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Impact of Workplace Bullying on Job Burnout

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IMPACT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING ON JOB BURNOUT

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Abstract

Workplace bullying can result in serious consequences for both employees and employers. Unfortunately, despite the guarantee of safe employment, workplace harassment, violations of employment rights and bullying continue to occur within organizations. This study investigated the relationships and pathways between workplace bullying and job burnout in insurance company employees. The study consisted of 189 employees. The data were collected using a sociodemographic data questionnaire, the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised, and Maslach Burnout Inventory Scale. The model was tested using path analysis techniques within structural equation modeling. The analysis results demonstrated a strong positive correlation between workplace bullying and job burnout. The study revealed that assigning underperforming or impossible tasks, setting unachievable goals, and excessive workloads are indicators of workplace bullying. Hostile acts such as spreading rumors, speaking maliciously, ignoring someone intentionally, and teasing someone also contributed to diminished personal achievements and underperformance. Intimidation tactics, such as recalling mistakes or domineering behavior, also led to job burnout. The study's findings suggest that employers should be aware of workplace bullying's harmful effects and take measures to prevent it from occurring to protect their employees' well-being and organizational success.

Keywords: Work-Related Bullying; Workplace Bullying; Intimidation; Job Burnout.



A. Introduction

Workplace bullying is a significant issue recognized globally as a threat to employees and organizations. Workplace health and safety legal documents from countries worldwide acknowledge the serious psychological threat posed by workplace bullying. At the same time, research has shown that workplace bullying harms employees and organizations. Nevertheless, efforts to address these issues have been made through international research and initiatives to prevent and combat workplace bullying.

Scientific research into workplace bullying began in Europe in the early 1990s (Einarsen, 1999; Leymann, 1996; Wilson, 1991; Zapf & et al., 1996). Since then, there has been a growing interest in this topic within the academic community, and workplace bullying was even named the “research topic of the 1990s” in the area of workers’ health, performance, and well-being. It has achieved international recognition as a significant occupational concern (Einarsen & et al., 2020).

In his 1976 book “The Harassed Worker”, researcher Carroll M. Brodsky defined workplace harassment as a process involving the constant use of physical and emotional pressure, bullying, and intimidation by employers, colleagues, or customers, resulting in fear and distress for the targeted employee (Shelton, 2011). Scholar Wilson (1991) noted that workplace stress can significantly harm employees’ well-being, leading to negative work attitudes, increased absenteeism, and decreased employee morale and health. In their 2002 article, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper argued that workplace stress has profound negative consequences for individuals and organizations, citing ample evidence to support their claim and emphasizing the significant psychosocial risks posed by this issue (Hoel & et al., 2002). Scholars Esser and Wolmerath (2003) defined workplace harassment as a situation in which harmful events are repeatedly inflicted upon an individual over an extended period, leading the victim to perceive them as personal obstacles, attacks, or events in the workplace. Workplace bullying refers to aggressive behavior directed towards an individual or group of employees. It can be defined as any inappropriate or threatening



behavior that causes harm, intimidation, or insults to others or creates a hostile work environment (Einarsen & et al., 2020).

Workers exposed to workplace bullying are at greater risk of developing anxiety and stress and becoming violent (Brotheridge & Lee, 2010). Since the interest in workplace bullying studies has grown, comprehensive research has been conducted on its negative impacts (Hogh & et al., 2010). Initial studies revealed that the mental health of those targeted can be severely impacted by experimental conditions such as episodic acute stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite various studies on the negative impacts of workplace bullying, there is still inadequate research on how it affects job burnout. Therefore, there is a need for further research to explore the relationships between workplace bullying and job burnout (Allen & et al., 2015; Zanabazar et al., 2023).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) also reported in 2020 that while many countries have legislation on workplace bullying and harassment, implementation and enforcement are frequently lacking. The report stressed the importance of adopting preventive measures, such as policies and training programs, to tackle workplace bullying. Additionally, a 2019 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) discovered that only 49% of organizations have a formal anti-bullying policy, and 29% reported having no policies or procedures to address workplace bullying.

In 2018, a study conducted by the National Human Rights Commission with the EU's support revealed widespread human rights violations in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Mongolia. The study found various labor rights violations, including restrictions on freedom of association, non-compliance with collective agreements, non-payment of a percentage of the contract even after signing an employment contract, unpaid work on a trial basis, workplace pressure from management and forms of discrimination and forced labor, indicating a violation of human rights. The report also stated that workplace harassment and discrimination existed in most enterprises (Liewkeat & et al., 2018).



