



Personality Antecedents and Consequences of Workplace Bullying among Faculty Members at Higher Educational Institutes in Central India

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Abstract- This study examines personality antecedents and consequences of workplace bullying among faculty members. Data were collected, via a questionnaire, from 399 faculty members of higher educational institutes in central India. Results reveal that the Big Five personality characteristics have some predictive power to explain victimization from workplace bullying. The most important personality antecedent was found to be neuroticism. Contrarily, neuroticism was found to be positively related with workplace bullying. Workplace bullying was found to intensify the intention to leave, increase stress levels, and reduce work performance. The most important consequence was found to be the victim's intention to leave. The identification of individual traits will help organizations to pinpoint likely victims of bullying and to initiate anti-victimization efforts to effectively safeguard individuals in the workplace.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, Performance, Intention to leave, Personality, India

I. INTRODUCTION

The association of the Big Five personality characteristics with bullying has been explored in much prior research (e.g. Bowling *et al.*, 2010; Milam, Spitzmueller, & Penney, 2009). A few studies have confirmed the effectiveness of utilizing personality characteristics to differentiate victims from non-victims of bullying (e.g. Rammsayer, Stahl, & Schmiga, 2006), while other studies have not confirmed such associations (Lindet *et al.*, 2009; Glaso, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2009). Based on these inconsistent findings, it remains unclear whether or not personality characteristics are actually related with the experience of bullying. Most studies on workplace bullying have been carried out in the Western context, with reference to several business organizations such as banking, information technology, and healthcare professions (e.g. Cibi & Raya, 2015; Kolanko *et al.*, 2006; Ikyanyon & Ucho, 2013; Johnson, 2011; Kodellaset *et al.*, 2014). Several studies can be found on workplace bullying in academia in the Western context (Lampman, Phelps, Bancroft, & Beneke, 2009; Kodellaset *et al.*, 2014, Kolanko *et al.*, 2006; Tepper *et al.*, 2007, Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Yamada *et al.*, 2014), but such research in the Indian context is limited. For example, Indian scholars have studied a plethora of organizational behavior topics including leadership, engagement, conflict, power and politics, stress, motivation etc. (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2010), but workplace bullying had received scant attention. Only a few studies exploring workplace bullying in Indian non-academic context (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2009; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010; D'Cruz & Rayner, 2012; Cibi & Raya, 2014) can be found. Workplace bullying, in the background of these contextual developments, has emerged as one of the major problems with the Indian workforce. When studying workplace bullying, the national context assumes a high importance not only for understanding bullying behavior but also for understanding the social context (Parker, 2014).

The present study attempts to focus on the personality antecedents of bullying among academics (faculty members) because academia is different from other organizations as their structure is slackly coupled and possesses a diverse tenure (Meyer, 2002). In this sense, the academic environment is susceptible to the encouragement of bullying behavior amongst its members. The subjective evaluation of performance and competing goals make higher education an ideal setting for bullying (Westhues, 2006). Moreover, in the name of academic freedom and autonomy, some institutions have proved willing to change their rules and HR practices to benefit certain groups of people who curry favor with their superiors at the expense of others, which, in turn, promotes feelings of frustration, harassment, and inequity (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Which in turn, leads to exodus of high potential people and it becomes difficult for institutions to

sustain high academic performance. This observation has been supported by Price (1995), who reported that 23% of faculty and staff in the American universities had experienced bullying by university administrators. In another study on the educational setting in the UK, it was reported that 45% of employees had experienced bullying that had adverse consequences for both employee and the organization. In light of these contextual factors, this study attempts to study the personality antecedents of workplace bullying among faculty members in higher educational institutes in the newly developed state of Chhattisgarh, Central India, where socio-economic conditions, basic academic infrastructures, and awareness related to education are underdeveloped.

Theory and hypotheses

This study incorporates trait theory (Costa & McCrae 1992) to conceptualize the personality antecedents of workplace bullying. Research has revealed that traits are relatively stable characteristics that cause a person to respond to specific situations in certain ways. Personality traits differ among individuals (e.g. some people are extrovert, whereas others are introvert) and can influence their perceptions, their attributions for the causes of events, their emotional reactions, and their coping mechanisms in relation to anti-social impulses in the workplace (Spector, 2010). The general taxonomy of personality is often labeled as the “Big Five personality dimensions. This is an integrative approach to understanding personality in a common framework, comprising openness to experience; conscientiousness; extraversion; agreeableness; and neuroticism (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Five-factor model of personality and workplace bullying

