

The world of bullying: antecedents, consequences, and future pathways of workplace bullying

Annisa Savira Alifia¹, Fiona Niska Dinda Nadia^{1*}, Nuri Herachwati¹, Ansar Abbas²

¹Human Resource Development, Postgraduate School, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia

²Social Sciences and Humanities Faculty, Hamdard University, Pakistan

Abstract

Workplace bullying is a widespread problem that has received great attention in academic studies in various fields. This research aims to facilitate future research by identifying the antecedents and consequences of workplace bullying. To answer the research question, a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology was used. The Scopus-indexed database journal was used to gather previous articles regarding workplace bullying, with 40 journals reviewed. This research found that workplace bullying occurs widely across industries and countries and negatively impacts the individuals affected by the bullying (victims) and the organisation. In addition, a model has been developed to examine the antecedents and consequences of workplace bullying to understand its impact more comprehensively. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, this research uncovered trends and patterns in workplace bullying that had not previously been identified. The findings revealed an intriguing discrepancy between the predominant focus of previous studies on workplace bullying on the individual level and under-researched on the organisational level. Moreover, the Asian context has been overlooked in this field of inquiry. Therefore, there is a compelling rationale for conducting multilevel research in the context of Asia and developing countries to enhance our comprehension of this complex phenomenon.

Keywords:

decent work; economic growth; quality of work; systematic literature review; workplace bullying.

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*Corresponding author

Email: fionaniska@pasca.unair.ac.id



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Introduction

Nowadays, the occurrence of workplace bullying has attracted great attention in scientific investigations, primarily due to its extensive and harmful impact on employees and overall business operations (Jana et al., 2021). Workplace bullying encompasses a range of destructive behaviours, such as verbal aggression, social exclusion, and harassment, which can have a profound impact on individuals who are targeted or victimised (Singh et al., 2021). Previous research has shown that workplace bullying has a detrimental impact not only on its direct targets but also on people who witness the behaviour. Witnessing workplace bullying can lead to increased psychological distress, reduced job satisfaction, and increased likelihood of job turnover (Sims et al., 2012; Einarsen et al., 2020). Workplace bullying behaviour has a broader impact than on people, as it is associated with reduced productivity, higher absenteeism rates, and adverse consequences to the overall work environment (Otema et al., 2022; Pokhrel et al., 2022).

Workplace bullying is a multifaceted and widespread problem that includes several types of harassment and workplace bullying behaviours. (Nielsen et al., 2010). Bullying is generally defined as a pattern of intentional, sustained, and interpersonal adverse actions that have a detrimental impact on the person being targeted (Chadwick et al., 2017). Workplace bullying is widely recognised in the scientific literature in various fields of study (Bartlett et al., 2011). Workplace bullying is a strong predictor of an employee's intention to leave their job, and this can have a detrimental impact on employee well-being and mental health (Favaro et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2021).

Workplace bullying has been widely researched due to its negative impact on individuals and organisations. Previous research shows that workplace bullying harms employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Yao et al., 2020). Moreover, it is associated with higher turnover intention, lower employee engagement (Coetzee et al., 2018), lower job satisfaction (Li et al., 2020), and affects overall productivity (Otema et al., 2022; Salman et al., 2023). Witnessing or seeing workplace bullying firsthand is associated with lower employee satisfaction and greater strain (Sims et al., 2012).

Workplace bullying has implications that extend beyond psychological well-being to reduced physical health and absenteeism (Magee et al., 2017). In addition, workplace bullying has been shown to reduce employee opinions, work-family conflict, and overall employee well-being (Liang, 2021). Thus, workplace bullying has a wide-ranging and negative impact on employees and organisations, affecting

psychological well-being, job satisfaction, intention to leave, and organisational dynamics.

Workplace bullying remains a serious problem that impacts both individual and organisational dynamics. Employee experiences and organisational responses to workplace bullying differ significantly, exposing a divide that might perpetuate the problem. This conversation draws on recent literature to investigate the present status of workplace bullying, highlighting the mismatch between employee experiences and organisational strategies.

One of the most pressing challenges is the incidence of workplace bullying, which disproportionately impacts specific populations, particularly women in lower-level employment. Female employees are more susceptible to bullying, which can have severe psychological implications such as sadness and anxiety (Jung et al., 2023; Dan, 2023). This gender discrepancy reveals a significant gap in organisational understanding and intervention measures, as many firms fail to recognise the unique vulnerabilities of different employee groups. Furthermore, the hierarchical architecture of many businesses sometimes encourages bullying since people in positions of power may engage in or ignore bullying practices without accountability (McKay et al., 2024).

Comprehensive interventions and a supportive organisational culture are critical to reduce the adverse effects of workplace bullying. Studies have indicated that environments with inadequate leadership and a lack of employee influence considerably enhance the probability of bullying (Conway et al., 2021). In contrast, firms that promote supportive leadership and employee participation had lower incidences of bullying (Pokhrel et al., 2022). This implies that employers must deliberately build a healthy work environment to address the underlying reasons for bullying rather than simply responding to incidents when they occur.

The implications of workplace bullying go beyond individuals and affect organisational performance. Employees who are bullied frequently report higher levels of emotional weariness, which can further reduce engagement and performance (Singh et al., 2021; Liang, 2021). This demonstrates the importance of organisations recognising the prevalence of bullying and developing comprehensive preventative and intervention initiatives.

The SLR technique is important in workplace bullying research because it is a methodical, rigorous, and transparent way to collect and assess journals related to a particular subject or object (Tranfield et al., 2003). The SLR are more effective than standard narrative reviews in minimising researcher bias and facilitating the replication of findings in future studies (Sokolov et al., 2022). The SLR also facilitates the detection of shortcomings in previous research and helps to build a thorough understanding of the subject area (Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2019).

The SLR techniques are based on robust and reliable data while reducing bias by conducting a thorough literature search of published research. In the context of workplace bullying research, where the sensitivity and complexity of the issue

require a careful approach, an SLR provides an appropriate framework for collating meaningful and significant findings in the domain (Pickering et al., 2014).

This research uses the Scopus index to access previously published SLR due to its broad database coverage and reputation for indexing high-quality journals. Scopus is a comprehensive electronic database that covers 16,500 peer-reviewed journals in the scientific, technical, medical, and social sciences, including over 18,000 articles from over 5,000 international publishers. Scopus provides access to a wide array of academic literature, including systematic reviews, allowing thorough searches and identification of relevant studies for inclusion in their SLR. Scopus characteristic is crucial for conducting a rigorous and comprehensive review of the existing literature on workplace bullying. In addition, Scopus offers advanced search functions and citation-tracking features to identify key studies and tracking the impact of previous systematic reviews in the field (Sulardja, 2021).

