

Impact of Workplace Bullying on Psychological Wellbeing; Personality Traits as Moderators

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Abstract:

Workplace bullying is a noteworthy problem that prevails in different organizations and has devastating impacts on employees as well as on organizations. The present research is an attempt to find out the impact of workplace bullying on psychological wellbeing of employees by taking the role of personality traits as moderators. To achieve this objective, Negative Acts Questionnaire, Ryff's Scale of Psychological Wellbeing, and NEO-FFI were used. A sample of (N = 538) employees were selected from four different professions (Doctors, University Teachers, Bank Employees, and Telecommunication Employees). It was revealed from the study that workplace bullying has negative impact on psychological wellbeing of employees, furthermore it is also revealed from results that the agreeableness and conscientiousness significantly negatively predicted the workplace bullying and the remaining personality factors (neuroticism, openness to experience and extraversion) non-significantly predicted the workplace bullying. The results also depicted that the Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness moderated the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing by strengthening this relationship.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, Psychological wellbeing, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness.

I. Introduction

Workplace bullying is a serious issue prevailing in work settings from the last few decades. Lately, a rush of curiosity appeared in research towards destructive behaviors in the workplace and the main focus of these researches is on the destructive behaviors of employees. According to Birkeland and Einarsen (2007) over the last two decades, a substantial social and academic interest has been produced by the workplace bullying that appeared as a type of non-physical violence. According to different researches despite of being only an interpersonal issue, workplace bullying is also an organizational problem which has an impact on all exposed i.e., victims, observers and organizations as a sum total (Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003; Mayhew & Chappell, 2007; Salin, 2003). According to Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003) despite of all other

work-related stressors, mobbing is classified as a more serious and destructive dilemma for employees. Brodsky (1976) reported workplace bullying as a progressively growing problem due to which victim feels himself in a lower place and prey of methodical harmful social acts by one or more perpetrators.

Due to the exposure of workplace bullying, there is a high probability that victims will suffer from various health consequences as a result of social stress (Vartia, 2001; Zapf, 1999). The most common forms of health consequences are experiences of mental and emotional distress, aggravations, and symptoms of depression (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). This is also reinforced in a study which mentioned that victims of workplace bullying displayed negative health behaviors such as psychological stress (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004). Researchers also reported chronic psychological and occupational impairment in victims of workplace bullying (Crawford, 2001; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996). Furthermore, Adams and Crawford (1992) reported bullying as a serious and destructive issue that can injure health, self-esteem, cognitive functioning, and psychological wellbeing of victims (Brodsky, 1976; Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Keashly & Harvey, 2005). Workplace bullying has significant relationship with increase in perceived stress, lowered psychological wellbeing, mental health symptoms (GHQ 12), anxiety, psychosomatic health complaints, and depression (Björkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Einarsen, Matthiesen, & Skogstad, 1998; Einarsen, Raknes, Matthiesen, Hellesoy, 1994; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Quine, 1999).

Bullying can be analyzed from the different perspectives i.e., situational, personal, organizational or environmental. The environmental view has been given the most importance as compare to the personality of victim. According to the personality view, bullying is subjected to the traits of the persons contributing in this process that may include victim, bully, or both. Different researches emphasized the importance of victim's personality differently in regard to the particular personality traits that lead to the victimization in bullying. Researches have revealed that sudden traits had significant relationship with bullying than others in certain circumstances (Coyne, Seigne, & Randall, 2000; Randall, 1997). Similarly, Einarsen (2000) recommended that various personality traits may possibly elude hostile behaviors and bullying in others and perceiving others' behavior as bullying may also vary individually.

Zapf and Einarsen (2003) reported that the victim's exposed position, lack of social skills, overachievement, self-esteem, and divergence from norms of the group may take part in the commencement of bullying. Brodsky (1976) reported that usually victims perceive themselves as hard workers who have no personal contribution in surfacing of bullying, but are just targeted by others, system or simply bad luck. According to Zapf (1999) certain victims reported their personal characteristics (their appearance, personal life, or religious/political attitudes) as the leading cause of bullying.

The study aims to find out the consequences of workplace bullying on psychological wellbeing and it also aims to determine the moderating role of personality factors (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness) in explaining predictive relationship of workplace bullying with psychological wellbeing.

II. Material and Methods

A. Sample

A sample of N = 538 employees was conveniently drawn from the various organizations (i.e., Banking, Telecommunications, Academic settings, & Medical etc) located in the cities of Islamabad, Lahore, Sargodha, Bahawalpur and Mianwali of the Punjab province. The inclusion criterion was having at least 1 year of job experience (M = 30.34, SD = 5.46), and age ranging from 22 years to 60 years (M = 30.34, SD = 5.46) having at least 16 years of education. Both male and female employees were included from various organizations. Employees were contacted individually and objectives of the study were briefed to them. After taking the consent for participation, questionnaire booklet (including informed consent form, demographic information sheet, and scales of study variables) were handed over to them.

