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# Workplace bullying and workplace deviance

## The mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and the moderating effect of core self-evaluations

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance. This study also examined the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and the moderating effect of core self-evaluations (CSE) in the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Convenience sampling was used in this study; 262 caregivers at a long-term care institution in Taiwan participated in the study.

**Findings** – The results of this study showed that workplace bullying positively and significantly influenced workplace deviance; emotional exhaustion fully mediated the relationship between workplace bullying and deviance; and CSE significantly moderated the relationship between workplace bullying and deviance.

**Research limitations/implications** – The self-reporting method and cross-sectional research design adopted in this study might have resulted in common method variance and limited the ability to make causal inferences. This study suggest future studies to obtain measures of predictor and criterion variables from different sources or ensure a temporal, proximal, or psychological separation between predictor and criterion in the collection of data to avoid the common method bias.

**Practical implications** – Businesses should establish a friendly work environment and prevent employees from encountering workplace bullying. Next, an unbiased process for internal complaints should be established. Finally, this study suggests recruiting employees with high CSE.

**Originality/value** – This study was the first to simultaneously consider the effect of emotional exhaustion (a mediator) and CSE (a moderator) on the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance.

**Keywords** Workplace deviance, Emotional exhaustion, Workplace bullying, Core self-evaluation

**Paper type** Research paper



### Introduction

Bullying has become an important social problem that is prevalent in organizations (Einarsen *et al.*, 1994, 2011). Workplace bullying has also received substantial attention from numerous researchers and scholars (Bergbom *et al.*, 2015; Devonish, 2013). Nielsen *et al.* (2010) found that approximately 14.6 percent of employees have experienced

workplace bullying, indicating that bullying is a common behavior at the organizational level and any signs of bullying in an organization should not be disregarded. Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) postulated that workplace bullying can cause physical and psychological harm to individual employees as well as increased costs and profit loss to the organization. Tepper *et al.* (2006) found that the negative consequences of managers who bully their employees cost American corporations US\$23.8 billion annually. Consequently, Leka *et al.* (2012) and Yada *et al.* (2011) have asserted that ensuring the mental health needs of employees has become a key issue in occupational health. Concurrently, workplace bullying has evidently become a phenomenon that cannot be neglected in organizational management (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011; Samnani and Singh, 2012).

In recent years, numerous scholars have found that workplace bullying has negative effects on employee mood or behavioral intentions, including work satisfaction (Quine, 1999; Devonish, 2013), organizational commitment (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012), intention to leave (Hoel and Cooper, 2000; Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012), and team performance (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998; Ramsay *et al.*, 2011). Surprisingly, few studies have examined negative employee behaviors that may be triggered by workplace bullying (Devonish, 2013). However, researchers have indicated that employees subjected to unfair treatment or disrespect may mollify their emotions by engaging in counterorganizational actions such as workplace deviance or counterproductive behavior to emphasize their uniqueness and dissimilarity with the organization (Bennett and Robinson, 2003).

Workplace deviance among employees can manifest as behaviors that clearly violate the organization's norms, policies, or regulations and threaten the welfare of the organization or other employees (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). These behaviors that do not conform to organizational standards are harmful to the organization and detrimental to its operations (Kuo *et al.*, 2014). Bennett and Robinson (2000) found that costs related to workplace deviance are extremely high; one survey found that as many as 33 to 75 percent of employees have engaged in behaviors such as theft, deception, vandalism, embezzlement, or intentional absenteeism (Harper, 1990). However, few empirical studies have been performed to determine whether workplace bullying triggers workplace deviance (Ayoko *et al.*, 2003). The first objective of the present study was to augment empirical evidence in this area by examining whether workplace bullying causes workplace deviance among employees who are bullied.

The mechanisms that mediate the effect of workplace bullying on workplace deviance remain indeterminate. According to both Einarsen's (2000) theoretical framework for workplace bullying and Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) affective events theory, when employees encounter work stress, it affects their psychological and emotional perceptions, which in turn influence employee behavior. Thus, examining only the relationship between workplace bullying and deviance is tantamount to examining a black box because it fails to elucidate the changes in employee psychology and emotions. Miner *et al.* (2005) declared that studies of emotion-oriented work behaviors among employees must consider the emotional reactions of employees. Grandey *et al.* (2002) found that the positive and negative emotions of employees are reflected in their work behaviors and attitudes. Thoresen *et al.* (2003) proposed a similar argument, that employee reactions and attitudes can be predicted by emotional characteristics. Accordingly, the second objective of the present study was to examine the mediating mechanism of emotional exhaustion on the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance.