This study aims to systematically synthesise and integrate existing research on workplace bullying, providing an overview of its concept, prevalence, impact, and interventions. By analysing findings from various studies, this research identifies key topics, trends, gaps, and emerging directions in the literature. Additionally, this research explores future avenues by proposing new methodologies and interventions to enhance understanding and address unanswered questions. Thus, this study is guided by two research questions.

RQ1: What does the literature suggest about the concept and current research on workplace bullying?

RQ2: What possibilities exist for future research to expand and develop the literature in this domain?

Literature review

Definition of workplace bullying

Numerous terms characterise the phenomenon of workplace bullying, wherein an employee perceives persistent direct or indirect harassment at work over an extended duration, rendering them incapable of effectively defending themselves (Einarsen, 2000). Einarsen et al. (1994) posited that workplace bullying is defined by ongoing and recurrent negative actions aimed at individuals, leading to direct and indirect adverse effects on victims and the organisation. According to Björkqvist et al. (1994), workplace bullying is defined as a recurrent behaviour intended to cause psychological (and occasionally physical) harm to one or more individuals who, for various reasons, are unable to defend themselves.

Factors affecting workplace bullying

Some individual and organisational factors cause workplace bullying. Individual variables include traits that may cause workplace bullying. Numerous studies have linked certain personality traits to bullying. Dark personality qualities are like narcissism and psychopathy, increase bullying. Conscientiousness,

friendliness, extraversion, and openness to experience are linked to lower workplace bullying rates (Kivimäki et al., 2003). Low self-esteem, confidence, and assertiveness may increase workplace bullying risk. Individually, abuser's and victim's personalities can contribute to bullying and victimisation. Numerous variables may contribute to the victim's lack of coping strategies and mental and behavioural responses to the alleged mistreatment. Relationship dynamics and interactions between the accused and the victim are the focus. Bullying requires a power imbalance (Attell et al., 2017).

Several factors in workplace culture and environment can contribute to workplace bullying. Quine (2001) found that the lack of comprehensive bullying prevention regulations and processes can perpetuate bullying. Corporate culture and climate also matter greatly. A toxic workplace with excessive competitiveness, limited support, and poor communication promotes bullying. Companies with hierarchical structures and little monitoring may also have power imbalances, which can lead to workplace bullying (Hauge et al., 2010). Workplace bullying has also been linked to job demands, resources, company reorganisation, and leadership quality (Conway et al., 2021).

The relationship between individual and corporate characteristics is crucial because one can affect the other (Anderson et al., 2008; Jiménez et al., 2009). Individuals with specific personality traits may be more likely to engage in workplace bullying in a company culture that condones it (Fernández-del-Río et al., 2021; Wilson & Nagy, 2017). In a hierarchical organisation with few resources, low self-esteem may increase the risk of workplace bullying (Jiménez et al., 2009). Organisations must understand these individual and corporate factors to prevent and reduce workplace bullying (Bryant et al., 2009). Addressing individual and organisational aspects may create a secure and respectful workplace that promotes excellent relationships and well-being (Baillien et al., 2009; Jang et al., 2024; Rousseau et al., 2014; Stapinski et al., 2023).

Consequences of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying can have severe consequences for victims and employers. Numerous studies have linked workplace bullying to cardiovascular illness, depression, anxiety, and poor well-being (Kivimäki et al., 2003). According to Baillien et al. (2009), workplace bullying can raise stress, fear, and emotional weariness. Kivimäki et al. (2003) found that continuous bullying may lower mental health and raise cardiovascular disease risk. Additionally, workplace bullying can reduce job satisfaction, performance, and development opportunities (Sims et al., 2012). Victims may also feel social isolation, low self-esteem, and insecurity. Workplace bullying can affect relationships and well-being outside of work (Attell et al., 2017).

Research method

The SLR is a method used to address a specific research topic. This approach seeks to include all relevant published evidence on a particular issue and assess the quality of that evidence. This strategy ensures that the review process is methodical and transparent, which is essential for maintaining the integrity of the research (Lame, 2019). In addition, an SLR is beneficial for detecting poorly understood topics, explaining complex ideas, and examining research practices, making it an appropriate approach for addressing many research questions and objectives (Munn et al., 2018). Moreover, it is used to build a scientific amalgamation to answer specific questions, providing a thorough understanding of a particular subject or field of study (Ourzik, 2022).

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) offers principles for conducting systematic reviews and meta-analyses, which ensure transparency and rigour in describing the review process (Moher et al., 2009). This methodology facilitates a systematic search and selection procedure of scientific publications, thereby increasing the reliability of the review process (Muñoz-La Rivera et al., 2021). Furthermore, the SLR method includes various stages, such as formulating a research question, developing a search strategy, selecting relevant studies, extracting data, and synthesising findings (Siriani et al., 2019).

An SLR is a comprehensive way to collect and harmonise the latest knowledge on a particular research topic. This approach follows clear rules and uses well-known methods, such as the PRISMA, to ensure that the results are transparent, accurate, and repeatable. The SLR can facilitate a better understanding of a particular topic by systematically investigating, evaluating, and summarising all available sources of information to create better decisions, improve existing practices, and determine the direction of future research.

This study determined the criteria for journals used as the study material, which are: (1) journal publication year is not more than 5 years starting from 2019 to 2023; (2) using English language; (3) filtering subject areas into business, management, and accounting, and arts and humanities; (4) filtering document type into article; (5) filtering the journals used only quartile 1 (Q1) based on Scopus quartile index. Setting some criteria for the study materials is intended to ensure that the reviewed articles are pertinent and capable of addressing the research questions that have been posed.

Literature search

Journal filtering involves identification, screening, eligibility, and including. (1) Identification. Initial Scopus searches were undertaken to find relevant papers. This research uses the following keywords: "workplace bullying", "workplace", "bullying", and "systematic review", and there are 3524 journals or articles published on Scopus. (2) First-stage screening. The first screening followed

identification. Subject area, document type, and language were used to screen the identified articles. This screening found 441 articles that satisfied the initial criteria. (3) Second-stage Screening. A second screening focused the search on articles published from 2019 to 2023. This ensures that the study is current and relevant. This screening yielded 177 time-appropriate articles. (4) Eligibility. The next step is the Scopus quartile index article eligibility evaluation. Only Q1-quartile articles were evaluated due to their superior quality and relevance. After screening, 135 articles remained. (5) Including. The third stage involved reassessing the remaining publications for research relevance. Articles from inaccessible journals or unrelated to the research theme were eliminated. In the end, 40 articles were selected for the study.