B. Instruments

For achieving the objectives of the proposed study, the instruments for workplace bullying, psychological wellbeing and personality traits were administered on the aforementioned sample. Negative Acts Questionnaire developed by Einarsen and Raknes, (1997) was used to assess the occurrence of workplace bullying and its types. The Chronbach's alpha reliability of original NAQ reported to be .87 to .93. Through 29 items having 5 point rating scale, NAQ measures the perception of various negative acts experienced by the respondents in the last 6 months. The Ryff scale of psychological wellbeing consisting of 18 items was used to measure the psychological wellbeing of respondents. Respondents gave their responses on a 6 point rating scale where 1 used to indicate strongly disagree and 6 for strongly agree. Responses are totaled (about half of the responses are reverse scored, which are item no. 1, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17, & 18). To measure the personality traits, NEO- Five Factor Inventory (McCrae & Costa, 2004) consisting of 60 item was used. The inventory has scoring on 5 point rating scale where 1 indicated strongly disagree and 5 indicated strongly agree in order to measure five dimensions of personality i.e., Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The Chronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for five dimensions reported to be in range of .79 to .83.

C. Procedure

After identifying the potential sample for the proposed study, the consent of individuals as well as their employing organizations was sought out so for their effective participation in the study. The sample was assured that confidentiality of their responses will be maintained. The instruments booklet was provided and received back from employees individually. No personal information such as name or contact information was obtained from participants. Organizations were assured to keep their names confidential and data obtained from them will be used only for research purposes.

III. Results and Discussion

In array of exploring the objectives of the study, various statistical analysis including alpha reliability coefficients, Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, and moderation analysis have been applied. To measure the internal consistency of instruments, alpha reliability coefficients were computed, while correlation coefficient was computed to find out the relationship between perception of bullying and different personality and organizational factors. The results of study are as follow:

Table 1: Alpha Reliability Coefficients & Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of Scales (N=538)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	WB	PWB	NET	EXT	OTE	AGR	CON
Workplace bullying	58.36	21.62	.94	-	-.26**	.09*	-.19**	-.06	-.18**	-.36**
Psychological wellbeing	68.88	10.85	.81		-		.33**	.01	.18**	.48**
Neuroticism	36.34	4.74	.60							.22**
Extraversion	38.41	5.05	.65							
Openness to experience	36.18	4.11	.62							
Agreeableness	37.78	4.30	.71							
Conscientiousness	41.03	6.59	.68							

Table 1 indicates the reliabilities of all the scales and it shows that all the scales have moderate to good reliabilities. Table further reveals that workplace bullying is significantly negatively correlated with psychological wellbeing, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness while neuroticism is positively related with workplace bullying but negatively related with psychological wellbeing.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis on scores of Workplace Bullying by Personality Traits and Affectivity (N = 538)

Personality traits	Workplace Bullying				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Neuroticism	-.079	.194	-.017	-.460	.303
Extraversion	.178	.211	.042	-.236	.592
Openness to experience	-.243	.217	-.046	-.668	.182
Agreeableness	-.671	.219	-.134**	-1.10	-.241
Consciousness	-1.22	.160	-.371**	-1.53	-.903
R = .388, R ² = .151, ΔR^2 = .143 (F = 18.79**)					

***p* ≤ .00

Table 2 depicts the predictive relation between personality factors and workplace bullying and results showed that agreeableness and consciousness significantly negatively predicted the workplace bullying.

Table 3: Results for Moderating Role of Extraversion in Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Psychological Wellbeing (N = 538)

Model 1	Predictor	Psychological Wellbeing	
		ΔR^2	β
Step 1	Workplace Bullying	.063	-.255***
Step 2	Workplace Bullying	.145	-.200***
	Extraversion		.295***
Step 3	Extraversion × Workplace Bullying	.152	-.205***
			.296***
			-.092**

***p* > .001, *df* = (3, 535)

Table 3 consists of three models and the first model depicts the significant negative prediction of psychological wellbeing by workplace bullying { ΔR^2 = .063, *F* (1, 537) = 37.00, *p* < .000, (β = -.255, *t* = -6.08, *p* = .000)} and proved to have a contribution of 25.5% variance in the psychological wellbeing. In model 2, both extraversion and

workplace bullying are included as the predictors and this model appeared significant $\{\Delta R^2 = .145, (\Delta F(2, 536) = 46.53, p = .000)\}$. Values of beta revealed extraversion as a significant positive predictor of psychological wellbeing ($\beta = .295, t = 7.24, p = .000$). The interaction of extraversion and workplace bullying for predicting psychological wellbeing was presented in final model. Largely this model also proved to be significant $\{\Delta R^2 = .152, \Delta F(3, 535) = 33.07, p = .000\}$ and depicts that the product of extraversion and workplace bullying predicted the psychological wellbeing ($\beta = -.092, t = -2.31, p = .002$).