Extraversion reflects the extent to which a person is social, gregarious, interactive, outgoing; such individuals draw energy from interacting with people. Extraversion in most cases is found to be negatively associated with workplace bullying experiences (Judge *et al.*, 2002). Extrovert people often experience more positive emotions, possibly as they generally perceive life events more positively, resulting in such people not necessarily perceiving that bullying has even occurred in the workplace (Milam *et al.*, 2009). Introverts are rather sensitive and attentive to bullying behaviors. However, individuals with extreme introversion are often unable to get along with others as they are unable to establish effective communication with people, resulting in other people finding relationships with them to be frustrating, which can lead to feelings of being bullied (e.g. Digman, 1990). Consequently, this results in elevated levels of inter-role conflict, which may increase the likelihood of exposure to bullying in the workplace (Skogstad *et al.*, 2007). Conscientiousness is characterized by dutifulness, being dependable, being self-disciplined, being ordered, and the need for achievement (Digman, 1990). Conscientiousness can also be associated with the experience of bullying. For example, employees who do not show consistency in performance, or who fail to demonstrate set performance standards, may subsequently be closely monitored by their supervisor, which, in turn, may trigger feelings of being bullied (Nielsen & Einarsen 2015). Agreeableness refers to the extent to which an individual is trusting, helpful, and well-tempered (McCrae & Costa, 1991). Past studies have found a negative relationship between agreeableness and bullying (Milam *et al.*, 2009; Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001). According to McCrae and Costa (1991), individuals who score highly for agreeableness have a more positive effect, while individuals with a low score for agreeableness are found to be skeptical and untrustworthy (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Individuals with a low score for agreeableness may perceive social interactions as annoying, or even as bullying, even if there are no actual instances of workplace bullying (Milam *et al.*, 2009). As a result, their behavior is more likely to provoke others, resulting in an increased risk of being bullied by others (Milam *et al.*, 2009). The theoretical argument suggests a negative association between agreeableness and workplace bullying. Neuroticism is defined as a vulnerability to negative moods such as, anger, antagonistic hostility, callousness, emotional instability, and uncooperativeness (Costa *et al.*, 1989, p. 48). Meta-analyses (e.g. Bowling and Beehr, 2006) and the results of other studies (e.g. Bowling *et al.*, 2010) have shown that neuroticism is positively associated with workplace bullying. This may be due to such individuals' negative approach to perceiving life events compared to other individuals (Magnusson *et al.*, 1993). Consequently, they are often at risk of being bullied.

Openness reflects a flexible, unconventional, autonomous, nonconforming, imaginative, and intellectual curiosity (Watson & Hubbard, 1996) as well as the willingness to explore original ideas (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As a result, individuals with high openness are more proactive and receptive to change and are less controlling (McCrae & Sutin, 2009) and abusive (Kiazad *et al.*, 2010). Most findings have revealed that

openness is not related to bullying experiences (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006; Glasø *et al.*, 2007; Lind *et al.*, 2009) because those scoring high on this trait are more tolerant and flexible to imperfections and stressful situations (Watson & Hubbard, 1996) compared to persons with low scores (Smith & Williams, 1992). However, some past studies have suggested the modest association of openness with exposure to workplace bullying (Bowling *et al.*, 2010). The above discussions lead to the following hypothesis:

H1: Faculty members perceiving high levels of (a) extraversion, (b) conscientiousness, (c) agreeableness, and (d) openness will experience low levels of workplace bullying, while high levels of (e) neuroticism will be associated with high levels of workplace bullying.

