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AND ROMANIAN EMPLOYEES' STRAIN**

Teodora MAIDANIUC-CHIRILA

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The Mediation Role of Resilience on the Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Romanian Employees' Strain

Teodora MAIDANIUC-CHIRILA¹

Abstract

The concept of resilience is understood as a person's capacity to hold up, recover, and come out stronger after facing a situation affecting integrity. The present article aims to verify the mediation role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and strain. A total of 88 Romanian employees participated in the present study by completing online questionnaires referring to workplace bullying, resilience, and strain. The results showed the mediation role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and physical strain in that the direct relationship between workplace bullying and physical strain decreases when resilience is introduced as a mediator. These results showed that those employees who have higher levels of resilience have lower levels of physical strain when they are confronted with workplace bullying behaviours. The findings of the present study can help human resources practitioners improve their anti-bullying programs by developing not only resilient individuals in their workplaces, but also by helping the organization to develop as a resilient company.

Keywords: workplace bullying, resilience, physical strain, mental strain, mediation model

Introduction

Progression of resilience as a concept extends from the 1800s and continues to the present time. During its conceptual development, resilience has been constructed as a trajectory, a continuum, a system, a trait, a process, a cycle, and a qualitative category (Flach, 1980; Rutter, 1985; Jacelon, 1997; Tusaie & Dyer, 2004; Bonanno, 2004 & 2005). The influence of resilience is evident by its reach

¹ Romanian Academy, Iai Branch, ROMANIA. E-mail: chirila.teodora@yahoo.com

across diverse disciplines. In the area of business, resilience is measured by an organization's ability to withstand the impact of any interruption and recuperate while resuming its operations to provide basic services. As evident in most fields, and seen in most typologies, the essence of resilience is described as the ability to bounce back from some form of disruption, stress, or change (Santos, 2013) and applied to the workplace bullying phenomenon, resilience can be understood as being the organization's ability to bounce back from the stress produced by negative bullying acts and to protect the targeted employees by employing useful internal policies. At an individual level, the concept of resilience refers to the capacity composed of the set of personal characteristics and the contexts of development of an individual and the set of internal and external mechanisms when facing adversity (Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Ungar, 2011). Some authors refer to resilience as the ability to respond positively, despite living in challenging or threatening circumstances. This means holding out, facing, and reacting better than expected in a situation of risk, a traumatic event, or adversity affecting the psycho-social integrity of an individual (Brooks, 2006; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1993 & 1995). Applied to workplace bullying phenomenon, resilience can be seen as the victim's ability to hold up, to face, and react better than expected to workplace bullying negative behaviors.

Resilience is a reference framework to describe the positive aspects and mechanisms in an individual, group, material, or system which, when facing a destabilizing and disruptive situation affecting their integrity and stability, enables them to hold up, cope, recover, and come out strengthened by it (Vaquero, Urrea, & Mundet, 2014). From an ecological point of view (Ungar, 2011), the concept of resilience can be used to refer to individual and context characteristics. Also, resilience refers to all the mechanisms used by the internal and external assets when facing adversity. Resilience is a concept related to numerous individual characteristics (abilities, skills, and personal qualities) and multi-systemic (characteristics and qualities of the family, social and cultural environment, where an individual develops, as well as the relationships formed within this context and the individual) (Navarro, 2011). In the present study, resilience is approached on an individual level, being described as the employee's ability to recognize, understand, and better react to workplace bullying acts in order to maintain his motivation and enthusiasm for his work without any major health costs.

The workplace bullying phenomenon

Workplace bullying phenomena has become a real issue in Europe and it is considered to be more prevalent than sexual harassment or racial discrimination (Rayner, 1997). According to an anti-bullying campaign, one in five employees is being verbally aggressed in a repeated and deliberate manner (Namie, 2000). Over the years various definitions have been given to workplace bullying in order to

differentiate it from other types of conflict. According to these definitions workplace bullying is defined as being that situation in which a person perceives herself being intentionally exposed during a longer period of time to repetitive negative acts (Chirila & Constantin, 2013). The aggressed person finds herself in an inferior position from which she can't defend herself anymore (Leymann, 1992; Salin, 2003; Vartia, 2003).

