BULLYING AS VICTIMIZATION: COPING STRATEGIES AS A SURVIVAL MECHANISM AMONG FEMALE SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study is about workplace bullying and coping strategies among school teachers. It was carried out to examine how frequently school teachers face bullying and what coping strategies they use. In Pakistan, this area of study lacks the attention of researchers therefore, this study would be significant in developing an understanding regarding bullying in Government schools. For this purpose, survey was conducted and the sample consisted of 155 female teachers of public sector high schools. The age range of the respondents varied from 24 to 53 years. Pearson correlation coefficient was computed for workplace bullying and coping strategies. Findings revealed that workplace bullying does exist in schools and it is more common among young teachers as compared to older ones. Moreover, it is found that teachers most likely use emotion-focused coping strategies to cope with the bullying as compared to problem-focused coping strategies.

Keywords: Bullying, Workplace abuse, Coping, vulnerability and resilience, School violence and bullying

INTRODUCTION

This study aims at identifying workplace place victims and the various coping strategies used by the female school teachers in public sector Lahore, Pakistan. In the 1970s, the bullying issues among school children started to receive the attention from public and researchers while the bullying problems among adults at workplaces took attention in the early 1980s (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). Since then, several studies and documentation have been done for determining the frequency and risk of this serious problem in different occupational groups within different countries.

Bullying is becoming a prevailing issue in contemporary working life (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009). People who face bullying try to cope with the situation in different ways. As every person has a unique personality, their way of handling a stressful event or situation can also

vary. If a person would prefer to ignore the stressor then maybe in the same situation another person would like to take some action and do something to alter the stressful situation. It all depends on the people who face bullying at their workplaces that how they feel about it and what coping strategies they choose to handle the situation.

Workplace bullying in academia is also receiving attention in the world as it has become a serious issue in the research field. In Pakistan, it has not gained much attention by researchers and remained treated as a taboo (Razzaghian & Ghani, 2014). In the limited attention given to this research area, researchers have not paid attention to the perspective of workplace bullying in schools in Pakistan. Workplace bullying in academic institutes, especially in schools, is worth the researchers' consideration. It can affect teachers in many ways, for instance, it brings emotional and psychological consequences and it can also affect their performance in classrooms (McCormack, Casimir, Djurkovic, & Yang, 2009).

Several studies concluded that coping strategies are an important aspect of handling stressful situations. Coping strategies have a constructive effect on the lives of those people who use them (Karatuna, 2015). Workplace bullying in schools is common and Victims have to suffer from different behaviours such as they are blamed for unreasonable things, criticizing their personality, or teaching methods. Particularly, the new teachers find it difficult to cope with such situations. So, this area of study is worth attention to research the extent to which teachers in schools face workplace bullying and how they cope with it.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF BULLYING

In literature, there are several possible reasons which can be taken as the root cause of bullying. A study claims that in the list of causes of bullying, there could be personality traits, the role of the bully or the victim and the psychosocial factors. Some other perceived reasons can be envy, jealousy, competition and uncertainty about one's self (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). The role of the victim in bullying can be shyness, lack of conflict management skills and low self-esteem of the victims. Usually, by just ignoring and not responding to such behaviours they give more strength to the bully.

Above mentioned reasons are those which give motivation or strength to the bully but here are also some payoffs and effects of bullying for the victims. As for the teachers, bullying can have biopsychosocial health effects. The teachers who were being bullied more often complain about depression and anxiety (Sinha & Yadav, 2017). The harmful effects of workplace bullying do not appear limited to the mental well-being. Rather, research also indicates that the effects of experiencing workplace bullying can extend far beyond the personality and into the classrooms or even into the schools. The impact of bullying can change productivity in work and loss of ability to focus on work (McKay, Arnold, Fratzl, & Thomas, 2008). Moreover, bullying can also affect their performance in the classrooms and even worse they can tend to quit their jobs (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015).

