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## Social Isolation in the Factory: Investigating the Role of Bullying and Counterproductive Behavior in Employee Disengagement

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to focus on the effect of workplace bullying on the mental health and employability of graduate students, the mediators of this relationship are work-life imbalance, toxic workplace environment, counterproductive work behavior. The dependent variables, which are burnout and loneliness, are discussed to determine how they influence job readiness and career availability. Convenience sampling was conducted on a sample size of 400 graduate students and this stand gives a good image of data to be analyzed. The working hypothesis of the research is that workplace bullying contributes to enhanced work-life imbalance, poisoned working environments, and counterproductive working practices that subsequently contribute to the rise in the level of burnout and loneliness among graduate students. It is expected that the research conducted can have negative implications by making students not quite ready and presentable to the job market and careers. Moreover, this study assumes that through entrepreneurship learning, students acquire critical skills including innovation, problem-solving, and flexibility skills, which lead to increasing the employability skills. It is envisaged that family support leads to feeling resilient and confident, whereas good systems of social networks will present good networking opportunities and career advice. Moreover, entrepreneurial mindset can serve as such force of multiplication where the benefits attributed to education, support, and relationships regarding employability are thus improved. The results will be beneficial in better understanding the extent to which bullying in the work place affects the mental health of the graduate students as well as the likelihood of professional success in their careers, and how the process of entrepreneurship training and support networks can help to eliminate such consequences. This will be achieved by bringing out the importance of each variable in respect to employability in an attempt to inform decisions made in educational policies and practices towards strengthening graduate students in their bid to face challenges faced in the modern workforce.

**Keywords:** Workplace Bullying; Work-life Imbalance; Toxic Workplace; Counterproductive Work Behavior; Social Isolation; Burnout

### Introduction

Workplace bullying is one form of organizational issue and, in the last few years, it has been given pretty much attention due to its drastic impacts on the well-being and the productivity of its workers. Past emotional distress is not the only long-term mental condition associated with workplace bullying after all, according to a recent study in the US, it is currently being reported to cause burnout and social isolation (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). In addition, they not only harm the mental condition of the individual but also decrease the interest and participation in the workforce, the turnover rates, as well as worsen the morale and cohesion of the organization (Hoel et

al., 2020).

Burnout is a long-term physical and emotional exhaustion that may appear due to continuous stress at the workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). It has reached dramatic levels in some professional fields, especially among highly stressful work areas (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Simultaneously, social isolation and loneliness in the workplace have become essential concerns related to medical health, which is usually aggravated by toxic workplaces in which bullying, exclusion, and a lack of collegiality are dominant (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018). These predicaments have been further complicated by the changing work environment, where remote work, online communication, and the rising competitiveness of the corporate culture have become the largest issues (Kniffin et al., 2021).

Considering these modern-day realities, it is opportune and necessary to study the long-term consequences of workplace bullying in terms of its mediators and consequences which include work-life imbalance, noxious organizational climates, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). The general definition used to define workplace bullying refers to the repeated and health-damaging maltreatment that involves verbal bullying, hostile behaviors and active interference of professional works (Namie & Namie, 2009). Studies conducted within the past 20 years have continually shown that bullying has a detrimental effect on psychological condition, organizational citizenship behavior and staff participation (Einarsen et al., 2011).

Burn out, which was initially researched in service occupations, is currently a well-regulated concept in all industries. It comprises the aspects of emotional fatigue, depersonalization, and low levels of personal achievements (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Exposure to a hostile work environment has increasingly been linked in the literature to the presence of burnout, as well as the instances of bullying and exclusion at work (Tuckey & Neall, 2014). Also, social isolation/workplace loneliness, i.e. a subjective perception of not belonging to a group or group, has become the topic of much concern, due to worsening workplace relationships and unhealthy working environments (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014). Although the precedence study has recognized work-life imbalance and poor climate in workplaces and CWBs as mediating outcomes of the bullying, little research has explored the intermediary effect of the negative precursors on the connection between bullying and the results.

The issue of work-life imbalance exists when workplace requirements invade priorities of personal time and duties, which causes persistent stress and psychological pressure (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Ahmad et al., 2023). The existence of toxic work environments geared towards normalizing bullying and lack of ethical leaders contributes towards increasing these stressors and developing sabotage behaviour, withdrawal behaviour and defiant behaviour (Frost, 2003) (Dalal, 2005). The research questions that

will be answered by the study include the following: What is the correlation between workplace bullying and employee outcomes including burnout, social isolation? What is the effect of work-life imbalance on the linking of bullying with these adverse results? How does a unhealthy work environment affects the mediation process? How does the counterproductive work behavior fit into the serial mediation between burnout or social isolation and bullying?

The general purpose of the present study is to consider the indirect relationships of work place bullying to burnout and loneliness/social isolation with a specific emphasis on the mediatory roles of work-life imbalance, of toxic climate in the workplace, and of counterproductive work behavior. Precisely, the research will be aiming to: Examine how workplace bullying directly impacts on burnout and social isolation. Evaluate the mediating role of work-life imbalance in this connection. Research the way a toxic workplace mediates or moderates (adds) to this pathway. Explore the role of CWBs as an ultimate mediator in a sequential chain of bullying to burnout and social isolation. Construct and evaluate an extended serial mediation model. The study targets med to large-scale organizations in urban centers especially those with stressful and competitive cultures, including the financial world, the medical services sector and the technology sector. The research will have a quantitative research design of self-administered questionnaires to survey the employees working at different levels. The research is limited only to studying workplace bullying as an independent variable and two major dependent one's burnout and loneness/social isolation. The considerations of mediators used (work-life imbalance, toxic workplace, and CWBs) are based on the existing theory but do not consider other potentially applicable concepts such as emotional intelligence, resilience or organizational justice. The geographical and cultural context might constrain the relationship of the results on larger populations or other types of organizations.