After this filtering process, only high-quality and relevant articles should be used in the review. The procedure for screening the articles to be reviewed is depicted in Figure 1. This study follows the PRISMA method as guidance.

Study quality assessment

This study searched online for previous journals about workplace bullying on Scopus. The search was conducted in December 2023. This review focuses on workplace bullying studies from 2019 to 2023 because continuing research using the SLR regarding previous workplace bullying has been carried out by [Feijó et al. \(2019\)](#).

Scopus articles with a Q1 rating, which is the highest, have high credibility among scholars, researchers, and specialists. This step is crucial because Q1 journals are known for their high-quality review process, ensuring the reliability and validity of the published research ([Huang et al., 2023](#)). By prioritising articles from Q1 journals, journals can be more trusted with the methodological rigour, quality, and impact of their published systematic reviews. These selection criteria help maintain standards of excellence in the field and ensure that the systematic reviews in these reputable journals contribute significantly to existing knowledge on workplace bullying and other relevant topics. Table 1 outlines the number of Q1 journal articles used as review material and the names of the journals. Most of the journals were published in the field of organisational behaviour and human resource management.

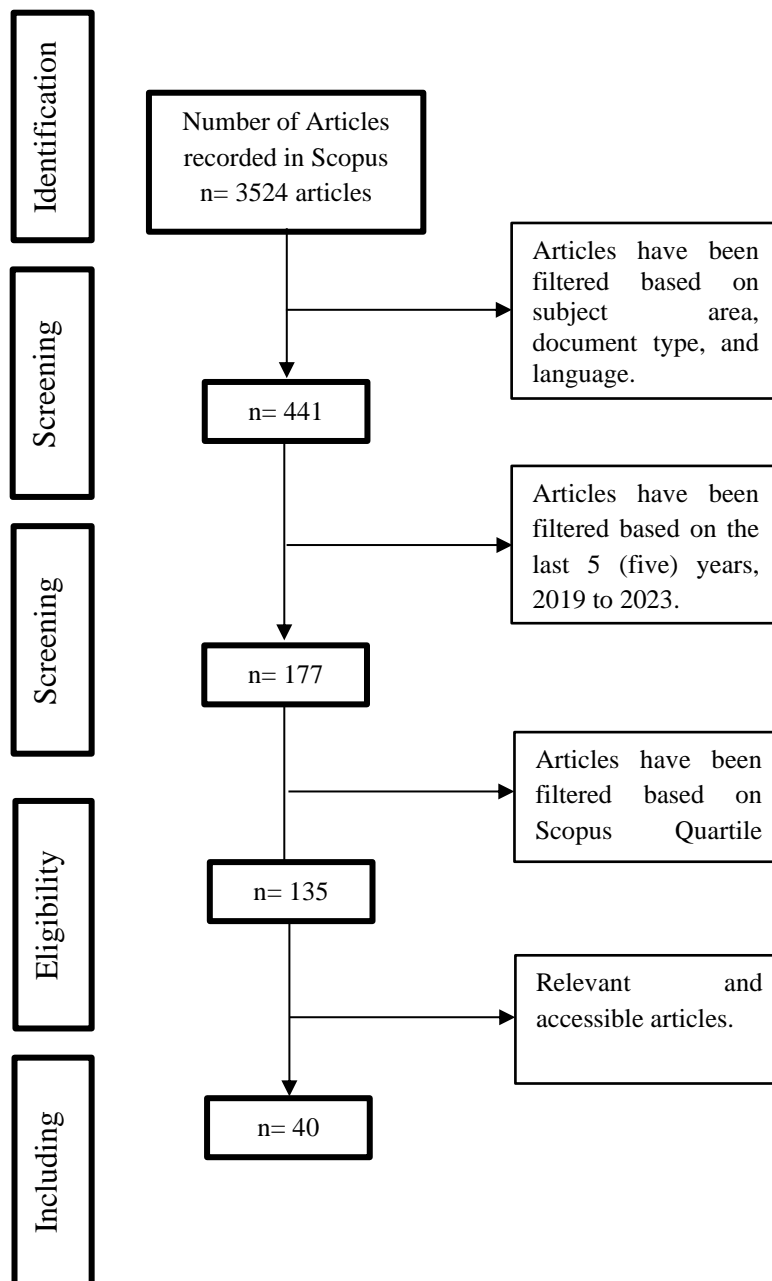
Results

The results presented are based on the research question (RQ1) addressed in this study. The results reflect information on the development of academic publications, theoretical lenses, methodological applications, antecedents and consequences, and future research directions of workplace bullying as identified by previous research. Appendix 1 shows journals published in Scopus regarding workplace bullying. The publication shows that workplace bullying research interest started since 1997. Initially, there were only a few publications related to

workplace bullying, though this number increased in 2019 despite fluctuating; the highest number of publications was in 2023. Hence, this study focuses on the last five years of published research (2019-2023).

Figure 1.

Preferred reporting items for systematic review (PRISMA) screening method



Source: Authors' work (2024)

Workplace bullying research context

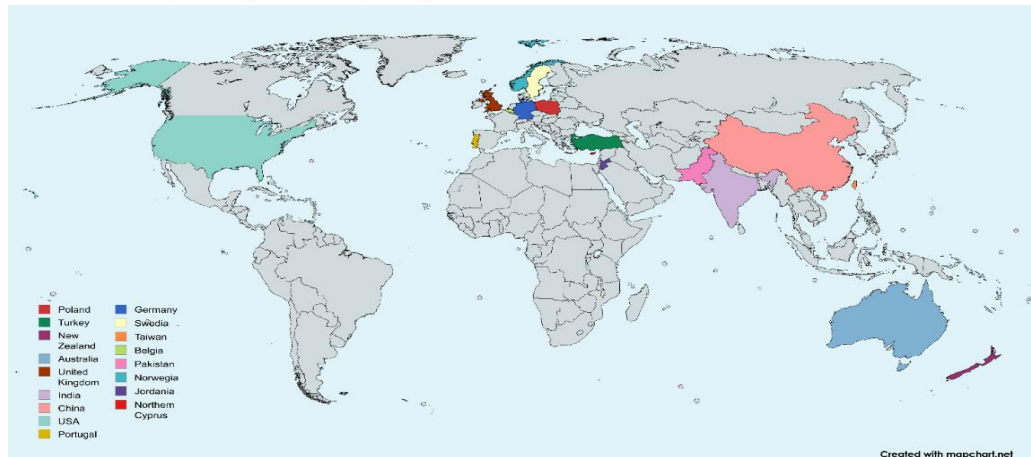
From the results of the SLR in Figure 2, the distribution of publications on workplace bullying is spread across 17 countries, and 3 publications did not explain where the research data was taken. Of the 40 journals reviewed in this study, the countries that conducted research and published journals on workplace bullying the most are India, as many as 15% (n=6), Pakistan, and Australia, as many as 13% each (n=5). Sweden, the United States of America, and journals that do not indicate the publishing country were 8% (n=3). Lastly, Turkey, China, and the United Kingdom researched workplace bullying as many as 5% (n=2).