Consequences of workplace bullying

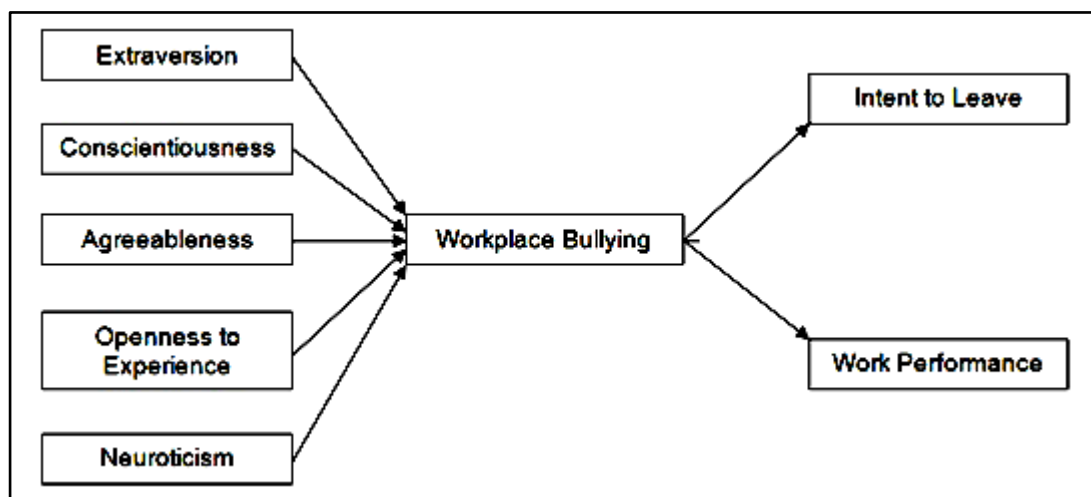
Workplace bullying has a considerable impact on organizations and individuals, including as decreased performance (Yildirim, 2009), increased healthcare costs, and increased turnover (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003; Von Bergen, Zavaletta, & Soper 2006). This may be attributable to unwilling and ineffective leaders promoting and supporting a work ecosystem that does not reinforce a positive work culture (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). This erodes mutual reciprocity because employees anthropomorphize their organizations according to how their organizations treat them (e.g. Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, any unpleasant experience further affects the relationship among members (Glasø, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2009) and teamwork (Baillien *et al.*, 2009), which, in turn, affects various work outcomes (Gardner & Johnson, 2001). The unpleasant conditions due to prolonged workplace bullying entail significant psychological and organizational costs for employee and organizations, respectively (Bulutlar & Unler, 2009; Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Kivimaki *et al.*, 2003; Namie, 2007; Vergel & Hernandez, 2010). Many researchers have evidenced in cross-sectional and longitudinal studies that prolonged harassment has harmful effects on members' well-being and work behavior (e.g. Hershcovis, 2011; Nielsen *et al.*, 2016). For example, constant bullying nurtures intention to leave (Djurko *vicet al.*, 2008). This is also considered one of the important markers of employee turnover (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003), which has substantial costs for organizations (Waldman *et al.*, 2004).

Surprisingly, however, little attention has been paid to investigating the influence of workplace bullying on victims work performance. While some studies have suggested that workplace bullying may deteriorate the levels of performance (e.g. Harvey *et al.*, 2009). Other studies have suggested that some individuals believe that, through bullying, the performance of employees can be enhanced (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Sidle, 2009). The victim's perception of intent of plays an important role in labeling their experience as bullying or not. However, past investigations have not considered the role that intent can play in increasing or decreasing victims' exposure to bullying (Zapf, 1999, p. 76). This study, therefore, proposes following hypothesis:

H2: The experience of workplace bullying experience will intensify (a) intention to leave and (b) reduce work performance.

Based on the above discussion this study proposes the research model depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model.



II. METHOD

Participants

Participants in this survey were from higher educational institutes in Central India. The questionnaire used in this survey was prepared in English and distributed among 2,500 faculty members across all levels in the organization. A total of 399 respondents returned useable questionnaires, representing a response rate of 16%. Table 1 represents the respondents' profiles in terms of gender, age, experience, hours worked per week, number of employees, marital status, and qualifications. Male and female faculty respondents were almost equal in numbers. The participants had a PhD, postgraduate, and undergraduate degree. More females had Ph.D. degrees compared to male faculty members. However, more male members had post graduate qualifications than female faculty members. Only a few participants were under graduates. The married respondents' percentage was higher for males than females. Working hours for male respondents were slightly higher, with similar standard deviation, compared to female respondents.

Variable	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Age	38.86	8.33	37.21	8.49
Experience	9.11	7.93	7.90	7.79
Hours worked per week	39.98	12.36	36.83	12.54
No. of employees	196(49.12%)		203(50.87%)	
Married (%)	78.06		71.92 %	
Qualification (%)				
PhD	44.82		46.94	
Postgraduate	53.20		50.51	
Undergraduate	01.97		02.55	

Table 1. Demographic profile.