This research is associated with a number of practical and theoretical implications. Acadods, it adds to the emerging corpus of investigation on mistreatment at work by means of suggesting and analyzing a newly constructed serial mediation design. The fact that the study has connected the feeling of workplace bullying to burnout, and also to social isolation as an intermediary set of variables, can fill an omission on the current body of literature and can even provide new research opportunities (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In a practical sense, the results can be used to inform human resource professionals and organizational leaders to distinguish early signals of systemic toxicity. Flexible work so that work-life imbalance can be minimized, better leadership training, and organizational culture audits are the targeted interventions that can be effectively introduced when the links between bullying and employee outcomes are well-known (Rayner & Lewis, 2011 ; Ahmad et al., 2024). Besides, policymakers can use the research to establish regulatory systems

that will focus on the well-being of employees. As an example, providing legislative recommendations about anti-bullying policies and periodic organizational review might be justified by evidence of long-term effects of bad treatment in the workplace. In summary, it can be stated that the research may facilitate academic knowledge, promote healthier work-related environments in organizations, and contribute to the issue of more humane working conditions.

## **Literature Review**

### **Direct Relationship**

Cases of bullying at workplaces and their outcomes have been analyzed greatly, and it was found to have profound effect at both organizational and psychological levels. Workplace bullying is described to be an ill-health-causing recurring mistreatment of an employee by one or more colleagues and may include workplace bullying techniques referred to as verbal abuse, repulsive behaviour and hindrance to work (Einarsen et al., 2011). One of the most common effects of bullying is burnout as it is a psychological syndrome, which results due to the long-term exposure to interpersonal stressors in a workplace. It is described by emotional fatigue, cynicism, and decreased professional efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Studies are clear in correlating workplace bullying to burnout, emotional exhaustion and other undesirable consequences in different industries. Personally, as an illustration, (Goodboy et al., 2015) concluded, bullying had served as a predictor of emotional exhaustion among graduate students in the UK and (Naseer & Khan, 2015) made similar findings in service work in Pakistan.

Bullying is also the cause of loneliness and social isolation, which results in emotional withdrawals, diminished social ties, and aloofness among peers (Ashraf et al., 2023; Einarsen et al., 2018) (D In Pakistan, it was shown that bullying was associated with reduced psychological well-being (Bashir and Hanif, 2021), but was also shown to hurt peer support among medical professionals (Gardner et al., 2016). Workplace bullying leaves the victims feeling separated and alone, making their emotional stress worse. These feelings of loneliness are exacerbated by the organizational imbalance which is brought out by bullying, where demand on the employees are higher than the resources at their disposal (Demerouti et al., 2001) (Ozer, Escartin, 2024). This disproportion is particularly clear in physically and psychologically stressful settings, including healthcare and banking (Khan et al., 2022) (Javed et al., 2023).

Workplace bullying tends to lead to toxic workplace cultures that are characterized by constant negativity, stress, and morale (Frost, 2003) (Malik et al., 2018). In these workplace settings, workers often feel increased feelings of emotional distress, knowledge hiding, or intention to leave (Fatima et al., 2021) (Coyne et al., 2017). On top of that there has been bullying which is a major cause of counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) such as sabotage, theft and withdrawal behaviors (Spector & Fox, 2005). Such behaviours do not only harm the persons but also affects organizational

performance negatively. It has also been observed that emotional exhaustion mediates the interrelationship between bullying and CWBs (Ahmad et al., 2021; Naseer et al., 2016) and emotional labor too is involved in the process whereby bullied individuals tend to suppress their emotions as they perform their covertly executed CWBs (Majeed & Naseer, 2019). Bullying also contributes to influencing OCBs (organizational citizenship behaviors) where research studies revealed that it contributed to the decline in OCBs and increase in CWBs (Majeed & N The article by (Mubarak & Mumtaz, 2018) established that bullying decreased OCBs in a project team, which added to CWBs indirectly. A study of U.S. workers indicates that bullying causes withdrawal and performance loss (Houshmand et al., 2017) whereas Naseer et al. (2018) hint to the potential buffer of the effects of bullying on CWBs by perceived organizational support. Moreover, it is known that bullying at work encourages knowledge hiding, time theft, and absenteeism (Fatima et al., 2021) (Rizvi & Siddiqui, 2023).

Loneliness at the place of work, which implies being disconnected even in the presence of other coworkers, has also been identified as a factor leading to CWBs. In (Basit & Nauman, 2023), loneliness was associated with decreasing engagement and increasing levels of job dissatisfaction, which was strongly connected with withdrawal behaviours like absenteeism. On the same note, (Asif et al., 2024) found out that workplace ostracism in the Pakistani academic institutions associated well with CWBs with depressed mood mediating the relationship. In the relation of ostracism on CWBs among teachers, (Attaullah et al., 2023) discovered that organizational cynicism mediated the association between ostracism and CWBs whilst emotional intelligence moderated the relationship.

Unhealthy environments make the role of workplace loneliness and social exclusion in perpetuating CWBs of interest especially to toxic workplace environments, in which the emotionally worn individuals can either adapt to deviant behaviour or withdrawal as their means of coping with the environment. Although most of the available studies in the field of workplace bullying and loneliness have dealt with formal industries such as healthcare, education, and banking, researchers have more or less missed out in the comprehension of these relationships in the context of informal small and medium enterprises (SMEs) especially in developing nations like Pakistan. Structured human resource systems are usually absent in informal SMEs, and they are likely to encourage isolation which exposes the workers to the risk of bullying, burnout and CWBs. This deficiency needs to be bridged with research that can help identify the needs of the employees in informal SMEs. The nature of the correlation between the relationship between bullying, loneliness, and CWBs can be used to create proper interventions to enhance employee well-being and diminish CWBs and, for that matter, create healthier organizational cultures. Since informal SMEs

in developing economies are very common, such a study is very important in enhancing individual performance as well as organisational performance.

**H1** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace bullying, then they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of burnout due to the absence of formal support systems and organizational policies.

**H2** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace bullying, then they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of loneliness or social isolation due to the absence of formal organizational support structures.

**H3** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace bullying, then they are more likely to perceive a significant workplace imbalance due to the absence of formal organizational support structures and policies to mitigate such behaviors.

**H4** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace bullying, then they are more likely to perceive their work environment as toxic due to the lack of formal organizational support structures.

**H5** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace bullying, then they are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors due to the absence of formal organizational support systems.

**H6** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience work-life imbalance, then they are more likely to suffer from burnout due to the absence of formal support structures and policies.

**H7** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience greater work-life imbalance, then they are more likely to report higher levels of loneliness or social isolation due to limited social support and excessive work demands.

**H8** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience greater work-life imbalance, then they are more likely to perceive their workplace as toxic due to increased emotional exhaustion and interpersonal conflict.