In this study, India made the largest contribution to research and journal publications on workplace bullying, presenting 15% (n=6). In contrast, Poland, New Zealand, Belgium, Jordan, Taiwan, Northern Cyprus, Portugal, Germany, and Norway have the lowest contribution with only 3% (n=1) each. Thus, this research context in Asia or other developing countries is still under-explored concerning the phenomenon of workplace bullying. This represents a recommendation for further research.

Moreover, the results can be classified in the field sector used as an object in research on workplace bullying. From the 40 journals reviewed in this study, the population used in employees in various companies is the most frequently used research object by researchers by 37.5% (n=15), then hotel workers are the second most used research object by previous researchers 12.5% (n=5), followed by the health sector 10% (n=4), for university workers or faculty members, home-based workers, workers in government, and service companies each sector has been carried out previous research as much as 5% each (n=2) research. Then, for working students, top management, IT companies, catering companies, women's staff, insurance companies, clothing factories, the LGBT community, the restaurant industry, construction companies, and military college each have conducted research on workplace bullying once or 2.5%.

Figure 2.

Distribution of workplace bullying publications in various countries



Source: Authors' work (2024)

Table 1.

List of journal outlets

Journal name	Number of articles
International Journal of Conflict Management	7
Management Research Review	1
Group and Organisation Management	1
International Journal of Emerging Markets	1
Journal of Knowledge Management	1
Employee Relations	3
Personnel Review	4
Journal of Leadership & Organisational Studies	1
International Journal of Manpower	1
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1
The Service Industries Journal	1
The International Journal of Human Resource Management	3
Gender Work and Organisation	1
Journal of Business Ethics	2
Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal	1
Work, Employment and Society	1
Management Research Review	1
Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources	2
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	1
Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems	1
Construction Management and Economics	1
European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology	1
Work and Occupations	1
European Management Journal	1
International Journal of Hospitality Management	1
Total articles	40

Source: Authors' work (2024)

Theoretical lenses applied

The articles analysing workplace bullying are examined through various underpinning theories, including job stress theory (52.5%), leadership theory (20%), social conflict theory (15%), dark tetrad personality theory (5%), social exchange theory (25%), organisational citizenship behaviour (2.5%), workplace well-being theory (10%), organisational behaviour theory (10%), social justice theory (10%), social interaction theory (2.5%), Marxist theory (2.5%), and cognitive appraisal theory (2.5%).

Job stress theory

Stapinski et al. (2023), Singh et al. (2023), Bari et al. (2023), Vincent et al. (2023), Maheshwari et al. (2023), Rosander et al. (2023), Anasori et al. (2023), Kara et al. (2023), Suskind (2023), De Clercq et al. (2022), Chen et al. (2022), Djurkovic et al. (2022), Chaudhary et al. (2022), Blomberg et al. (2022), Rosander et al. (2022), Ahmad et al. (2021), Djurkovic et al. (2021), Rainey et al. (2021), Ågotnes et al. (2021), Krishna et al. (2023), and Said et al. (2021) used job stress theory which is integral to the article's paradigm, as it analyses the impact of workplace stressors, such as role stress and bullying, on employee outcomes.

Occupational stress theory may elucidate how bullying and breaches of the psychological contract generate workplace stress, potentially affecting individual behaviours, such as knowledge concealment as a coping strategy or reaction to perceived pressure.

Leadership theory

Stapinski et al. (2023), Khan et al. (2023), Ababneh et al. (2023), Kara et al. (2023), Kim et al. (2023), Suskind (2023), Djurkovic et al. (2021), and Rainey et al. (2021) used leadership theory. This hypothesis elucidates how leadership roles might buffer or influence the relationship between role stress and workplace bullying. Inadequate or unsupportive leadership can exacerbate role stress and create an environment conducive to workplace bullying, whereas supportive leadership can alleviate the adverse effects of role stress and diminish the likelihood of bullying.

Social conflict theory

Tootell et al. (2023), Ababneh et al. (2023), Ekmekcioglu et al. (2023), Yanson et al. (2022), Patel et al. (2022), and Ågotnes et al. (2021) used certain elements of social conflict theory are employed to comprehend conflicts and disputes that emerge within organisations, particularly concerning bullying and organisational dissent. This theory posits that disparities in power and conflicts among individuals or organisations can generate tensions that incite bullying or dissent.

Dark tetrad personality theory

Khan et al. (2023) and Suskind (2023) used dark tetrad personality theory. The dark tetrad is a construct that amalgamates four psychological qualities linked to manipulative and antisocial conduct: narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and sadism. Previous research employs this theory to analyse how the amalgamation of these personality qualities can affect an individual's inclination to perpetrate workplace bullying behaviour. Individuals exhibiting qualities of the dark tetrad are more inclined to partake in actions that inflict emotional or psychological harm on others.

Social exchange theory

Vranjes et al. (2023), Ma et al. (2023), Rosander et al. (2023), Kara et al. (2023), Kim et al. (2023), Ribeiro et al. (2022), Noronha et al. (2022), Borg et al. (2022), Rosander et al. (2022), and Ahmad et al. (2021) used social exchange theory. This theory elucidates how reciprocal exchanges shape social interactions in the workplace. This theory posits that harmful behaviours, such as bullying, can adversely impact an individual's connections and reputation, subsequently leading to bad treatment from colleagues or superiors. When individuals engage in bullying,

they may generate social tension that ultimately rebounds upon them, resulting in their victimisation in the future.

Organisational citizenship behaviour

Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) elucidates how individuals inside organisations engage in actions that enhance the overall functioning of the organisation, despite these actions not being explicitly outlined in their formal jobs. OCB denotes discretionary behaviours that are not mandated by job requirements, including assisting colleagues or fostering a positive workplace environment (Mendiratta et al., 2023).

Workplace well-being theory

Ahmad et al. (2023), Ekmekcioglu et al. (2023), Maheshwari et al. (2023), and Ma et al. (2023) used workplace well-being theory, which emphasises the establishment of a work environment conducive to individuals' emotional and psychological well-being. In this context, servant leadership and empathy are crucial in fostering a climate that promotes employee well-being and mitigates problems such as bullying. Employees who perceive themselves as respected, heard, and supported generally experience heightened safety and comfort, hence diminishing the incidence of workplace bullying.

