

**RESEARCH PAPER****Investigating the Level of Workplace Bullying among University Teachers and its Effect on their Mental Wellness and Work Motivation****¹Salman Ahmad, ²Dr. Iqbal Ahmad* and ³Muhammad Waris**

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***Corresponding Author:** ikbalchtrali@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

Bullying at work has a serious impact on employees' motivation and mental health. It is a phenomenon that is harmful to employee welfare and has been shown to have significant effects on people, organizations, and society at large. Several studies have reported about the outcomes of workplace bullying in work industry and business field. However, little studies are available from high education sector in Pakistan. This study examined the level of workplace bullying, work motivation and mental wellness among university teachers. The study also evaluated the effect of workplace bullying on work motivation and mental wellness among university teachers. Data were collected from 503 university teachers of three public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The study revealed that teachers had high level workplace bullying and low level of mental wellness and low level of work motivation. The study found that workplace bullying strongly affected the mental wellness and work motivation among university teachers. The results conclude that workplace bullying is a barrier to mental wellness and work motivation of university teachers. The findings of this study provide additional knowledge about the role of workplace bullying in higher education context. The study further suggests that higher education authorities may consider this as policy matter to reduce monitor bullying in the work environment and to increase work motivation and mental wellness among teachers.

KEYWORDS Mental Wellness, University Teachers, Work Motivation, Workplace Bullying**Introduction**

The progress and growth of organizations are directly associated with its social climate and workplace environment. Bullying at work is a serious problem that negatively impacts workers' motivation at work and mental health. It can take many different forms and can cause the targeted person to feel stressed out, be less productive, lose talented resources, and have their self-esteem damaged. It may take various forms, such as intimidation, social exclusion, or verbal abuse (Nielsen, Harris, Pallesen & Einarsen, 2020). Studies have unveiled that the recent work environment in Pakistani higher education sector has been devoid of healthy social activities as social gatherings, productive discussions, debates, pro-social behavior.

There are numerous evidences of bullying cases which led to demonstrating agitations inside campuses and even internal work disruptions and created challenging issues for the management of the universities and to sustain peaceful work environment. The results of bullying are not only limited to unfriendly staff relations, rather it has led to reduced workplace motivation among workers and increased turnout intentions among teachers (Farley, Mokhtar & Niven, 2023). The social justice theory explains that a work environment characterized with discriminations and nepotism breeds disloyalty and lack of interest among the workers to stay in work. Sometimes, mutual differences among the co-

workers also create favorable conditions for work place bullying and as a result, the workers suffer psychological mental wellness issues (Afzal, Zamir & Sadiq, 2022).

Needless to say, a bullying free work environment is essential for the professional growth of its members in general and overall development of the organization in particular. According to Lovell and Lee (2011) bullying is a strong predictor of workplace stress, anxiety and low performance. Employees who work in a bullying situation may demonstrate low job satisfaction, higher turn-over intentions and work absenteeism. In general parlance, in Pakistani context, university teachers are subject to constraints such as high academic standards, demanding workloads, and administrative requirements. These elements might make workplace bullying more likely and worsen its effects on motivation and mental health (Anees, Heidler, Cavaliere & Nordin, 2021). This study aimed to investigate the teachers of public sector universities about the effect of bullying on their mental wellness and work motivation in Malakand division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Literature Review

Bullying at work is a widespread issue that negatively impacts people's mental health and motivation at work place (Høgh, Clausen, Bickmann, Hansen, Conway & Baernholdt, 2021). In a bullying workplace environment an employee is subjected to harassment from one or more coworkers including subordinates, colleagues and leaders repeatedly and over an extended period, and the targeted individual is unable to defend themselves against this systematic mistreatment. This mistreatment can take a variety of shapes, including verbal abuse, physical violence, and exclusion from activities connected to the job (Hsiao, Ma, Guo, Kao, Tsai, Chung & Huang, 2022; Anasori, Bayighomog & Tanova, 2020).

Bullying is a common occurrence at workplaces everywhere. Bullies are known to exhibit high levels of irritability and much higher levels of anxiety than non-bullied people. The other characteristics associated with bullied persons include low self-esteem, depression, and stress disorder systems (Ying-Ying, Yi, Chi-Jane, Hsiu-Yun, Yu-Mei & Hsing-Mei, 2020). Studies have confirmed about the numerous negative effects of workplace bullying on employees along its adverse financial impact on the organization due to the costs associated with employee turnover, decreased productivity, absenteeism, compensation claims, grievance mechanisms, and legal hassles (Anasori, Bayighomog & Tanova, 2020).