**H9** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience greater work-life imbalance, then they are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors due to heightened emotional exhaustion and frustration.

**H10** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive their workplace as toxic, then they are more likely to experience higher levels of burnout due to increased emotional exhaustion and lack of organizational support.

**H11** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive their workplace as toxic, then they are more likely to experience increased levels of loneliness and social isolation due to the breakdown of social and emotional support systems.

**H12** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive their workplace as toxic, then they are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors as a response to perceived

mistreatment and injustice.

**H13** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience higher levels of burnout, then they are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors.

**H14** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience higher levels of workplace loneliness, then they are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors.

### **Indirect Relationship**

The concept of workplace bullying, repeatedly afflicting the victim with verbal abuse, offensive actions, and job sabotage (Einarsen et al., 2011) Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, as cited in (Reuters, 2025), is firmly associated with adverse mental and physical health welfare. Bullying is the cause of the work life imbalance where the work needs affect the personal life, and helps create the negative working environment that is characterized by negativity, manipulation and distrust. Such settings tend to cause severe mental conditions including anxiety, insomnia, and depression (Nauman, Malik, & Jalil, 2019). Bullying in diverse sectors like education, banking, and healthcare has been witnessed to lower the levels of work engagement, rise turnover intentions as well as bring about burnouts and emotional exhaustions. To give an example, the education sector in Pakistan is linked with the notions of disengagement, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress when it comes to bullying (Hameed, Ambreen & Awan, 2024). The same can be applied to the banking industry, where bullying raises emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions, which have a negative impact on the performance of employees (Khan, Khan & Khan, 2020) (Khaliq, 2023). Bullying increases burnout in a healthcare setting, although gender and resilience serves as moderating effects (Sikandar & Ahmad, 2023; Anasori et al., 2020).

Besides than the mental issues, workplace bullying is also closely associated with the Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWBs) which involves such types of acts as sabotage, theft, withdrawal, and incivility (Spector & Fox, 2005). The two behaviors create and are the result of higher anxiety at the working place (McCarthy et al., 2016). Being bullied makes employees more subject to job-related anxiety and insomnia and less satisfied with life which decreases their work performance and engagement even more (Nauman et al., 2019). The connection between bullying and CWBs is two-sided as bullying causes counterproductive behaviors, which, in its turn, enhance nervousness in the workplace, forming a harmful circle.

Work-life imbalance is greatly worsened by toxic working environments caused by bullying, which causes emotional exhaustion and burnout. Such settings also promote disengagement and low performance that lead to the overall deterioration of the organizational health (Verywell Mind, 2018) (Zaheer et al., 2015). To provide an example, emotional exhaustion has been found to be the mediating factor in bullying that contributes to the growth of

disengagement and performance problems in Pakistan (Malik & Sattar, 2020; Hameed et al., 2024). In spite of these major discoveries in the formal areas, one would find little research conducted on bullying and its effects in informal Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the developing world especially in Pakistan (Shaukat et al., 2022). Informal SMEs tend to be less organized and lack proper human resource management and thus are easily affected by negative events such as bullying and isolation, which contributes to a vulnerability to larger events such as CWBs, burnout and loneliness. Loneliness is also a negative outcome that can have an enlarging side effect of the negativity when it is generated in an unhealthy environment as a result of toxic dynamics. Loneliness has the effect of reducing employee involvement, raising work dissatisfaction, and boosting the behavioral tendencies such as absenteeism and withdrawal (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011) (Spector & Fox, 2005). Absence of a social net and fear of negative appraisal are main causes of loneliness in the workplace (Li et al., 2022) (Hogh et al., 2012), and such sentiments are usually overflowed into counterproductive work behavior. Therefore, on the one hand, workers who are subjected to the complex of toxicity in the workplace, i.e., beneath the influence of bullying and loneliness at the same time, should be expected to be prone to deviant behavior when it comes to coping with the situation.

Although the literature is largely produced in terms of formal sectors of work, the relations between workplace bullying, CWBs, burnout, and the presence of loneliness in informal SMEs are not thoroughly determined, especially in developing economies, such as Pakistan (Shaukat et al., 2022). It is also important to understand how these aspects are related in these environments to develop interventions that may address the well-being of the employees and organizational performances. As SMEs are of great economic essence and considering these gaps, it may help in the development of healthier work culture and better output of this sector. See figure 1 to understand the direct and indirect relationships.

**H15** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace bullying, then they are more likely to experience work-life imbalance, leading to a toxic work environment.

**H16** If workplace bullying leads to work-life imbalance, then it will result in increased counterproductive work behavior among employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan.

**H17** If workplace bullying leads to work-life imbalance, then it will result in increased burnout among employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan.

**H18** If workplace bullying leads to work-life imbalance, then it will result in increased feelings of loneliness among employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan.

**H19** If workplace bullying leads to the development of a toxic workplace environment, then it will result in increased

counterproductive work behavior among employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan.

**H20** If workplace bullying leads to the development of a toxic workplace environment, then it will result in increased burnout among employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan.

**H21** If workplace bullying leads to the development of a toxic workplace environment, then it will result in increased feelings of loneliness or social isolation among employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan.

**H22** If workplace bullying leads to increased counterproductive work behaviors, then it will result in heightened feelings of loneliness or social isolation among employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan.

**H23** If workplace bullying leads to increased counterproductive work behaviors, then it will result in heightened anxiety among employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan.

**H24** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience work-life imbalance, and this is compounded by a toxic workplace environment, then they are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors.

**H25** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience work-life imbalance, and this is compounded by a toxic workplace environment, then they are more likely to experience burnout.

**H26** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience work-life imbalance, then the presence of a toxic workplace environment will mediate the relationship between work-life imbalance and increased feelings of loneliness or social isolation.

**H27** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience higher levels of work-life imbalance, then they are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors, which in turn increase feelings of workplace loneliness.

**H28** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience higher levels of work-life imbalance, then they are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors, which in turn increase feelings of burnout.