From the perspective of stress theories, bullying is understood as being a social stress factor (Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996), which can cause problems not only for employees but also to the entire organization. These employees experience mental and physical decline and a decrease in their job performance, and the organization will be confronted with legal and financial problems (Rayner & Cooper, 1997). Across time, the workplace bullying literature promoted a series of explanatory theories among which can be mentioned the escalated conflict theory (Glasl, 1982); frustration-aggression theory (Berkowitz, 1989; Fox & Spector, 1999); social interaction theory (Felson & Tedeschi, 1993); the nervous breakdown theory (Wilkie, 1996); stress and emotion theory (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001); and the cognitive model explaining workplace aggression (Beugre, 2005). So far, Beugre's (2005) cognitive theory is the most detailed explanatory model of workplace aggression. According to this model, the workplace bullying behaviors appear as a consequence of a cognitive process of potential benefits and consequences. Between the trigger moment and the displayed behaviors there is a cognitive process step on the facilitating factors existing in the organization. If there are some facilitator factors the cognitive process focus on the costs and benefits of displayed bullying behaviors. If the costs and benefits are rewarding then the workplace bullying behaviors appear.

The role of resilience in case of workplace bullying experiences

Resilience is an adapting dynamic process to the permanent changes existing in the environment in order to maintain a balance between stressors and personal goals achievement (Herman, Steward, Diaz-Granados, Berger, Jackson, & Yuen, 2011; Pipe, Buchda, Launder, Hulvey, Karus, & Pendergast, 2012). The way in which a person responds to environmental stress is unique and requires personal resources, and resilience can be one of these personal resources (Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007; Sauer, 2013). Resilience literature evidences five features of resilience, including: having a meaningful life (i.e., having a purpose), perseverance, equanimity, self-reliance, and existential loneliness (i.e., coming home to yourself) (Wagnild, 2009).

According to Wagnild's (2009) five-feature model, a person is resilient when she has a personal goal in life, when she is determined to fight adversity in order to achieve her goal, when she maintains a balanced perspective on life, and when she uses humor to face life stressors. Moreover, self-reliance refers to the person's

ability to rely on herself in order to achieve her goals. A person with high levels of self-reliance often knows her strengths and weaknesses and efficiently uses these strengths in order to make successful decisions (Wagnild, 2011). Existential loneliness refers to the person's ability to feel good with her own person without having the need to conform to a majority (Wagnild, 2011).

So far the relationship between workplace bullying and resilience has been investigated among nurses, and studies have shown that those nurses who had high levels of resilience also had high levels of professional satisfaction (Larrabee, Persily, Simoni, Johnson, Maricshak, & Gladden, 2010) and higher levels of mental and physical health (Sauer, 2013). Furthermore, studies evidenced that those nurses who had higher levels of resilience also had lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms (Mealer, Jones, Newman, McFann, Rothbaum, & Moss, 2012). Often the reaction to workplace bullying varies from one person to another, suggesting that there are personal resources which help them overcome workplace bullying (Sauer, 2013). Among factors such as personality traits and emotional traits, resilience has been suggested to be a useful resource to overcome workplace bullying. So far there are few studies (Jackson *et al.*, 2007; Mealer *et al.*, 2012; Sauer, 2013) interested in the resilience role in a bullying framework and these studies often are made on a particular sector (i.e., the health sector). The present study tries to fulfill this gap by investigating the resilience role in a bullying framework on employees no matter what their activity sector is.

Methodology

The aim of the present study

The aim of the present study is to investigate the mediation role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' strain as it was suggested by Sauer (2013), who tested the mediation role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and physical health and didn't obtain a significant mediation model.

Hypothesis: Psychological resilience mediates the relationship between bullying and strain.