Figure 1: Moderating Effects of Extraversion

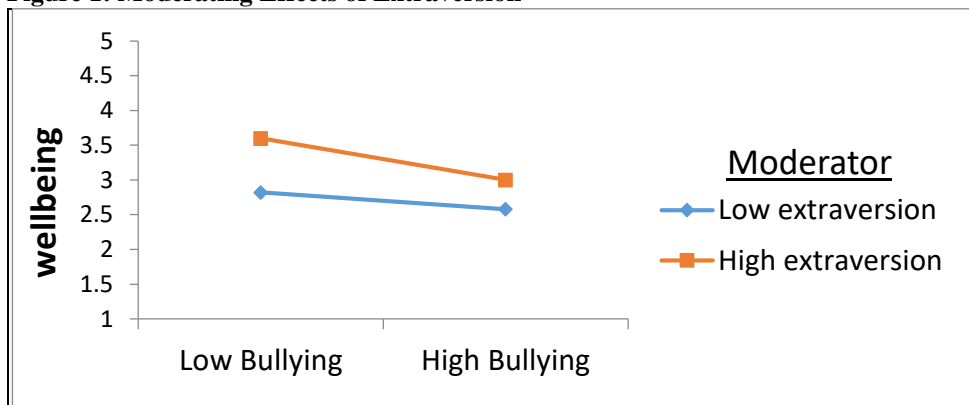


Figure 1 depicts that extraversion strengthens the negative relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing.

Table 4: Summary of the Results for Moderating Role of Agreeableness in Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Psychological Wellbeing (N = 538)

Model 1	Predictor	Psychological Wellbeing	
		ΔR^2	β
Step 1	Workplace Bullying	.063	-.255***
Step 2	Workplace Bullying	.080	-.230***
	Agreeableness		.139**
Step 3	Agreeableness x Workplace Bullying	.095	-.246***
			.140**
			-.131**

*** $p > .001, df = (3, 535)$

Table 4 has reported three different models by explaining the prediction of psychological wellbeing through workplace bullying, first model found as significant $\{R^2 = .065, F(1, 537) = 37.00, p < .000\}$ where psychological wellbeing is negatively predicted by the workplace bullying ($\beta = -.124, t = -2.89, p < .05$) by adding 1.4% of variance in the psychological wellbeing. Model 2 includes both agreeableness and workplace bullying as the predictor and model is reported as significant $\{\Delta R^2 = .080, (\Delta F(2, 536) = 24.26, p = .000)\}$. Values of beta reported agreeableness as a significant positive predictor of the psychological wellbeing ($\beta = .139, t = 3.29, p = .001$). The interaction of agreeableness and workplace bullying predicting psychological wellbeing has been depicted in the last model and it is also found to be significant $\{\Delta R^2 = .095, \Delta F(3, 535) =$

19.79, $p < .000$) revealing the prediction of psychological wellbeing by the product of agreeableness and workplace bullying ($\beta = -.131, t = -3.16, p = .002$).

Figure 2: Moderating Effects of Agreeableness

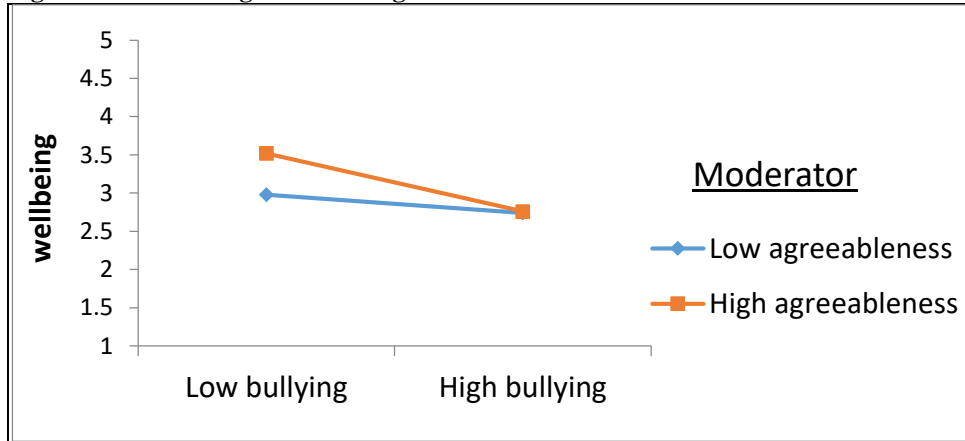


Figure 2 depicts that agreeableness strengthens the negative relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing.

