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## Article

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## **Role of Personal Factors in Perception of Workplace Bullying Among Telecommunication Personnel**

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### **Abstract**

Workplace bullying is a substantial and intricate issue that presents a target for organizations to cope. The present study is cross-sectional survey that examined the role of personality traits (extroversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, and openness to experience) of individuals and demographics (i.e., gender, marital status, education and monthly income) in their perception of workplace bullying. Negative Acts Questionnaire (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997) and Mini Markers Personality Inventory (Saucier, 1994) were administered on a sample of (N = 280; women = 83, men=197, Age range from 20 to 40 years) employees of five telecommunication companies from Islamabad. Results showed that negative correlation exist between personality traits (extroversion agreeableness, emotional stability and conscientiousness) and workplace bullying. Agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability are significantly predicting workplace bullying. Non-significant differences were revealed on gender, marital status, income level, job experience and education with respect to workplace bullying. The findings are discussed in cultural context. This study has utilized a cross-sectional design, rather than a longitudinal design. The sample of the study was small and only limited to the cellular services providing companies. Future researches should include a larger sample from other professions.

**Keywords:** Workplace bullying, extroversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, openness to experience.

### **1. Introduction**

Workplace bullying is an unavoidable issue that is challenging to overlook (Needham, 2003). According to studies (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003; Namie & Namie,

.physical illness, emotional harm, and career damage. The present study aimed to focus on workplace bullying and to understand the personality factors of its victims.

### 1.1 Workplace Bullying

Baldry and Farrington, (2000) defined bullying as verbal, physical, or psychological extortion that is intentional to create harm, distress, or fear for target. According to another study bullying can frequently occur without any obvious aggravation and can be carried out by different ways, like bodily interaction, vocal aggression, mean gestures, making faces, and deliberately discounting the target from the group (Araki, et al., 2002). According to Crick, Casas, and Ku (1999) bullying has two types; (i) when people are harmed and controlled by physical means (*physical bullying*) and (ii) when people are harmed by damaging their relationships with others (*relational bullying*).

### 1.2 Personality Traits

Personality traits are defined as individual differences in the tendency to behave, think, and feel in certain consistent ways (Caspi, 1998). There are several theoretical and practical implications based on understanding the relationship between personality traits and behaviors, such as bullying and discrimination. The research described here suggests that some individuals are prone to bullying or discrimination. That is, some individuals are more likely to engage in these acts in a given environment.

According to McCrae and Costa (1997) the following are some of the important characteristics of the five factors:

*Extroverted*: Extroverted also called as *surgency*: *extroverted* people tend to be energetic, enthusiastic, dominant, and talkative. On the other hand, *introverted* people tend to be shy, submissive, and quite.

#### 1.2.1 Agreeable

Agreeable people are friendly, cooperative, trusting, and warm.

People low on this dimension is cold, quarrelsome, and unkind.

#### 1.2.2 Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness also called lack of impulsivity. They are generally cautious, dependable, organized, and responsible. Impulsive people tend to be careless, disorderly, and undependable.

#### 1.2.3 Neuroticism

Neuroticism also called as emotional instability. Neurotic people tend to be nervous, high-strung, tense, and worrying. Emotionally stable people are calm and contented.

#### 1.2.4 Openness

Openness also called culture or intellect. Open people generally appear imaginative, witty, original, and artistic. People low on this dimension is shallow, plain, or simple.

## 2. Literature Review

It was found that in Europe, for many workers workplace bullying is a thoughtful dispute ((Einarsen *et al.*, 2011; Einarsen *et al.*, 2003; Glambek, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2014). Nearly 5-10% of European employees may have faced workplace bullying and harassment to some extent. Workplace bullying exists in all types of organizations (private and public), and its targets may vary from men to women as well as managers to workers alike. Einarsen and Raknes, (1997) also found out that perception of workplace bullying is an arduous basis of stress at work and may be an upsetting problem for its victims. Although exclusive deeds of violence and persecution appear commonly at work, but they seem to be allied with ruthless health dilemmas in the victim if repeated regularly (Einarsen, 2000; Zapf *et al.*, 2011).

