



## The Impact of Workplace Bullying on Intention to Leave: A Moderated Mediation Model

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### Abstract

Workplace bullying has emerged as a significant occupational health hazard within the nursing profession, manifesting as persistent exposure to harmful behaviors that are challenging to counter due to power imbalances. This phenomenon has been linked to adverse effects on job retention, with bullied employees exhibiting a higher propensity to leave their jobs. This study explores the relationship between workplace bullying and work disengagement, highlighting how such negative experiences deplete employees' resources, leading to disengagement and increased turnover intentions. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory underscores the importance of organizational support in mitigating these effects, suggesting that perceived organizational support (POS) can buffer the detrimental impacts of bullying. Specifically, supportive environments can reduce work dissatisfaction and turnover intentions among bullied nurses. The research employs a cross-sectional design, surveying 500 nursing professionals in public and private hospitals in Pakistan to investigate the prevalence and consequences of workplace bullying. The study aims to provide insights into the dynamics of workplace bullying and its implications for nursing staff retention.

**Keywords:** Workplace Bullying, Intention to Leave, Work Disengagement, Perceived Organizational Support

### 1. Introduction

Workplace bullying has been identified as an occupational health hazard in the nursing profession throughout the last two decades (Anasori et al., 2023). Bullying at work is typically described as persistent exposure to harmful behaviors that the target finds difficult to defend against due to a real or perceived power imbalance between the parties (Glambek et al., 2018). Additionally, it has been shown that workplace bullying endangers the target's ability to maintain their employment (Glambek et al., 2018). According to scientific research, bullying at work is linked to a higher likelihood that employees may want to leave the company (Dou et al., 2020). The phenomenon of unwelcome and unfavorable treatment in the workplace, referred to by different names including harassment, bullying, mistreatment, or abusive behavior, has drawn the attention of scholars and practitioners in organizational psychology and the general public (Hogh et al., 2011). Health-related and work-related effects have been broadly categorized as results of workplace bullying (Dou et al., 2020). Bullying at work was found to be a precursor to unfavorable job-related well-being, meaning that maltreatment could exhaust the victims and lower their level of involvement at work. We predict a negative relationship between job engagement and workplace bullying based on prior empirical findings.

Perceived organizational support can be seen as an organizational resource linked to workers' general belief that their employer values their work and is concerned about their welfare. In this way, employees feel obligated to repay the company with the desired work-related attitudes and behavior. Employees who feel that their employer is supportive are more dedicated to the company and give better work. For example, compared to bullied nurses with less support, those who reported being bullied but received support from their employer in the form of resources had less intention to quit, have been less depressed, and were more satisfied with their jobs (Salahieh - 2015 - *The Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Support*, n.d.). Bullying is typically characterized by repetitive, harmful behaviors intended to exert power over another person, creating an imbalance of power. Prior research has indicated that healthcare professionals are at a rather high risk of experiencing bullying in the workplace; however, the exact numbers vary slightly throughout studies. A number of studies have found a positive correlation between bullying and intention to leave (thinking about quitting the job), which has implications for organizations. One such correlation is between workplace bullying and potential employee turnover (Hoel & Cooper, 2000). Additionally, there is a high correlation between verbal abuse and nurse turnover. Bullying at work is a widespread issue in the nursing field that endangers nurses' health and capacity to perform their jobs safely (Kwan et al., 2016). It has also been stated that individuals in positions of authority may misuse them by intimidating people in lesser positions (Otto & Mamatoglu, 2015). In the healthcare industry, active workplace behavior and a positive work environment are thought to improve organizational outcomes. However, difficulties include inter-professional conflicts, hierarchies, high demands, frequent turnover, and significant levels of stress are frequently present in the work environment and working circumstances in the healthcare industry (Belrhiti et al., 2021). The healthcare industry also has to deal with issues like high rates of harassment and bullying at work. Studies have indicated that bullying at work can have detrimental effects on companies, including decreased

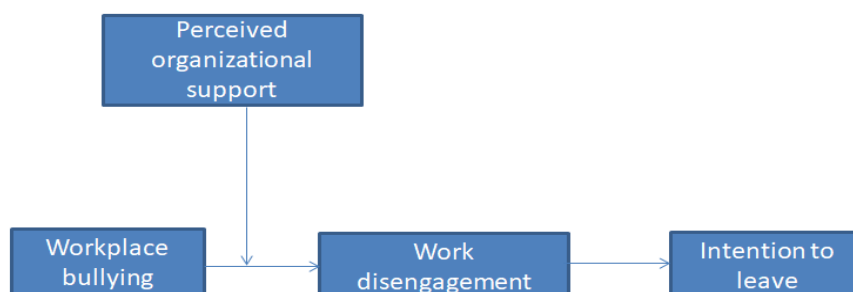
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output, employee absenteeism, and high staff turnover. This investigation of harmful gossip behavior supports earlier research that highlights the potential for bullying to escalate into other unfavorable job consequences (De Clercq, 2022). It has also been discovered that job features affect things like healthcare personnel's work engagement (Wan et al., 2018). Encouraging work engagement is critical for the organization to nurture since it affects both employee retention and care quality (Wan et al., 2018).