As teachers are considered role models for the students and their personalities are often inspired by their teachers' conduct. If the teachers in the schools are being bullied by their colleagues and they lack the training for handling the conflict or coping with stressful situations then it would not only impact their self-confidence but also bring about negative consequences in

classrooms which can affect the students' personalities. There is a dire need to disseminate awareness on how workplace bullying can create a negative effect on teachers' emotional & psychological health and its effects on the students. Moreover, it is imperative to make policies and training sessions for the teachers to cope with stressful situations. This way their wellness would be taken care of and it will enhance their teaching abilities and performance in the classrooms (Kruger & Jacobs, 2019).

WORKPLACE BULLYING AND COPING STRATEGIES

Various studies have examined the experiences of workplace bullying and the ways to cope with it. It is evident from the research that developing thick skin, ignoring or avoiding the bully or the negative behaviour were the right strategies to cope with workplace bullying because bullying behaviours get better over time. On the contrary, some research examined that confrontation of the bully and even reporting the bullying incidents in the organization is the best way to cope with these stressful situations (Simons & Sauer, 2013). For workplace bullying victims, confrontation and seeking support are the most effective strategies to cope with the negative behaviours (Karatuna, 2015). Furthermore, coping strategies play a moderating role between workplace bullying and individual well-being. Research indicated that seeking help and assertiveness moderate the relation between workplace bullying and well-being. Though avoidance also moderate the relation but it was considered in a counterintuitive manner by worsening the negative impact of bullying on well-being and self-esteem. Seeking help improve well-being and avoidance have a negative impact on the job satisfaction (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016).

A study examined the impact of workplace bullying on two job attitudes; job satisfaction and affective commitment. The emotional attachment of an employee to his/her organization is called affective commitment (Mercurio, 2015). Research revealed that experience of workplace bullying negatively affect job attitudes. It was also found that coping strategies play a very limited moderating role in the relationship between workplace bullying and job attitudes. Rather coping is directly related to job satisfaction and affective commitment as well as experience of workplace bullying (Lee & Lim, 2019). Although, relationship between workplace bullying and intention to leave the job is mediated by the affective commitment. Research indicated that bullying in the workplace has both direct and indirect effects on turnover intention. While the direct effect of bullying on turnover intention is stronger than the indirect effect. Research stated that the intention to leave and workplace bullying is usually mediated by the affective commitment (McCormack et al., 2009).

Apart from the impact on job attitudes the effects of workplace bullying can also result in counter-bullying or simply when prey becomes predator. Exposure to negative behaviour leads to counter-aggression and others become victims who can be the bully himself/herself or any other random person. The research indicated that coping strategies such as self-doubt shows a mediating link between workplace bullying and psychological and emotional health. Moreover, verbal abuse was related to problem-solving coping strategy while belittlement was found related to self-doubt and ignoring (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006). Another research was conducted to examine the impact of workplace bullying and coping with the issues in safety professionals and the pressure to change the decisions. Data were collected through the questionnaire developed on the basis of two scales NAQ-R and Brief-Cope. Findings of the data analysis suggested that work-related bullying is a

predictor of substance use, self-blame, humour while person-related bullying is a predictor of denial, religious coping, emotional support and instrumental support. Moreover, workplace bullying predicted that being pressured to change the decisions regarding risk or safety (Brewer, Holt, & Malik, 2018).

WORKPLACE BULLYING IN PAKISTAN

There are limited studies of workplace bullying in Pakistan that explored this phenomenon and its implications. A research was conducted in 2014, in which the effects of workplace bullying on turnover intention was examined among the faculty of the private universities of Peshawar, Pakistan. The findings of the study revealed that the level of workplace bullying faced by the faculty members of private universities is very low. However, the turnover intention is very high as compared to the level of bullying faced. Research indicated a relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention. There are many consequences of workplace bullying and organizations also got affected and face direct costs such as increased turnover. Apart from organizations, victim's mental health also pay heavy costs due to these prevalent behaviours and they try to tackle their issues through different mediators (Razzaghian & Ghani, 2014).

Another study was conducted in 2020, researchers aimed to examine the necessity of distance learning and organizational adjustments in higher education institutions. This study examined the problem-focused coping strategy and its efficiency in tackling the strain related to the work. According to the results, workplace bullying served as a significant positive predictor of coping strategies and bullying-related strain. Predictability of turnover was also suggested as the result of bullying. Moreover, it revealed the direct effects of workplace bullying as a significant predictor of bullying-related strain, coping and turnover intention. As problem-focused coping strategies mediate the relation between bullying, strain and turnover intention which means that problem-focused coping strategies can alleviate the effects of bullying on the strain level and the turnover intention (Muazzam, Anjum, & Visvizi, 2020).