According to Hoel, Rayner and Cooper (1999) only few researches have so far consider the characteristics of victims like their profession, sexual category, and age. In this reverence Hoel *et al.*, suggests that the experience of bullying across gender appears to be tremendously identical with other researches showing rare differences.

According to Coyne, Seigne, and Randall ( 2000), at hand only limited designed pragmatic researches about personality of victim are available and using different methods or scales some researchers explored akin victim profiles, yet few researchers were unable to explore the difference between being victim and non-victim. Brodsky, (1976) on the basis of operational framework, defined victims as conscientious, suspicious, inflexible, and obsessive. Einarsen, Rakens, and Matthiesen., (1994) described that in Norway, coping and conflict management skills of victims are lesser to others as shyness also play a role in experience of bullying. In a survey in Finland. Vartia (1996) reported that victims have high scores on neuroticism as compare to normal group but in circumscribed work environment this relation was abridged. A study on an Irish sample depicted victims are less emotionally stable, less dominant but are more anxious, apprehended, and sensitive as compare to non-victims. In German sample, Zapf (1999) explored that victims of bullying had indicators of anxiety and depression and poorer social skills than others, and they try to cope it by flight response. In another study on Irish sample, based on personality inventory framed on a Five-Factor model, 60 victims of bullying found to have low score on extroversion and independence than non-victims, in accumulation it was also found out that victims scored high on instability and conscientiousness. Thylefors (1987) described that in conflict situations victims are more active and aggressive than non-victims. Different researches (Einarsen, *et al.*, 1994; Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2001) depicted that victims of workplace bullying reveal a meager self-image and are more anxious in social situations.

Two different kinds of workplace bullying had been described by Einarsen (1999) (i) predatory in which the victims are targets because they are easy to defeat and (ii) dispute-related bullying is triggered by work-related conflicts which accelerate into a bullying condition.

Few researches described that bullying is primarily created by the psychopathic personality of the bully (Einarsen, *et al.*, 2003; Field, 1996). While some researches (Einarsen, *et al.*, 1994; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001) described that it was reported by

the colleagues of both bullies and victim that the victims' personality and manners yield vital part in bullying. Few researchers come to an agreement that victims react and affected by contrarily to akin workplace bullying (Davenport, Schwartz, & Eliot, 1999). Balducci, Cecchin, & Fraccaroli, (2012) described that workaholism is correlated with aggressive behavior. Furthermore some individualities of an individual incline them to experience bullying (Randall, 1997). In accumulation, through aggressive behaviors victim may aggravate the predatory (Einarsen, 1999).

Although the personality of victim can't explicate the bullying behavior but it is definite that his/her personality determines that how he/she experiences and infers instances and probability of grasping the problems at work (Einarsen, 2000). Though the experience of being exposed to bullying may has foundation in a real situation, such an experience doesn't correspond to an objective explanation of the environment without any personality factor (Lakey, Tardiff, & Drew, 1994; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001).

Coyne et al., (2000) described that individual factors (targets' and perpetrators' personality) certainly may be implicated as basis of bullying experience. Zapf and Einarsen (2003) describes that organizational disputes surely be well-thought-out in explaining the bullying but without inclusion of personal factors, no explanation would be comprehensive,

In another research, Brodsky (1976) revealed that victims of workplace bullying are ingenuous, literal-minded and conscientious, having complications in regulating the situation. Niedl (1995) explains that the possibility of victimization escalates with the inability of person to protect himself or being trapped in a situation due to dependency factors. Victim's personal factors (self-esteem, personality & cognitive capacity) may impact such a dependent relationship. Likewise, in a survey, Einarsen, et al., (1994) explained that numerous victims testified that deficiency of certain skills (low self-esteem, self efficacy, lack of skills to manage conflict & shyness), play a role in their problem.