In addition, this study attempted to understand whether the negative effects of workplace bullying could be mitigated by relevant factors. Lu and Kao (1999)

developed a comprehensive theoretical framework of work stress, which states that specific individual characteristics can moderate the effect of a stressor on the perception of stress as well as the effect of perceived stress on employee behavior. Consequently, the moderating effect of personal characteristics cannot be ignored in examining the effects of workplace bullying on employee behavior. Therefore, the third objective of the present study was to examine whether core self-evaluations (CSE) can moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance.

In summary, the present study had three objectives. First, this study examined whether workplace bullying caused employees to exhibit workplace deviance. Next, what was the mediating mechanism of this effect? Lastly, examined whether the CSE of employees could mitigate the negative effect of workplace bullying.

### **Workplace bullying and workplace deviance**

Workplace bullying is the behavior in which a person harasses, offends, or socially excludes another person; this behavior negatively affects the target's work tasks and occurs repeatedly and regularly over a period of time (e.g. approximately six months; Einarsen *et al.*, 2003). Thus, workplace bullying is characterized by frequency, persistency, hostility, and power imbalance (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011). Frequency refers to the number of times per week that the negative behaviors are exhibited. Researchers vary on whether the minimum number of acts must be one or two per week (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011; Samnani and Singh, 2012). Persistency refers to the duration of time for which the negative behaviors are experienced. As with frequency, researchers vary on whether the minimum duration of exposure to negative acts must be 6 or 12 months (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011; Samnani and Singh, 2012). Hostility refers to the underlying negativity of the behaviors. Finally, power imbalance refers to the disparity in perceived power between the target and the perpetrator. This power can take a number of forms (e.g. physical, social-peer groups); thus in not solely limited to hierarchical power (Samnani and Singh, 2012).

Targets of bullying believe that they have been subjected to repeated and persistent negative behaviors from one or more individuals. These behaviors may originate from superiors, coworkers, or customers (Fox and Stallworth, 2005). In addition, the bullying targets find it difficult to prevent, or even impossible to resist or respond to, the negative behaviors (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Olweus, 1993). Based on the negative reciprocity norm in social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960), employees who are treated unfairly may refuse to contribute and may seek revenge on the perpetrator. However, some researchers disagree with this viewpoint. Dollard *et al.* (1939) found that when targets of bullying are unable to seek revenge on the perpetrator or are worried that perpetrators may escalate their behaviors, the targets may, instead, engage in behavior that is forbidden in the organization. Similarly, based on the theory of justice, employees will evaluate whether they have received unfair treatment in the workplace (Skarlicki and Folger, 1997). If so, they may engage in negative behaviors such as vandalism, theft, or revenge (Ambrose *et al.*, 2002; Colquitt *et al.*, 2006). Summarizing the above discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H1.* Workplace bullying relates positively to workplace deviance.

### **Workplace bullying and workplace deviance: the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion**

Based on the affective events theory, developed by Weiss and Cropanzano in 1996, work events experienced by employees produce emotional reactions. These emotional

experiences then directly affect individual behaviors. Miner *et al.* (2005) obtained empirical results that accorded with affective events theory; specifically, the various work events that employees encounter daily affect their emotional state, which in turn affects their behaviors. Because workplace bullying involves long-term and sustained negative behaviors demonstrated by perpetrators on their targets, it is considered a negative work event. This type of event can produce symptoms of stress, including tension, anxiety, fear, and depression, among the targets of bullying (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012).

According to the conservation of resources theory, workers who face excessive stress will first determine whether they have the ability or resources to cope with the stress. If they are incapable of coping and their resources are constantly drained without replenishment, the workers will develop negative physiological and emotional reactions (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001). Among these, emotional exhaustion is the most common negative reaction to stressful situations. It is also the core component of job burnout. Numerous studies have shown that emotional exhaustion effectively predicts employee performance and turnover (Maslach and Jackson, 1984; Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Witt *et al.*, 2004). In light of this, this study designated emotional exhaustion as a representation of job burnout.