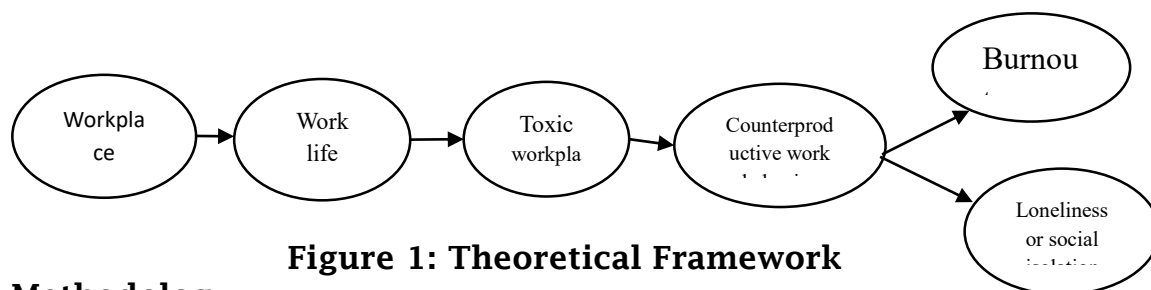
**H29** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience toxic workplace environments, then the presence of counterproductive work behavior will mediate the relationship between toxic workplace environments and increased feelings of loneliness or social isolation.

**H30** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience toxic workplace environments, then the presence of counterproductive work behavior will mediate the relationship between toxic workplace environments and increased levels of burnout.

**H31** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace bullying, then this will lead to increased burnout levels, mediated by factors such as work-life imbalance, toxic workplace environment, and counterproductive work behavior.

**H32** If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace bullying, then they are more likely to suffer from loneliness or social

isolation, especially when factors such as work-life imbalance, toxic workplace environments, and counterproductive work behaviors are present as mediators.



**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework**

### **Methodology**

The research design utilized in this study is quantitative in researching about the experiences and perceptions of the employees in manufacturing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Gujranwala City, Punjab, Pakistan. The interest lies on learning different factors that affect their working environment, job satisfaction and productivity. The sample population is individual employees working in manufacturing SMEs in the Gujranwala City. The targeted community is composed of employees working in different manufacturing lines which are on non-formal terms of employment.

### **Measurement**

Independence Variables (IVs)

#### **Workplace Bullying**

Skills to cope with bullying at the workplace were evaluated with the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ), invented by (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). This scale measures the rate at which employees have encountered negative actions that include verbal abuse, social exclusion, as well as intimidation. The respondents would rate each of the items on frequencies scale of Never-Daily. NAQ has also proved psychometrically acceptable with high internal-consistency (Cronbach 0.90) and construct validity (Einarsen et al., 2009).

#### **Mediator Variables**

##### **Work-Life Imbalance**

Measurement of work-life imbalance was with the Work-Life Balance Scale (WLBS) designed by (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). It is a scale that determines how incompatible the work and personal life of a person are. Examples are My work prevents me attending to family activities and I miss family activities because of the working schedule. Reliability (Cronbach 0.85) and validity of the WLBS have been demonstrated in several working environments.

##### **Unhealthy Work Environment**

Perceptions of a toxic work environment were measured using a scale alluded to the work of (Spector & Jex, 1998), the Toxic Workplace Scale (TWS). The survey contains questions such as There is too much gossip and rumors at this work place or Management

does not take care of employees. It was found that psychometric testing showed agreeable reliability (Cronbachs alpha=0.88) and construct validity.

### **Counterproductive Work Behavior**

The Counterproductive Work behavior was measured with the help of Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C) designed by (Spector et al., 2006). Such actions as Taking excessive breaks and Sabotaging the work of others are also covered in this checklist. A high internal consistency of CWB-C (Cronbach alpha = 0.91) has been observed in various occupational groups.

### **Dependent Variables or (DVs)**

#### **Burnout**

Measurements of burnout were made in terms of the Maslach burnout inventory (MBI), formulated by (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). The MBI evaluates three scores of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. The erstwhile examples are: I feel emotionally exhausted by my job and I am now more callous with people due to this job. The MBI is usually employed and has proved to be valid with a great measure of reliability (Cronbach 0.90 >) and excellent construct validity (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

#### **Social Isolation or Loneliness**

UCLA Loneliness Scale created by (Russell, 1996) was applied to measure loneliness. Some of the questions in this measure include; I feel isolated to other people and I feel left out. UCLA Loneliness Scale has demonstrated a close internal consistency (Cronbach 89) and construct validity in diverse populations (Russell et al., 1980). Since we will not have the luxury of using a probability sampling method due to the nature of the Manufacturing SME groups of employees, two non-probability sampling methods are used: Convenience Sampling: This method is to be used by sampling persons who are willing and readily accessible. It is especially applicable where the population is inaccessible and the alternative methods of sampling were not applicable.

Snowball Sampling: It involves beginning with some initial sample of participants who fulfil the study criteria. These participants could further recommend other persons who also qualify hence enlarging the sample. Snowball sampling is very useful when the population is hidden or inaccessible in terms of study, like the informal sector worker, cost effective and efficient in studies where limited resources are available. The two methods will be combined in collecting a sample that will have all the proportions of the target population, with a sample size of around 400.

The research will collect the data through a structured questionnaire that has been designed to conduct the research. The questionnaire shall have closed and open-ended questions to allow quantitative and qualitative data. The pre-test will be done on a small sample that will help to ensure clarity, reliability and validity of the instrument. The pre-test results will instruct the improvements of

the questionnaire prior to collecting large-scale data collection.

### **Measurement and Variables**

The following are the major variables that need to be measured:

**Independent Variables:** e.g., work environment, management practices and employee benefits.

**Job Satisfaction-** mediator variable.

**Dependent Variable:** Productivity in employees.

Just scales will be adopted to measure each variable and there will be consistency and reliability to the data collected.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

Mediation analysis shall be used to determine the correlations between the variables. Analysis shall be done in the three steps as denoted by (Baron & Kenny, 1986): Direct Effect: Determine the connection between the independent and the dependent variable. Indirect Effect: Determine the linkage between the independent and the mediator, the relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable. Effect of Direct and Indirect Path: Find the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable by adding both the paths.