In other countries, researches have revealed that exposure to bullying and personality traits (neuroticism) are correlated (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Vartia, 1996). According to Thylefors, (1987) victims react more aggressively in problematic conditions as compare to non-victims. O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire, and Smith, (1998) found out that in Ireland bullying victims scored low on dominance and emotional stability, but scored high on the anxiety, sensitivity scales, and apprehension.

According to Zapf, (1999) victims of bullying represented symptoms of depression and anxiety before the perception of bullying. In another study victims were revealed as less extroverted and independent and more conscientious and unstable than non-victims. On the basis of these findings it can be inferred that personality traits may hint towards the target of bullying, thus pointing certain hazard of exposure to bullying.

In relation to the personality hypothesis, there is a necessity for rational research (Coyne et al., 2000). Leymann & Gustafsson, (1996) describes that this deficiency can be justified as the basic bullying researches ignored the role of individual features as reasons of bullying. Accordingly, Leymann (1996) saw rigidity or anxiety as a result of exposure to bullying instead of its causes. So one has to advance cautiously with respect to these issues, so that "the victim" cannot be pointed out wrongly (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003).

Despite of these precautions, still valid reasons exist for examining the impact of personality in the victimization. Through the notion of “The fundamental attribution error” Ross (1977) has revealed that how people attribute and explain the social behaviors of others with regard to personal factors. That’s why, a person-oriented approach will prevail in the population, requiring pragmatic data in this regard. The victim’s personality must be related with the explanations of perceptions and reactions to workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000). Victim’s personality also brings forth definite negative behaviors and reactions in the bully, and vice versa. It was also found out that in reactions of exposure to bullying, individual differences may play a role of potential moderator in clarifying why some persons develop health problems and stress (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). In regard to avoid bullying at work, an ample understanding of the phenomenon is mandatory in order to develop effective intervention techniques (Olweus, 1993).

In nut shell on the basis of the inadequate existing empirical support which focuses on targets of workplace bullying appear to be neurotic, passive, and anxious, lacking self-esteem and social competence, and illustrated by behavioral patterns relating conscientiousness and overachievement(Coyne et al., 2000; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). On the basis of this empirical support significant relationship between personal factors and exposure of workplace bullying has been found. Consequently, pragmatic data specifies the presence of individual factors of bullying found in victims. So the study has following objectives,

- To explore the role of personality traits in workplace bullying (person-related & work-related).
- To determine the gender differences in perception of bullying in workplace.
- To find out the relationship of other demographic variables (age, income level & marital status) with perception and types of experiencing bullying in workplace.

## 2. Hypotheses

Following hypotheses were formulated regarding telecommunication personnel:

- i. Workplace bullying is a negatively related with personality traits (Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional stability, & Openness to experience).
- ii. Work-related form of bullying is negatively related with personality traits (Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional stability, & Openness to experience).
- iii. Person-related form of bullying has negative relationship with personality traits (Extroversion, Agreeableness Conscientiousness, and Emotional stability, & Openness to experience).

## 3. Method

The main study was done on a sample ( $N = 280$ ). The reliability indices of the scales were estimated and an initial insight in to the pattern of their relationships among the variables of the present study was yield. Through the use of psychometrically sound

instruments the collected data was subjected to correlation matrix for testing the proposed hypotheses of present study.

### *3.1 Sample*

A sample of 280 (Men = 197 and Women = 83 with age ranging from 20 to 40 years,  $M = 27.30$ ,  $SD = 3.64$ ) telecommunication personnel from five 5 telecommunication companies (Mobilink, Ufone, Warid, Telenor & Zong) from Islamabad was taken through purposive convenience sampling for the present study. The sample was taken on inclusive criterion of minimum job experience of one year. On the basis of marital status the sample consisted of Married = 105, Unmarried = 175. Three income groups were formulated from the sample; Lower income group = 148, Middle income group = 122, Higher income group = 10. Graduation was set as the educational baseline for the sample, MS/M.Phil = 12, MA./MSc/MBA = 164 BA/ BBA/BSc/BCom = 104.