**Figure 1:** Conceptual model

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical background and hypothesis

According to COR theory, stress develops when persons are threatened with resource loss or fail to obtain resources after investing resources. Because resources are frequently difficult to get and retain, COR theory considers resource loss to be more visible and consequential than resource gain. In turn, resource gain becomes increasingly crucial in the face of resource loss. The COR hypothesis explains the significance of social support. People have limited resources, which may be insufficient, especially when under stress. People can rely on social support to provide the resources they lack, reinforce their weak resources, or remove them from stressful situations so that they can regain resources or the ability to use their resources (Raja et al., 2018). This theory explains that due to bullying at workplace the nurses become disengaged from their work that leads them to leave the organization. But if perceived organizational support is given to them there are more chances that they will be less disengaged from their work and their intention toward leaving the organization decreases (Jin et al., 2018).

### 2.2. Workplace Bullying and Intention to Leave

According to (Silva Junior et al., 2023), bullying at the workplace and intention to leave has a positive relationship with each other. Workplace bullying is defined as behaviors that annoy, offend, socially exclude, or negatively impact another person's capacity to execute their job (Nielsen et al., 2020). The health and social work sectors exhibit elevated reports of bullying, with particular vulnerability observed among nurses as targets for workplace violence (Nielsen et al., 2020). The fundamental cause of workplace bullying, according to (Van Raalte et al., 2023), is the disparity in power that exists between the abuser and the victim when a person in a position of authority decides to misuse that position. People in positions of more power are more prone to harass employees who have less influence inside the company. Clients, patients, consumers, pupils, or anybody else to whom an employee provides a service directly or indirectly may bully employees (Stankov et al., 2020).

**Hypothesis 1.** Bullying at workplace is positively related with intention to leave

### 2.3. Effect of Work disengagement as a mediator

Work-related effects of bullying at work include job unhappiness, absenteeism, and desire to leave the company (De Clercq, 2022). A longitudinal study identified that workplace bullying and job engagement have significantly negative links between each other (Goodboy et al., 2020). Bullying at work can affect the culture of the organization, the effectiveness of the job being done and productivity (Goodboy et al., 2020). According to scientific research, bullying at work is linked to a higher likelihood that employees may want to leave the company (Skuzińska et al., 2023). Bullying at work, according to (Goodboy et al., 2020), negatively impacts employee work engagement. Employees found it challenging to satisfy their fundamental psychological needs (autonomy, connection, competence) at work when bullying incidents, such as ignoring, taunting, or gossiping, occurred. According to this theory, the satisfaction of demands at work reduces employee motivation and decreases work engagement (Goodboy et al., 2020). However, unfavorable workplace attitudes like burnout and bullying may push nurses to quit their jobs or increase turnover intentions (Hsiao et al., 2022). A variety of negative outcomes have been proven to occur as a result of bullying, both for the individual target and at the organizational and

societal levels. These consequences include impaired mental health, impaired somatic health, decreased job dedication and job satisfaction and increased absenteeism and intention to leave.

**Hypothesis 2.** Work disengagement mediates between workplace bullying and intention to leave

#### 2.4. Effect of perceived organizational support as a Moderator

Salahieh, 2015 investigated the influence of perceived organizational support as a moderator in the relationship of bullying and intention to leave. Not surprisingly, the results show the non-significant relation between both of them when employees are perceived to be supportive from the organization. Workplace bullying has been related to a variety of negative outcomes that can be extremely costly to organizations. Perceived organizational support (POS) is one strategy for mitigating the consequences of this undesirable behavior. The three components of rewards, fairness, and supervisor support that make up perceived organizational support (POS) positively reduced the effect of bullying on intention to leave (Hogh et al., 2011). Bullying and intention to leave were found to have no statistically significant relationship for those who thought their organization was supportive; however, there was a positive correlation for those who thought their organization was non-supportive or neither supportive nor non-supportive (Djurkovic et al., 2008).

**Hypothesis 3.** Perceived organizational support moderates between bullying and work disengagement

### 3. Methodology

The study aims to shed light on the prevalence, nature, and consequences of workplace bullying within the unique context of the public and private hospitals in South Punjab, Pakistan. In order to collect a comprehensive and representative understanding of the phenomenon, the research employs a purposive sampling technique targeting a sample size of 500 nursing professionals directly associated with the public and private hospitals.

#### 3.1. Measures

##### 3.1.1. Workplace Bullying

Items-scale for collecting data on workplace Bullying is opted from (Parkins et al., 2006) using 6 items scale.

##### 3.1.2. Intention to Leave

The intention to leave scale is opted from (Vermeir et al., 2018) using 3 items.

##### 3.1.3. Perceived Organizational Support

Items-scale for perceived organizational support is opted from (LaMastro, 1999) using 12 items.

##### 3.1.4. Work Disengagement

Items-scale for work disengagement is opted from (Heckhausen et al., 1998) using 2 items.