In 2016, another research was conducted to examine the effect of workplace bullying on employee's productivity. Moreover, the effect of workplace spirituality as a mediator between workplace bullying and employee's productivity was examined in the study. Workplace spirituality was defined as the inner feeling of an individual that can be observed in his/her behaviour. The findings of the study revealed the negative effect of workplace bullying on the employee's productivity. However, workplace spirituality mediates the effect of workplace bullying and it helps to improve the level of employee's productivity in higher education institutes (Khan, Sabri, & Nasir, 2016).

Apart from the effect on employee's productivity, the implications of workplace bullying can also lead towards deviancy. In this regard, research was conducted to explore the effects of workplace bullying on minor forms of deviant behaviours i.e. hiding knowledge and time theft. The mediating role of negative emotions between workplace bullying and its outcomes were also examined in the study. The results described that workplace bullying increases deviant behaviours such as hiding knowledge and time theft. However, negative emotions lead the employees towards deviant behaviours such as hiding knowledge and time theft. Moreover, it was concluded that the victims of workplace bullying do not indulge in deviant behaviours directly but it is their negative

emotions such as anxiety, stress, and anger that lead them towards knowledge hiding and time theft (Fatima, Abdul Ghaffar, Zakariya, Muhammad, & Sarwar, 2021). A limitation in this study was the collection of mixed data and results not being categorized on the basis of public and private sector. Moreover, the gender of respondents was not considered in the aforementioned research.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Prior studies shows that there are various gaps in the literature especially in the context of Pakistan. The workplace bullying in schools has not gained much attention. This study adds to these gaps in knowledge by assessing workplace bullying and the coping strategies with the sample of female teachers from public schools of Lahore.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The data was collected from the public high schools of Lahore by using convenient sampling. Between July of 2021 and August of 2021, a survey was conducted in which data was collected from female teachers of 19 Government high schools of different areas of Lahore. In the account of COVID-19 educational institutes were closed therefore, data was collected online. The questionnaire was shared with the respondents through emails. The initial number of responses received was 176. However, 21 questionnaires were not considered due to incomplete information and data. Hence, a total of 155 teachers participated in this research by filling the complete questionnaire.

MEASURES

Workplace Bullying. Workplace bullying is defined here as the frequent exposure to aggression and mistreatment from the superiors or colleagues at a workplace. It includes negative remarks or actions taken to create an uncomfortable environment for the colleagues which could lead to the social exclusion of the person being targeted (Einarsen et al., 2009). To measure how frequently female school teachers experience workplace bullying, the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (Einarsen et al., 2009) scale was used. It was refined based on the previous NAQ which was developed in 1997 (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). This previous version was based on the review of the literature but it had some serious shortcomings. Later on, that older version was modified into a 29-items questionnaire (Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001). After further analyses and studies, it was further modified into a new 22-items questionnaire that is used in this study. This scale has further three sub-scales, which are work-related bullying, person-related bullying, and physical intimidation. Items 1, 3, 14, 16, 18, 19, and 21 assess work-related bullying. While items 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, and 20 helps to assess the person-related bullying. The remaining three items 8, 9, and 22 assess the physical intimidation (Einarsen et al., 2009).

Coping strategies. Coping can be defined as the thought or action of a person in response to some stressful situation. According to Folkman & Lazarus (1985), Coping is of two types, the first is problem-focused coping while the other is emotion-focused coping. The first one aims at problem-solving and doing something to change the stressful situation. While the latter aims to reduce the emotional distress which is associated with that stressful situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). People usually tend to elicit both types of coping but some of them prefer emotion-focused coping when they feel that stressor needs to be endured. While other people prefer problem-focused

coping when they think that something constructive can be done about this stressful situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). In the current study, the emotion-focused strategies include mental disengagement, religious coping, and getting emotional social support. Whereas the problem-focused strategy used in this study is active coping. To know about the coping strategies used by the school teachers the Cope-Inventory by Carver was used. In 1989, Carver developed this scale. This has fifteen extensive range of coping strategies with each coping strategy is being further divided into four items (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). As for the present study, from the original scale, items 2, 16, 31, and 43 were selected to assess mental disengagement. Items used for assessing active coping were 5, 25, 47, and 58. The religious coping was assessed by items 7, 18, 48, and 60. Items selected for assessing humour were 8 and 20. Lastly, items that were selected to assess the emotional social support strategy were 11, 23, 34, and 52.