In 2016, we conducted a study on workplace bullying, examining employees' perceptions, attitudes, and the impacts of bullying on their well-being. According to the survey results, understanding and knowledge about workplace bullying were weak, and 71.8% of the participants said workplace bullying exists in some form. Workplace bullying is a widespread issue that can occur in any industry or organization, regardless of its size or scale. However, there needs to be more research on workplace bullying in Mongolia. Organizations must take a proactive approach to prevent and address workplace bullying by formulating and implementing anti-bullying policies while providing necessary support to the victims. The present study aims to investigate the relationship between workplace bullying and job burnout and to compare the findings with previous research conducted by other scholars.

The concept of job burnout was first introduced by Freudenberg in 1974 and later expanded upon by Maslach in 1976 in their work on organizational behavior (Kanchanapa & Karnsomdee, 2019). These researchers defined job burnout as a sense of hopelessness about the future, exhaustion from excessive effort and energy expenditure, and various manifestations such as fatigue, depression, anger, mistrust of others, inefficient work, and a sense of failure. Burnout is a state of physical and emotional exhaustion characterized by a loss of energy, a detached or abstract approach to things, constant feelings of depression, hopelessness, a sense of being stuck in a difficult situation, and other related symptoms. Scholars Lau & et al. (2005) suggest long-term and continuous stress leads to mental fatigue or discouragement. Job burnout is characterized by three main symptoms: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and often a decrease in personal accomplishments (Kim & et al., 2007).

Recent studies have discovered that job burnout does not occur in stages, as previously believed, but can be triggered suddenly. Increased job demands can result in anxiety, while workplace bullying leads to depersonalization, withdrawal, and a diminished sense of personal



accomplishment (Demerouti & et al., 2001). According to Maslach (2003), burnout is a response to chronic work-related stress that attempts to adapt and protect oneself from it. Workplace bullying is a primary cause of job burnout, which can significantly impact an employee's mental and physical health (Allen & et al., 2015; Chowdhury & et al., 2023). Job burnout is a common consequence of workplace bullying and causes employees constant stress and emotional exhaustion.

Several studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between workplace bullying and job burnout (Ali & et al., 2019; Bernotaite & Malinauskiene, 2017; Kim & et al., 2007; Srivastava & Dey, 2020). Employees who experience workplace bullying are more likely to experience burnout than those who do not (Giorgi et al., 2016). Fatigue resulting from workplace bullying is often an early indication of job burnout, as it can lead to emotional exhaustion, decreased job satisfaction, and diminished personal accomplishment (Glasø & Notelaers, 2012). Also, bullying from managers is the most harmful, increasing the employees' intention to leave their job by four times, and bullying from colleagues is more reduced job satisfaction (Deery & et al., 2011). Research has shown that workplace bullying has a significant negative impact on job satisfaction (Duan et al., 2019), which can contribute to lower employee well-being and lead to employee burnout (Giorgi et al., 2016; Glasø & Notelaers, 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik & et al., 2007).

B. Method

Research model: Upon review of theoretical concepts, we proposed the following research model supposing that the three types of workplace bullying positively correlate with job burnout.



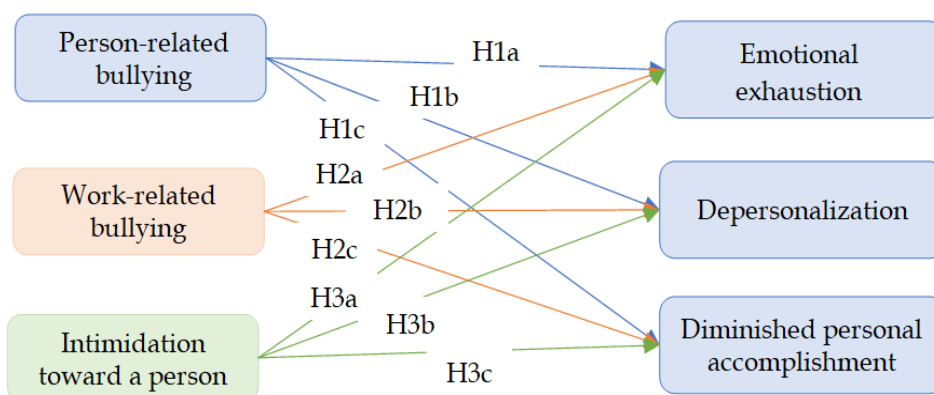


Figure 1. Research Model

Research hypothesis: The following hypothesis is developed within the framework of the research model:

