

Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying among Faculty in Higher Education: Insights from Private Universities in Pakistan

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Abstract

Bullying at work has emerged as a serious management issue at the higher education tier with an extreme impact on how psychological well-being of the faculty members and the overall effectiveness of the institution. The current research examined the association among bullying, stress and violent behavior among faculty members in Gujranwala and Gujrat district of Pakistan in private universities. Total of 460 faculty members as sampled were surveyed using the Workplace Bullying Scale, Workplace Stress Scale and Clinical Anger Scale. Results revealed that the workplace bullying was positively correlated with workplace stress $r = .53$, $p < .01$ and aggressive behavior $r = .49$, $p < .01$. Moreover, regression analyses showed that workplace bullying also significantly predicted stress $\beta = .55$, $R^2 = .28$ and aggressive behavior $\beta = .45$, $R^2 = .24$ at $p < .001$. results findings also highlighted that bullying is not only prevalent in private universities but also has significant psychological consequences for faculty members in Pakistan. These findings demonstrate the exceptional necessity of introducing anti-bullying strategies by the private higher education institutions, which should be dominant and should concentrate in the delivery of stress management frequent interventions and supportive organizational practices. The management of such workplaces bullying and associated challenges in Pakistani scholastic institutions is essential in addressing the psychological health of faculty due to the enhancement of the institutional culture and quality of the higher education delivery.

Keywords: Bullying at work, Stress, Aggression, Higher Education, Pakistan.

Introduction

Bullying in the workplace has continued to gain grounds and has been noted as a prevalent issue among all other workers in the workplace and where higher education is no exception (Shahzadi & Toor, 2025). It describes common ill will actions, social exclusion and professional

denunciation, which can greatly influence the psychological wellbeing of a person, attitudes to make decisions and work performance (Einarsen et al., 2020). Although, bullying has equally been addressed on a broader scale on healthcare and corporate organizations, the issue has not received much attention on academic organizations, especially in the South Asian society (Shahzadi et al., 2019). A typical aspect of such faculty conditions at these private universities has led to their being largely susceptible to bullying behaviours, given that they commonly encounter numerous work-related stressors in the workplace, such as excessive teaching workload, research opportunities and bureaucratic administrative systems. Working in the private universities especially, they operate within the performance-driven cultures and lack the regulator oversight as a development in the public institutions hence that increases the vulnerability of work-related bullying and other psychological problems (Bukhari et al., 2024, Shahzadi, Arshad, & Akhter, 2024). Work-based bullying involves not only harbouring self-definition but incurring considerable organizational costs, including low value recall, regular absenteeism, low productivity and turnover (Anjum et al., 2019). The effects of these in reduced teaching performance, decreased research productivity and increased work-relationships with their peers and students are clear in case of faculty members in private universities. Similarly, exposure to chronic bullying has also been identified to escalate levels of psychological distress or in most cases reports of aggressive behavior that may in turn worsen the academic overall environment (Saeed et al., 2025). Although the broader association between bullying, stress and aggression in the workplace has been examined among working women in Pakistan, the latter has explicitly given emphasis on how these interrelations can expose themselves in the context of the university environment at the personal level. This research is going to fill this gap by attempting to understand the predictive relationship between stress and aggressive behavior and bullying at the workplace in predicting such behaviors among faculty members in private universities in Pakistan. The topic of workplace bullying in the Education sector has not been new to learners of the field since it is a systematic problem that affects the professional nature of the Peter university of academia. The recent massive bullying training among Pakistani higher education faculty came out exposing that nearly a half of the accused had suffered some sort of workplace bullying with elimination, workload and intimidation being among the among the most common (Bukhari et al., 2024). Internationally, Hollis (2019) stated that almost two-thirds of American faculty members in higher education had met bullying, often in the form of directorial negligence or peer rudeness. In the Pakistani context, Manzoor and Rose (2025) conducted research and highlighted that bullying among university teachers significantly reduced job satisfaction, work productivity and professional commitment that suggesting deep organizational suggestions. These findings always point to a critical concern of any academia, despite its intellectual attitude that is far from immune to hostile work situations (Shahzadi et al., 2019). One of the most frequently stated values of workplace bullying is higher stress. Stress is well-defined as a psychological and physiological response to demanding or bullying situations, and when continuing, it can severely harm health and recital (Berger, 2022). In higher education settings, bullying has been initiating to increase psychological strain, revealing in symptoms such as anxiety, depression, exhaustion and burnout (Shahzadi, Mufti, & Arshad, 2025). A study conducted among