According to prior studies, workplace bullying can cause workers to feel less committed to their jobs and less productive (Robert, 2018). Scholars have pinpointed that workplace bullying can hurt a person's mental health by increasing stress, anxiety, and sadness. It is further stated that bullying at work can also affect performance, job satisfaction, and motivation at work (Duan, Ni, Shi, Zhang, Ye, Mu & Wang, 2019). Bullying can occur both directly and indirectly. The victims of bullying experience higher levels of stress which serves as an outlet for their agony over workplace bullying (Mento, Silvestri, Bruno, Muscatello, Cedro, Pandolfo & Zoccali, 2020). It is completely unfavorable for employees both physical and psychological and impairs workers' health. In recent organizational contexts, bullying has been designated as one of the major factor having harmful effect on motivation of employees (Wu, Lin, Li, Chai, Zhang, Wu & Zhu, 2014). It has been stated that bullying behaviour of workers negative affects their job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Razzaghian & Ghani, 2014).

Bano and Malik (2014) have reported a negative correlation between workplace bullying and employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Bano & Malik, 2013). It is considered to be one of major contributor towards the victim's poor mental and physical health as well as an overall negative effect on the workplace environment, which in turn has an impact on any coworkers or bystanders who witness the bullying (Taris, 2022). It causes emotional weariness among workers and leads to low job satisfaction. It causes melancholy, anxiety, and stress among workers and significantly

harms their mental health and general well-being (Pfeffer & Williams, 2020). Thus, health issues associated with bullying included anxiety or fear while entering the workplace, feelings of annoyance and/or vulnerability, loss of confidence, and low self-esteem (Lange, Burr, Rose & Conway, 2020).

Bullying hurts the workplace and the health of the staff. A study revealed that workplace bullying increases the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Malik & Björkqvist, 2019). It also decreases psychological well-being of workers and permanently damages their self-esteem and elevates in them feelings of rage, irritation, and anxiety. In some studies, bullying has been reported to have caused individuals to experience sadness, anxiety, sleep problems, stress disorder, and other mental disorders. In contrast to personal circumstances, which are anticipated to be frequent and encourage systematic behavior, bad workplace behavior is more likely to be associated with working settings that humiliate, distress, and offend employees (Chan, Wong, Yeap, Wee, Jamil & Swarna Nantha, 2019).

Workplace bullying hurts employee motivation, resulting in lower job satisfaction, a weaker organizational commitment, and more inclinations to leave the job (Hayat, & Afshari, 2021). Bullying at work can result in many other negative organizational outcomes such as lower job dedication, satisfaction, and productivity as well as higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Attia, Abo Gad & Shokir, 2020). It also negatively affects mental health and job motivation of employees (Hsiao, Ma, Guo, Kao, Tsai, Chung & Huang, 2022).

Ahmad, Kalim and Kaleem (2017) have highlighted that workplace bullying badly affects employees’ job satisfaction and well-being, because bullying at work increases job stress, job dissatisfaction, and burnout. However, there are several ways to reduce the frequent occurrence of bullying in work environment such as creating a consistent social support, decreasing the chances of burnout among workers. It indicates that supportive work settings can lessen the detrimental effects of workplace bullying on employee motivation and well-being (Livne, & Goussinsky, 2018).

Based on the above listed literature, the following hypotheses were formulated for this study.

- H01 Workplace bullying has significant effect on mental wellness of university teachers.
- H02 Workplace bullying has significant effect on work motivation of university teachers.

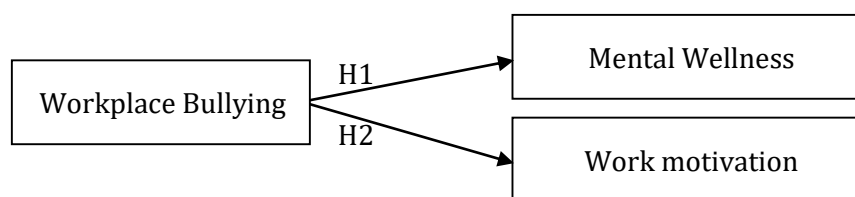


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methods and Materials

Research design

A descriptive correlational research design was used to examine the relationship among workplace bullying, mental wellness and work motivation of university teachers.