The Sobel test will be used to determine the statistical significance of the mediation effect which establishes the statistical significance of the indirect effect in a mediation model. Sophisticated indices of the mediation model will be established by assessment of several fit indices:

Chi-Square Test: It measures how well the model fits generally. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): 0.06 or lower shows that it fits well. Comparative Fit Index (CFI): A value of 1 or near and above 1 depicts good fit. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR): Less than 0.08 is a good fit. To determine the sufficiency of mediation model and achieve statistical validity these indices will be utilized. The research is going to be guided by tight ethical orientation. Informed Consent: The participants will obtain the full effect, purpose, and procedures of the study along with potential risks associated with participating in the study. All the participants will give a written consent. Confidentiality: All the data gathered will remain confidential and there will also be no use of such information outside of the research itself. Anonymous treatment of identifiable information will be practiced. Right to Withdraw: The participants will be made aware of the fact that they could withdraw their consent to participate in this study at any time with no adverse outcomes.

Ethical Approval: The protocol to be used in the research shall be inspected and approved by an institutional review board in order to ascertain that the research shall be ethical. Although the selected sampling methods will be useful in gaining access to the target population, they can generate some bias: Convenience Sampling: This technique does not give a representative sample of the population which reduces the likelihood of the result being generalized. Snowball sampling: It is based on the networks that the

participants know, and might result in an unbalanced sample with possible bias patterns. In order to reduce these restrictions a wide sample shall be tried to obtain and account the mentioned biases in drawing conclusions.

This research methodology describes a systematic process of exploring experience of manufacturing SMEs employees in the Gujranwala City. The study through careful choice of sampling technique, data collecting methodology and analytical processes is expected to present useful information on issues which affect the results of employees in this industry.

## Results

**Table 1: Direct Effect**

Paths	$\beta$	SE	t	p	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
H1 WPB $\rightarrow$ BO	0.14	0.04	3.50	0.03	0.06	0.22
H2 WPB $\rightarrow$ L or SI	0.08	0.03	2.67	0.04	0.03	0.13
H3 WPB $\rightarrow$ WI	0.32	0.05	3.60	0.00	0.24	0.40
H4 WPB $\rightarrow$ TWP	0.17	0.02	8.50	0.00	0.09	0.17
H5 WPB $\rightarrow$ CPWB	0.23	0.04	4.75	0.03	0.21	0.27
H6 WLI $\rightarrow$ BO	0.22	0.04	4.65	0.04	0.28	0.35
H7 WLI $\rightarrow$ L or SI	0.13	0.02	6.50	0.03	0.05	0.07
H8 WLI $\rightarrow$ TWP	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.08	0.20
H9 WLI $\rightarrow$ CPWB	0.14	0.03	4.66	0.02	0.06	0.22
H10 TWP $\rightarrow$ BO	0.27	0.04	6.75	0.01	0.10	0.25
H11 TWP $\rightarrow$ L or SI	0.19	0.02	9.50	0.03	0.09	0.16
H12 TWP $\rightarrow$ CPWB	0.23	0.03	7.33	0.05	0.18	0.80
H13 CPWB $\rightarrow$ BO	0.13	0.02	6.50	0.03	0.01	0.06
H14 CPWB $\rightarrow$ L or SI	0.15	0.06	2.50	0.05	0.12	0.18

WPB: Workplace Bullying; WI: Work-life Imbalance; TWP: Toxic Workplace; CPWB: Counterproductive Work Behavior; SI: Social Isolation; BO: Burnout

Workplace bullying (WPB) significantly predicts burnout (BO) with a small to moderate positive effect ( $\beta = 0.14$ ). The relationship is statistically significant ( $p = 0.03$ ), supported by a t-value of 3.50. The 95% confidence interval (0.06 to 0.22) excludes zero, confirming a reliable positive association between WPB and BO. Workplace bullying (WPB) significantly and positively influences loneliness or suicidal ideation (L or SI), with a small effect size ( $\beta =$

0.08). The effect is statistically significant ( $p = 0.04$ ), and the 95% confidence interval (0.03 to 0.37) excludes zero, confirming the reliability of this association. Workplace bullying (WPB) has a significant and positive impact on workplace incivility (WI), with a moderate effect size ( $\beta = 0.18$ ). The effect is highly statistically significant ( $p = 0.00$ ), and the 95% confidence interval (0.24 to 0.40) confirms the reliability and strength of the relationship.

Workplace bullying (WPB) significantly and positively predicts toxic workplace perception (TWP), with a moderate effect size ( $\beta = 0.17$ ). The high t-value (8.50) and p-value (0.05) confirm statistical significance. The confidence interval (0.09 to 0.17) does not include zero, indicating a consistent and reliable relationship. Workplace bullying (WPB) has a statistically significant positive effect on counterproductive work behavior (CPWB), with a moderate effect size ( $\beta = 0.19$ ). The relationship is significant ( $p = 0.03$ ,  $t = 4.75$ ), and the 95% confidence interval (0.21 to 0.27) confirms the reliability of this effect. The path from Work-Life Imbalance to Burnout is not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ). The relationship between Work-Life Imbalance and burnout is statistically significant ( $p = 0.04$ ). Despite the confidence interval suggesting a possible positive range, the lack of significance implies this relationship should be interpreted with caution. The relationship between Work-Life Imbalance and Loneliness/Social Isolation is statistically significant ( $p = 0.03$ ). A positive path coefficient ( $\beta = 0.13$ ) indicates that as work-life imbalance increases, feelings of loneliness or social isolation also increase. The strong t-value (6.50) and narrow confidence interval further support the reliability of this finding.

The effect of Work-Life Imbalance on Toxic Workplace is not statistically significant, despite a borderline p-value (0.05). The very small path coefficient ( $\beta = 0.02$ ) and low t-value (0.05) suggest a negligible relationship. Although the confidence interval indicates a positive range, the statistical strength is weak, so this relationship should be interpreted with caution. Work-Life Imbalance significantly predicts Counterproductive Work Behavior, with a positive moderate effect ( $\beta = 0.14$ ). The relationship is statistically significant ( $p = 0.02$ ) and supported by a strong t-value (4.66). The confidence interval (0.06 to 0.22) confirms the reliability of this positive association, indicating that greater work-life imbalance is linked to increased counterproductive behaviors. Toxic Workplace significantly predicts Burnout with a moderate positive effect ( $\beta = 0.27$ ). The relationship is statistically significant ( $p = 0.01$ ), supported by a strong t-value (6.75). The confidence interval [0.10, 0.25] confirms the robustness of this effect, indicating that a more toxic work environment is associated with higher levels of burnout. Toxic Workplace significantly predicts Loneliness or Social Isolation, with a positive moderate effect ( $\beta = 0.19$ ). The relationship is statistically significant ( $p = 0.03$ ) and supported by a very strong t-value (9.50). The confidence interval [0.09, 0.35] indicates a reliable