university staff in Punjab confirmed that bullying was positively related with both psychological and physiological stress which in turn condensed self-confidence and job performance (Saeed et al., 2025). Likewise, international research approves that bullying-related stress is a interpreter of absenteeism, income meanings and reduced production (Magee et al., 2017). In private universities, where faculty face additional weights such as contractual diffidence and high-performance potentials the stress induced by bullying may be mainly detrimental. Aggression is another common side effect of workplace bullying. In the workplace, aggression is defined as verbal or behavioral acts designed to damage others, and it frequently manifests as a maladaptive coping technique in reaction to repeated pressures (Shahzadi & Toor, 2025).. According to research, bullying not only causes psychological distress but also prompts aggressive responses, whether directed at coworkers, administrators or even students (Geoffrion et al., 2020). A cross-cultural study exposed that persons who had been bullied were more likely to demonstrate aggressive tendencies, demonstrating the universality of this consequence across professional domains (Denson et al., 2018). Aggression in academia has the likely to harm collegial relationships, impede collaboration, and destroy the learning and mentoring atmosphere. While the prevalence of aggression among lecturers has not been thoroughly researched in Pakistan, global evidence recommends that bullying-induced hostility may represent a severe threat to university procedures. Bullying is becoming more common in academic settings, according to Pakistani research. Ahmad et al. (2021) recommended that Pakistan's high power-distance culture contributes to the perpetuation of workplace bullying because hierarchical norms allow for the misuse of authority. More recent research has revealed its adverse impact on teacher well-being and institutional production (Arooj, Shahzadi & Arshad, 2025). For example, Bukhari et al. (2024) discovered that bullying significantly reduced teacher self-efficacy, with the administrative environment modulating this effect. Bullying was connected to increased stress and emotional tiredness among university instructors in South Punjab, conferring to Saeed et al. (2025), whereas Manzoor and Rose (2025) found a durable negative correlation between work bullying and job satisfaction among Quetta teachers. These scholarly works provide crucial details on the process of bullying within Pakistan academia, yet they have concentrated largely on the state universities, neglected to investigate the competencies of faculty members working in privately-owned universities.

Research Gap

The literature reviewed reveals that workplace bullying is a common and harmful marvel of higher education all over the world and Pakistan. It has been repeatedly linked with the elevated stress levels and, in other scenarios, the violent nature that sabotage the quality of personal health and the productivity of the organization. However, even with the increasing amount of signal, there still remains dearth of experimental studies that would address the sparse acquired traits with respect to Pakistani, one-specifically, private universities. Considering this fact about the rapid development of civilian institutions of higher learning in the national status and the special compressions that faculty undergo in such settings it is most prudent to consider the occurrences of workplace bullying in relation to stress and the resultant aggression among this

population area of concern. Filling this gap will be donating to the creation of specific interventions and policies which will likely be adopted at the promotion of better and more supportive academic communities.

Method

Research Design

The research design utilized in the current study was quantitative and correlational research, to test the association between workplace bullying, stress and aggressive behavior among faculties serving in a private university located in Gujranwala and Gujrat district in Pakistan. This design was selected because it allows for the investigation of relations between variables and the documentation of forecasters without handling of conditions.

Population and Sample

The target population of the study was consisted of faculty members working in different private universities in the districts of Gujranwala and Gujrat, Pakistan. A sample of 460 faculty members was selected using purposive sampling technique and ensuring that those participants met the inclusion criteria of being full-time teaching staff with at least one year of job experience. Faculty from both social sciences and natural sciences departments were included as sample to enhance target representativeness. Visiting and part-time faculty were excluded from the study in order to focus on the practices of full-time academic staff experience.

Instruments

Data were collected using three standardized instruments that have established good reliability and validity in previous researches. Followings were the administered scales,

