



Workplace Bullying and Self-Esteem among University Teachers: A Mixed-Methods Study on the Moderating Role of Defense Styles

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ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying is a growing concern in academic institutions because it can lead to a negative effect on the psychological well-being of teachers, their confidence in their work, and their interpersonal functioning. This paper has investigated how workplace bullying has impacted self-esteem in university teachers and how defense styles mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem. This research used mixed-method explanatory sequential research design. During the quantitative phase, a total of 119 university teachers, 61 males and 58 females, were sampled working in selected public and private universities in South Punjab, Pakistan. Workplace bullying, self-esteem, and defense styles were measured with standardized measures, including the Workplace Bullying Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Defense Style Questionnaire. The quantitative data were analyzed using correlation, regression, independent sample t-tests, and moderation analysis through SPSS. During the qualitative stage, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 10 university teachers in order to learn more about the reasons of workplace bullying and the potential ways of its reduction. These results revealed that workplace bullying had a significant negative impact on the prevalence of self-esteem, which implies that the greater the levels of bullying, the lower the levels of self-esteem. It was also found that defense styles significantly mediated the relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem, but did not significantly mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem. The gender-based results showed that female teachers were more likely to report higher levels of workplace bullying than male teachers, but no significant difference in gender in the defense styles. Based on the qualitative responses, workplace setting, misuse of power, personality differences, incompetent authority, and workload were found to be the most significant causes of workplace bullying. The study recommends creating awareness, fair administrative policies, open communication, empowerment, counselling and a healthy working environment to reduce bullying and to boost the self-esteem of educators.



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1. Introduction

While bullying has always been an issue, it was not empirically examined until the 1970s, with researchers concentrating on schools, workplaces, paramilitary groups, and prisons at the time (Tahir & Konstantinos, 2011). The lack of an unified term or phrase to define the phenomena of workplace bullying, according to Pamela Lutgin-Sandvik, is a problem because individuals have difficulties naming their abusive behavior and, as a

result, have problems seeking justice against by the bully (Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010). A person's subjective judgement of their own worth is referred to as self-esteem. Self-esteem corresponds to one's opinions of oneself, such as "I am incapable of love" or "I am honorable" feelings and emotions like success, melancholy, pleasure, and indignity (Hewitt, 2009). What we assume about ourselves is our self-concept; our self-esteem is our positive or negative evaluations of ourselves, as well as how we believe about ourselves (Mackie & Smith, 2015). Self-esteem is a desirable psychological concept since it forecasts a wide range of outcomes, including academic performance, pleasure, marital, interpersonal fulfilment and law breaking (Baumeister et al., 2003; Orth & Robins, 2014; Urbina Robalino & Eugenio Piloso, 2015). According to the sociometer theory, self-esteem measure one's social position and approval. Terror Management Theory claims that self-esteem has defensive function, alleviating worry about fate (Greenberg & Kosloff, 2008). An unconscious psychological process that prevents an individual from stress thoughts and feelings regarding the internal problems and external disturbances is known as a defensive mechanism (Schacter et al., 2009). Based on the conditions and how often the defense mechanisms are used, it may have helpful or detrimental outcomes (Utah Psych, 2010).

The following are examples of mechanisms that distort, reject, or misrepresent reality: burying a terrible sensation or concept, even if reappear in the form symbols; incorporation of idea into one's self (Craig, 2010). Throughout their lives, healthy people employ a variety of defence systems. A defence mechanism becomes abnormal only when it is used repeatedly and results in problem behaviors that compromise the person's physical or mental health. Defence styles are used to guard the person from distress or punishments, as well as to include a haven from a circumstance in which one is now unable to handle ("defence mechanisms -- Britannica Online Encyclopedia",2008). George Vaillant suggested a defense hierarchy, with mature defenses being correlated with greater adaptive functioning. Higher academic output is anticipated, Given the association between mature defence mechanisms and better levels of functioning, improved problem-solving, and coping strategies (Vaillant, 1994). Although defence mechanisms are formed in childhood to mediate the relationship between reality and the psyche, Vaillant claims that they continue to change and adapt during adulthood. In his book, *The wisdom of the ego* (1993), he says "A book is about mid-life of males and females grappling with learning to love, trying to make sense, restructuring chaos, and finding, often unwittingly, how to place what wasn't there before in the world" (Vaillant, 1994).