Organisational behaviour theory

Suskind (2023), De Clercq et al. (2022), Yao et al. (2022), and Chen et al. (2022) used organisational behaviour theory to examine the interactions of individuals and groups within organisations and the impact of social, psychological, and structural factors on workplace conduct. This hypothesis elucidates the influence of psychopathic behaviour in the workplace on group dynamics, organisational decision-making, and detrimental workplace conduct. Individuals with psychopathic traits in positions of authority frequently exert detrimental effects on social relationships and workplace dynamics, manifesting as manipulation, intimidation, and sabotage.

Social justice theory

Jaakson et al. (2023), Ahmed et al. (2022), Noronha et al. (2022), and Patel et al. (2022) used social justice theory emphasises the tenets of equity and equality within a community or organisation. This theory elucidates how injustices stemming from age, gender, or ethnic discrimination can heighten tensions and intensify bullying dynamics within the workplace. Discrimination against specific groups engenders power imbalances and results in injustices that can deteriorate the work environment and incite bullying behaviours.

Social interaction theory

Shafaei et al. (2023) used social interaction theory to examine the impact of interpersonal relationships inside the workplace on employee behaviour. Inclusive leadership can foster favourable social dynamics by alleviating tension and encouraging healthy interactions among employees, diminishing the probability of bullying. Inclusive leadership fosters a climate conducive to open communication and collaboration, diminishing the likelihood of bullying.

Marxist theory

Ahmed et al. (2022) used Marxist theory frequently employed to analyse how power dynamics and disparities within organisations or sectors can lead to the exploitation of labourers. Within this journal's framework, Marxism elucidates that the escalation of labour surveillance and workplace harassment stems from the imbalanced power dynamics between employees and capital proprietors. This thesis elucidates how workplace bullying and heightened control over supply chain workers serve as mechanisms for firms to exert dominance and optimise earnings by minimising production expenses.

Cognitive appraisal theory

Majeed et al. (2021) used the theory of cognitive appraisal. This concept posits that stress arises not just from external events, such as bullying, but also from an individual's perception of the situation. This theory comprises two primary steps of evaluation, i.e., primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal involves individuals assessing whether an incident or circumstance is perceived as threatening, frightening, or challenging. The primary factor that will influence whether an individual perceives the bullying they endure at work as threatening is their principal evaluation. Perceptions of bullying as perilous vary across individuals, contingent upon their viewpoints. However, secondary appraisal involves individuals assessing their capacity to manage the stressful situation. Individuals may not perceive bullying as a significant threat if they believe they possess adequate resources or assistance to address it. This is valid even if others perceive the situation as distressing. Bullying is perceived as a significant threat when individuals believe they lack the resources to confront it.

Methodological Application

Eighty percent of the reviewed articles used quantitative research methods (n=32), while twenty percent employed qualitative research methods (n=8). Scholars have largely overlooked the use of mixed-methods research or multilevel analyses, and it may be a worthwhile avenue for future research.

Discussion

Antecedents of workplace bullying

Figure 3 shows the framework of antecedents and consequences of workplace bullying. Many factors influence workplace bullying, each contributing to its occurrence in various forms. Role stress, caused by ambiguous or conflicting job demands, can be a stressor for workplace bullying, as stressed individuals may lash out at others (Stapinski et al., 2023; Shafaei et al., 2023). When combined with the dark tetrad personality traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism), individuals are more prone to manipulative and aggressive behaviour. Although disagreements are a healthy part of organisational communication, they can escalate into workplace bullying if not managed well (Khan et al., 2023).

Disagreement with organisational policies, methods, or corporate culture can lead to bullying enactment. The correlation between employee dissatisfaction or disagreement with certain organisational elements and adverse interactions, such as workplace bullying, was examined (Tootell et al., 2023; Vranjes et al., 2023).

Workplace bullying increasingly complicates the work environment, whether directly (overt hostility) or indirectly (social isolation and rumour spreading). Previous research examined how the breach of the relational psychological contract may be the mechanism underlying the relationship between individual-related harassment behaviours and knowledge-hiding behaviours (Bari et al., 2023).

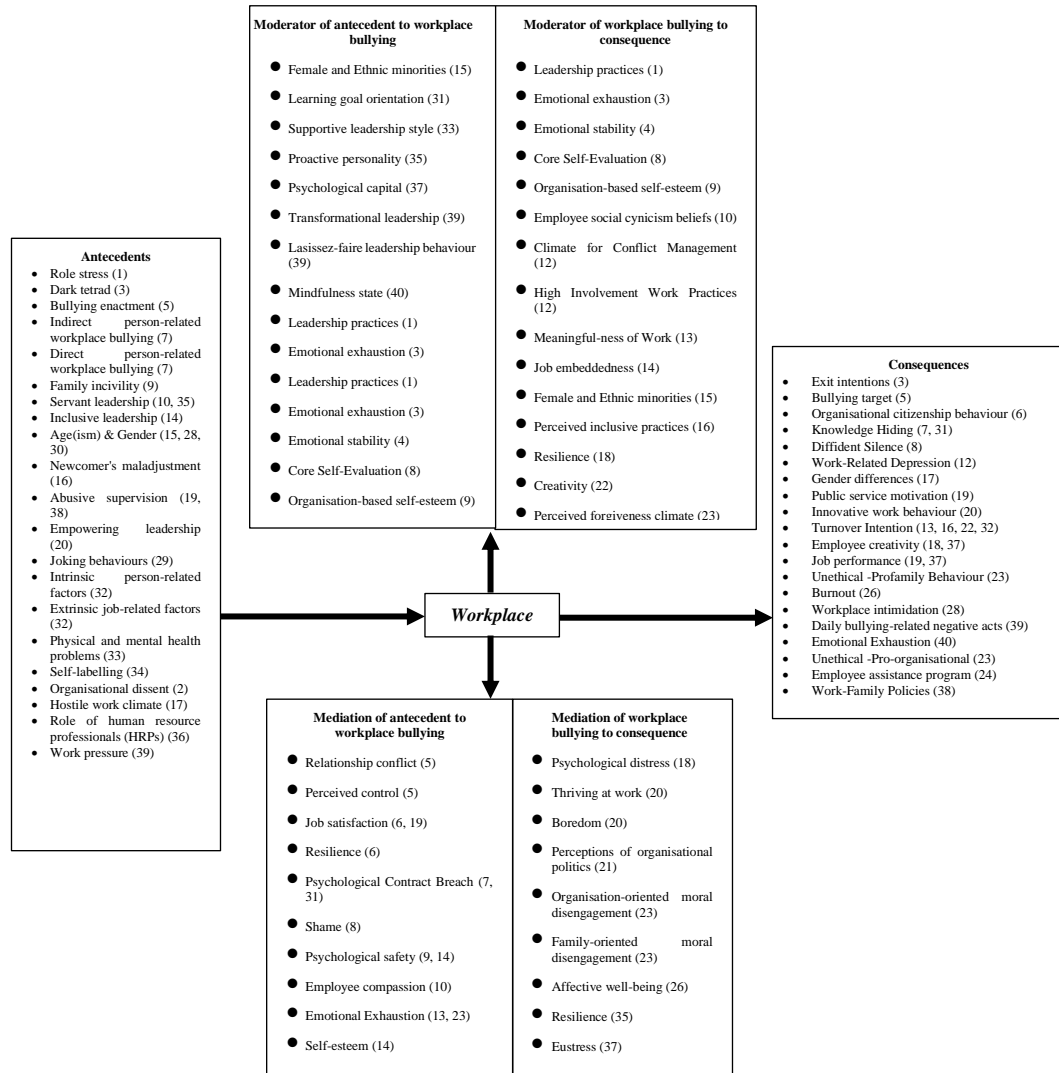
Incivility at home can spill over into the workplace, exacerbating tensions. In addition, family incivility also plays a role as a factor in the emergence of workplace bullying. Previous research analysed how psychological characteristics, including psychological safety, optimism, and organisation-based self-esteem, influence the relationship between family injustice and workplace bullying as moderators and mediators (Vincent et al., 2023).