- H1a: Person-related bullying leads to emotional exhaustion.
- H1b: Person-related bullying results in depersonalization.
- H1c: Person-related bullying creates diminished personal accomplishment.
- H2a: Work-related bullying leads to emotional exhaustion.
- H2b: Work-related bullying makes employees depersonalization.
- H2c: Work-related bullying creates diminished personal accomplishment.
- H3a: Intimidation towards a person leads to emotional exhaustion.
- H3b: Intimidation towards a person develops depersonalization.
- H3c: Intimidation towards a person creates a sense of diminished personal accomplishment.

Data Collection and Sample Size: Our research examined the relationship between workplace bullying and job burnout. To accomplish this, we distributed an online questionnaire to employees from three insurance companies and collected data on workplace bullying and job burnout. We conducted our study on an insurance company in light of the intense competition in a relatively small market. This is apparent from the frequency of ads for open vacancies among other finance-related local businesses. As of the first quarter of 2021, 18 insurance companies, including two long-term care insurance and reinsurance companies, with

639 branches and representative offices (FRC, 2021) were operating in the country with a population of 3.2 million, indicating the severity of competition in the industry. Attracting and retaining potential customers takes work for these organizations, creating a challenging work environment for their employees. The excessive workload often contributes to the deterioration of employees' physical and mental health, resulting in stress, disengagement, and resignation (Qureshi & et al., 2013).

To collect our data, we conducted an online survey among three insurance organizations between September 25, 2022, and November 5, 2022. To ensure the statistical significance of our results, we aimed for a 95% confidence level and a 5% confidence interval, as suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). We chose a sample of 353 employees from these companies and, upon estimation, determined that surveying 184 of these employees would be adequate. Ultimately, we collected data from 189 eligible employees.

We then analyzed the data using statistical software such as SPSS 23.0 and Smart PLS 4.0. Our analytical techniques included factor analysis, reliability testing, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM), which we used to test our proposed hypothesis.

Instruments: Our study used two instruments to measure workplace bullying and job burnout. We employed the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R) to assess workplace bullying developed by Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers (2009). This measure is widely used and consists of 22 items and three subscales corresponding to three types of bullying (work-related, person-related, and physically intimidating). Respondents rate each item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (daily).

We used an adapted version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) to measure job burnout. The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions and assessed the frequency of burnout experiences across three domains: exhaustion, cynicism (depersonalization), and professional efficacy (personal accomplishment, which is reverse-scored). Respondents rated



each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1/ never to 5/ daily). The questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency and external validity.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Result

Background information on survey respondents, including demographic characteristics and employment status, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Background information on respondents

| Sex | n | | Age | | Work experience | | | Position | | | |
|--------|-----|------|-------|----|-----------------|-------------------|----|----------|------------------------------|----|------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| Female | 149 | 78.8 | 21-25 | 11 | 5.8 | Up to 1 year | 34 | 18.0 | Workers | 46 | 24.3 |
| | | | 26-30 | 45 | 23.8 | 1-3 years | 47 | 24.9 | Officers | 71 | 37.6 |
| | | | 31-35 | 55 | 29.1 | 4-6 years | 40 | 21.1 | | | |
| | 40 | 21.2 | 36-40 | 34 | 18.0 | 7-10 years | 30 | 15.9 | Managers | 52 | 27.5 |
| Male | | | 41-50 | 36 | 19.0 | 11-15 years | 21 | 11.1 | | | |
| | | | 51+ | 8 | 4.2 | 16 and more years | 17 | 9.0 | Head of Department /Director | 20 | 10.6 |

The majority of the respondents who participated in the survey were young employees (76.7%) and female employees (78.8 %), while only a few males (21.2%) participants shared their views. Overall, 98.8% of respondents had tertiary education backgrounds. The representatives of different organizational levels participated in the survey to share their views, including top (10.6%), middle (27.5%), and bottom level (61.9%) managers. Even though some respondents (40.2%) agreed that numerous articles are included in the organizational rules and guidelines regarding workplace bullying and unethical conduct, others (59.3%) admitted the imprecision of the implementation procedure.