Hochschild (1983) and Maslach (1982) have postulated that workers who endure emotional exhaustion for prolonged periods lack energy and feel emotionally numb. They feel tired and exhausted both physiologically and emotionally, and this negatively affects both their quality of life and the functioning of the organization (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000). Spector and Fox (2005) developed stressor-emotion model that gives central importance to emotions as a response to workplace stressors. Emotions contribute to workplace deviance that can occur immediately and impulsively or at a later time. Empirical studies have shown that emotional exhaustion can trigger workplace deviance in employees. (Bolton *et al.*, 2012; Raman *et al.*, 2016). Trépanier *et al.* (2013) found that work engagement decreases as job burnout increases, and the predictive ability of job burnout reached 0.85. Based on the above discussion, this study maintained that the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance is mediated by emotional exhaustion. Thus, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H2.* Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance.

### **Workplace bullying and workplace deviance: the moderating effect of CSE**

The comprehensive theoretical framework of work stress proposed by Lu and Kao (1999) clearly states that work stress is a subjective and individualized phenomenon. Internal resources and personality traits can moderate the impact of work stress at an individual or organizational level. The theoretical framework for workplace bullying proposed by Einarsen (2000) was used to explain how individual or personality traits moderate the relationship between stressors and subsequent behaviors. Einarsen believed that when employees perceive they are being bullied or harassed, the resulting emotional and behavioral reactions are affected by organizational factors or individual traits. Hobfoll (1989), asserted that personal characteristics cause individuals to exhibit different behaviors when they face stress. Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) posed a similar argument, stating that individuals differ in their perception of the intensity of workplace bullying. Empirical studies have shown that personality traits can moderate the relationship between stress and behavior. For example, Korotkov (2008) found that

the openness, extroversion, and neuroticism traits within the Five-Factor Model of Personality can moderate the relationship between stress and health behavior. Thus, individual differences must be considered when analyzing the effects of workplace bullying to clearly understand how similar work events can produce behavioral reactions of different intensities because of personality traits.

Judge *et al.* (1998) developed the concept of CSE as the overall evaluation of oneself based on an individual's appraisal of his or her situation. This overall evaluation integrates self-esteem, locus of control, self-efficacy, and neuroticism. Self-esteem is the most representative subdimension of CSE; it is a core concept that refers to an individual's ability to comprehensively summarize his or her self-worth (Judge *et al.*, 1998). Studies have shown that workers with high self-esteem are more willing to accept challenging work and maintain a positive and optimistic outlook regardless of their work outcomes. Conversely, workers with low self-esteem are unable to accept the prospect of failure at work (Judge and Bono, 2001). Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that their behaviors can change their lives and that their fates are in their own hands. Individuals with an external locus of control believe that their lives are controlled by fate (Judge *et al.*, 1998). Individuals with high self-efficacy believe that they have the ability to independently resolve difficulties and problems at work and complete their work tasks. Conversely, individuals with low self-efficacy feel that they lack the ability to complete work tasks independently (Judge *et al.*, 1998). Highly neurotic individuals are more likely to display traits and behaviors associated with anxiety, dependence, and helplessness. They are often dissatisfied with work and believe themselves to be victims (Judge *et al.*, 1998; Eysenck, 1990).

In a previous deductive process, this study proposed that employees who experience workplace bullying are likely to display workplace deviance. However, workplace deviance may be moderated in employees with higher CSE. Because such employees have more positive psychological traits, they are more optimistic about success and failures at work. Moreover, they are willing to accept challenging tasks, believing that they have the ability to resolve workplace difficulties and problems and complete their work tasks. Based on the aforementioned discussion, this study considers that CSE moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and deviance. Thus, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

- H3.* CSE moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance. As CSE of an employee increases, the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance weakens.