Measures

Along with socio-demographic profile of respondents, personality traits, bullying experience, intention to leave, job performance, and work stress were also assessed as detailed below [all responses were recorded on a five-point scale (1=never to 5=always); see the Appendix for full details]:

- Personality traits were measured using a 20-item scale developed by Domnellan *et al.* (2006). The scale has five-dimension: (a) extraversion; (b) conscientiousness; (c) agreeableness; (d) neuroticism; and (e) openness, with each dimension having four questions. Sample items include: (a) "I am the life of any party" (extraversion); (b) "I get chores done right away" (conscientiousness); (c) "I sympathize with others' feelings" (agreeableness); (d) "I have frequent mood swings" (neuroticism); and (e) "I have vivid imagination" (openness).
- *Workplace bullying* was measured using the Negative Acts Questionnaire (revised version) (NAQ-R) developed by Einarsen and Hoel (2001). This instrument has 22 items. Sample items include "Have your key areas of responsibility been removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks?"
- *Intention to leave* was measured using 10-item scale developed by Flinkman *et al.* (2010). Sample items include "I am thinking about leaving this organization".
- *Work performance* was measured using a seven-item scale developed by Abramis (1985). Sample items include "Producing satisfactory quality of work.".

Through confirmatory factor analysis, the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs was examined. The fit measures such as goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of the scales were obtained. The items with weak loading (i.e. <0.30) were removed to reaffirm the convergent validity of items for each construct. GFI, CFI, and NFI satisfied the recommended cut-off values of Kline (2005) regarding a reasonably good fit of items to each construct. [Regarding RMSEA, Values ≤ 0.05 are considered a good

indicator of model fit by Browne and Cudeck (1993), while values ≤ 0.08 are considered acceptable by Mac Callum et al. (1996). In the current analysis, the RMSEA value was ≤ 0.08 .]

The reliability of the scale was established using Cronbach's alpha. In the current analysis, Cronbach's alpha was greater than 0.70 (Nunnally, 1967) (see Table 2). Variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to examine the multi collinearity among constructs. Low VIF (< 5) low level of correlation among the dimensions, which ultimately suggested lack of multi collinearity.

	ZTE	ZTA	ZTC	ZTN	ZTO	ZWP	ZSE	ZNAQ	ZTI
ZTE	1	0.641**	0.600**	0.560**	0.628**	0.226**	0.228**	-0.813**	-0.747**
ZTA		1	0.684**	0.609**	0.732**	0.242**	0.180**	-0.861**	-0.764**
ZTC			1	0.608**	0.652**	0.194**	0.210**	-0.837**	-0.746**
ZTN				1	0.621**	0.192**	0.230**	-0.820**	-0.710**
ZTO					1	0.203**	0.197**	-0.858**	-0.810**
ZWP						1	0.469**	-0.254**	-0.285**
ZSE							1	-0.250**	-0.240**
ZNAQ								1	0.897**
ZTI									1

Table 2. Indices of the factors used in the research instrument scale reliability and validity of personality antecedents, workplace bullying, and work outcomes.

III. RESULTS

All dimensions of personality, i.e. extraversion (ZTE; $r = -0.813$; $p < 0.01$), agreeableness (ZTA; $r = -0.861$; $p < 0.01$), conscientiousness (ZTC; $r = -0.837$; $p < 0.01$), neuroticism (ZTN; $r = -0.820$; $p < 0.01$), and openness (ZTO; $r = -0.858$; $p < 0.01$) had a high negative correlation with experiences of workplace bullying. Workplace bullying was negatively correlated with work performance (ZWP; $r = -0.254$; $p < 0.01$). In addition, workplace bullying was significantly and positively correlated with intention to leave (ZTI; $r = 0.807$; $p < 0.01$). The direct associations of Likewise, these dimensions had negative correlation with intention to leave (ZTI) (extraversion $r = -0.747$, agreeableness $r = -0.764$, conscientiousness $r = -0.746$, neuroticism $r = -0.710$, and openness $r = -0.810$; $p < 0.01$). The correlations were in the hypothesized

Variable	No. of items	M	SD	Cronbach's α	GFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
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direction except in the case of neuroticism that was negatively associated with workplace bullying.

	Original	Retained							
Extraversion (E)	4	4	4.13	0.759	0.753	0.97	0.955	0.950	0.08
Conscientiousness (C)	4	4	4.194	0.704	0.714	0.98	0.98	0.99	0.04
Agreeableness (A)	4	4	4.348	0.69	0.754	0.989	0.981	0.976	0.08
Neuroticism (N)	4	4	4.265	0.741	0.676	0.99	0.98	0.99	0.04
Openness (O)	4	4	4.201	0.771	0.750	0.97	0.95	0.95	0.08
Individual-level workplace bullying (NAQ)	22	22	1.755	0.61	0.924	0.86	0.86	0.82	0.07
Intention to leave (TI)	4	4	1.746	0.719	0.725	0.990	0.98	0.974	0.08
Work performance (WP)	7	7	3.956	0.591	0.806	0.958	0.936	0.880	0.07

Table 3. Correlation among variables.