The presence of workplace bullying at their workplace was viewed by the participants considerably in different ways. Seven-point four percent of them admitted it had been practiced widely within their organization, and 47.1% agreed on the negative practice of the phenomena in their day-to-day work life. On the other hand, 16.9% admitted a slight presence, while 14.8% believed very low levels of workplace bullying were encountered in



their work. Only 13.8% considered that there was no bullying practice in their workplace.



Figure 2. Source of work-related bullying

When we asked about the sources of work-related bullying in their organization, 50.6% said it comes from line managers, 16.8% consider it originated from customers/ users, 12.4% experienced it from experienced employees, and 10.1% exposed to the bullying at work by non-linear managers/ supervisors. It can be concluded that line managers frequently tend to bully their subordinates in the workplace.

a. Reliability test

To test the composite reliability, we conducted a reliability test on each composite of the instrument and estimated Cronbach α , which presented greater than 0.7, which demonstrates internal consistency of the questions in the instrument is acceptable. We proceeded with further analysis. Cronbach alphas in the current study were: $\alpha = .932$ for the whole scale, $\alpha = .956$ for person-related bullying, $\alpha = .916$ for work-related bullying, and $\alpha = .911$ for physically intimidating bullying. In the present study, scale reliability was satisfactory: $\alpha = .826$ for the whole scale, $\alpha = .936$ for exhaustion, $\alpha = .845$ for depersonalization, and $\alpha = .861$ for diminished personal accomplishment. Composite Reliability coefficient all presented 0.5, and values have practical significance. We excluded the questions



which presented a lower than 0.5 value or low inconsistency to proceed with further analysis. The summary of the test is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Composite Reliability test

| Factors | Number of questions | Factor loading | Cronbach's α | AVE | CR |
|--|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|------|------|
| Work-related bullying-WRB | 7 | 0.773-0.880 | .916 | .655 | .930 |
| Person-related bullying-PRB | 11 | 0.756-0.885 | .956 | .684 | .960 |
| Intimidation toward a person-ITP | 4 | 0.881-0.901 | .911 | .785 | .936 |
| Emotional exhaustion-EE | 9 | 0.739-0.887 | .936 | .620 | .935 |
| Depersonalization-DEP | 4 | 0.749-0.844 | .845 | .649 | .877 |
| Diminished personal accomplishment-DPA | 4 | 0.711-0.875 | .861 | .693 | .899 |

b. Correlation analysis

The results of the correlation analysis are summarized below in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of correlation analysis

| | | Correlations | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-----|
| | | WRB | PRB | IPT | EE | DEP | DPA |
| WRB | Pearson Correlation | 1 | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | |
| PRB | Pearson Correlation | .811** | 1 | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | | | | |
| IPT | Pearson Correlation | .835** | .798** | 1 | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | | | | |
| EE | Pearson Correlation | .801** | .691** | .678** | 1 | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | | | |
| DEP | Pearson Correlation | .739** | .716** | .602** | .867** | 1 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | | |
| DPA | Pearson Correlation | .552** | .604** | .459** | .650** | .787** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Tests show that workplace bullying has a significant correlation with emotional exhaustion [$r=.801, p<0.01$] and depersonalization [$r=.739, p<0.01$] but is slightly correlated with diminished personal accomplishment [$r=.552, p<0.01$]. Person-related bullying has a significant correlation with depersonalization



[$r=.716$, $p<0.01$] and a positive correlation with emotional exhaustion [$r=.691$, $p<0.01$] and diminished personal accomplishment [$r=.604$, $p<0.01$].

Intimidation towards a person has a positive correlation with emotional exhaustion [$r=.678$, $p<0.01$] and depersonalization [$r=.602$, $p<0.01$] but has a slight correlation with diminished personal accomplishment [$r=.459$, $p<0.01$].