Although much attention has been devoted to the subject of the problem of workplace bullying within the framework of organizational and psychological studies, not many studies have been conducted on the question within the frames of the work of university teachers in Pakistan, and in South Punjab in particular. Past studies have generally aimed at the connection of workplace bullying with job stress, job satisfaction, turnover intention, psychological distress, and overall mental health outcomes. However, the effect of workplace bullying on teachers' self-esteem has not been sufficiently examined in academic institutions, where professional respect, social recognition, autonomy, and collegial relationships are highly important. Additionally, the defense styles have seldom been examined as a psychological constituent which might mediate the connection amid workplace bullying and self-esteem. Hence, this research paper fills this gap by investigating the relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem among university teachers and defense styles moderate this relationship through a mixed-method research design.

The main purpose of the study is to examine how self-esteem of the university teachers is affected by workplace bullying and to test whether defense styles mediate the effect of workplace bullying on self esteem among the university teachers. To be more precise, the study would investigate the relationship between workplace bullying, self-esteem, and defense styles; compare workplace bullying, self-esteem, and defense styles in male and female university teachers; and explore the qualitative factors behind workplace bullying in academic institutions. The research will also focus on determining effective measures that can be applied to curb workplace bullying and improve the self-esteem level of university teachers.

This study is significant for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature on workplace bullying by linking bullying experiences with self-esteem and

defense styles in the context of university teachers. It also broadens the discussion of self-esteem by demonstrating how negative workplace experiences can influence the teachers' sense of professional worth, dignity and confidence. The study is also important as it represents a mixed-method approach where quantitative findings may be supported and explained by the themes of the qualitative interviews. In practice, the findings can assist university administrators, heads of departments, policymakers, and human resource managers to appreciate the causes of workplace bullying and come up with effective strategies to create a healthier academic work environment. The research can also be used to develop anti-bullying policies, counselling services, awareness programs, equitable distribution of workloads, and bias-free administrative practices in higher education institutions.

2. Literature Review

Workplace bullying is an organizational and psychological problem that is based on the repetitive negative behaviors that employees encounter within the workplace. Such actions may involve humiliation, verbal criticism, social exclusion, excessive monitoring, unfair workload, abuse of authority and acts that demean dignity of an employee and his/her professional identity. In contrast to typical workplace conflict, bullying is typically repetitive, power-based, and unavoidable by the victim. In educational institutions, bullying at the workplace can manifest in the following ways: unfair administrative decisions, persecution by other colleagues, discriminatory treatment, denial of academic opportunities, and excessive workload. These actions may undermine teacher confidence, diminish their professional motivation, and adversely impact on the academic work environment. Previous studies have established that workplace bullying is related to psychological distress, lower job satisfaction, poor mental health, and negative work outcomes (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Verkuil et al., 2015).

Workplace bullying is of particular concern in the higher education institutions and workplace setting because university instructors are supposed to work in an environment of respect, autonomy, collegiality and intellectual freedom. But in cases where teachers have suffered humiliation, criticism, abuse of power, and interpersonal hostility, their sense of professional value may be impaired. Academic workplaces can also be hierarchical, and the hierarchies may lead to a situation where bullying is ignored, normalized or underreported. Research has revealed that employees who are bullied can develop emotional exhaustion, insecurity, anxiety and low confidence in their ability. Thus, the study of workplace bullying among university teachers is significant in the sense that it would help to understand how negative workplace experiences can influence the psychological well-being and professional functioning of teachers (Hodgins et al., 2024; Nielsen et al., 2024).

Self-esteem is the general assessment of personal worth, value, competence, and self-respect of an individual. Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as a universal attitude to the self that can either be negative or positive. People who have high self-esteem tend to feel more confident, valued, and able to handle the social and professional challenges. Conversely, people with low self-esteem might develop feelings of insecurity, self-doubt, and lack of confidence. Social relations and recurring interpersonal experiences have a strong impact on self-esteem. Baumeister et al. (2003) argued that self-esteem is linked to various critical psychological and social outcomes, and the Orth and Robins (2014) clarified that self-esteem is developed and altered by life events and interactions with others (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023).