Notes: ZTE=extraversion; ZTA=agreeableness; ZTC=conscientiousness; ZTN=neuroticism; ZTO=openness; ZWP=work performance; ZNAQ=workplace bullying; ZTI=intention to leave.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the hypotheses. SEM tests the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The path study was tested using AMOS 16.0. The path coefficient is equivalent to the beta coefficient in multiple regression. The path analysis of the hypotheses is shown in Figure 2. Supporting the first hypothesis, the unstandardized path coefficient (see Table 4) indicated that an increase in extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness led to decreased workplace bullying. However, contrary to conventional wisdom, neuroticism was also found to decrease workplace bullying experience. In accordance with the second hypothesis, faculty members experiencing more workplace bullying had increased levels of intention to leave and work performance.

Figure 2. Path model antecedents, personality attributes, workplace bullying, and work outcomes.

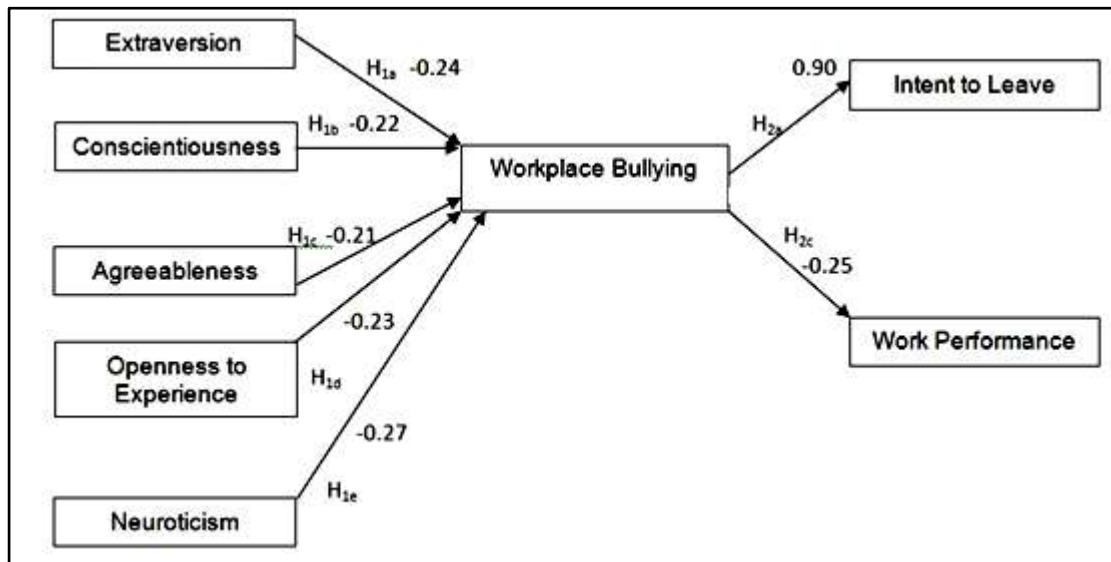


Table 4. Path analytic results of hypotheses.

Personality antecedents and workplace bullying	USTD	SE	CR	Decision
H1a: Extraversion → Workplace bullying	-0.24	0.006	-41.386***	Accepted
H1b: Conscientiousness → Workplace bullying	-0.22	0.006	-37.013***	Accepted

H1c: Agreeableness → Workplace bullying	-0.21	0.007	-31.772***	Accepted
H1d: Openness → Workplace bullying	-0.23	0.007	-34.723***	Accepted
H1e: Neuroticism → Workplace bullying	-0.27	0.006	-47.269***	Refuted
Workplace bullying and outcomes				
Workplace bullying and consequences				
H2a: Workplace bullying → Intention to leave	0.89	0.022	40.455***	Accepted
H2c: Workplace bullying → Work performance	-0.25	0.048	-5.237***	Accepted

Table 5 shows the fit measures of the path model. Chi-squares were highly significant ($p < 0.001$). Because chi-square is sensitive to large sample size, relative chi-square ($\chi^2/\text{degrees of freedom}$) was estimated. It was observed that the relative chi-square was within the range of less than 3 (Kline, 1998). The fitness of the model was also tested using other measures. GFI compares the fit of a target model to the fit of an independent, or null, model. CFI compares the fit of a target model to the fit of an independent, or null, model, and NFI is an incremental measure of fit. These fit measures were above 0.90, implying the good fit of the model. The parsimonious fit measures (PGFI, PCFI, PNFI) were within the acceptable limits in the models. RMSEA is a parsimony-adjusted index; the lower the RMSEA, the better the model (see Table 5). RMSEA value below 0.5 is considered to be the best indicator of model fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). However, Steiger (1990) suggested that the RMSEA value must be less than 0.10, while MacCallum *et al.* (1996) suggested that values below 0.08 may be considered as a good fit. In the current study, RMSEA values were ≤ 0.08 , which is within acceptable limits.