### *3.2 Instruments*

#### *3.1.1 Negative Acts Questionnaire (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997)*

For measuring the perception and types of workplace bullying i.e., work-related bullying and person-related bullying “Negative Acts Questionnaire” (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997) was used. The NAQ has 29 items described in behavioral terms without referencing to the word bullying. The items are set on a 5 point rating scale, (never, now or then, about weekly, and about daily) ranging from 1 to 5 respectively. There was no reverse scored item and the score on the whole ranged from 29 to 145 where high scores represented higher levels of perception of workplace bullying. It was a validated instrument as it has been validated in previous researches (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen et al, 2003; Moreno, Rodríguez, Martínez, & Gálvez, 2007)

#### *3.2.2 Mini Marker Personality Inventory (Saucier, 1994)*

To measure the personal factors, Mini Marker Personality Inventory (Saucier, 1994) based on 40 adjectives having 9 point rating scale (1=Extremely inaccurate, 2= Very inaccurate, 3= Moderately inaccurate, 4= Slightly inaccurate, 5= Neither inaccurate nor accurate, 6= Slightly accurate, 7= Moderately accurate, 8= Very accurate & 9= Extremely accurate) was used. It is based on five personality traits so it ends up with 5 scores, where each trait is comprised of 8 items.

#### *3.2.3 Personal Information Sheet*

It was used to gather the information about each respondent's gender, age, qualification, income, and marital status, .

### *3.3 Procedure*

After explaining the research plan to the administrative officials of various telecommunication companies, permission for data collection was obtained. It was make assured to them that data collected from their organization will only be used for research purpose. Employees were personally contacted by the researcher and the booklet containing various scales was distributed among 500 telecommunication personnel of five companies. It was explained to the sample that what they would be expected to do with the booklet through written instructions that accompanied each booklet. The response rate was very low due to which only 350 questionnaires were returned back.

From these 350 only 280 were deemed appropriate for data analysis as most of them were incomplete or having response bias. The employees were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided. Questionnaires were given to the sample and were collected after few days. Non-cooperative attitudes from concerned personnel were experienced during data collection.

#### 4. Results

Analysis was done by using SPSS version (20). After testing the normality of data by calculating the Kurtosis and Skewness and values were found within acceptable range, the data was further analyzed to meet the objectives.

**Table 1: Correlation Coefficient for the Personality Traits and Perception and Forms of Workplace Bullying (N = 280)**

	Personality trait	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	<b>Extraversion</b>	51.54	12.48	.85	-	.56**	.48**	.23**	.36**	-.05	-.10*	-.07
2	<b>Agreeableness</b>	57.28	11.38	.87	-	-	.68**	.19**	.48**	-.17**	-.19**	-.19**
3	<b>Conscientiousness</b>	56.24	12.14	.89	-	-	-	.16**	.57**	-.12*	-.23**	-.17**
4	<b>Emotional stability</b>	44.37	8.27	.52	-	-	-	-	.19**	-.11*	-.15**	-.13*
5	<b>Intellect</b>	49.14	9.35	.63	-	-	-	-	-	-.05	-.12*	-.08
6	<b>Person-related bullying</b>	31.56	8.97	.93	-	-	-	-	-	-	.87**	.98**
7	<b>Work-related bullying</b>	26.66	11.82	.88	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.96**
8	<b>Workplace bullying</b>	58.23	20.19	.95	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

Table 1 indicates the alpha coefficient reliability for the Negative Acts Questionnaire and its subscales. The alpha reliability coefficient for Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) and its subscales shows that alpha coefficients for total and subscales are satisfactory ranging from .88 to .95. It also indicates the alpha reliability coefficient for Mini Marker Personality Inventory and its subscales ranging from .52 to .90.

Table also describes that there is significant negative relationship between Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional stability personality trait and workplace bullying. The results also indicated that these three personality traits are significantly negatively correlated with both forms; person-related and work-related, of bullying. While Extroversion and Intellect personality traits are significantly negatively related with work-related form of bullying.