Table 5: Summary of the Results for Moderating Role of Conscientiousness in Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Psychological Wellbeing (N = 538)

Model 1	Predictor	Psychological Wellbeing	
		ΔR^2	β
Step 1	Workplace Bullying	.063	-.255***
Step 2	Workplace Bullying Conscientiousness	.236	-.230*** .139**
Step 3	Conscientiousness x Workplace Bullying	.246	-.246*** .140** -.131**

*** $p > .001, df = (3, 535)$

Table 5 shows three models and the first model explaining the prediction of workplace bullying for psychological wellbeing reported as significant ($R^2 = .063, F(1, 537) = 37.00, p < .000$) depicting workplace bullying as a significant negative predictor of psychological wellbeing ($\beta = -.255, t = -6.08, p = .000$) and contributed 25.5% variance for psychological wellbeing. Model 2 includes both conscientiousness and workplace bullying as predictors and the model appeared as significant ($\Delta R^2 = .236, (\Delta F(2, 536) = 83.59, p = .000)$). Values of beta revealed conscientiousness as a significant positive predictor of the psychological wellbeing ($\beta = .447, t = 11.03, p = .000$). The interaction of conscientiousness and workplace bullying predicting psychological wellbeing was presented in the last model which appeared as significant ($\Delta R^2 = .246, \Delta F(3, 535) = 59.0, p < .000$) suggesting the prediction of psychological wellbeing by the product of conscientiousness and workplace bullying ($\beta = -.108, t = -2.80, p = .005$).

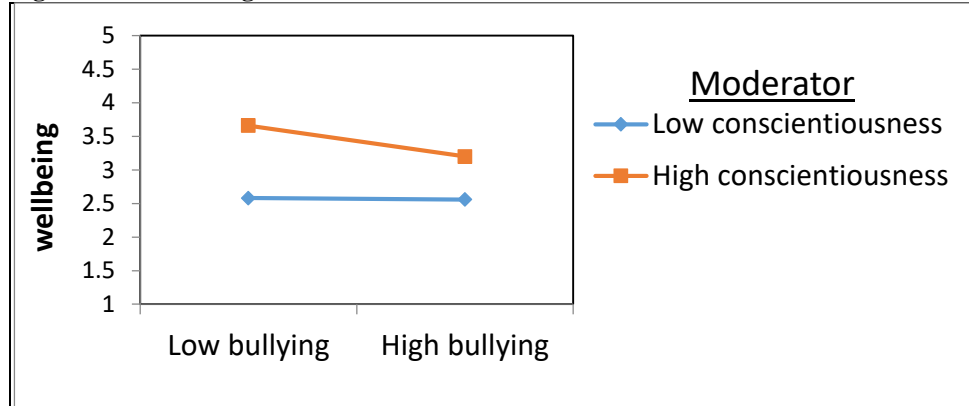
Figure 3: Moderating Effects of Conscientiousness

Figure 3 demonstrated that conscientiousness strengthens the negative relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing.

IV. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the influence of workplace bullying on psychological well-being of employees and it also determined the moderating role of personality traits. It was hypothesized that relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing is moderated by the personality traits. The first hypothesis of the research was partially accepted as the agreeableness and conscientiousness significantly negatively predicted the workplace bullying and the remaining personality factors (neuroticism, openness to experience, and extraversion) reported to be the non-significant predictors of workplace bullying. The current research results are in line with the previous researches (Brodsky, 1976, Einarsen et al., 1994; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Niedl, 1995; Olweus, 2003; O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire, & Smith, 1998; Thylefor, 1987; Vartia, 1996) who found significant prediction between workplace bullying and personality factors. Results also revealed that workplace bullying has significant negative affect on psychological wellbeing. These results were supported by the findings of Zapf (1999), which stated that the psychological health of victims of workplace bullying is severely damaged by the verbal attack on a person's private life. These result findings are also in line with the previous findings which suggested that handing over erroneous or insignificant task to someone or act offensively, giving someone futile errands, and talking behind someone's back are associated with stress that leads to a decline in psychological wellbeing of employees (Smith, 2002).

It was also hypothesized that the association between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing will be moderated by personality traits. Results depicted the partial acceptance of this hypothesis as extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness strengthens the negative relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing but neuroticism and openness to experience had non-significant moderation between the variables. These results are also supported by the previous research studies (Einarsen, 2000; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Quine, 1999) which depicted that workplace bullying can harm the psychological wellbeing and physical health of the employees.

To conclude, this study indicates that workplace bullying is an important phenomenon at workplace which leads to a decreased level of psychological wellbeing of employees. Furthermore, this relationship between bullying and psychological wellbeing is moderated by the personality traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness).

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