Participants

A total of 88 Romanian employees participated by completing online questionnaires. Their age ranged from 22 and 53 years old ($M = 28.57$; $SD = 4.86$), and there were 68 female employees (77.3%) and 19 male employees (21.6%). Only three employees had a high-school diploma (3.4%), 34 employees had a bachelor's degree (38.6%), 38 had a master's degree (43.2%), 11 employees had a Ph.D.

degree (12.5%), and only one employee had a postdoctoral degree. From 88 employees, 28 (31.8%) work in public institutions, 23 work in private institutions, 27 of employees work in private firms, and seven employees work in non-governmental organizations. All the employees completed online the questionnaires referring to workplace bullying, resilience, and strain. The present study was presented as being one interested in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships at work and employees having lower scores on resilience, higher scores on workplace bullying, and higher levels of mental and physical strain were considered for the present study.

Measurements

Workplace bullying

The workplace bullying phenomenon was assessed with the aid of the Romanian version of NAQR (Chirilă & Constantin, 2014). The original form was obtained from Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers (2009). The NAQR is the most commonly used tool in research studies that explore bullying in workplace settings. The NAQR is a standardized instrument with 22 items that measure perceived exposure to bullying at work in the past six months. All items were written in behavioral terms, and the word bullying was not used until the last question. The response for the first 22 items was a five point ordinal scale designed to measure the frequency of exposure: *never* = 1, *now and again* = 2, *monthly* = 3, *weekly* = 4, and *daily* = 5 (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009). The last item on the questionnaires was a self-label identification of exposure to bullying which includes the definition for bullying with six options “no,” “yes, very rarely,” “yes, now and then,” “yes, several times per month,” and “yes, almost daily” (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009). The questionnaire included three sub-sets: work-related bullying, person-related bullying, and physically intimidating bullying. The NAQR provided two summary scores, frequency of bullying behaviors, and intensity of bullying. Any item behavior that was reported weekly (4) or daily (5) indicates an exposure to negative behavior. Intensity of negative behavior was measured by the sum total score (range 22-110). A higher score indicated a higher intensity of bullying behaviors. Notelaers and Einarsen (2009) (as cited in Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011) found that an NAQR score between 33-44 indicates the respondent is “sometimes” bullied, and a score greater than or equal to 45 indicates the respondent is a victim of workplace bullying (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011). The internal consistency for the entire scale is .94, meaning that all the items are measuring the same psychological construct which is workplace bullying.

Psychological resilience

Psychological resilience was assessed with the aid of the Resilience scale (RS-14; Wagnild, 2011). This scale was obtained from Wagnild and it was translated into Romanian using the back-method translation. The Resilience Scale (RS-14) is a 14 item self-reported inventory designed to measure resilience (Wagnild, 2009). Resilience is a dynamic process of adaptation in response to ever-changing demands, stressors, and adversity with the goal of maintaining equilibrium (Herrman *et al.*, 2011; Pipe *et al.*, 2012). There are five characteristics of resilience: (a) a purposeful life, (b) perseverance, (c) equanimity, (d) self-reliance, and (e) existential aloneness (Wagnild, 2009). Responses are scored on a seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The RS-14 has been used to measure resilience in a variety of populations including adolescents, young, and middle-aged adults 53 and senior adults. Wagnild (2009) conducted a review of research which used the resiliency scale (RS-14 and RS-25) to measure resilience and found higher resilience scores correlated with psychological well-being, health promoting activities, purpose in life, and sense of coherence, morale, and forgiveness. Theoretically, resilience would be positively related to life satisfaction and morale, and inversely related to depression (Wagnild, 2011). The resilience score from the RS-14 was obtained by summing all items; possible scores range from 14-98. Scores of 14-56 indicate very low levels of resilience; 57-64 is low, 65-73 moderately low, 74-81 moderately high, 82-90 high, and 91-98 very high levels of resilience (Wagnild, 2011). The internal consistency for the entire scale is .86.

Mental and physical strain

Mental strain was assessed with seven items from the Occupational Stress Inventory (Evers, Frese, & Cooper, 2000). These items were translated into Romanian using the back-method translation. The internal consistency for all the seven items is .63. Physical strain was assessed with five items from the Occupational Stress Inventory (Evers *et al.*, 2002). All the five items were translated into Romanian using the back-method translation and the internal consistency is also .63.