Table 5. Fit measures model dealing with personality attributes, workplace bullying, and work outcomes.

Model	χ^2	Df	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA	PGFI	PCFI	PNFI
Value	77.311	26	2.973	0.924	0.987	0.981	0.070	0.456	0.570	0.567

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Using a cross-sectional design, a sample survey of 399 faculty members from higher academic institutions in India was conducted in which this study investigated the personality antecedents and consequences of workplace bullying. For all the hypotheses, i.e. between antecedents and consequences of workplace bullying, a robust relationship was reflected by a combination of high coefficient magnitudes of structural paths/constructs and the extent to which the p -value was above the statistical significance level. The results shown in were obtained while testing the path analytic hypothesized relationship in SEM. Among all personality traits, neuroticism had the highest path coefficient for workplace bullying among faculty members, which meant that faculty members who were more likely to bullied high on neurotic tendencies like being moody and often experiencing unwanted feelings such as anxiety, worry, fear, anger, frustration, envy, jealousy, guilt, loneliness, etc. Because Neuroticism leads to an annoying temperament that causes negative relationships with colleagues in the organization and increases chances of committing behaviour which could be termed as workplace bullying. Typically, neuroticism should have a positive impact on workplace bullying because someone who is of an angry disposition will provoke their supervisor more. The opposite is true for the other four factors; for example, a high score for openness should lead to the subordinate feeling less bullied because he/she has a more open nature, hence being more open to discussion and, therefore, being less bullied. The negative association of neuroticism with workplace bullying suggests that more a faculty member is neurotic, the more bullying experience he/she will experience. These findings are in line with previous findings (McCrae & John 1992) that have indicated that neuroticism has a negative association with bullying. The results of past studies regarding the association of openness with workplace bullying have varied from no correlation (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006; Glasøet *al.*, 2007; Lind *et al.*, 2009) to a modest correlation (Bowling *et al.*, 2010). Supporting H1d, the present study found that openness was negatively associated with workplace bullying. This suggests that more the faculty member is open, the less he/she will experience workplace bullying, as this decreases the threshold for experiencing interactions as unpleasant.

Taken together, supporting other parts of the first hypothesis, the current study showed that the Big Five model of personality traits explain workplace bullying. Corroborating past findings (Flinkman, Leino-Kilpi, & Salanterä, 2010), this study found a positive association between workplace bullying and intention to leave. During a discussion with a faculty member, it was observed that feelings of being bullied led a cynical attitude towards the perpetrators, which can trigger the intention to leave the organization.

Implications

This study suggests that understanding the Big Five personality characteristics can play an important role in reducing incidences of workplace bullying. The identification of individual traits through personality testing could help organizations identify the likely victims of bullying, allowing anti-victimization efforts to be initiated to safeguard such individuals in the workplace. Building leadership and framing policies focusing on reducing incivility, as suggested by Estes and Wang (2008), could also help organizations to control bullying; these measures could be supplemented with appropriate training, assessment, and continuous observation.

Limitations and directions for future research

The relationship linking personality and workplace bullying were based on self-reported measures; therefore, the common-method variance may have caused an overestimation of the strength of the associations examined. An investigation with a specific focus on the personality of the perpetrator is warranted as it could further reveal potential antecedents of bullying. Similarly, a longitudinal study could conclusively establish the causal relationship among variables. To understand the impact in the organizational context, this study could be extended to different types of higher educational institutes to discern the prevalence of workplace bullying in distinct workplace environments. The current study could also be extended to other cultures and different occupation groups to fully comprehend the relationship between personality traits and workplace bullying.

Conclusion

Workplace bullying may have adverse consequences for many organizations. Although some studies have suggested that situational factors contribute to workplace bullying (e.g. Leymann, 1990, 1996), the current study suggests that personality characteristics have an important role in exposure to workplace bullying. Sometimes the victim's own personality could be related to her/his susceptibility of getting bullied by superior or colleague in the organization.

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