### 4. Results

Table 1 shows the results of confirmatory factor analysis which indicates the goodness and fitness of model ( $\chi^2=1265.676$ , RMSEA = 0.063, GFI = 0.873, AGFI= 0.856, TLI = 0.934, CFI = 0.954).

#### 4.1. Test of Hypothesis

We applied a technique drawn by Hayes (2018) and Preacher et al. (2007) to assess the mediation moderation model. We tested the complete hypothesized model using the SPSS macro (PROCESS) developed by Hayes (2018). The PROCESS results for the whole model are presented in table 2.

**Table1:** Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Goodness of fit indices	Desirab Measure le nt Model Range	
$\chi^2$	Nil	1265.676
NC	$\leq 5$	1.40
GFI	$\geq 0.80$	0.873
AGFI	$\geq 0.80$	0.856
RMSEA	$\leq 0.08$	0.063
TLI	$\geq 0.90$	0.934
CFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.954

**Table2:** Direct effects and moderation mediation effect of work disengagement on intention to leave

Hypothesis	B	SE	t	P
H <sub>1</sub>	0.4274	0.0610	7.2526	0.0000*
	0.4645	0.0634	5.0675	0.0002**
H <sub>2</sub>				
	0.5343	0.0733	7.0786	0.0003**
H <sub>3</sub>				

In this study, the first hypothesis suggested direct relationship of workplace bullying on intention to leave. Research analysis illustrated that workplace bullying was having positive relationship with intention to leave ( $\beta = 0.4274$ , se = 0.0610. t = 7.2526, p < 0.01), all these values support the first hypothesis.

The result analysis of mediating variable exhibited that there was a mediating effect of work disengagement on the connection of workplace bullying and intention to leave ( $\beta = 0.4645$ ,  $se = 0.0634$ ,  $t = 5.0675$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Hence, hypothesis 2 is also supported whereas the result of hypothesis 3 showed that perceived organizational support moderates in the relationship between workplace bullying and work disengagement ( $\beta = 0.5343$ ,  $se = 0.0733$ ,  $t = 7.0786$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, hypothesis 3 is also supported.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings from the study on workplace bullying in the nursing profession have significant theoretical implications. First, the study reinforces the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, demonstrating how resource loss due to workplace bullying impacts employees' job engagement and overall well-being. This supports the theory's assertion that resource loss is more impactful than resource gain and that social support can buffer the effects of resource depletion (De Clercq, 2022). Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) as a mitigating factor. The study's findings suggest that organizational support can moderate the negative impacts of bullying, reducing work disengagement and turnover intentions among employees. The study also contributes to the understanding of power dynamics in workplace bullying. It illustrates how power imbalances facilitate bullying behaviors, impacting employees' mental health and job performance. This aligns with existing literature on the role of authority and power misuse in organizational settings (Skuzińska et al., 2023). Lastly, the research emphasizes the multifaceted consequences of workplace bullying, including its effects on organizational culture, employee productivity, and overall workplace environment. By linking bullying to increased absenteeism, decreased job dedication, and higher turnover rates, the study provides a comprehensive view of how bullying can undermine organizational effectiveness.

### 5.2. Practical Implications

This study highlights several practical implications for healthcare organizations, particularly in managing workplace bullying and enhancing employee retention. First, healthcare administrators should recognize the significant impact of workplace bullying on nurses' job engagement and intention to leave, emphasizing the need for comprehensive anti-bullying policies and interventions. Implementing robust support systems, including counseling services and training programs for both staff and management, can help mitigate the adverse effects of bullying. Organizations should foster a supportive work environment by promoting perceived organizational support (POS), ensuring that employees feel valued and cared for, which can reduce turnover intentions and improve job satisfaction. Regular assessments of workplace culture and employee well-being through surveys and feedback mechanisms can help identify and address bullying behaviors promptly. Additionally, training programs focused on building interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and stress management can empower employees to handle challenging situations more effectively. By addressing workplace bullying and enhancing support structures, healthcare organizations can improve overall employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and enhance the quality of patient care.

### 5.3. Limitations and directions for future research

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality as data is collected at a single point in time, making it difficult to establish temporal relationships between workplace bullying, job disengagement, and intention to leave. Reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires introduces potential response bias, with participants possibly underreporting or overreporting their experiences due to social desirability or fear of retaliation. Additionally, the 26-item questionnaire, while comprehensive, may be time-consuming and complex, leading to incomplete or hurried responses. Distributing the questionnaire only in English may exclude non-English speaking nurses or those with limited proficiency, potentially biasing the sample. The study does not account for contextual factors such as organizational culture, management practices, or external stressors that might influence the relationship between workplace bullying, job disengagement, and intention to leave. The five-point Likert scale used may not capture the full nuance of participants' experiences and perceptions, resulting in a loss of detailed information. The exclusive focus on nurses limits the applicability of the findings to other roles within the healthcare sector, and the study does not consider potential changes over time in workplace dynamics, policies, or personal circumstances that could influence the experiences and impacts of bullying.

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