## Method

### *Participants and data collection procedure*

The sample of this study comprised caregivers at long-term care facilities. Researchers have found that medical care facilities are a high-risk population for workplace bullying; the likelihood of encountering workplace bullying in health care is three times that in other industries (Gilmore, 2006; Kelly, 2002). This study used convenience sampling to distribute and collect questionnaires. The distribution channel involved contacting long-term care facility managers by telephone to explain our research goals and ask for their assistance. If they agreed, the research team visited the long-term care facility and distributed questionnaires during morning rounds or mid-day education and training sessions. To avoid the social desirability bias that can cause participants to choose answers that do not correspond to their beliefs, this study adopted the testing

method used by Podsakoff *et al.* (2012). First, prior to the test, participants were informed that this was a purely academic study. Second, questionnaires were completed anonymously. Third, participants were informed that questionnaire results would be presented only as overall data analysis, rather than being analyzed individually. Finally, after participants completed the questionnaires, this study personally collected them to minimize any concerns that the results might be leaked.

This study distributed a total of 500 questionnaires and collected 480. After eliminating invalid questionnaires, this study obtained a total of 420 valid responses, for a valid response rate of 84 percent. If the participants had answered “no” to all items in the workplace bullying, which indicated that they had not experienced workplace bullying in the past six months, their questionnaires were not included in the analysis. This resulted in the exclusion of 158 questionnaires; thus, 262 valid questionnaires were included in the final analysis. The demographic data of the participants are as follows: 128 were female (92.2 percent; average age = 50.55 years; SD = 8.72 years). Regarding education level, 23 participants completed elementary school (8.9 percent); 63 completed junior high (24.4 percent); 122 completed high school or vocational high school (47.3 percent); 32 completed junior college (12.4 percent); and 18 completed university or above (7.0 percent).

### *Measures*

*Workplace bullying.* The current study was used negative acts questionnaire-revised to assess bullying in the workplace (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009). This 22-item scale measures the frequency of exposure to negative behavior that is considered to constitute bullying if they occur regularly. On a five-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (daily), participants were asked to indicate how frequently they experienced each behavior in the last six months. It was three subscales by workplace bullying (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009): work-related bullying (seven items,  $\alpha = 0.70$ ) focusses on employees' performance of job tasks (e.g. someone withholding information which affects your performance). Person-related bullying (12 items,  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) relates to employees' reputation and social status (e.g. being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work). Physically intimidating bullying (three items,  $\alpha = 0.67$ ) regards employees' physical integrity and safety (e.g. being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger).

*Organizational deviance.* Workplace deviance was assessed using the scale developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000). It comprised 12 items that evaluated whether employees engaged in behaviors that are harmful to the organization (e.g. taking property from work without permission). All items were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of the scale was 0.86.

*Emotional exhaustion.* Emotional exhaustion was assessed using a subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). It comprised eight items that evaluated the emotional exhaustion of employees (e.g. I feel emotionally drained from my work). All items were rated on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The reliability of the scale was 0.84.

*Core self-evaluation.* CSE was assessed using a 12-item scale developed by Judge *et al.* (2003) that measured an individual's perceptions regarding his or her self-worth. All items were rated on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Six of the items were reverse-worded and reverse-scored. The reliability of the scale was 0.83.

*Control and socio-demographic variables.* The objective of this study was to examine whether employees who experienced workplace bullying exhibit workplace deviance. Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) reported that men are more likely than women to exhibit workplace deviance. In addition, according to the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1992), older workers are less likely than younger workers to engage in negative or destructive behaviors. Thus, this study designated sex and age as control variables.

#### *Convergent validity and discriminant validity*

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test construct validity. This study defined the following criteria for convergent validity: factor loading  $\geq 0.5$ , and significant *t*-values; and an average variance extracted of  $\geq 0.5$  (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Items with factor loading less than the threshold were removed; all remaining items had factor loadings greater than 0.5 (0.55-1.00). Average variance extracted values were 0.50 for workplace bullying, 0.60 for emotional exhaustion, 0.67 for workplace deviance and 0.67 for CSE. All exceeded the suggested critical value of 0.50. In addition, all average variance extracted values were greater than the square of the correlation coefficient between pairwise latent variables, and no correlation coefficient was equal to 1 at the 95 percent confidence level. This indicates that the variables can be distinguished from one another (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

In addition, this study employed a self-report questionnaire, the results of which can be affected by common method variance (CMV). To reduce this bias, this study referred to the suggestions of Podsakoff *et al.* (2012). Prior to testing, various precautions were taken. Different scales were used for items in the questionnaire. For example, emotional exhaustion and CSE items used a four-point scale, whereas workplace bullying and workplace deviance items used a five-point scale. The items were sorted randomly to minimize the associations between these items. Some items were reverse-worded to ensure that the participants focus on answering the questions and to decrease the consistent motif effect. Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) was used to conduct a *post hoc* comparison. Loading all of the items resulted in five factors that collectively explained 66.33 percent of the variance and the highest explained variance of a single factor was 24.85 percent. These results indicated that CMV bias was not severe.