Population and Sample

All university teachers in Malakand division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan comprised the population of this study. A total of 503 teachers conveniently

participated in this study from University of Malakand, University of Swat and University of Sheringal Upper Dir.

Data Collection Tools

Three different validated scales were adopted and used for measuring the effect of workplace bullying on work motivation and mental wellness of public sector university teachers of Malakand division.

Workplace Bullying Scale (WBS)

Workplace Bullying Scale (WBS) was adopted and used to measure workplace bullying among teachers. The WBS is a self-reported scale and consists of 23 items. The scale was pilot tested before using for data collection.

Mental Wellness Scale (MWS)

Mental Wellness Scale (MWS) was adopted and used to measure mental wellness among university teachers. The MWS is a self-reported scale having 14 items. The scale was pilot tested before using for data collection.

Work Motivation Scale (WMS)

Work Motivation Scale (WMS) was adopted and used to measure work motivation among teachers. WMS is a self-reported scale having 17 items. A five point Likert scale having response format with strongly agree (5) to strong disagree (1) was used to collect data from the university teachers.

Reliability and Validity

The validity of the scales was checked by three experts in the field of education. Based on their feedback the instrument was finalized. Cronbach alpha test was used to assess the inter-consistency of the scale items for all the three scales as given in Table 1.

Table 1
Reliability analysis

S. No	Variable	Total items	Current alpha
1	Workplace Bullying (WPB)	23	.73
2	Mental Wellness (MW)	14	.77
3	Work Motivation (WM)	17	.81

Table 1 shows the reliability values of all scales in the questionnaire with WPB (total item 23 items $\alpha=.73$), MWS (total items 14, $\alpha=.77$) and WPS (total items 17, $\alpha=.81$).

Data Collection

The researchers personally visited the target universities and the teachers were approached personally for data collection. The teachers were given questionnaires on availability basis and were explained about the purpose of the research.

Data Analysis

For data analysis both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to ascertain the level of workplace bullying, mental wellness and work motivation. Pearson r and one-way ANOVA statistics were calculated to find out the effect of independent variable on dependent variables.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, the researchers obtained permission from the management of the schools. For this purpose, the researchers visited the district education office lower Dir at Timergara to get permission to visit the schools and meet teachers for data collection. Upon getting permission, the selected school teachers were approached for data collection. However, individual permission was also obtained from the teachers to fill out the questionnaires. They were assured that the data collected from them will not be leaked or shared without their prior consent and the data will only be used for research purpose.

Results and Discussion

The collected data was put on SPSS version 20. For analysis of data the researchers used descriptive and inferential analysis techniques such as mean, standard deviation and simple linear regression. The result of the study is presented below.

Table 2
Democratic Statistics

S.#	Variable	Frequency
1	Gender	
	1. Male	453
	2. Female	50
	Total =	503
2	Designation	
	1. Professor	19
	2. Associate professor	55
	3. Assistant professor	212
	4. Lecturer	266
3	Universities:	
	1. University of Swat	143
	2. University of Malakand	284
	3. SBBU, Sheringal Upper Dir	125
4	Experience	
	1. Less than 1 year	65
	2. More than 1 and less than 5 years	221
	3. More than 5 years	266
5	Qualification	
	1. M.Phil	374
	2. PhD	165
	3. Postdoc	13

Table 2 indicates that out of the total participant, 453 were male and 50 were female. In designation category, majority of the teachers 286 were lecturers followed by 212 assistant professors 35 associate professors and 19 were professor, and 266 were lecturers. In university category, 143 participants were from university of Swat, 284 were from university of Malakand and 125 were from university of Sheringal Upper Dir. In terms of experience, 65 participants were less than 1 year, 221 were more than 1 year and less than 5 years. And 266 were more than 5 years. In terms of qualifications, 374 were M.Phil, 165 were PhDs and 13 were postdoc qualified.