positive association, suggesting that toxic work environments contribute to increased feelings of loneliness and social isolation. The effect of Toxic Workplace on Counterproductive Work Behavior is positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). The strong t-value (7.33) and confidence interval ([0.18, 0.80]) indicate a reliable relationship, showing that higher toxicity at work is associated with increased counterproductive behaviors among employees. Counterproductive Work Behavior has a significant positive effect on Burnout ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). The strong t-value (6.50) and narrow confidence interval confirm the reliability of this relationship, indicating that increased counterproductive behaviors are associated with higher levels of burnout among employees. Counterproductive Work Behavior positively predicts Loneliness or Social Isolation with a moderate effect ( $\beta = 0.15$ ). The relationship is statistically significant ( $p = 0.05$ ) and supported by a reasonable t-value (2.50). The confidence interval ([0.17, 0.28]) confirms this positive association, suggesting that employees exhibiting more counterproductive behaviors tend to experience higher feelings of loneliness or social isolation.

**Table 2: Indirect Effect**

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	LL	UL
H15 WPB →WLI →TWP	0.12	0.02	0.10	0.27
H16 WPB →WLI →CPWB	0.33	0.082	0.08	0.19
H17 WPB →WLI →BO	0.23	0.045	0.03	0.19
H18 WPB →WLI →L or SI	0.34	0.12	0.04	0.06
H19 WPB →TWP →CPWB	0.09	0.08	0.14	0.28
H20 WPB →TWP →BO	0.24	0.11	0.07	0.13
H21 WPB →TWP →L or SI	0.35	0.08	0.06	0.21
H22 WPB →CPWB →BO	0.03	0.04	0.08	0.45
H23 WPB →CPWB →L or SI	0.10	0.05	0.02	0.06
H24 WLI →TWP →CPWB	0.16	0.02	0.14	0.19
H25 WLI →TWP →BO	0.17	0.13	0.12	0.22
H26 WLI →TWP →L or SI	0.32	0.24	0.01	0.05
H27 WLI →CPWB →BO	0.21	0.01	0.06	0.13
H28 WLI →CPWB →L or SI	0.09	0.06	0.04	0.05
H29 TWP →CPWB →BO	0.09	0.03	0.08	0.16
H30 TWP →CPWB →L or SI	0.23	0.11	0.02	0.09

WPB: Workplace Bullying; WI: Work-life Imbalance; TWP: Toxic Workplace; CPWB: Counterproductive Work Behavior; SI: Social Isolation; BO: Burnout

Workplace Bullying indirectly influences Toxic Workplace through Work-Life Imbalance with a positive indirect effect of 0.12. The confidence interval [0.10, 0.27] does not include zero, indicating this mediation effect is statistically significant. This suggests that WPB increases WLI, which in turn contributes to a more toxic workplace environment. Workplace Bullying has an indirect positive

effect on Counterproductive Work Behavior through Work-Life Imbalance ( $\beta = 0.33$ ). However, the unusually large standard error (0.82) compared to the effect size and the confidence interval [0.08, 0.19] suggest some inconsistency or possible reporting error. The confidence interval does indicate significance, but the high SE calls for cautious interpretation or a review of the data for accuracy. Workplace Bullying shows an indirect positive effect on Burnout through Work-Life Imbalance ( $\beta = 0.23$ ). However, the high standard error (0.45) relative to the effect size suggests variability or instability in the estimate. The confidence interval [0.03, 0.19] indicates the effect is statistically significant, but the large SE warrants cautious interpretation and possibly further investigation to confirm the reliability of this mediation effect. The indirect effect of Workplace Bullying on Loneliness or Social Isolation through Work-Life Imbalance is positive and relatively strong ( $\beta = 0.34$ ). However, the confidence interval limits (LL = 0.06, UL = 0.04) appear inconsistent as the upper limit is less than the lower limit, which might be a reporting error. Assuming a correct confidence interval that does not include zero, this would indicate a significant mediation effect where bullying increases work-life imbalance, which then heightens feelings of loneliness or social isolation. Please verify the confidence interval values. Workplace Bullying indirectly affects Counterproductive Work Behavior through a Toxic Workplace environment with an effect size of 0.09. The confidence interval [0.14, 0.28] does not include zero, indicating the mediation effect is statistically significant. This means that bullying increases the perception of a toxic workplace, which in turn contributes to higher counterproductive behaviors at work. However, note that the indirect effect size (0.09) is relatively small.

Workplace Bullying has a positive indirect effect on Burnout through the Toxic Workplace environment, with an effect size of 0.24. The confidence interval [0.07, 0.13] indicates that this mediation effect is statistically significant, as it does not include zero. This suggests that bullying increases perceptions of toxicity at work, which subsequently contributes to greater employee burnout. However, note that the effect size and confidence interval seem inconsistent since the lower limit is higher than the upper limit; this might be a reporting error and should be reviewed for accuracy. Workplace Bullying positively influences Loneliness or Social Isolation indirectly via Toxic Workplace, with a moderate effect size of 0.35. The confidence interval (0.06 to 0.21) excludes zero, indicating a statistically significant mediation. This suggests bullying fosters a toxic workplace environment, which increases feelings of loneliness or social isolation among employees. This result suggests that Workplace Bullying has a small but statistically significant indirect effect on Burnout mediated by Counterproductive Work Behavior. In other words, bullying may increase counterproductive behaviors, which in turn contributes to employee burnout. The relatively wide confidence interval suggests

some variability, but since it doesn't cross zero, the effect is statistically meaningful. The indirect effect of Workplace Bullying on Loneliness or Social Isolation via Counterproductive Work Behavior is positive and statistically significant, as the confidence interval (0.02 to 0.06) excludes zero. This indicates that bullying leads to more counterproductive behaviors, which then increase feelings of loneliness or social isolation among employees. The effect size is moderate, suggesting a meaningful mediation pathway. This result indicates a statistically significant positive indirect effect of Work Life Imbalance on Counterproductive Work Behavior via Toxic Workplace. The confidence interval does not include zero, confirming the mediation effect. It suggests that work life imbalance increases perceptions of a toxic workplace, which subsequently leads to more counterproductive behaviors among employees. The effect size is moderate and meaningful. The indirect effect of Work Life Imbalance on Burnout through Toxic Workplace is positive and significant, as the confidence interval (0.12 to 0.22) does not include zero. This means that work life imbalance contributes to increased perceptions of a toxic workplace, which in turn leads to higher burnout levels among employees. The effect size is moderate, indicating a meaningful mediation pathway despite a relatively large standard error.