## **Result**

### *Descriptive statistics and correlations*

Table I provides means, standard deviations and correlations for the variables used in the study. The current study was found working bullying has positive correlation with emotional exhaustion, emotional exhaustion has negative correlation with workplace deviance, and core self-evaluation has negative correlation with workplace deviance.

### *Hypothesis testing*

Hierarchical regression was used in this study to validate all hypotheses. For *H1*, sex and age were defined as control variables before loading workplace bullying to examine its effect on workplace deviance. The statistical results are shown in Table II, Model 1-2. Workplace bullying had a significant and positive effect on workplace deviance ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ), implying that employees who experienced bullying in the workplace exhibited behaviors that are detrimental or harmful to the organization; thus, *H1* was supported.



To examine *H2*, this study followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step process for testing mediating effects; in particular, three criteria must be satisfied to verify mediating effects. First, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables must be significant. The present study confirmed that workplace bullying had a significant and positive effect on workplace deviance. Second, the relationship between the independent and mediator must be significant. As shown in Model 2-2, workplace bullying had a significant and positive effect on emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = 0.20, p < 0.01$ ). Third, both the independent and mediator variables must simultaneously predict the dependent variable. As shown in Model 2-3, workplace bullying did not have a significant effect on workplace deviance ( $\beta = 0.07, p > 0.05$ ) but emotional exhaustion positively significantly influenced workplace deviance ( $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$ ). In other words, the  $\beta$  coefficient between workplace bullying and workplace deviance was non-significant (Model 2-3,  $\beta = 0.07$ ), and it was smaller than the  $\beta$  coefficient between workplace bullying and workplace deviance in Model 1-2 ( $\beta = 0.11$ ).

**Table I.**  
Descriptive statistics  
and correlation

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Sex	1.92	0.27					
Age	50.55	8.72	0.04				
Working bullying	1.46	0.43	0.03	-0.10			
Emotional exhaustion	2.17	0.41	-0.04	-0.22**	0.22**		
Core self-evaluation	2.90	0.77	0.09	0.01	-0.20**	-0.26**	
Workplace deviance	1.05	0.34	0.00	0.10	0.11	0.14*	-0.17**

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table II.**  
Hierarchical  
regression analysis

Dependent variables	Workplace deviance			Emotional exhaustion			
	Model 1-1	Model 1-2	Model 2-3	Model 3-1	Model 3-2	Model 2-1	Model 2-2
<i>Control variables</i>							
Sex	0.00	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.03	-0.04
Age	0.10	0.11***	0.15**	0.11***	0.09	-0.22**	-0.20**
<i>Independent</i>							
Working bullying (WB)		0.11***	0.07	0.08	0.07		0.20**
<i>Mediator variable</i>							
Emotional exhaustion			0.18**				
<i>Moderator variable</i>							
Core self-evaluation (CSE)				-0.14*	-0.13*		
<i>Interaction effect</i>							
WB×CSE					-0.15*		
$R^2$	0.01	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.05	0.09
$F$	1.26	1.83***	3.40**	2.55**	3.19**	6.58**	8.00**
$\Delta R^2$		0.01	0.04	0.03	0.02		0.04
$\Delta F$		2.96***	5.50**	3.81**	5.55**		10.36**

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.1$

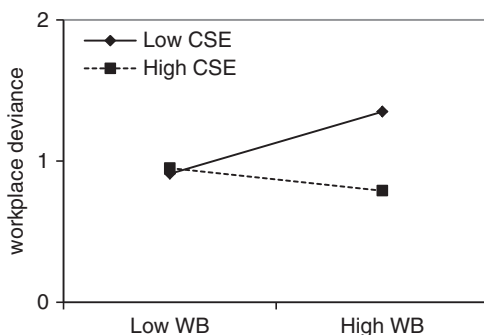
Therefore, emotional exhaustion fully mediated the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance. Finally, this study performed the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) to verify the mediating effect; the result confirmed the existence of the mediating effect ( $t = 2.52, p < 0.05$ ). Thus,  $H2$  was supported.