Results

Mediation was used to model the relationship between variables because there is a hypothetical casual sequence between variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In this example, bullying is the independent variable of interest. Physical strain was the dependent variable. Resilience is a mediator if (a) there is a significant

relationship between bullying and physical strain, (b) there is a significant relationship between bullying and between resilience, (c) resilience still predicted strain after controlling for bullying, and (4) the relationship between bullying and physical strain decreased with resilience in the equation (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Correlations

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and correlations between workplace bullying, resilience, and strain

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. workplace bullying	1.72	.64	1			
2. resilience	5.79	.70	-.242*	1		
3. mental strain	2.12	.43	.112	-.359**	1	
4. physical strain	1.80	.49	.269	-.228**	.452**	1

*, $p < .05$; **, $p < .01$

The correlation analyses revealed significant correlations between workplace bullying, resilience, and physical strain. There are also significant correlations between resilience, mental strain, and physical strain. As presented above, there is a significant, medium, and negative correlation between workplace bullying and resilience, meaning that high scores of workplace bullying correlate with low scores of resilience and low scores of workplace bullying correlate with high scores of resilience. Furthermore, workplace bullying significantly and positively correlates with physical strain meaning that high scores of workplace bullying correlates with high scores of physical strain and low scores of workplace bullying correlates with low scores of physical strain. Moreover, resilience negatively and significantly correlates not only with physical strain but also with mental strain. These correlations indicate that high scores of resilience correlate with low scores of mental and physical strain and low scores of resilience correlate with high scores of mental and physical strain.

Regressions

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis for workplace bullying and resilience as predictors of physical strain

Models	B	SE	β	t	p	R2	F(dt)	$\Delta R2$
Model 1 Workplace bullying	.207***	.080	.269***	9.880	.000	.073	6.731	.062
Model 2 Resilience	-.160*	.074	.228*	- 2.171	.033	.052	4.714	.041
Model 3 Workplace bullying * resilience	-.177*	.077	-1.302*	- 2.305	.024	.154	5.106	.124

*, $p < .05$, **, $p < .01$, ***, $p < .001$

All the regression models presented in the Table 2 show significant models, meaning that workplace and resilience taken as separate predictors (i.e., Model 1 and Model 2) are significant predictors of physical strain. The workplace bullying regression model explains 6.2% of physical strain variance and the resilience regression model explains 4.1% of physical strain variance.

The third model contains as a predictor the interaction between workplace bullying and resilience. This model is also statistically significant and explains 12.4% of the physical strain variance. This third model explains best the appearance of physical strain among Romanian employees.

Table 3. Linear regression analysis for workplace bullying as predictor for resilience

Models	B	SE	β	t	p	R2	F(dt)	$\Delta R2$
Workplace bullying	-.264*	.115	-.242*	-2.309	.023	.058	5.330	.047

*, $p < .05$;

The third table present the regression results of workplace bullying as a predictor of resilience. This regression is also statistically significant and explains 4.7% of resilience variance.

The mediation model

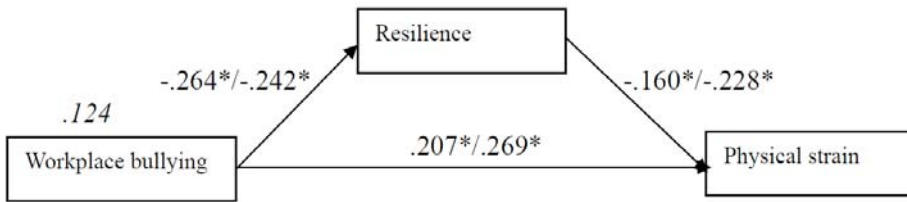


Figure 1. *The mediation model proposed*

The mediation model presented above shows the mediation role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and physical strain. In Figure 1 there are presented not only the un-standardized coefficients but also the standardized ones. As can be seen in Figure 1, the direct relationship (i.e., the relationship between workplace bullying and physical strain) is statistically significant ($B = .207\%$; $\beta = .269\%$). This direct relationship indicates that high levels of workplace bullying lead to high levels of physical strain and low levels of workplace bullying lead to low levels of physical strain.

