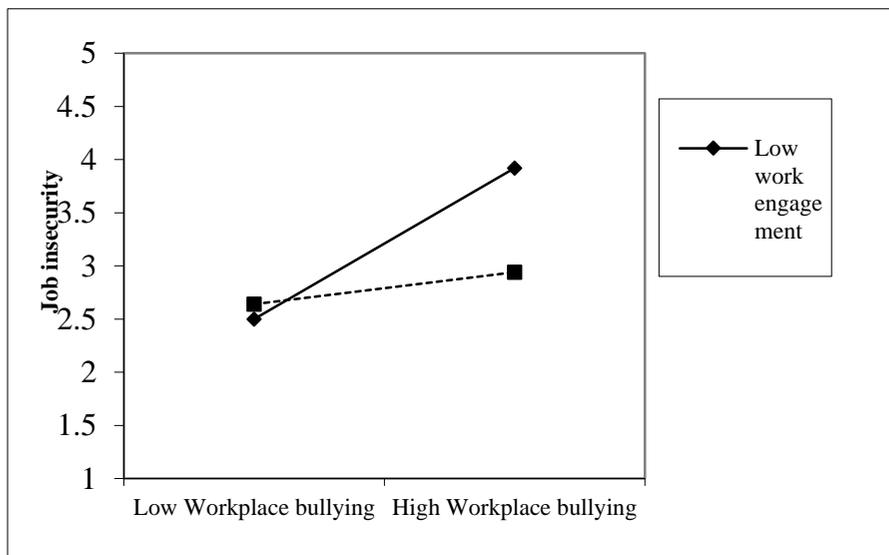


Figure 1: Work engagement as moderator of workplace bullying – job insecurity relationship

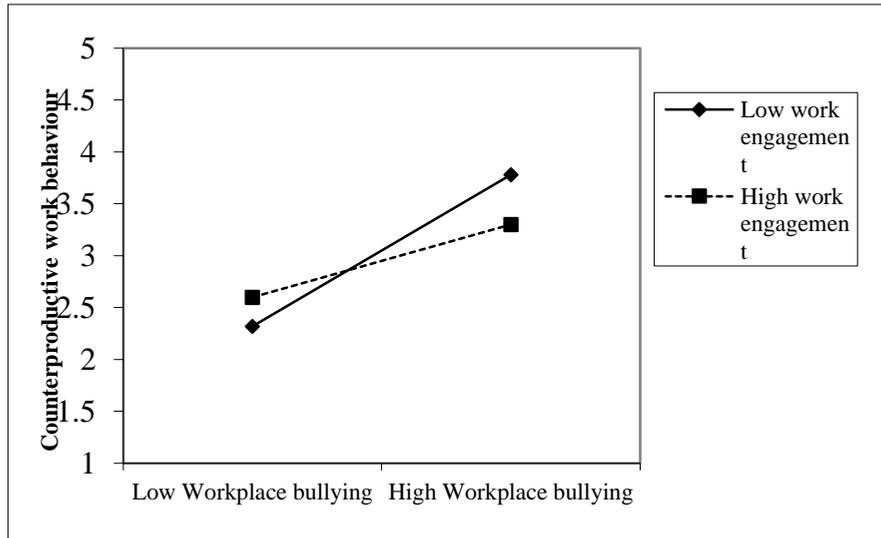


Figure 2: Work engagement as moderator of workplace bullying – counterproductive work behaviours relationship

Discussion

The present study set out to answer two important questions in contemporary literature pertinent to workplace bullying – whether workplace bullying offsets job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours, and whether work engagement moderates these effects. Four hypotheses were tested by obtaining data from 337 faculty from working in nine higher education universities in six cities of Pakistan. Hierarchical regression procedures revealed that the two hypotheses predicting direct effects of workplace bullying on job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviour were confirmed, implying that workplace bullying offsets job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours in bullied faculty. Full support was also found for the two hypotheses that had premised a moderating effect of work engagement on relationships of workplace bullying with job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours suggesting that bullied faculty who are highly engaged at work experience lesser job insecurity than bullied employees with low work engagement levels. Overall, these results point to triggering of job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours in bullied higher education faculty and signify work engagement as a moderator of relationships of workplace bullying with job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours.