**Table 2: Comparison of Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of Men and Women Employees on Experience of Bullying and its Forms (N = 280)**

	Men (n = 197)		Women (n = 83)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UP</i>	
<b>Person-related bullying</b>	31.96	11.76	30.63	12.18	.857	.392	1.73	4.40	.11
<b>Work-related bullying</b>	26.87	9.30	26.17	8.16	.599	.549	1.61	3.02	.08
<b>Workplace bullying</b>	58.83	20.39	56.80	19.79	.770	.442	3.17	7.24	.10
<b>Extraversion</b>	50.97	12.86	52.87	11.48	1.16	.247	5.10	1.32	.16
<b>Agreeableness</b>	56.55	12.36	59.01	8.46	1.66	.099	5.38	.46	.23
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	55.34	12.88	58.39	9.90	1.93	.055	6.16	.06	.27
<b>Emotional stability</b>	44.11	8.41	44.99	7.96	0.81	.417	3.01	1.25	.11
<b>Intellect</b>	48.55	9.46	50.54	8.97	1.64	.103	4.39	.416	.22

Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviations and *t*-value of men and women employees on perception and forms of workplace bullying. Results show that there is non-significant difference between them. Table also shows the mean, standard deviations and *t*-value of men and women employees on different personality traits. Results show that there is non-significant difference between men and women employees on different personality traits.

**Table 3: Mean Difference between Experience of Bullying and its Forms among Married and Unmarried Employees (N = 280)**

	Married (n = 105)		Unmarried (n = 175)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UP</i>	
<b>Person-Related Bullying</b>	31.70	12.55	31.48	11.49	.153	.879	2.67	3.12	.02
<b>Work-Related Bullying</b>	26.11	9.11	26.99	8.90	-.794	.428	3.06	1.30	.10
<b>Workplace Bullying</b>	57.82	21.10	58.47	19.69	-.262	.793	2.50	5.57	.03

Table 3 show the mean, standard deviation and *t*-value of married and unmarried employees on forms and experience of workplace bullying. Results show that there is

no significant difference between married and unmarried employees in their perception and experience of different forms of bullying.

In the overall comparison of three income groups on the perception and forms of bullying results show that there is no difference among three income groups in the perception and experience of forms of bullying. The overall comparison of three educational levels on the perception and forms of bullying show that there is no difference among three educational levels in the perception and experience of forms of bullying.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

The present research was aimed to explore the relationship between workplace bullying and personality traits among telecommunication personnel. Results showed that mean scores of Agreeableness were high and of Emotional stability were low. Results showed that some personality traits have no significant relationship with workplace bullying so first hypothesis was partially supported. The results depicted that Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional stability had significant negative relationship with perception of bullying experience (see Table 1). It can be explained that individual who is more agreeable and conscientious and emotionally stable is less susceptible to workplace bullying. It was also shown in the results that Extroversion and Openness to experience were non-significantly related with workplace bullying. Previous research literature supports these results as researches overlooked the role of personal factors in describing causes of bullying (Leymann, 1996; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996). The second hypothesis was supported by the findings of the present study as the data regarding the relationship between personality trait and workplace bullying revealed that there is significant negative relationship between Extroversion and work-related bullying (see Table 1). It means that victims of workplace bullying have low scores on extroversion. Similarly the results also showed that Agreeableness, Emotional stability and Conscientiousness, personality trait were significantly negatively correlated with workplace bullying (see Table 1). It means that persons scoring low on conscientiousness personality traits are more prone to workplace bullying as person scores high on this trait are organized, persistent and motivated so they face low workplace bullying as compare to the low scorers on this trait. So the low scorers are dependent, impractical and sloppy so they easily become the victims of workplace bullying. Person, who is less stable, is the prey of workplace bullying. These findings were in line with previous researches as they explained that victims of workplace bullying scores low on Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Openness to experience and score high on neuroticism (Brodsky 1976; Einarsen et al., 1994; Mikkelsen & Einarsen 2002; Niedl, 1995; O'Moore et al., 1998; Olweus, 1993; Thylefor, 1987; Vartia, 1996). The study results by Coyne, Seigne, and Randall (2000) also supported our results as according to them, victims of bullying are less extroverted and independent and are more unstable. The results also revealed that there is significant negative relationship between Intellect personality traits and work-related form of bullying (see Table 1).