The indirect relationship (i.e., workplace-bullying \rightarrow resilience \rightarrow physical strain) is also significant. The relationship between workplace bullying and resilience is statistically significant ($B = -.264\%$ /. $-.242\%$), meaning that high levels of workplace bullying lead to low levels of resilience or low levels of workplace bullying lead to high levels of resilience. Furthermore, the relationship between resilience and physical strain is also statistically significant, meaning that low levels of resilience lead to high levels of physical strain or that high level of resilience lead to low levels of physical strain. Moreover, the Sobel test showed a value of 1.573 for a significance level of $p = .057$. The mediation model is significant and the results show that resilience acts like a mediator of the relationship between workplace bullying and physical strain, meaning that resilience mitigates the effects of workplace bullying on employee's physical strain.

The mediation model proposed shows that the indirect relationship is smaller than the direct relationship, meaning that the resilience mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and physical strain. This mediation relationship shows that resilience mitigates the effects of the direct relationship. In other words, the fact of being resilient leads to employees with lower levels of physical strain. The results of the present study evidenced the important role of resilience in experiencing workplace bullying. The fact of being resilient leads to healthier employees.

Discussions

The present study aimed to investigate the mediation role of resilience in the relationship between workplace bullying and physical strain. This relationship was previously tested by Sauer (2013), who didn't obtain a significant mediation model. This study revealed significant correlations among workplace bullying, resilience, and physical strain. There wasn't obtained a significant correlation between workplace bullying and mental strain, but the correlation between workplace bullying and physical strain was statistically significant, meaning that the more employees experience workplace bullying acts the more they will feel physical strain.

Furthermore, resilience was statistically significantly correlated not only with physical strain, but also with mental strain. The correlation was negative, meaning that the more the employee has higher levels of resilience the less he will feel mental and physical strain. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), there is a mediation role of resilience if (a) there is a significant relationship between bullying and physical strain, (b) there is a significant relationship between bullying and between resilience, (c) resilience still predicted physical strain after controlling for bullying, and (d) the relationship between bullying and physical strain decreased with resilience in the equation. All four conditions were confirmed only for workplace bullying, resilience, and physical strain. As could be seen in the section result, the correlations among workplace bullying and physical strain was significant, the correlation between workplace bullying and resilience was also significant, resilience still predicted physical strain when controlled for workplace bullying, and the relationship between workplace bullying and physical strain decreased with resilience in equation.

The hypothesis that resilience can mitigate the effect of workplace bullying on strain was assessed only for physical strain. The results of the present study are convergent with those existing in the literature (Mealer *et al.*, 2012), showing that resilience can mediate the relationship between bullying and outcomes, meaning that resilience can act as a personal resource to overcome adversity produced by the workplace bullying phenomenon. Through the present study, Sauer's (2013) suggestion that resilience would act like a mediator between workplace bullying and resilience was confirmed. The results of the present study showed that resilience acts like a personal resource of the targeted employee, a resource which helps him hold up, resist workplace bullying acts, and bounce back with new personal strengths.

The results of the present study have practical implications because they can be the basis for training programs meant to develop personal resilience among workplace bullying employees. Also, the findings of the present study can help human resources practitioners improve their anti-bullying programs by developing

not only resilient individuals at work, but by helping to the development of a highly resilient company or organization.

Study limits

The present study has also a series of limits such as: (1) the results rely on self-report questionnaires triggering subjective responses and personal reinterpretation of the social climate at work and potential overestimates of personal resilience. Further research should take into account a more objective methodology in order to assess these variables; (2) the cross-section study design allows data collection at one point in time. A limitation of this study design is that findings are descriptive and prediction and causation cannot be determined; (3) outcomes such as depression, anxiety, self trust and self esteem should be investigated in relationship with workplace bullying and resilience.

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