Table 3
Level of workplace bullying among University Teachers

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
WPB1	503	1	5	2.33	1.118
WPB2	503	1	5	2.33	1.118
WPB3	503	1	5	2.13	1.114

WPB4	503	1	5	2.03	.768
WPB5	503	1	5	2.00	1.013
WPB6	503	1	5	2.48	1.320
WPB7	503	1	5	2.03	1.025
WPB8	503	1	5	2.03	.891
WPB9	503	1	5	1.90	.871
WPB10	503	1.	5.	1.75	.840
WPB11	503	1	5	2.00	1.109
WPB12	503	1	5	1.72	.784
WPB13	503	1	5	1.53	.751
WPB14	503	1.	5.	1.55	.504
WPB15	503	1	5	1.67	.474
WPB16	503	1	5	1.88	.791
WPB17	503	1	5	2.58	.801
WPB18	503	1	5	1.43	.636
WPB19	503	1	5	2.25	1.296
WPB20	503	1	5	1.58	.501
WPB21	503	1	6	2.05	1.197
WPB22	503	1	5	1.55	.783
WPB23	503	1	5	1.68	.829

Table 3 shows that the mean scores of workplace bullying ranged from 1.43 to 2.58. The mean scores of the all the computed variables were above 3.00 indicating a fairly high level of workplace bullying among the teachers.

Table 4
Level of Mental Wellness among university teachers

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
MW1	503	1	5	1.45	.504
MW2	503	1	5	1.48	.506
MW3	503	1	5	1.85	.949
MW4	503	1	5	2.00	.784
MW5	503	1	5	1.67	.616
MW6	503	1	5	2.15	.864
MW7	503	1	5	2.05	1.085
MW8	503	1	5	2.05	1.131
MW9	503	1	5	1.72	.599
MW10	503	1	5	2.07	.859
MW11	503	1	5	2.48	1.664
MW12	503	1	5	2.45	1.260
MW13	503	1	5	2.53	1.921
MW14	503	1	5	2.38	1.102
Valid N (list wise)	503				

Table 4 shows that the mean scores of all the variables for mental wellness ranged from 1.45 to 2.53. The mean scores of the all the computed variables were below 3.00 indicating very low level of mental wellness among the teachers.

Table 5
Level of Work Motivation among university teachers

Variable	N	Min	Ma	Mean	Std. Deviation
WM1	503	1	5	2.50	1.301
WM2	503	1	5	2.15	1.027
WM3	503	1	5	2.08	.829
WM4	503	1	5	1.93	.797

WM5	503	1	5	1.97	.800
WM6	503	1	5	1.90	.778
WM7	503	1	5	1.90	.928
WM8	503	1	5	2.03	1.025
WM9	503	1	5	2.05	1.154
WM10	503	1	5	1.72	.847
WM11	503	1	5	1.93	.917
WM12	503	1	5	2.05	.876
WM13	503	1	5	1.93	.829
WM14	503	1	5	1.65	.622
WM15	503	1	5	2.03	.891
WM16	503	1	5	1.95	.904
WM17	503	1	5	2.12	1.682

Valid N (list wise)

Table 5 shows that the mean scores of all the variables for work motivation ranged from 1.65 to 2.50. The mean scores of the all the computed variables were below 3.00 indicating very low work motivation level among university teachers.

Table 6
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.914 ^a	.835	.834	10.32088

a. Predictors: (Constant), WPB

Table 7
ANOVA of Workplace Bullying and Mental Wellness

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	546511.208	1	546511.208	5130.571	.000 ^b
	Residual	108331.383	1017	106.521		
	Total	654842.591	1018			

a. Dependent Variable: MW

b. Predictors: (Constant), WPB

Table 8
Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	32.547	1.809	17.992	.000
	SD	2.271	.032	.914	71.628

Table 6, 7 and 8 indicate the testing of the independent variable 'Workplace Bullying' on the dependent variable 'Mental Wellness' with an indicator (R=.914). This shows that the variable 'Workplace Bullying' has a statistically proven strong effect on the dependent variable 'Mental Wellness' with an indicator (.835). Hence, the H₁ 'There is a significant effect of workplace bullying on mental wellness of university teacher' was accepted. Based on this computation, it is concluded that workplace bullying has a significant effect on mental wellness of university teachers.

Table 9
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.981 ^a	.963	.963	1.72081

a. Predictors: (Constant), WPB

Table 10
ANOVA of Workplace Bullying and Work Motivation

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	78336.453	1	78336.453	26454.510	.000 ^b
	Residual	3011.516	1017	2.961		
	Total	81347.969	1018			

a. Dependent Variable: WM

b. Predictors: (Constant), WPB

Table 11
Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.519	.302		1.719	.086
	SD	.860	.005	.981	162.648	.000

a. Dependent Variable: WM

Table 9, 10 and 11 indicate the testing of the independent variable 'Workplace Bullying' on the dependent variable 'Work Motivation' with an indicator ($R=.981$). This shows that the variable 'Workplace Bullying' has a statistically proven strong effect on the dependent variable 'Work Motivation' with an indicator (.963). Hence, the H_1 'There is a significant effect of workplace bullying on work motivation of university teacher' was accepted. Based on this computation, it is concluded that workplace bullying has a significant effect on work motivation of university teachers.