Results also partially supported our third hypothesis as the findings indicated that Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional stability personality traits significant negative relationship with person-related form of bullying, but Extroversion and

Openness to experience personality traits found non-significantly related with workplace bullying. In order to consider personality traits as the antecedent of workplace bullying, one has to be careful as not to blame the victim (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Similarly, Ross (1977) described that people attribute and describe others actions in reference to their personality. Similarly the person-oriented hypothesis stated that no model of bullying in workplace is ample without personality factors (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003).

The results on gender differences of workplace bullying revealed that there is no significant difference between men and women employees on experience of workplace bullying but the mean scores of men employees are little high than women employees (see Table 2). This means that both men and women employees have similar experience of workplace bullying. The findings on forms of workplace bullying among men and women employees also appeared to be non-significant. These results indicated that Person-related and Work-related forms of workplace bullying have non-significant gender differences. These non-significant differences could be explained by the fact that the trends are changing and now a large number of women are serving in different sectors with men, so both have equal opportunities and the risk factors are equal for both men and women. Although the gender differences are non-significant; but the mean scores of our findings indicated that men reported higher experience of Person-related form of bullying. It could be explained by the fact that in our country, women are a respected figure and people avoid to give any comments about them. So the men are more prone to personal comments and jokes related to personal life.

Findings of Table 2 described non-significant gender differences of employees on all subscales of Mini Marker Personality Inventory. Mastor (2006) also reported the same pattern of results by revealing non-significant gender differences on Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, while in case of Emotional stability and Intellect personality trait men have faintly higher score than women.

Cultural differences could be the underlying basis of these non-significant gender differences on personality traits of telecommunication personnel. Those studies who found significant gender differences on personality traits were conducted in Western countries, which have quite different cultural and social values as compared to Pakistan. Pakistan has significantly dissimilar social setup as compare to the other countries of the world; even when we compare Pakistani culture with other Asian countries; we found significant inconsistencies.

The results of the present study revealed non-significant differences of married and unmarried employees on workplace bullying and its forms (see Table 3). These findings could be explained by the fact that workplace bullying is not related to personal factors as it is mostly related to work environment so the marital status of the employees have nothing to do with their experience of workplace bullying.

The results of the present study indicated non-significant differences on income level of employees on workplace bullying and its forms. Although the income level has non-significant differences but the mean score of upper income group is slightly high as compare to the lower and middle income group on Person-related form of bullying. This could be explained by the fact of professional jealousy due to which a person who is on a lower income level satisfies his ego by attacking the person on a higher income.

The results of the current study revealed non-significant educational differences of telecommunication employees on workplace bullying and its forms. Despite this fact that all the education differences were non-significant, but the mean scores indicated that Graduate employees have high tendency of being victims of workplace bullying as compare to the employees having Masters and M.Phil education. It could be explained by the fact that persons having higher educational level are on higher job designation so they face less or no workplace bullying while persons with Graduation are on lower job designation so they are easy victims of workplace bullying.

The study has certain limitations as it is based on a small sample from a single profession collected through non random sampling. In this regard future research could test the relationships in a longitudinal design to examine the effects and must incorporate various occupational categories which may not only help in enhancing the external validity of the findings but also may yield an insight into the dynamics by which workplace bullying and its correlates may vary across various occupational categories. Finally, future research should continue efforts to determine the most effective ways of managing and controlling workplace bullying. In sum, workplace bullying is a relatively young and new topic in the psychological and business literature in Pakistan, so it is full of possibilities for future research.

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