- **Workplace Bullying Scale.** It was developed by Anjum et al. (2019) including 21-item scale measures the occurrence of bullying behaviors experienced at work. Answers are rated on a 5-point Likert scale 1 = never to 5 = daily and the higher scores indicate greater experience to workplace bullying. Previous studies have stated Cronbach's alpha values above .80, confirming its reliability in organizational contexts.
- **Workplace Stress Scale.** This 8-item scale was developed by The Marlin Company in collaboration with the American Institute of Stress. It measures employees perceived stress associated to workplace conditions. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale 1 = never to 5 = very often. Scores are added to produce an overall degree of stress with higher scores representing greater levels of workplace stress.
- **Clinical Anger Scale.** This scale was developed by Snell et al. (1995) including 21-item self-report measure which assesses the intensity of anger and anger related aggressive tendencies. Each item cluster runs four statements reflecting increasing severity of anger and scored on a 4-point Likert scale like 0–3. The scale yields a total score ranging from 0 to 63 with higher scores brilliant greater levels of aggression. The instrument has been extensively used in both clinical and organizational research with strong internal consistency $\alpha \geq .80$.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was attained from university authorities to approach faculty members in their respective departments. Participants were provided with an informed consent form by ensuring their voluntary participation, confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any stage. After obtaining consent, surveys comprising the demographic form and three standardized scales were dispersed to faculty members in paper-and-pencil format during working hours with their permission. They were informed about the purpose of the study and were given directions on how to complete the scales. Out of 480 distributed questionnaires, 460 were fully completed and returned so the resulting in a response rate of 95.8%.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in agreement with the ethical standards for research involving human participants such as prior to data collection, consent was obtained from the relevant departmental research ethics committees. Permission was also sought from the administrations of the selected private universities in Gujranwala and Gujrat districts to approach respected faculty members. Faculty were fully well-versed about the purpose of the research the voluntary nature of their participation and most of all their right to withdraw at any point without any penalty. Written informed consent was obtained; confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by collecting no identifying information. All data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes. Participants were also sure that their responses would remain private and would not be shared with university administrations.

Results

Table1.

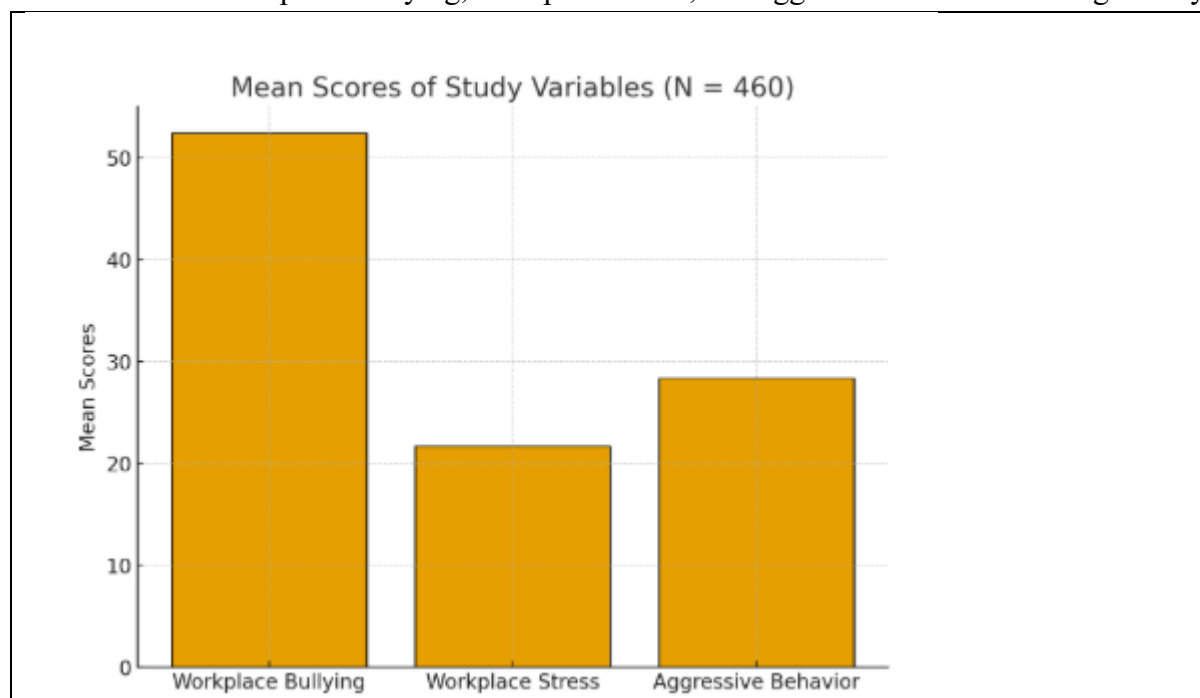
Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	A
Workplace Bullying	52.41	11.37	.82
Workplace Stress	21.68	5.94	.74
Aggressive Behavior	28.34	9.21	.85

The results of table 1 indicated that faculty stated a moderate level of workplace bullying $M = 52.41$, $SD = 11.37$, along with clear levels of workplace stress $M = 21.68$, $SD = 5.94$ and aggressive behavior $M = 28.34$, $SD = 9.21$. Reliability analysis also exposed good internal consistency for all scales with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .74 to .85. These results propose that the measures were statistically reliable and that bullying, stress and aggression were meaningfully present among private university faculty members.