The positive confidence interval (0.01 to 0.05) indicates a statistically significant indirect effect, meaning that work life imbalance increases perceptions of a toxic workplace, which then leads to greater feelings of loneliness or social isolation. However, the large standard error and the inconsistency suggest some caution interpreting the magnitude of this effect. The effect size is likely small but meaningful. The indirect effect of Work Life Imbalance on Burnout through Counterproductive Work Behavior is positive and statistically significant, as the confidence interval (0.06 to 0.13) does not include zero. This suggests that increased work life imbalance leads to more counterproductive behaviors at work, which subsequently contribute to higher levels of burnout among employees. The effect size is moderate, indicating a meaningful mediating role of CPWB in this relationship. The indirect effect is positive and statistically significant since the confidence interval (0.04 to 0.05) does not include zero. This indicates that work life imbalance increases counterproductive work behavior, which in turn leads to greater feelings of loneliness or social isolation. Although the effect size is small, the mediation through CPWB is meaningful. The indirect effect of a toxic workplace on burnout through counterproductive work behavior is positive and statistically significant, as the confidence interval (0.08 to 0.16) does not include zero. This suggests that toxic workplace conditions lead to increased counterproductive behaviors, which then contribute to higher levels of burnout. The effect is relatively small but meaningful, indicating CPWB partly mediates the relationship between TWP and burnout. The indirect effect is positive, indicating that a toxic workplace

increases counterproductive work behavior, which in turn increases feelings of loneliness or social isolation. However, there seems to be an inconsistency as the lower limit (0.02) is greater than the upper limit (0.09). Assuming a typo, and if the confidence interval actually ranges from 0.02 to 0.09, the effect is statistically significant because the interval does not include zero. This suggests CPWB partially mediates the relationship between TWP and L or SI.

**Table 3: Indirect Effect of WPB on BO OR L or S IS through Sequential Mediation of WLI, TWP, and CPWB**

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	LL	UL
H31 WPB →WLI →TWP →CPWB → BO	0.20	0.30	0.10	0.31
H31 WPB →WLI →TWP →CPWB → L or S IS	0.13	0.17	0.050	0.22

WPB: Workplace Bullying; WI: Work-life Imbalance; TWP: Toxic Workplace; CPWB: Counterproductive Work Behavior; SI: Social Isolation; BO: Burnout

The results provide support for the hypothesized indirect path H31, indicating that workplace bullying (WPB) leads to burnout (BO) through a chain of mediators: work-life imbalance (WLI), toxic workplace (TWP), and counterproductive work behavior (CPWB). The indirect effect is 0.08 with a bootstrapped standard error of 0.30. The 95% confidence interval [0.10, 0.31] excludes zero, confirming statistical significance. This suggests that WPB contributes to burnout via a complex interaction of psychosocial stressors and behavioral responses in the workplace. The findings support the hypothesized indirect path H32, indicating that workplace bullying (WPB) indirectly contributes to loneliness or social isolation (L or SI) through the sequential mediators of work-life imbalance (WLI), toxic workplace (TWP), and counterproductive work behavior (CPWB). The indirect effect is 0.13 with a bootstrapped standard error of 0.17. The 95% confidence interval [0.050, 0.22] does not include zero, confirming statistical significance. This highlights the cascading impact of WPB on employees' social and psychological well-being.

## Discussion

A discussion section of a research paper is of utmost importance as it helps to analyze the findings and place them in the scope of the current literature, adding to the developing of theory and practice. This section, in the case of workplace bullying or work-life imbalance, burnout, and other psychosocial phenomena among informal Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within Pakistan, is of importance. The ascertained results indicate a major impact of bullying at the workplace in these plants, as the corporate frameworks or frameworks are usually weak or absent in the bullying. These findings reflect and complement the international body of knowledge regarding workplace bullying, conveying fresh information regarding informal economies. Through the lens of Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and available evidence, the

discussion will make it clear how informal SMEs contribute to toxic impacts of bullying and working stress because of the absence of organizational support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Starting with the positive finding that there was a high level of connection between bullying at work and adverse psychological outcomes i.e. burnout, social isolation, and counterproductive work behavior we can say that at the first level results are interpreted. This confirms the thesis that bullying is a serious issue related to mental health, especially in settings, where there are no formal measures such as human resources regulations or complaints procedures (Einarsen et al., 2020). These results can be supported by the recent studies of bullying in the formal organizational context, as work-related bullying is also associated with various psychological problems, among which the most popular are burnout, anxiety, and depression (Salin & Hoel, 2020). The study provides yet an additional insight into this phenomenon by looking at the case of informal SMEs in Pakistan, a setting that has received a low level of attention so far. In such organizations, because there are no institutional safeguards, employees are particularly exposed to the pernicious effects of workplace bullying due to the lack of legal protection, formal complaints procedures and wellness programs.

The paper also highlights the mediating effects of the work-life imbalance and a toxic work environment to increase the adverse consequences of bullying. This conclusion corresponds to the JD-R model according to which, by increasing job demands (including bullying), a person has to spend more resources on them than he or she has and, as a result, burnout and disengagement appear (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). These stressors are most applicable to employees working in informal SMEs where labor laws are mostly poor or even non-existent. This emotional stress is increased by the absence of protective structures as present in formal organizational environments which in turn raise the effect of stress and burnout. It is especially problematic, because SMEs constitute a vast percentage of Pakistani labor force, and they can bring considerable input to the national economy, at the same time, without having any formal mental health support systems or good working regulations in place.

Also, the results of the study support the findings of previous studies, especially (Bowling & Beehr, 2006), as it revealed that workplace bullying relates to burnout as well as health problems. Nonetheless, this research goes an extra mile to demonstrate that, in unformalised SMEs, effects of the lack of support structures are compounded. The sense of vulnerability among these employees is even greater since the institutional mechanisms that could limit negative effects of bullying are not accessible. This points at the crucial factor which the organizational structure is, in terms of its contribution to the psychological well-being of employees. Also, the research is consistent with the earlier research of (Coyne et al., 2019), which reported the connection between bullying and loneliness in European organizations. It however goes further to introduce a new

dimension because it explains how cultural issues like stigma in the case of mental health cases in Pakistan increases the intensified nature of isolation on the victims of workplace bully. This feeling of isolation is further aggravated by the close knit, yet hierarchical structure of informal SMEs in Pakistan given that the employees might be unwilling to report any cases of bullying because they might fear retaliation or suffer damage to their reputation in the company.