ANALYSIS

Statistical analysis was performed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The data were analyzed in three key steps. First of all, Demographic frequencies and mean were computed to distribute the sample into different age groups. Secondly, descriptive statistics were computed and Cronbach's alpha of NAQ-R & COPE-Inventory scale was measured to compute the reliability of these two scales for the present study's population. Moreover, Pearson correlation was computed to measure the relationship among the variables.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results of the current study are presented for workplace bullying and coping strategies among high school teachers. Here, Table 1 presents the descriptive and reliability coefficients of workplace bullying and coping strategies.

Table 1: Reliability and descriptive of NAQ-R and COPE scale

Variables	*K*	M	*SD*	α
NAQ-R	22	55.63	9.14	.853
COPE	18	42.86	4.68	.664

Note. k= no. of items; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation, *a* = Cronbach's Alpha.

With the help of Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the internal consistency of the two scales was estimated. Table 1 shows the results determined by the analysis which describes that the scale NAQ-R (M=55.63, SD=9.14) has Cronbach's alpha coefficient .853. The alpha internal consistency estimate of COPE scale (M=42.86, SD=4.68) is .664. Three age groups were computed to measure the percentage and frequencies of the sample. Figure 1 presents the percentages of the respondents by age groups. The results showed that approximately 62% of the total respondent's age ranging between 24 to 33 years. While 30% of the sample age range is 34 to 43 years and only 7.7% of respondents age is between 44 to 53 years. This depicts that workplace bullying is more common among young teachers as compared to the older ones. The reasons can be vulnerability to negative behaviours at a young and immature age along with the factor that young people are more competitive. Therefore, the race of achieving the best career goals can make people's behaviour toxic towards each other. These competitive behaviours and attempts to

let other people down can make them a bully. Meanwhile, the other novices who still struggling to adapt themselves to the circumstances can become victims of workplace bullying. Perhaps, on the other hand young people can also be bullied by their older colleagues because the generation gap and fear of being replaced can indulge them into negative behaviours.

Furthermore, Pearson product-moment correlation was computed for the NAQ-R & COPE inventory scales. The results of this analysis are described in Table. 2. These results depict the inter-correlation among the variables of the present study. It indicates that overall the workplace bullying has a significantly positive and moderate correlation with coping strategies (r=.49, p<.01). It implies that age has a positive and moderate correlation with mental disengagement (r=.32, p<.01) and religious coping (r=.43, p<.01). It reflects that when age increase; then people who encounter workplace bullying often use mental disengagement and religious coping as their coping mechanism. Moreover, a negative correlation with humour (r=-.19, p<.05) reflects that perhaps, youngsters find humour as a convenient way to cope with bullying as compared to older people.