Figure 1

Mean scores of workplace bullying, workplace stress, and aggressive behavior among faculty



The bar chart showed that workplace bullying had the highest mean score $M = 52.41$ as compared to workplace stress $M = 21.68$ and aggressive behavior $M = 28.34$. This also shows that faculty members reported experiencing bullying more often than stress and aggression in private universities.

Table.2

Correlations among Workplace Bullying, Stress, and Aggression (N = 460)

Variable	1	2	3
Workplace Bullying	—		
Workplace Stress	.53**	—	
Aggressive Behavior	.49**	.57**	—

Table 2 findings exposed that workplace bullying was significantly correlated with workplace stress $r = .53$ and with aggressive behavior $r = .49$. In addition, workplace stress verified a strong positive correlation with aggressive behavior $r = .57$. These results also suggested that higher levels of bullying among faculty are steadily linked with greater stress and aggressive inclinations.

Table.3

Regression Analysis of Workplace Bullying as Predictor of Stress

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	P
Workplace Bullying	0.36	0.05	.55	9.65	<.001

$R^2 = .28$, $F(1, 465) = 96.4$

The findings of regression analysis revealed significant prediction of stress at workplace with bullying at the workplace $9.65 p < .001$. The relationship between stress and bullying among the faculty members witnessed a significant predictive variable as workplace bullying explained 28 percent of stress variance $= .28$, $F(1, 465) = 96.4$.

Table.4

Regression Analysis of Workplace Bullying as Predictor of Aggressive Behavior

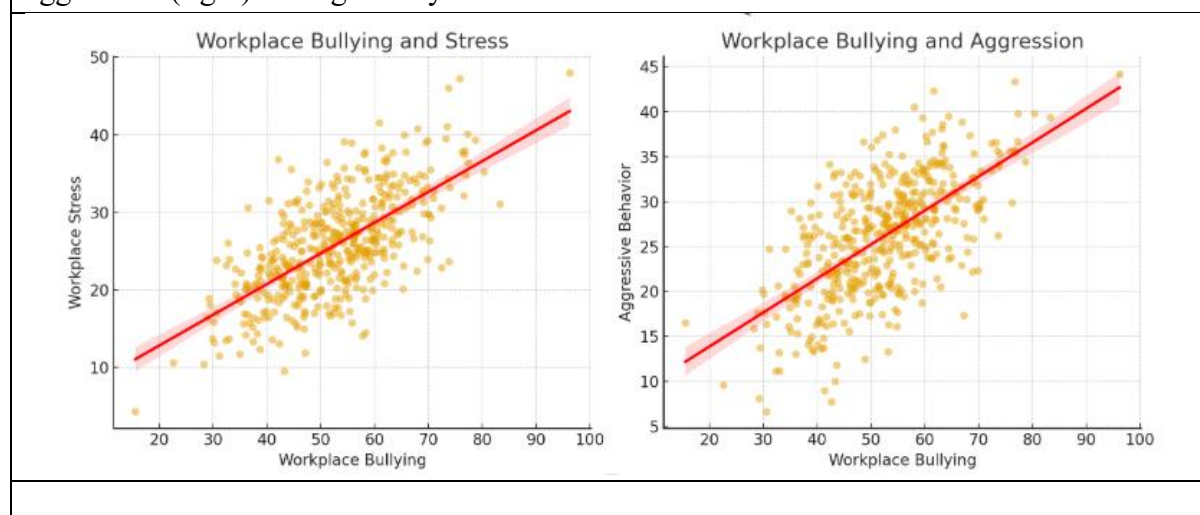
Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	P
Workplace Bullying	0.37	0.06	.45	8.23	<.001

$R^2 = .24$, $F(1, 458) = 65.9$

Table 4 results indicated that workplace bullying significantly predicted aggressive behavior $\beta = .45$, $t = 8.23$, $p < .001$. While workplace bullying explained 24% of the variance in aggression $R^2 = .24$, $F(1, 458) = 65.9$, suggesting that higher exposure to bullying is strongly associated with increased aggressive inclinations among faculty.

Figure 2

Regression lines showing the relationship of workplace bullying with stress (left) and aggression (right) among faculty



These scatterplots show that the workplace bullying had a strong positive relationship with workplace stress and aggressive behavior among faculty members. As bullying scores enlarged, faculty testified higher stress levels $\beta = .55$, $R^2 = .28$ and greater aggressive tendencies $\beta = .45$, $R^2 = .24$. These patterns indicate that bullying serves as a significant predictor of psychological tension and aggression in private university faculty.