c. Structural Equation Modeling

To test the reliability of the data and research model, we estimated R-Square, which enables us to measure or forecast the research model structurally in Partial Least squared regression analysis. We tested the model by projecting the predicted and observable variables by removing repeated processes. The test results supported all hypotheses and presented a positive regression value ($p < 0.05$). The results of the study PLS-SEM are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of the study PLS-SEM

| Hypothesis | Path | Standardize Beta | t value | P value | Remarks |
|------------|-----------|------------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| H1a | WRB →EE | 0.717*** | 5.595 | .000 | Supported |
| H1b | WRB →DEP | 0.710*** | 5.484 | .000 | Supported |
| H1c | WRB →DPA | 0.435*** | 2.510 | .000 | Supported |
| H2a | PRB →EE | 0.139*** | 7.897 | .000 | Supported |
| H2b | PRB →DEP | 0.293*** | 4.185 | .000 | Supported |
| H2c | PRB → DPA | 0.406*** | 3.289 | .001 | Supported |
| H3a | IPT → EE | 0.123*** | 9.773 | .000 | Supported |
| H3b | IPT → DEP | 0.186*** | 5.760 | .000 | Supported |
| H3c | IPT → DPA | 0.170*** | 3.415 | .001 | Supported |

The test results show that in the case of respondents, workplace bullying has a strong impact on emotional exhaustion [$\beta=.717$, $p<0.01$] and depersonalization [$\beta=.710$, $p<0.01$] but an average impact on diminished personal accomplishment. The determination coefficient (R square) of 0.663 shows that these factors can be explained by 66.3%, and the remaining factors can be explained by other factors not included in the equation.

However, person-related bullying has an average impact on diminished personal accomplishment [$\beta=.406$, $p<0.01$] but a slight impact on



depersonalization [$\beta=.293$, $p<0.01$] and emotional exhaustion [$\beta=.139$, $p<0.01$]. The determination coefficient (R square) of 0.651 shows that these factors can be explained by 65.1%, and the remaining factors can be explained by other factors not included in the equation. Furthermore, intimidation has a slightly weak impact on depersonalization [$\beta=.186$, $p<0.01$], diminished personal accomplishment [$\beta=.170$, $p<0.01$], and emotional exhaustion [$\beta=.123$, $p<0.01$]. The determination coefficient (R square) of 0.548 shows that these factors can be explained by 54.8%, and the remaining factors can be explained by other factors not included in the equation. Path model and PLS-SEM Estimations are summarized in Figure 3.

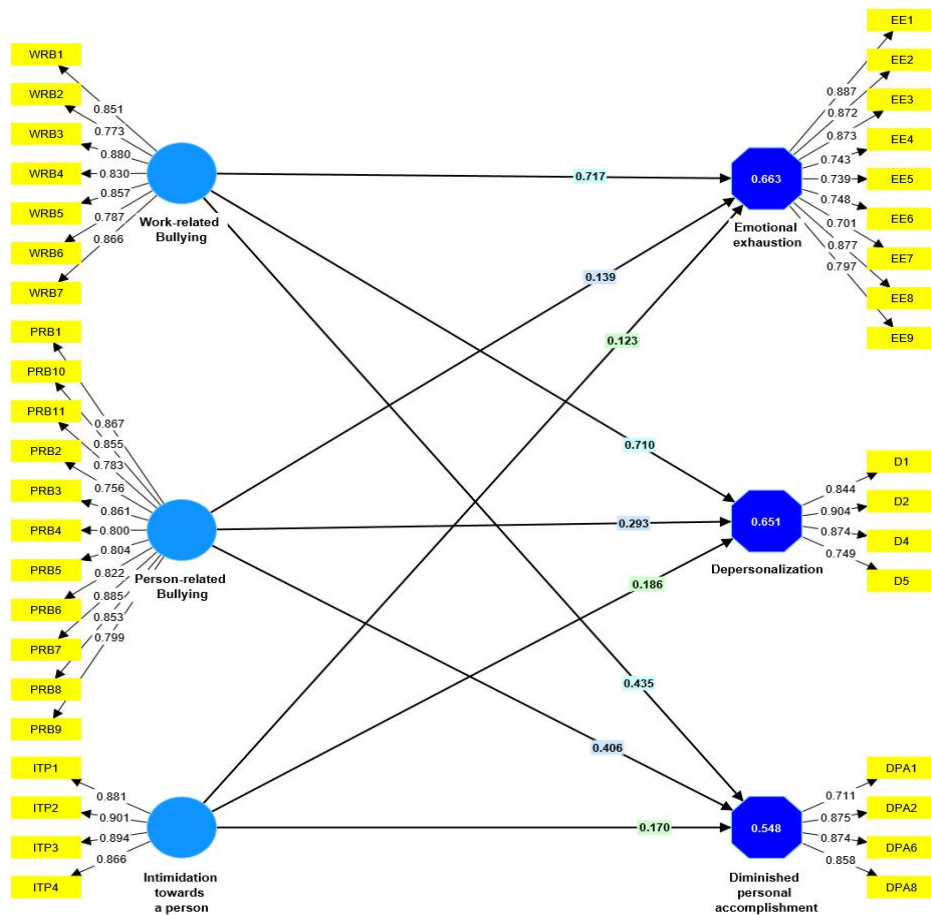


Figure 3. Path model and PLS-SEM estimate



Relevant observable factors presented positive (Beta coefficient), statistically significant values. Therefore, we conclude that our hypothesis is supported.