Work-related bullying has a significantly positive and moderate correlation with mental disengagement (r=.54, p<.01), religious coping (r=.66, p<.01), and humour (r=.69, p<.01) as shown in the Table 2. However, work-related bullying showed a significantly negative and moderate correlation with active coping (r=-.31, p<.01), and getting emotional social support (r=-.26, p<.01). This shows that teachers who face work-related bullying less often use active coping or getting emotional social support as their coping strategy. The reason behind this avoidance could be their lack of training in handling the conflict and lack of anti-bullying policies in their schools. Perhaps, due to not finding any formal way to report their problem, they prefer to either ignore the situation or if unavoidable then mostly cope with humourous remarks.
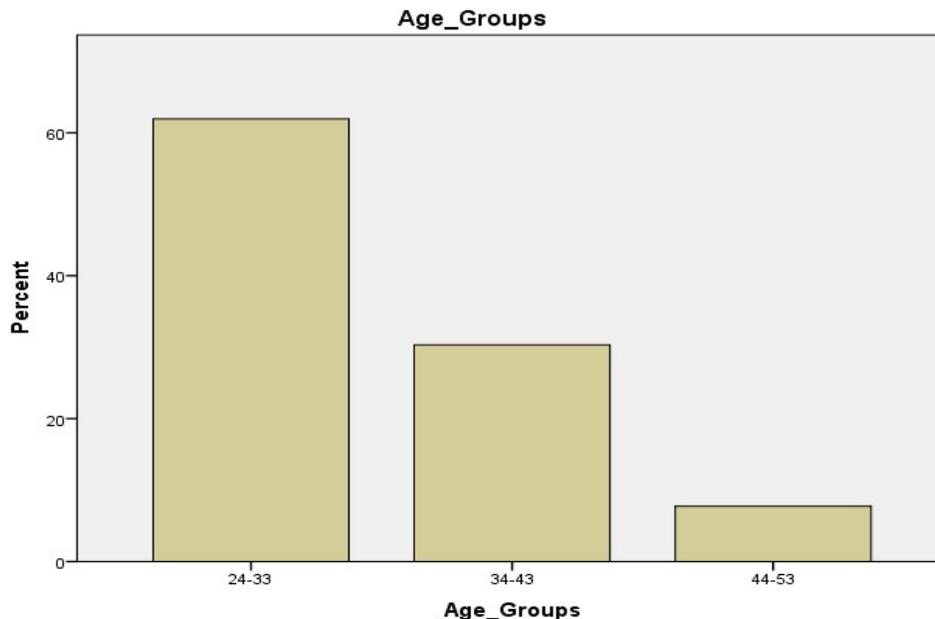

Figure 1: Presentation of the percentages of the respondents by age groups

Furthermore, it is indicated that person-related bullying has a positive and strong correlation with mental disengagement (r=.77, p<.01). It is also found that person-related bullying has a positive and moderate correlation with religious coping (r=.68, p<.01) and humour (r=.71, p<.01). Moreover, results determined that person-related bullying has a negative and moderate correlation with active coping (r=-.21) and getting emotional social support (r=-.47). The reason behind this can be, people usually try to ignore the negative behaviours pointed towards their personalities and they do not take action or ask for help. Another reason could be that people do not take emotional support from their social circle because they feel insecure and assume that others will also make fun of them. Therefore, they prefer to ignore or take it lightly as a better strategy to cope with the situation.

The third dimension of workplace bullying which is physical intimidation showed a negative correlation with mental disengagement (r=-.34), active coping (r=-.27), religious coping (r=-.17), and humour (r=-.16). However, physical intimidation has a positive and moderate correlation with getting emotional social support (r=.38, p<.01). The positive correlation implies that if teachers encounter physical intimidation at their workplace then they try to get emotional support and they discuss the situation with their trusted people. As compared to other dimensions of workplace bullying physical intimidation is alarming because it can also include threats of violence or physical abuse, probably that is why victims prefer to talk about it instead of just ignoring or making fun of it.

DISCUSSION

The present study was focused on examining the relationship between workplace bullying dimensions and coping strategies. In general, workplace bullying dimensions showed a direct relation with emotion-focused coping strategies and humour whereas inverse relation with problem-focused coping strategies. These results add support to the conclusion of prior research which stated that people use emotion-focused coping strategies when they think nothing constructive can be done (problem-focused coping) and bully needs to be endured (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). According to the results, age showed an inverse relationship with a coping strategy that is humour. While it showed a direct relationship with two coping strategies which are mental disengagement and religious coping. This result is consistent with a prior study in which the researcher explained that older people more often handle situations maturely. They most likely do not get affected by minor clashes and try to tackle the situation by staying away from the stressors (Aldwin, 1991). For religious coping, the results are consonant with research conducted by Whitty in 2003, in which the researcher explained that in older age religion becomes the ultimate support and most effective coping mechanism for people in every stressful situation. On the other hand, at a younger age, people are most likely to take the minor issues lightly (Whitty, 2003). This supports that older teachers tend to address workplace bullying with mental disengagement and religious coping while the younger teachers handle it with humour.

