

Mediation's role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and Romanian employees' physical and mental strain

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Abstract: Workplace bullying victims and their resilience levels had been little study so far. This present article aims to verify mediation's role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and physical and mental strain. Most resilience definitions refer to resilience as a person's capacity to hold up, recover, and come out stronger after facing a situation which affects one's integrity. A total of 172 Romanian employees participated in this present study by completing online questionnaires referring to workplace bullying, resilience and physical and mental strain. The results showed mediation's role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and mental and physical strain in that the direct relationship between workplace bullying and mental 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 and mental strain when they are confronted with workplace bullying behaviours. The findings of this present study can help human resources practitioners by showing that psychological resilience is an important resource for workplace bullying victims and they can 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 models

1. Introduction

Bullying is a compulsive need to displace aggression and is achieved by the expression of inadequacy (social, personal, interpersonal behavioural, professional) by projecting that inadequacy onto others through control and subjugation (criticism, exclusion, isolation, etc). Bullying is sustained by abdication of responsibility (denial, counteraccusation, pretence of victimhood) and perpetuated by a climate of fear, ignorance, indifference, silence, denial, disbelief, deception, evasion of accountability, tolerance and reward (e.g. promotion) for the bully. (Field, 1996)

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The importance of studying workplace bullying was demonstrated by previous research showing prevalence percentages between 2%-18% in Denmark (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), 3.5%-8% in Sweden (Leymann, 1990), 2.9%-6% in Germany (Martino, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003), 3%-10% in Finland (Vartia, 1996), 3%-10.3% in Norway (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), 7%-17% in Ireland (O'Moore, 2000), 26% in Austria (Nield, 1996), 10.6%-53% in England (Hoel, Cooper & Faragher, 2004; Rayner & Keashly, 2005), 7%-15% in Romania (Andronache, Bitere, Benali, Mihali-Viorescu, 1999; Chirilă, 2012; Maidaniuc-Chirilă, 2014). Furthermore, research in workplace bullying evidenced its importance through its negative consequences on victims, so that studies have shown that workplace bullying is associated with symptoms of stress (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Chirilă & Constantin, 2014b), mental and physical strain (Hyung-Park & DeFrank, 2010; Maidaniuc-Chirilă, 2015b), anxiety (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004), depressive symptoms (Bjorkvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994a), gastrointestinal disorders (Lewis, 2006a), somatic symptoms such as headaches, stomach pain and sleep disorders (O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire, & Smith, 1998b; Quine, 2001; Vartia, 2001; Vaez, Ekberg, & LaFlamme, 2004). Moreover, the need for studying workplace bullying has been shown by the fact that there are important interpersonal differences when it comes to facing such negative acts. Most studies in the field were interested in studying the role and the efficiency of coping strategies employed in workplace bullying cases (Rayner, 1997; Hogh, & Dofradottir, 2001; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Faulx, 2007; Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Hyung-Park & DeFrank, 2010). According to these researchers, the most used coping strategies to tackle workplace bullying acts are voice, loyalty, denial, avoidance and the use of different substances. Referring to their efficiency, Lee and Brotheridge (2006) have shown that passive coping strategies such as relaxation strategies and talking to family and friends about the experience are the most used and efficient ones.

More than ten years of research in coping among workplace bullying victims has led to the idea of their resilience levels as well as the role of resilience in workplace bullying cases. Studies in the workplace bullying area interested in the role of resilience are new and thus, few studies (Gross, 2009; Mealer, Janes, Newman, McFann, Rothbaum & Moss 2012, Sauer, 2013; Van Haughten, 2014; Fraccaro, 2014; Maidaniuc-Chirilă, 2015a; Maidaniuc-Chirilă, 2015b) have examined the relationship between workplace bullying exposure and resilience.

This present study wants to fulfil this gap by presenting a mediation model containing not only manifest variables, but also latent ones, of the relationship between workplace bullying, resilience, physical strain and mental strain.

2. The role of resilience in the case of workplace bullying experiences

In 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 (Santos, 2012).

Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of English Language (1958) defined resilience as „the ability to bounce or spring back after being stretched or constrained or recovering strength or spirit” and the American Heritage dictionary defined resilience as „the ability to recover quickly from illness, change or misfortune”. Later, Richardson, Neiger, Jensen and Kumpfer (1990) contended that resilience is „the process of coping with disruptive, stressful or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from the event” (p.34). Four years later, Masten (1994) explained that resilience must be viewed as an inter-play between certain characteristics of the individual and the broader environment, a balance between stress and the ability to cope, and a dynamic and developmental process that is important to life transitions.