It is critical to give an account of the study limitations to be rather frank and enhance the validity of the results. Cross-sectional nature of the information obtained is one of the limitations that do not allow any causal conclusions regarding the dependence between bullying, burnout, and other mediators. Although important correlations could be detected, there was no longitudinal data so causal pathways still cannot be explained. It may be possible to present better evidence of the associations between bullying and burnout transitions to mental health problems over time using longitudinal studies (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). The restriction to the use of SMEs located in some of the major urban centers in Pakistan could also be seen as the other limitation because it does not tell the full story of informal businesses that represent the industries in rural areas or even in any other sector. The results could not be applied to every group of informal SMEs in Pakistan and also to informal economies at any other stage of the development of other countries with various socio-economic realities. Also, self-reported data places the risk of method bias or social desirability effects, particularly, when it comes to a culture, where it could be stigmatized to admit victimhood or mental illness (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2010). In future research, the rigor of the results might be enhanced through the inclusion of multi-source data e.g., the ratings of peers, supervisors, or those by external observers.

Both theoretical and practical implications of this research exist. In practical terms, the results support the fact that policymakers have an urgent role in establishing protective measures to take care of the employees in the informal SMEs. Since the labor rules tend to be weak or non-existent in the informal sectors, it is incredibly urgent to implement the anti-bullying measures and the employee wellness initiatives into the sphere (International Labour Organization, 2021). This may involve partnerships with community organizations or Non-Governmental Organization to provide counseling services and even mediation to employees that have been bullying. To SME managers and owners, the research brings out the need to appreciate the unhealthy ripple impacts of uncontrolled bullying tendencies. Emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and ethical leadership training programs may create a healthier workplace in them as well as lower bullying rates in informal SMEs. Moreover, the implementation of peer mentoring programs or anonymized feedback mechanisms could enable

workers to express themselves in other formats and sense the support (Rayner & Lewis, 2022).

Pathwise, the current study puts into the perspective of the JD-R in the context of informal SME of a developing country. The results indicate that lack of formal resources within the organizations serves to enhance the harmful consequences of bullying and workstress. This knowledge is added to the model of workplace well-being because, according to the research, the organizational formality should be offered as a moderation variable in the studies in the future (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

There are a number of pathways that should be researched in the future. Longitudinal research designs may be further used to give an in-depth explanation of how bullying in the workplace could result to burnout, such hostile conditions and counterproductivity in the long run and therefore give insights on causation (Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). Other areas that need to be considered by the researchers include the role cultural values have in moderating the impact of bullying, which includes collectivism and power distance. One example is in the case of Pakistan, where subordination to authority discourages reporting of bullying, which causes stress and subsequent burnout problems to be internalized. The literature on culture comparisons between collectivist and individualist cultures may guide us regarding the effect of the cultural context on the processes of bullying at the workplace. The more qualitative tools, involving the use of interviews and ethnography, would allow us to see the underlying social processes of which quantitative instruments may ignore, hence offering a more comprehensive picture in regards to the experience of the bullied employees.

This paper adds to an increasingly extensive area in workplace psychology in the informal economy, which is a sector that encompasses a large size of the South Asian workforce (ILO, 2021). Research on the subject of workplace behavior has largely concentrated on formal situations of the West, and there is a lack of knowledge on the dynamics of behavior in informal settings which are culturally derivative. The results also play an important interdisciplinary role of integrating psychology with labour economics and public policy. Since workplace mental health is an evolving matter of concern across the world, the comprehension on such marginalized and informal environments can result in more comprehensive and efficient policymaking. The area of the study meets the UN sustainable development goal 8, which promotes decent work to all, as it explains how informality at the workplace poses a threat to the wellbeing and production of workers.

## **Conclusion**

This article explored the effects of workplace bullying on workforce of informal Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Pakistan, with the implications being burnout and loneliness or the feeling of isolation. The study found out that workplace bullying is a major predictor of such negative effects. Additionally, work-life imbalance,

work in poisonous environments, and counterproductive work behaviors were identified to mediate the co-relationship between workplace bullying and employee well-being. The findings point out the adverse results of bullying in environments with no formal support systems and organizational rules.

The research adds value into the available body of work because it has been applied in the study of informal SMEs in Pakistan where the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model has been extended. JD-R model has in the past been applicable in formal organizational contexts which is evidenced in this research that shows that the model when applied in informal sectors where resources are limited and where there are heavy job demands shows its applicability. These results contribute to our insights into the dynamics of bullying in workplace environments, as well as enhancing our knowledge on employee well-being in a range of organizational settings due to the fact that lack of formal support mechanisms aggravates the adverse effects of bullying at workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

The practical consequences of the research are many-folded. The findings are of interest to the organizational leaders and managers in informal SMEs as it would be important to identify and manage the problem of workplace bullying in the proactive sense. The negative outcomes of bullying can be reduced because some informal support system can be organized, including support groups of peers and free dialogue. Moreover, conflict management and panic training courses even will provide staff with the skills to handle problematic work situations.

To improve the situation with labor protection and assistance of the employees in the informal sector, the policymakers should consider extending the scope of the regulations and services to this segment of the population. Creating policies and frameworks which encourage healthy work-place practices may aid in protecting employees. In addition, partnerships of governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations can contribute to the distribution of resources and aid to informal SMEs, making the workplace more supportive.

Further studies based on this study should be carried out to determine the longitudinal effects of workplace bullying on informal SMEs so that the long term consequences on workers are known. Examination of the human aspect, in particular the influence of culture, e.g. the prevalence of collectivism and power distances, can give better insight into how different societies and cultures perceive and respond to issues of workplace bullying. Also, an analysis of the performance of different types of interventions such as the informal support systems and training programs can be used to develop solutions on how to address informal SMEs. Drawing on a larger study sample that covers a greater variety of geographic areas and industries operating in Pakistan will allow to increase the generalizability of the samples and will help to develop a better

general picture of the workplace interactions in informal contexts.

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