To examine  $H3$ , this study followed Aiken and West's (1991) suggestions, standardizing the independent and moderator variables. Subsequently, this study calculated the interaction term from the cross-product of the two standardized variables to avoid multi-collinearity caused by a high correlation between the independent variable and the interaction term. As shown in Table II and Models 3-1 and 3-2, after the effects of the control variables, the independent variable, and the moderator were controlled for, the interaction between workplace bullying and CSE significantly negatively influenced workplace deviance ( $\beta = -0.15, p < 0.05$ ). Next, this study substituted values of CSE equal to one standard deviation above and below the mean into the regression equation and graphed the results. The interaction between high CSE and workplace bullying did not have a significant effect on workplace deviance ( $\beta = -0.04, t = -0.20, ns$ ). The interaction between low CSE and workplace bullying had a significant positive effect on workplace deviance ( $\beta = 0.18, t = 1.70, p < 0.1$ ). As shown in Figure 1, after experiencing workplace bullying, employees with high CSE were less likely than employees with low CSE to exhibit behavior that is harmful to the organization. Thus,  $H3$  was supported.

## Discussion

The focus of the present study was to examine whether workplace bullying causes employees to engage in behaviors that are detrimental or harmful to the organization. We also applied the affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) to analyze the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion on the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance. In addition, using the theoretical framework for workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000), and comprehensive theoretical framework of work stress (Lu and Kao, 1999), we examined the moderating effect of CSE on the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance. Overall, this study produced the following three contributions and findings.

First, past studies investigating the consequences of workplace bullying have mostly focussed on its effects on emotions, behavioral intentions, physical and mental health, or positive behaviors (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012; Devonish, 2013; Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998; Ramsay *et al.*, 2011). Few studies have examined whether workplace bullying can cause workers to engage in negative behaviors.



**Figure 1.**  
Moderation effect  
of CSE on the  
workplace bullying  
and workplace  
deviance

However, employee behaviors that are detrimental to the organization have a substantial impact on the organization or on the welfare of fellow employees (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). The present study verified that workplace bullying has a positive effect on workplace deviance, indicating that long-term and repeated workplace bullying can induce employees to display behaviors that clearly violate organizational norms and threaten the welfare of the organization or fellow employees. This result conforms to the negative reciprocity norm of the social exchange theory, which states that people react to unfair treatment by taking revenge (Gouldner, 1960).

Second, we used the affective events theory to clearly describe how employee emotional reaction is connected to work events and work behaviors. Thus, a comprehensive overview of how workplace bullying affects workplace deviance is provided. This study found evidence that emotional exhaustion played a mediating role between workplace bullying and workplace deviance. In other words, when employees perceive unfair treatment at work, eliciting prolonged tension or stress in them, employees first experience emotional exhaustion, which then leads to workplace deviance. This result conforms to Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) affective events theory, in that work events alter employee emotional perceptions, which subsequently provoke employees to demonstrate a certain behavior.

Third, few past studies have considered differences in personality traits when exploring the relationship between workplace bullying and employee behavior (Buk-Lee and Spector, 2006; Devonish, 2013). However, according to Lu and Kao's (1999) comprehensive theoretical framework of work stress, investigations regarding the effect of stress on behavior should consider the moderating effects of individual personality traits. The results of the present study revealed that CSE significantly moderated the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance. In other words, employees with differing levels of CSE displayed differing levels of workplace deviance in response to workplace bullying. When employees with high CSE are being bullied at work, they display significantly fewer workplace deviance behaviors than employees with low CSE do. Conversely, when employees with low CSE are being bullied at work, they display significantly more workplace deviance behaviors than their counterparts do.