Positive leadership styles, such as servant and inclusive leadership, can dramatically reduce the harms of bullying by building a culture of mutual respect and support (Stapinski et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2023; Shafaei et al., 2023). On the contrary, transformational leadership cannot reduce the impact of job stress on bullying; laissez-faire leadership exacerbates it. The laissez-faire leadership style has harmful effects in high-pressure situations and increases the likelihood of adverse actions associated with bullying (Ågotnes et al., 2021). This corroborates the hypothesis that inadequate work environments and leadership can promote bullying. Ageism may also play a role, where bias against certain age groups leads to targeted workplace bullying (Jaakson et al., 2023). Workplace bullying can result from newcomer's maladjustment and a generally unpleasant work environment, as well as poor supervision, where power dynamics are utilised to "scare" subordinates (Ma et al., 2023; Kara et al., 2023; Rainey et al., 2021). Workplace bullying can be prevented by empowering leadership that develops a sense of autonomy and respect. While seemingly harmless, joking can sometimes cross the line into

workplace bullying, primarily if the behaviour is targeted or malicious (Kim et al., 2023).

Figure 3.

Framework antecedents and consequences of workplace bullying



Source: Authors' work (2024)

Intrinsic person-related factors, such as personality qualities, and extrinsic work-related factors, such as work environment and job duties, are essential in developing workplace bullying behaviour. Due to power imbalances, workplace bullying perpetrated by supervisors or workplace bullying from individuals in authority can be particularly damaging (Borg et al., 2022). Rosander et al. (2023) emphasised that a hostile work environment can facilitate workplace bullying. The correlation between workplace bullying and developing feelings of insecurity and discomfort in the work environment was examined. This, in turn, can intensify the presence of a hostile work environment.

Finally, human resource professionals are essential in preventing and responding to workplace bullying by formulating effective policies, awareness programs, and intervention measures. Each of these underlying factors, either separately or together, contributes to the diverse nature of workplace bullying and emphasises the importance of comprehensive solutions to manage and mitigate it (Djurkovic et al., 2021).

Moderator of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying is a multifaceted issue and can be mitigated by various factors, thus creating a buffer or vulnerability to the behaviour. Attachment to work, for example, refers to the extent to which employees feel connected to their workplace through relationships and perceived fit; higher levels of attachment may reduce the likelihood of workplace bullying because employees feel more integrated with the organisation (Shafaei et al., 2023). Gender and ethnicity also play a role; women and ethnic minorities may experience workplace bullying differently due to societal biases and stereotypes, thus requiring targeted interventions (Jaakson et al., 2023).

Perceived inclusive practices within an organisation can significantly reduce bullying by fostering a culture of acceptance and diversity. Resilience, an individual's ability to cope with stress and adversity, is a personal buffer against the impact of workplace bullying. Similarly, creativity can provide an outlet for expression and problem-solving, thereby reducing the impact of negative interactions in the workplace (Ma et al., 2023).

A perceived forgiveness climate, where mistakes are viewed as opportunities to learn rather than failures, can reduce the likelihood of retaliatory behaviour that often manifests as workplace bullying. A learning goal orientation, which emphasises growth and skill development, can shift the focus from interpersonal conflict to personal and professional development (Yao et al., 2022).

Leadership styles are crucial in determining the atmosphere of workplace interactions. Supportive leadership styles which prioritise employee's well-being can create a protective environment against bullying. Psychological capital, which includes self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism, equips employees with the mental resources to deal with or counteract bullying (Blomberg et al., 2022).

The cognitive appraisal theory of stress provides a paradigm for understanding how individuals evaluate and react to workplace bullying. Previous research emphasises the importance of psychological capital, which includes components such as hope, optimism, resilience, and self-confidence, in influencing how individuals perceive and deal with workplace bullying (Majeed et al., 2021).

Emotional exhaustion can amplify the impact of workplace bullying, as exhausted employees are less likely to cope effectively with negative interactions. Emotional stability, which is part of the Big Five personality traits, can reduce the

impact of bullying, so individuals with more stable emotions are less affected (Said et al., 2021; Maheshwari et al., 2023).

Core self-evaluation, which includes self-esteem, self-efficacy, and emotional stability, influences how one perceives and reacts to workplace bullying. High levels of optimism can buffer the negative impact of workplace bullying by fostering a positive outlook (Krishna et al., 2023). Organisation-based self-esteem, which reflects how much value and respect a person feels within their organisation, can reduce the impact of bullying, with higher self-esteem providing stronger protection. Employees' social cynicism beliefs, or scepticism of social norms and institutions, can exacerbate or reduce the perception and impact of workplace bullying based on how these beliefs affect trust and workplace interactions (Ahmad et al., 2021). Employees' beliefs about social cynicism can influence the dynamics of workplace bullying. The role of servant leadership and compassion in managing and preventing cases of workplace bullying, was analysed with a focus on how employee social cynicism beliefs can trigger or reinforce factors for workplace bullying (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Workplace bullying can significantly influence employees' psychological well-being, productivity, and creative capacity. Psychological resilience can moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and its consequences, including psychological distress, work performance, and employee creativity. This emphasises mental resilience's important role in mitigating workplace bullying's adverse effects. This magazine offers a comprehensive exploration of how psychological resilience can play an important role in reducing the negative impact of workplace bullying on employees' mental well-being and performance (Anasori et al., 2023; De Clercq et al., 2022).