Two dimensions of workplace bullying which are work-related bullying and person-related bullying showed a direct relationship with religious coping, mental disengagement, and humour. While they exhibited an inverse relationship with active coping and getting emotional social support. The direct relationship of person-related bullying with mental disengagement and humour is reconcilable with the previous study. However, mental disengagement's direct relationship with

Table 2: Correlation among workplace bullying dimensions & coping strategies

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Age	-	.21	.00	.02	-.04	-.18	.32**	-.00	.43**	-.19*	-.06
2	Workplace Bullying		-	.87**	.95**	.34**	.49**	.28*	-.09	.10	.06	-.09
3	Work-Related			-	.70**	.07	.06	.54**	-.31**	.66**	.74**	-.26**
4	Person-Related				-	.31**	.11	.77**	-.21	.68**	.61**	-.47
5	Physical Intimidation					-	.30**	-.34	-.27**	-.17*	-.16	.34**
6	Coping Strategies						-	.45	.40**	.02	.34**	.63**
7	Mental Disengagement							-	-.40**	.06	.35**	-.11
8	Active Coping								-	-.15*	-.26**	.46**
9	Religious Coping									-	.02	-.20*
10	Humour Coping										-	-.08
11	Getting Emotional Support											-

*Note **p< .01 *p< .05*

work-related bullying is contradicted. According to the research, people tend to ignore or take the situation lightly if they face bullying related to their personality or attitudes but they do not easily overlook the bullying related to their work (Maidaniuc-Chirila & Costantin, 2015).

Work-related bullying showed an inverse relationship with active coping which contradicts the previous studies. In prior research, it has been stated that victims of work-related bullying find problem-focused coping strategies more efficient. The findings from Muazzam et al., (2020) study on a different sample in Pakistan, revealed that problem-focused coping strategies can reduce the effects of bullying on the victims. Hence, for the present study person-related bullying inverse relationship with active coping is consonant with the previous studies that people perhaps, simply try to ignore the person-related bullying (Maidaniuc-Chirila & Costantin, 2015). In the present study, the third dimension of workplace bullying; that is, physical intimidation showed a direct relationship with getting emotional support. This is consistent with the previous study. The researcher claimed that due to physical intimidation people are more likely to ask for help and they tend to discuss it with their trusted people for solution or opinion to tackle the situation (Maidaniuc-Chirila & Costantin, 2015). As for the present study, perhaps, when teachers sometimes experience physical intimidating behaviours then having no option of reporting or complaining about the problem they are more likely to find it convenient to discuss with others for emotional support.

Physical intimidation exhibited an inverse relationship with four coping strategies which include mental disengagement, humour, active coping, and religious coping. This is consonant with the prior research except for active coping. In research, it is revealed that threats or abuse are not the subjects where avoidance or mental disengagement can work, people more likely to tackle the situation head-on (Brewer et al., 2018). This contradiction with preceding research can be due to the cultural or administrative differences between two societies. As in other countries, people got these rights to report bullying and they get training or seminars to learn how to handle or prevent clashes at their workplaces. However, in Pakistani society especially in the public sector schools, these results should encourage educational authorities and policymakers to consider training sessions for conflict management and anti-bullying protocol. Zero tolerance for workplace bullying and freedom of speaking up should be encouraged.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There were some limitations of the present study. Firstly, this was an area specified study and the data was collected from public sector schools in Lahore, Pakistan. The findings might not be generalized to the other schools located in different areas. This research was cross-sectional and conducted quantitatively with help of a questionnaire survey. In the present study, only five coping strategies have been added to the questionnaire. Another limitation was that data were collected from public sector high schools only. In the future, a comparison between public and private schools can be drawn or colleges can also be included. Moreover, this research was gender specified as the whole sample consisted of female respondents. Following studies can be carried out by collecting data from both genders and comparison can be drawn between the results. In future, data can be collected from other cities. Due to COVID-19 and the closure of educational institutes the data was collected online and the sample was restricted to 155 respondents only. Following studies should be carried out with a larger sample size for more accurate results. In future, researchers can opt for a qualitative approach and detailed interviews. In succeeding studies, more coping strategies can also be included for more details. More variables can be added for computing different effects of workplace bullying or the mediating role of coping strategies.

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