#### *Conclusions and practical implications*

Based on results of our study, we propose the following managerial implications for reference or use by practitioners. First, the empirical results showed that bullying in the workplace can elicit behaviors that are detrimental to the organization. Therefore, businesses should place primary importance on preventing workplace bullying. They must create a friendly work environment that establishes anti-bullying behaviors as a part of the organizational culture so that they are firmly rooted in the minds of each employee.

Next, emotional exhaustion clearly mediated the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance. To avoid an increase in emotional exhaustion in employees as the result of workplace bullying, businesses should provide relevant resources, such as establishing an unbiased process for internal complaints, so that bullying targets have a reasonable channel through which they can relieve their stress regarding unfairness they experience at work. In addition, the most commonly used adaptation method among targets of bullying is confiding in someone. Thus, we suggest organizations establish psychological consultation departments to encourage employees to speak up and to guide or improve the emotions and behaviors of both perpetrators and targets of bullying.

Finally, CSE significantly moderated the relationship between workplace bullying and workplace deviance. We suggest hiring employees with high CSE to lower the impact of workplace bullying on workplace deviance. If existing employees have low CSE, the organization can provide employees with expert consultation services that teach them the appropriate responses to workplace bullying and the importance of CSE in completing tasks. Such services can help them reduce the likelihood of workplace deviance.

#### *Limitation and implications for future researchers*

This study has several limitations that warrant attention. First, self-report questionnaires were employed to assess workplace deviance among employees. Participants may have been unwilling to tell the truth because of a social desirability bias. However, other researchers have suggested that self-reporting is applicable for assessing workplace deviance (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). This is primarily because if respondents are asked to evaluate others, the respondents may not be sure whether others have engaged in workplace deviance. In addition, admission of behaviors is moderately correlated with recorded deviant behaviors (0.50-0.69; Goldberg and Waldman, 2000; Harrison and Shaffer, 1994). Therefore, when the privacy of participants is protected, self-reporting is an appropriate method of assessing workplace deviance. Furthermore, all variables in this study were self-reported; this may result in CMV, which yields overestimated relationship between variables. We followed the suggestions proposed by Podsakoff *et al.* (2012) and Podsakoff and Organ (1986), and the results indicated that the common method bias exerted a limited effect on the findings of this study. Nevertheless, we recommend future studies to obtain measures of predictor and criterion variables from different sources or ensure a temporal, proximal, or psychological separation between predictor and criterion in the collection of data to avoid the common method bias.

Next, because this was a cross-sectional study, all data were collected at the same time. This limited our ability to make causal inferences because we were unable to draw conclusions about the chronological order of the correlations. However, both the affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) and the comprehensive theoretical framework of work stress (Lu and Kao, 1999) state that work events affect employee emotions, which then affect employee behavior. In addition, Nielsen and Einarsen's (2012) meta-analytic review of workplace bullying and Samnani and Singh's (2012) review of 20 years of research into the causes and effects of workplace bullying revealed that workplace bullying affects the emotions of the bullying targets, which subsequently affect their behavior. The aforementioned discussion verifies that workplace bullying affects emotional exhaustion, thereby influencing workplace deviance. We still suggest that future researchers can perform a longitudinal study to provide more persuasive evidence of the causal relationship.

In response to the suggestions regarding future studies, the following three clarifications are offered: first, perpetrators of bullying in this study were not categorized. However, Fox and Stallworth (2005) noted that perpetrators may be superiors, subordinates, colleagues, or customers. The present study indicated that perpetrators who hold different positions may have different effects on the subsequent emotional and behavioral responses of the bullying targets. Therefore, future studies could examine how the role of the perpetrator affects workplace deviance among targets of bullying.

Next, the main moderator in the present study was CSE. At the individual level, however, coping strategies and work experience, as well as personality traits, can moderate the relationship between stress and behavior, according to Einarsen's (2000)

and Lu and Kao's (1999) comprehensive theoretical framework of work stress. In addition, at the organizational level, social support and organizational culture have the same moderating effect. Therefore, future studies could examine the moderating effects of different moderators on the relationship between workplace bullying and deviance.

Finally, the primary outcome variable in the present study was workplace deviance. Similarly, according to Einarsen's (2000) theoretical framework for workplace bullying, workplace bullying impacts not only the target's individual behavior but also the organization. Therefore, future studies could examine the effect of workplace bullying on organizational performance or team cohesion.

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### Further reading

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