2. Discussion

Workplace bullying violates personal space and hinders employees' autonomy in performing their job. Workplace bullying is common in organizations needing more management skills and capacities. Regardless of the type of violence, it deeply impacts employee health, well-being, and changes in work attitude, which can result in poor interpersonal communication, job dissatisfaction, unproductivity, low employee retention, and impairment of organizational culture.

Based on previous studies and publications on the relationship between workplace bullying and job burnout, this study aims to examine the correlation between variables in the local context. The Negative Acts questionnaire-R, developed by Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers (2009), was used to measure workplace bullying, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS), developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), was used to measure job burnout. A questionnaire with Likert scaling was developed for the study.

The following results were observed upon data analysis:

- a. According to the results, one unit increase in workplace bullying results in an increase of emotional exhaustion by 0.717 (beta) unit, depersonalization by 0.710 (beta) unit, and diminishing personal accomplishment by 0.435 (beta) unit. Assigning an underperforming job or impossible tasks, deadline pressure, and heavy workload make an employee wear out and feel emotional exhaustion, resulting in discourteous communication with the customer, loss of self-confidence and confidence in professionalism and diminished personal accomplishments.
- b. One unit increase in person-related workplace bullying results in an increase of emotional exhaustion by 0.139 (beta) unit, depersonalization



- by 0.293 (beta) unit, and diminished personal accomplishment by 0.406 (beta) unit. When employees get the subject of rumors, disrespect, and mockery, they often get down both physically and psychologically. Moreover, they start perceiving their regular job as a painful task, leading them to perceive themselves as a person with diminished accomplishment.
- c. A slight increase in intimidation caused a rise of emotional exhaustion by 0.123 (beta) unit, depersonalization by 0.186 (beta) unit, and diminished personal accomplishment by 0.170 (beta) unit. Visibly, repeating one's mistakes recurrently, criticizing, and controlling the performance is more likely to result in job burnout.

The current study addresses the direct correlation between workplace bullying and job burnout, considering person-related bullying, work-related bullying, and intimidation that leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment.

Our findings support the results of previous studies that indicate a direct and significant relationship between workplace bullying and job burnout, including Giorgi et al. (2016), Glasø and Notelaers (2012), Gupta et al. (2020), Kim et al. (2019), Liang (2020), Nielsen and Einarsen (2012), and Samnani et al. (2013).

D. Conclusion

There is a positive correlation between workplace bullying and job burnout, which is supported by the findings of our study. The study fills a gap in the literature, as there has been a lack of research on workplace bullying and its negative impacts in Mongolia, despite a significant amount of literature on informal employment and sexual harassment.

The findings of this study align with the results of international studies that have also found a positive correlation between workplace bullying and job burnout. For example, a study published in 2022 by Ribeiro et al. found that workplace bullying is related to workplace well-being and job burnout (2022). Another 2023 study by Fan et al. found



workplace bullying had positive and direct effects on the job burnout of pediatric nurses (2023).

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the importance of increasing awareness of workplace bullying, implementing activities such as training and workshops, and conducting surveys to reveal the prevalence of workplace bullying in organizations. The study also emphasizes the need for organizations to ensure that workplace bullying-related policies are fully in practice and to take numerous actions towards preventing bullying to better address the problems that arise from workplace bullying. These findings and recommendations can be applied in Mongolia and other countries facing similar challenges.

Limitations and future actions

We need to acknowledge the limitations of the present study. First, the study sample was 189 employees of three companies engaged in insurance companies. Second, the participant organization agreed to involve the employees who mainly work in offices instead of those in the field. We accepted the offer and collaborated with the organization. The study results are a valuable reference for the participant organization as it enables them to explore and understand the prevalence of workplace bullying in their organization sensibly and seek an opportunity to address the challenges.

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