Discussion

The current study investigated the impact of workplace bullying on stress and aggressive behavior among faculty members at private colleges. The findings demonstrated that workplace bullying was positively connected with both stress and aggression, and additional regression analyses confirmed that bullying strongly predicted both outcomes. These results can be derived out of prior literature pinpointing workplace as a bullying event as an important psychosocial stressor that alters employee well-being and organizational effectiveness (Einarsen et al., 2020; Bukhari et al., 2024). When applied to the situation involving higher education where academic pressure and administrative ranks were high, these results bring home the sensitivity of the faculty to bullying practices and their adverse consequences (Shahzadi & Toor, 2025). Workplace bullying is associated with stress, which it is correlated with in existing research findings, both globally and specifically, that identify bullying as strong associations of burnout, psychological discomfort, and lower job satisfaction (Magee et al., 2021; Kuusela et al., 2024). Saeed et al. (2025) discovered that bullying added to the growth of psychological pressure and morale decrease in the teachers of government-owned universities in Pakistan. This new research uses the findings to generalize to the area of the applied research about which the study focuses, which includes the impact of the negative effects of the bullying in the environment marked by performance-driven education in the case of the private universities. Not only is the stress of faculty members a threat to their health, faculty stress causes adverse impacts to the quality of teaching performance, per/research output, and peer relationships, which reduces the standards of higher education. It is significant that the conclusion that bullying helps project aggressive behavior was discovered as it demonstrates how faculty could project psychological stress negatively. According to previous studies, the workplace aggressiveness is experienced frequently and can often be attributed to the situation characterized by unfairness, aggression, and insufficient support (Geoffrion et al., 2020; Denson et al., 2018). In the case of scholars in the prestigious universities, such confrontation may undermine working relationships and provoke unfavourable learning conditions among students (Arooj, Shahzadi & Arshad, 2025). These results point to the importance of institutional solutions, including anti-bullying rules, stress management programmes, faculty counselling services, etc, in reducing the harmful effects of bullying. The absence of these safeguards means that the private colleges are prone to pathways of stress and violence that lack positive effects on the well-being of the faculty and organisational culture. The present findings in the Pakistani context emphasize the role of cultural and organizational factors in perpetrating the existence of bullying at workplace in the higher education setting. The collectivist and high power-distance culture common in Pakistan normalizes dominance due to the hierarchy, and an academic finds it difficult to condemn any form of bullying or contact institutional assistance (Ahmad et al., 2021). Studies are done in Pakistani universities where the results show that bullying lowers job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and teacher self-efficacy (Bukhari et al., 2024; Manzoor and Rose, 2025). The faculty in the private universities, where job security tends to be performance-based and contract-related might be more susceptible to bullying and its psychological consequences (Shahzadi, Arshad, & Akhter, 2024). These observations should lead the Pakistani institutions of higher learning to

adopt open regulations, complaints systems, and support systems to reduce bullying and fostering healthier academic practices.

Conclusion

The current study verified the concept that workplace bullying is a significant predictor of stress and aggressive behavior among faculty in private universities of Gujranwala and Gujrat districts. The result findings of the study also exposed that the higher levels of bullying were constantly linked with increased level of stress and aggression or confirming the harmful role of toxic workplace behaviors in academic situations. These results also highlight that the status of addressing workplace bullying as a serious organizational issue in Pakistan's private higher education sector and for the eradication serious actions regarding the policy making and interventions needed.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations as well. First, the data were collected from faculty in private universities of only two districts Gujranwala and Gujrat, which may limit overall the generalizability of the results to other districts of Pakistan. Second, self-report measures tend to create a bias in responding since participants could have under- or even over-reported the frequency of their bullying, stress, and aggression. Third, there is the fact that cross-sectional design may not be able to provide a causal assumption with regard to relationship among variables. When conducting future research, they need to incorporate the idea of employing larger and more diversified, longitudinal designs and also when using qualitative research methods should give in-depth insights regarding the nature of workplace bullying in higher education.

Recommendations

Depending on the results, various recommendations may have been formulated in an attempt to widener the faculty well-being and institutional efficiency. To begin with, the anti-bullying policy needs to be formulated and implemented in private universities to make the environment safe and responsible at work. Second, colleges should put up confidential reporting systems and grievance boards to provide faculty with secured roads to help them address any cases of bullying. Third, workplace compressions that cause stress and counselling programs focused on managing stress among faculty should be introduced to decrease the risk of aggression. Lastly, administrators and departmental heads should also receive leadership training in order to facilitate pro-administrative processes, as well as decrease the hierarchy-related abuse of power by the administrators. The following measures can facilitate the development of a more positive organizational atmosphere, promote faculty efficiency and boost the quality of higher learning in Pakistan.

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