Garnezy's (1991) triadic model of resilience has provided a widely accepted ecological framework for understanding the process of resilience. This model describes the dynamic interactions among risk and protective factors on three levels (i.e. individual, family and environmental) and emphasizes that resilience is a process that empowers individuals to shape their environment and to be shaped by it in turn.

According to Herman, Steward, Diaz-Granados, Berger, Jackson and colleagues (2011), resilience is an adapting dynamic process to the permanent changes existing in the environment in order to maintain a balance between stressors and achievement in personal goals. Moreover, Pipe, Buchda, Launder, Hulvey, Karus, and colleagues (2012) have seen resilience as being the process that allows individuals to bounce back after experiencing a difficult period. The way in which a person responds to environmental stress is unique and requires personal resources, and resilience; this can be one of these personal resources (Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007).

Wagnild (2009) found five features of resilient people. According to this researcher, resilient people are those who always have a meaningful life (i.e. they always have a purpose), are perseverant, self-reliant, balanced and are not afraid of being left alone for a certain period of time.

Implicit in the concept of resilience as a dynamic process is the understanding that resilience can grow or decline over time depending on the interaction taking place between an individual and their environment and

between risk and protective factors in an individual's life (Borman & Rachuba, 2001; Werner & Smith, 1992). Therefore, people may be resilient at certain times and not at others depending upon the circumstances (Winfield, 1991).

Resilience's role in workplace bullying cases was also evidenced also by Mealer, Janes, Newman, McFann, Rothbaum and Moss (2012) in their study in which covered exposed employees' health outcomes. The results showed that those employees having higher levels of resilience also had better health outcomes. One year later, Sauer (2013) tested the mediation's role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and health outcomes among a sample of hospitals employees and found that those employees having higher levels of resilience also had better health outcomes. Moreover, Maidaniuc-Chirilă (2015a) tested the mediation's role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and the physical strain among 88 Romanian employees and evidenced that those employees having higher levels of resilience when faced with workplace bullying acts had lower levels of physical strain. Furthermore, Maidaniuc-Chirilă (2015b) showed that those employees using coping strategies focused on their emotions and those who had lower levels of resilience had higher levels of mental strain.

In Sauer's (2013) and Maidaniuc-Chirilă's (2015a) studies, resilience acted like a personal resource that may help workplace bullying exposed employees to protect themselves from negative health outcomes.

3. The aim of this present study

The aim of this present study is to investigate mediation's role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' strain as it was suggested by Sauer (2013) and by Maidaniuc-Chirila (2015a) who obtained a significant mediation model of psychological resilience but only for physical strain.

This present study replicates and improves Maidaniuc-Chirila's (2015a) mediation model proposed by showing that resilience mediates not only the relationship between workplace bullying and Romanian employees' physical strain but also the relationship between workplace bullying and Romanian employees' mental strain by proposing a new mediation model with latent variables.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

A total of 172 (114 female; 58 male) Romanian employees participated by completing the online questionnaires measuring workplace bullying, psychological resilience and depressive symptoms. They ranged from 22 to 62 years old ($M = 33.25$; $SD = 8.92$). Their work experience ranged from three to 240 months ($M = 44.06$; $SD = 49.72$) and their highest level of education included a bachelor's degree (63), master's degree (74) and doctoral degree (21). Their employers included public institutions (47), private institutions (47), private firms (61) and non-governmental institutions (11). Their employers varied by size: under 10 employees (37 participants), 10–40 employees (42), 41–200 employees (41), 201–1,000 employees (23), and over 1,000 employees (24).

This 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.

4.2 Measurements

Workplace bullying

Workplace bullying was measured with the Romanian version of Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers' (2009) Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (Chirila & Constantin, 2014a). The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) has 22 items referring to 22 behavioural negative acts grouped in three dimensions (i.e., intimidation, person-related bullying and work-related bullying). The response to this questionnaire was given on a five-point Likert scale ranging from never (1) to daily (5). The Cronbach's alpha for the entire questionnaire is $\alpha = .93$, with $\alpha = .78$ for person-related bullying, $\alpha = .81$ for context-related bullying, and $\alpha = .82$ for intimidation.