The climate for conflict management, which determines how conflicts are handled in an organisation, can increase or decrease workplace bullying tendencies. Finally, high-involvement work practices, which involve employees deeply in their roles and work meaningfulness, where employees find purpose and value in their tasks, can serve as significant moderators by increasing job satisfaction and engagement, thus potentially reducing the occurrence or impact of workplace bullying (Ekmekcioglu et al., 2023).

Mediation of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying is a complex issue that can be affected by several psychological and organisational elements, which influence its occurrence and impact. Interpersonal conflict and tension can develop into workplace bullying behaviour. Therefore, relationship conflict is an important mediator. Perceived control, or the extent to which employees believe they have autonomy and influence over their work, can reduce the impact of bullying; more vital perceived control is often correlated with a lower impact of misbehaviour. Job satisfaction is also essential for protecting the relationship between workplace dynamics and

workplace bullying, as happy employees are less likely to engage in or be affected by workplace bullying (Kara et al., 2023; Mendiratta et al., 2023).

Workplace bullying can be reduced or suppressed by resilience, or the ability to recover from stress, which gives individuals the strength to cope with and recover from unpleasant encounters (Mendiratta et al., 2023). Relational psychological contract breach, or the belief that an employer fails to keep its promises, can magnify the impact of workplace bullying by undermining trust and loyalty in the workplace. Shame is a powerful mediator because bullying can lead to feelings of shame, which can magnify the impact of bullying (Krishna et al., 2014).

Psychological safety, or the feeling that one can express oneself without fear of repercussions, is an essential mediator in workplace bullying. Workplace bullying has less impact when psychological safety is high (Shafaei et al., 2023; Vincent et al., 2023). Employee compassion, defined as the ability and willingness of employees to empathise and help each other, can help reduce the intensity and consequences of workplace bullying by building a supportive and compassionate work environment (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Workplace bullying can cause and exacerbate emotional exhaustion, a state of feeling tired and emotionally exhausted, leading to a vicious cycle of stress and burnout (Maheshwari et al., 2023). Another mediator is self-esteem; those with better self-esteem may be less affected by workplace bullying or less likely to engage in workplace bullying (Shafaei et al., 2023). Psychological distress, such as symptoms of anxiety and depression, may reduce the impact of workplace bullying, and greater levels of distress will increase harmful consequences (Anasori et al., 2023). Thriving at work, where people feel alive and learning, can help offset the consequences of workplace bullying by encouraging positive engagement and growth. Employees who are not actively engaged or challenged may be more prone to suffering or perpetrating workplace bullying, which can be caused by boredom (Kim et al., 2023).

Workplace bullying can be reduced by perceptions of organisational politics or how power and influence are managed and used. Workplace bullying may be more widespread and damaging if politics is viewed negatively (De Clercq et al., 2022). Emotional exhaustion and organisation-oriented moral disengagement may act as a buffer between workplace conditions and workplace bullying, and a lack of moral control could lead to greater workplace bullying behaviour. Family-oriented moral disengagement, where people disengage ethically in family-related decision-making, may also affect how people interact at work (Yao et al., 2022).

Affective well-being, or the general emotional state of employees, is an important mediator as it influences how employees perceive and respond to workplace bullying. Breach of the psychological contract, or the belief that the employer is failing to fulfil its responsibilities, might reduce the impact of workplace bullying by influencing employee engagement and loyalty (Ribeiro et al., 2022). Finally, eustress, or positive stress, might modulate the relationship

between difficult working conditions and workplace bullying. Certain levels of positive stress may act as a buffer against the adverse features of difficult working conditions. Each of these mediators contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of workplace bullying and provides potential pathways for intervention and support (Majeed et al., 2021).

Consequences of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying has far-reaching implications, harming the people involved and impacting various organisational performance and employee well-being areas. One of the most obvious consequences is the effect on the target of workplace bullying, which often leads to work-related depression. This severe disorder can interfere with a person's ability to perform efficiently at work and in personal life. This emotional impact often leads to turnover intentions, as affected employees may want to leave their current employer to avoid the bad atmosphere (Singh et al., 2023; Vranjes et al., 2023).

Workplace bullying can lead to decreased OCB, making employees less willing to perform their job duties due to its demoralising impact (Mendiratta et al., 2023). In addition, it can encourage a climate of knowledge hiding, where employees are hesitant to disclose information, perhaps for fear of being targeted. This knowledge hiding can inhibit employee creativity and innovation, essential for organisational growth and adaptation in a dynamic business environment (Bari et al., 2023; Chaudhary et al., 2022).

Another impact is diffident silence, where employees choose not to speak up or share ideas for fear of retaliation or continued harassment. This can hinder organisational progress and problem-solving (Krishna et al., 2023). Work-related depression can reduce the motivation and psychological safety that employees need to take risks and propose new solutions; therefore, innovative work behaviour will also be impaired (Ekmekcioglu et al., 2023).

Gender differences in how people experience and respond to workplace bullying can be profound. For example, the way men and women deal with and perceive bullying may differ, leading to disparities in mental health and job satisfaction (Rosander et al., 2020). Employees' efforts to overcome or comply with perceived organisational standards may increase pro-organisation unethical behaviours, such as breaking the rules for organisational gain (Grabowski et al., 2019; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Zhang et al., 2023). Conversely, pro-family unethical behaviour may arise when employees attempt to reconcile work stress with family duties (Chen et al., 2024; Li et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

Burnout is a severe consequence characterised by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased professional effectiveness. It is often the result of prolonged exposure to workplace bullying (Ribeiro et al., 2022). Workplace bullying can foster an environment of fear and insecurity, thus exacerbating stress

and burnout. Interestingly, work-family policies can either alleviate or enhance the consequences of workplace bullying; supportive policies can provide respite and resources, whereas unfavourable policies can exacerbate employee stress (Rainey et al., 2021).

Finally, workplace bullying can affect coworkers' assessment of employees' inventiveness. Organisations may perceive creative efforts as a risk or threat to the status quo. If workplace bullying persists, it can inhibit innovative thinking and expression. Each of these results highlights the tremendous impact that workplace bullying has, not only on individuals but also on the general health and effectiveness of organisations, making it a key issue for management and policy intervention (Anasori et al., 2023).