Discussion

The main aim of this study was to examine the effect of workplace bullying on mental wellness and work motivation of university teachers. The study further aimed to explore the perceptions of the teachers about the level of workplace bullying, mental wellness and work motivation of university teachers. The results showed that there was a strong effect of workplace bullying on university teachers' mental wellness. Based on the Pearson's correlation and regression analysis the hypothesis was supported. The findings of this study support the results of previous studies in which it was discovered that workplace bullying had a strong effect on teachers' mental wellness. It was described by Wu *et al*, (2014) that workplace bullying negatively affects employees' creativity and reduces their positive energy and motivation towards work. In another study, Rashid and Rizvi (2020) revealed that workplace bullying greatly reduces work motivation of workers which ultimately leads to low productivity. Mostly, employees in such an environment loose mental energy and suffer from stress and burn-out.

This study revealed a strong effect of workplace bullying on work motivation of university teachers. Previous studies have also reported a strong correlation between workplace bullying and work motivation of employees (Harlos & Knoll, 2018). Although, the findings are consistent with the former studies but there are possibilities that the employees have mentioned workplace bullying a strong factor that has the potential to affect work motivation of teachers. Some of the previous studies have pointed out that workplace bullying is a strong psychological factor of work environment having the potential to affect the work motivation of employees (Abbas, Javed & Raja, 2015). On the other hand, scholars have also highlighted that employees often demonstrate high psychological capital to bear the stress of workplace bullying due to norms and culture and remain silent in most cases (Sepahvand, Arefnezad, Fathi-Chegeni & Sepahvand, 2021).

In this study, the descriptive statistics showed that female respondents showed less agreement to the statements on workplace bullying, mental wellness and workplace

motivation. The main reason could be that in Pakistani context, due to gender disparity, female mostly become the victim of workplace bullying as compared to their male counterpart. They in most cases remain silent and do not report any complaint about it. However, male respondents showed strong agreement with the statements. Naturally, Pakistan has a male dominate society and may be due to this reason male respondents were found more expressive than female. According to Harlos et al. (2017), when female employees become victim of workplace bullying, they do not show strong reaction and prefer to remain silent. Whereas, the male members of the society can easily raise their voices against the perpetrators in most cases. The correlation analysis further revealed that there was strong relationship between workplace bullying, mental wellness and work motivation in the context of university teachers. It showed that the respondents considered that workplace bullying affected their mental wellness as well as their work motivation. Studies have already revealed that workplace disruptions lead to stress and depression which are important agents of negative and poor mental condition of an individual. In some cases, the employees remain silent to avoid negative consequences or poor cooperation with other workers in an organizational context (Rai & Agarwal, 2018).

Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the level of workplace bullying, mental health and work motivation of university teachers. Based on the results, it is concluded that there was strong effect of workplace bullying on mental wellness of university teachers and their work motivation. It was discovered the issue of workplace bullying existed among the participants. The study further revealed that there was low mental level among the participants and their work motivation was also negligible. This study further showed that workplace bullying strongly predicted university teachers' mental wellness and work place motivation. It was also inferred from this result that workplace bullying of employees may strongly affect their mental wellness and work motivation. Hence, it is concluded that workplace bullying was determined as an important factor of mental wellness and work motivation in the context of public sector universities. It can be argued that workplace bullying may lead to low mental wellness and low work motivation among employees which will ultimately negatively affect the growth and development of the organizations.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study the following recommendations are forwarded.

1. The results of this study inform the management of universities to focus on the need to create develop proper policies about reducing or curbing workplace bullying and may be implemented so that a conducive relationship could be promoted inside the higher education institutions. This will enhance the level of work motivation among the workers and this will contribute towards the growth and development of the higher education institutions.

2. The management of universities may also provide support to the workers for consultation of psychological experts or guidance to reduce the issue of mental health problem. This will help increase positive mental health among the workers.

3. This study used a small sample frame and single method approach to investigate the effect of workplace bullying on mental wellness and work motivation of university teachers in the context of Malakand region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

4. Future studies are recommended to study the same variables by using a mixed method approach to get more robust result comprehensively.

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