Psychological resilience

In order to measure resilience the Resilience Scale developed by Wagnild (2009) was used. This questionnaire is formed from 14 items measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale is $\alpha = .86$. The questionnaire concludes with another seven yes or no items referring to depressive symptoms, diet, substance abuse, alcohol consumption, ideal weight, physical exercising as well as general health and wellness.

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 seven items is .61.

Physical strain was assessed with five items from the Occupational Stress Inventory (Evers et al., 2000). All five items were translated into Romanian using the back-method translation. The internal consistency is .69.

4.3 Statistics

The results of this present study were obtained with the aid of SPSS 17.00 (for Pearson correlations) and AMOS 20.00 for designing the mediation model and computing for absolute and fit indices, for regression weights and for direct and indirect effects.

5. Results*Correlations*

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

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1- workplace bullying	1.74	.59	1			
2- resilience	5.88	.69	-.181*	1		
3- mental strain	2.09	.43	.282**	-.364**	1	
4- physical strain	1.84	.54	.451**	-.169**	.436**	1

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

The correlation analyses revealed significant correlations between workplace bullying, resilience, mental strain and physical strain. There are also significant correlations between resilience, mental strain and physical strain.

As presented above, there is a significant, small 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 mental and physical strain, meaning that high scores of workplace bullying correlate with high scores of mental and physical strain and low scores of workplace bullying correlate with low scores of mental and physical strain.

Moreover, resilience negatively and significantly correlate 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.

Table 2. Standardized and un-standardized regression weights

Regression Weights	B	S.E.	β	p
Workplace bullying->Resilience	-.260	.107	-.188	.015
Workplace bullying->Strain	.281	.060	.518	.000
Resilience->Strain	-.110	.037	-.281	.003
Workplace bullying-> Intimidation	1.000		.914	
Workplace bullying -> Context-related	1.314	.086	.827	.000
Workplace bullying->Person-related	1.146	.057	.953	.000
Strain-> Mental strain	1.000			
Strain-> Physical strain	1.405	.271	.699	.000

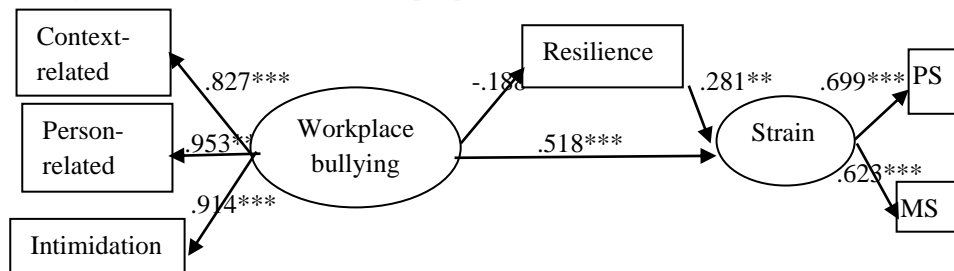
As it can be seen in table 2 all regression weights are significant. The more employees that are exposed to workplace bullying acts the more strain they feel and less resilient they become. In other words, resilience can act as a protective factor for workplace bullying victims.

Table 3. Direct and indirect effects of the mediation model

Effects	B	β
<i>Direct effects</i>		
Workplace bullying->Resilience	-.260	-.188
Workplace bullying->Strain	.281	.518
Resilience->Strain	-.110	-.281
<i>Indirect effects</i>		
Workplace bullying-> Strain (through Resilience)	.029	.053

The results from table 3 show that the indirect effect is smaller than the direct effect meaning that resilience is a mediator of the relationship between workplace bullying and mental and physical strain. Employees' levels of mental and physical strain will decrease if their personal resilience will increase. In other words, resilient employees have less strain when they are confronted with workplace bullying acts.

Figure 1. The mediation model proposed



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

In the figure 1 only the standardized effects are presented.

Note. PS - Physical strain; MS - Mental strain

Absolute and fit indices for the model

$\chi^2(7)=18.019$, $p=.12$, $RMR=.017$, $RMSEA=.076$ [.042; .152], $GFI=.968$; $AGFI=.904$; $NFI=.966$; $IFI=.979$; $CFI=.978$.