Integrated synthesis

This SLR confirms that workplace bullying is a multifaceted issue with profound implications for employees' mental and physical health, as well as overall organisational performance. Manifesting through verbal aggression, social exclusion, and harassment, bullying not only affects direct victims but also creates a toxic work environment that leads to dissatisfaction, disengagement, and higher turnover intentions. Key antecedents such as role stress, dark personality traits (e.g., the Dark Tetrad), and organisational conflict contribute significantly to the emergence of workplace bullying (Stapinski et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023). Conversely, positive organisational climates—characterised by work engagement, inclusive policies, and supportive leadership can serve as protective factors.

The review highlights that both individual and organisational levels play a role in either escalating or mitigating bullying behaviour. For example, relationship conflict, low perceived control, and lack of psychological safety have been found to exacerbate the effects of bullying (Ahmad et al., 2023; Ågotnes et al., 2021; Vincent et al., 2023; Stapinski et al., 2023). Workplace bullying lowers productivity, creativity, and job satisfaction. It can cause burnout and other mental health issues. Thus, this study emphasises the need for effective organisational interventions and management techniques to combat workplace bullying (Anasori et al., 2023; Kara et al., 2023).

According to extensive research, workplace bullying is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a combination of individual, organisational, and environmental factors. Role stress, dark personality features, and organisational policy unhappiness influence bullying. Studies have shown that unclear job expectations and toxic organisational cultures can foster conflict and escalate into bullying if left unaddressed. In contrast, certain moderating factors—such as strong work attachment, inclusive leadership, and a psychologically safe environment—can mitigate these negative behaviours. Supportive leadership has been consistently associated with healthier work environments, while laissez-faire leadership tends to

worsen bullying-related outcomes (Ågotnes et al., 2021; Shafaei et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2023; Blomberg et al., 2022).

Mediating variables such as psychological contract breaches, perceived control, and psychological safety play a vital role in shaping how bullying is perceived and responded to. High levels of burnout and low self-esteem exacerbate the effects of bullying, highlighting the urgent need for mental health interventions in the workplace. In addition to harming individual well-being, bullying significantly impacts organisational performance by reducing organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), stifling innovation, and increasing turnover. Furthermore, gender and ethnic disparities have been identified as amplifiers of bullying experiences, underscoring the importance of implementing diversity-sensitive and targeted interventions (Mendiratta et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the need for comprehensive policies, leadership development programs, and psychological support systems to cultivate a safe and productive work environment (Bari et al., 2023; Vincent et al., 2023; Chaudhary et al., 2022).

Furthermore, a noteworthy outcome of this research is that the majority of preceding studies examining workplace bullying tend to prioritise an examination of the antecedents and consequences at the individual level. This may be attributed to the immediate effects of such occurrences on the victims. Workplace bullying can lead to mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety, diminished productivity, and potential physical ailments. These studies primarily investigate victims' subjective experiences, discern factors that amplify or mitigate the impact, and propose strategies for coping or resistance. The primary reason is that bullying has a more significant impact on individuals. Workplace bullying can diminish morale, elevate turnover rates, and incur financial losses for organisation. Numerous publications demonstrate that bullying adversely impacts people, it is equally important to acknowledge that these effects can be extensive and influence organisational dynamics. A more comprehensive examination of organisations could elucidate this phenomenon. Consequently, there is an opportunity for further research to examine the antecedents and consequences of workplace bullying in cross-level and multilevel research, specifically at the organisational level.

Conclusions, limitations, and future research

This study highlights the serious and multifaceted nature of workplace bullying, which continues to harm both employees and organisational performance. Bullying leads to increased stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, and turnover. These individual effects can significantly undermine productivity, innovation, and employee engagement across organisations. Supportive leadership and inclusive policies are essential to reduce the impact of bullying, whereas passive or disengaged leadership may allow such behaviours to persist.

Despite increasing attention to workplace bullying, several limitations remain in current research. Most studies rely on self-reported data, which may introduce

bias and underreporting. Research often focuses narrowly on individual-level factors, overlooking organisational and contextual influences such as culture, structure, and policy enforcement. Additionally, limited sample diversity and inconsistent cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs make it difficult to compare findings and draw broad conclusions.

Future research should take a more holistic, multilevel approach by examining how organisational and team-level factors influence bullying. Factors such as leadership styles, resilience, psychological capital, and workplace culture need deeper exploration. Studies should also consider how digital transformation and remote work environments affect bullying dynamics. Longitudinal and experimental research designs can help assess causality and the long-term impact of interventions. By broadening the scope and improving methodological rigour, future studies can offer more comprehensive insights and inform more effective anti-bullying strategies in the workplace.

Author contribution

Annisa Savira Alifia: Conceptualisation and Research Design, Data Collection and Analysis, Writing Paper. **Fiona Niska Dinda Nadia:** Conceptualisation and Research Design, Supervision, Validation, Writing Paper. **Nuri Herachwati:** Funding Acquisition, Supervision. **Ansar Abbas:** Editing and Layouting, Writing Paper.

Declaration of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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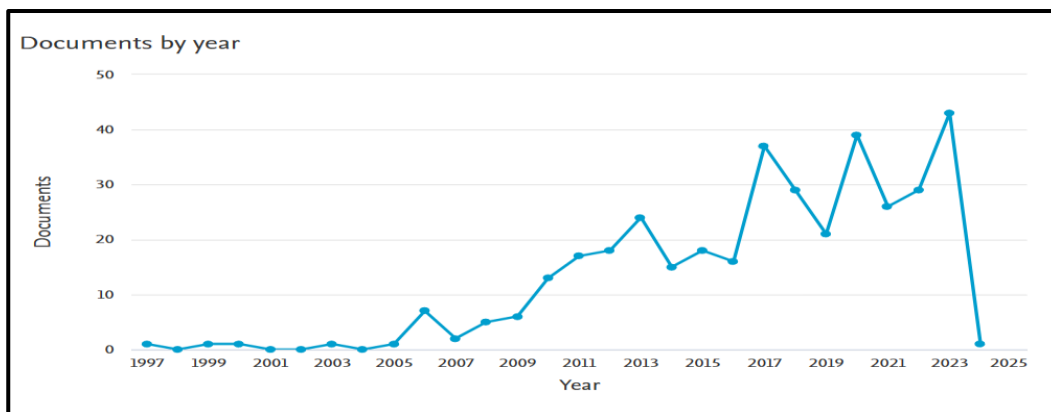
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Appendix 1.

Journal publications on scopus regarding workplace bullying



Source: Authors' work (2024)