Theoretical Implications

Our finding that workplace bullying prompts job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours in bullied higher education faculty corroborates with earlier bullying-

related research. Earlier bullying-related research has consistently demonstrated negative consequences of bullying on occupational outcomes including commitment, satisfaction, quitting intentions, retention, burnout, well-being, and mental health across various contexts including manufacturing, service, health, and public sector (Fontes, Alarcao, Sanatana, Pelloso, & Carvalho, 2019; Bosman & Notelaers, 2012; Laschinger, Wong, & Grau, 2012; Lever, Dyball, Greenberg, & Stevelink, 2019; Samsudin, Isahak, & Ramsal, 2018; Sheehan, McCabe, & Thomas, 2018) across the Western work environment. While bullying-related research has majorly been conducted in Western work environments and established damaging bullying effects, findings of our study conclude a similar, destructive effect of bullying on job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours within the Pakistani higher education faculty.

An important contribution of our study relates to moderating effects of work engagement on relationships of workplace bullying with job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours – a unique contribution in that it merges bullying-related research with research pertinent to positive psychology. We build on recent suggestions (Brandt, Bernstein, Reines, & Baillien, 2018; Nel, 2019) for employing coping mechanisms and personal resources as moderators of workplace bullying and outcomes relationships by investigating how work engagement curtails negative effects in bullied employees. Our study also responds to Bakker and Albrecht's (2018) advice for investigating work engagement as an intervention for employee well-being. The moderation effect of work engagement on relationships of workplace bullying with job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours implies that highly engaged, bullied employees experience lesser job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours amid pressurizing, demanding, bullying-prone work contexts, as opposed to those employees with low levels of work engagement, who experience higher job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours. Thus, work engagement curtails triggering of bullying effects in a bullying-prone work environment and offers a buffering, protective mechanism in a bullying-prone work context.

Managerial Implications

Based on our findings, notable practical managerial implications are suggested, particularly for the Asian academia. Managers concerned with job design and work flow should construct work design and flow mechanisms that prevent supervisor bullying in the first place. For example, data or information necessary for effective task execution should be made freely accessible to the job incumbent to prevent the supervisor from keeping necessary data or information control. Grievance procedures should be designed to allow bullying reports to be handled objectively and effectively. For selection and job assignment, likely work engagement levels of prospective employees

should be assessed and matched with job contexts. Human resource managers should offer awareness programs, practical exercises and trainings on work engagement to curtail negative bullying effects in bullied employees. Imparting awareness and experiential exercises on work engagement would teach employees to maintain high levels of energy, enthusiasm, and concentration on work tasks and restrain triggering of job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviours in bullying-prone work environments. Additionally, building engagement in tasks is also likely to enhance task performance, subsequently lessening the likelihood of being bullied.

Strengths and Limitations

Our study measured all constructs using well-validated instruments with established psychometric properties, which is a notable strength. We also confirmed factor structures of all measures, pointing to constructs' discriminant validity that adds to confidence in our study's findings. Moreover, we framed the research problem in a context where the problem clearly existed, i.e. the Pakistani higher education context. Hence, we believe that our findings can be endorsed with confidence in those settings. At the same time, important limitations of our study should be recognized. We used convenience sampling method, which is believed to limit generalisation of a study's findings across diverse contexts and populations. Employment of self-reports is also a possible limitation of our study, as it threatens social desirability bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). As our study aimed to measure bullying perceptions, we believe that those are best felt and reported by the employee, owing to differing sensitivities of bystanders, particularly in the collectivist culture of Pakistan where bystanders may possibly give biased replies for gaining social appeal. In addition, our study employed a cross-section study design while a longitudinal study design is generally considered to best determine causality. However, Wunch, Russo, and Mouchart (2010) challenge this 'traditional' view by arguing that causality may be assessed in a correlational study design if variables are time ordered. In our study, respondents were required to recall bullying acts experienced over the past six months, making our data retrospective that allows for reasonable causal inference.

Future Research Directions

We recommend that the study be replicated across dissimilar environments for generalisation and a broader understanding of relationships between workplace bullying and its outcomes of job insecurity and counterproductive work behaviour under diverse contexts. We also recommend examining moderating effects of other individual positive strengths, such as confidence, resilience, forgiveness, courage, and gratitude (Algoe & Haidt, 2008; Bandura, 1997; Frederickson, 2004; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007; Shea & Howell, 2000) on relationships between workplace bullying and employee

outcomes. Future research may also employ longitudinal study design to ascertain causality relationships with confidence.

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