The absolute and relative fit indices for the model are good meaning that the model proposed is sustained by the empirical data.

According to all the results showed in the present study resilience is a mediator of the relationship between workplace bullying exposure and employees' strain but is not the only one. In other words, resilience can act as a protective factor for workplace bullying victims.

6. Discussions

This present study was aimed at investigating the mediation role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and physical and mental strain by proposing a new mediation model containing latent variables. This mediation role of resilience was previously tested by Maidaniuc-Chirilă (2015a) on a sample of 88 Romanian employees and obtained a significant mediation role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and physical strain. The mediation model previous proposed (Maidaniuc-Chirilă, 2015a) contained only manifest variables and obtained significant mediation only for physical strain but not for mental strain. The present study replicated the results of Maidaniuc-Chirilă's (2015a) study on a larger sample (i.e. $N=172$) and also obtained a significant mediation role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and mental strain by proposing a mediation model containing latent variables. Furthermore, this study completed Maidaniuc-

Chirila's previous one (2015a) by showing that there are also significant relationships between workplace bullying, resilience and mental strain.

Mediation's role of resilience between workplace bullying and health outcomes on a sample of hospital employees was also previously tested by Sauer (2013) in his doctoral dissertation which showed that resilience can act as a protective factor for workplace bullying victims from the health sectors.

The hypothesis that resilience can mitigate the effect of workplace bullying on strain was assessed, not only for physical strain but also for mental strain. The results of this present study are convergent with those existing in the literature (Mealer et al., 2012), showing that resilience can mediate the relationship between bullying and health outcomes, meaning that resilience can act as a personal resource to overcome adversity produced by the workplace bullying phenomenon. This present study's results have confirmed Sauer's (2013) suggestion that resilience acts like a mediator between workplace bullying and health outcomes but taking into consideration only employees' levels of mental and physical strain.

The results of this present study has shown that resilience acts like a personal resource of the targeted employee, a resource which helps him/her hold up, resist and overcome workplace bullying acts, and bounce back with new personal strength and more social skills Maidaniuc-Chirila (2015a).

Practical implication

The results of this present study have practical implications because they can stay at the basis of training programs meant to develop personal resilience among affected workplace bullying employees. Also, the findings of the present study can help human resource practitioners improve their anti-bullying programs by developing, not only resilient individuals at work but also by helping them to develop a highly resilient company or organization (Maidaniuc-Chirila, 2015a).

The fact that this mediation model is significant and sustained by the empirical data shows that resilience can act as a protective factor for workplace bullying victims. This result can aid human resources practitioners to design and develop more efficient training programs designed to improve workplace bullying victims' resilience through different techniques such as Albert Ellis' cognitive and emotional technique used to build mental resilience. Resilient employees recover quickly from any form of workplace adversity (i.e. in this case workplace bullying experiences), remain productive and engaged in their work-tasks and become more socially skilled when it comes to dealing with difficult professional relationships.

Also these results can stay at the basis of training programs designed to help managers diagnose early symptoms of workplace bullying by improving managers' skills to recognize signs of workplace bullying behaviors. After the recognition phase, managers are trained to efficiently identify organizational antecedents and causes and to improve organizational settings by changing organizational factors responsible for the appearance of workplace bullying acts. In a third phase, managers are trained to recognize the negative impact workplace bullying has not only at an individual level but also at an organizational one. After this phase managers will be able to estimate the organizational financial costs with human resource recruitment and personal retention processes, with employees' sick leave, with employees' counseling sessions as well as employees' reintegration into new organizational settings.

These results show that resilient employees remain engaged in their work-tasks despite the fact they experience workplace adversity (i.e. workplace bullying acts), they not only resist to this negative workplace environment but also they experience personal growth (i.e. they become more socially skilled) and they don't bring any additional financial costs to the organization (i.e. resilient employees won't have many sick days off, won't need psychological counseling and training programs designed to develop resilience levels and social skills).

Study limitations

A first limit consists of the fact that these 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 more objective methodology in order to assess these variables and to have more control on the way data are completed.

The cross-section study design allows for data collection at one point in time. A limitation of this study design is that the findings are descriptive and predictive and causation cannot be determined. Further studies, should test these mediation models using longitudinal data.

Outcomes such as negative affectivity and previous experiences of victimization as a consequence of workplace bullying should be taken into account.

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