Workplace bullying can have a negative impact on self-esteem since bullying literally goes to the root of dignity, identity, and feeling of social acceptance. When teachers are frequently criticized, ignored, humiliated or treated unjustly, they may start to doubt their professional competence and personal value. It is also in line with the sociometer theory which implies that self-esteem is the perceived level of social acceptance and respect by an individual. If workplace bullying conveys rejection, disrespect or low professional value, it can lower the self-esteem of teachers. Li et al. (2020) concluded that workplace bullying was correlated with lower self-esteem and higher turnover intention, which means that self-esteem is a significant psychological outcome of bullying experiences. Similarly, Noor et al.

(2016); PM et al. (2023) found that self-esteem in the workplace was negatively correlated with bullying.

Another significant psychological consideration in comprehending how people react to stressful and threatening events is defense styles. Defense styles are the unconscious psychological patterns employed by individuals to deal with emotional discomfort, anxiety, and internal or external stressful situations. The Defense Style Questionnaire was created by Andrews et al. (1993): the questionnaire categorizes defense mechanisms into larger defense styles. These defense styles can be mature, neurotic and immature defenses. Mature defenses are typically viewed as more adaptive since they assist individuals to cope with stress in a healthier manner. Conversely, immature defenses can include denial, projection, withdrawal or avoidance, which can also cause additional psychological issues (Chatterjee, 2024). Defense styles can be effective in the workplace bullying context when it comes to how teachers interpret bullying, coping with emotional pain, and protecting their self-esteem.

Workplace bullying and defense styles are important because bullying leads to psychological stress and workers may adopt various defense mechanisms to cope with this stress. Some teachers may respond to bullying through mature coping responses, such as emotional regulation, acceptance, or constructive communication. Other possible reactions of others involve maladaptive defences, including denial, avoidance or displacement. Previous research suggests that defense mechanisms are linked with psychological adjustment and interpersonal functioning (Andrews et al., 1993; Petraglia et al., 2009). Thus, the styles of defense can be associated with the experience of workplace bullying, as well as the ways in which bullying can influence self-esteem (Mehmood et al., 2024).

The relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem may also be moderated by the defense styles. Teachers with more adaptive defensive styles can perhaps better protect their self-esteem in the face of bullying because they are more apt to interpret stressful situations in a more constructive way and respond with healthier coping styles. Conversely, educators who depend on maladaptive defense styles might be more susceptible to the adverse impacts of bullying since avoidance, denial, projection, or emotional withdrawal may exacerbate psychological distress and undermine self-esteem. Even though little empirical research has directly tested this moderating mechanism among university teachers, the theoretical connection between defense styles, stress regulation and self-esteem offers a platform on which defense styles as a moderator can be tested.

Gender may also play an important role in workplace bullying and self-esteem. Workplace bullying may manifest in male and female teachers differently because of the organizational hierarchy, social expectations, gender roles, and power relations. Other studies have indicated that women can be subjected to higher workplace bullying due to their vulnerability to be excluded, unjustly treated and mistreated based on power in some organizational settings (Salin, 2003). Likewise, studies on self-esteem have observed that males tend to report a little higher self-esteem than females though such differences may be varying according to age, culture, and social background (Kling et al., 1999). Female teachers in academic institutions might experience an extra amount of social and professional pressure, which can impact not only their experiences of bullying but their self-esteem as well (Horta & Tang, 2023).

Lastly, there may also be gender differences in the application of defense styles since male and female teachers may react differently to workplace stress, conflict, criticism, and emotional discomfort. However, previous evidence on gender differences in defense mechanisms is mixed. Petraglia et al. (2009) have indicated that gender differences in defense mechanisms are not necessarily constant meaning that the use of defense styles may depend on psychological, social, and organizational factors and not gender alone. Therefore, it is important to test whether male and female university teachers differ in their use of defense styles in the academic context of South Punjab.

The current research is also mixed method in nature since quantitative findings might not be sufficient to clarify the reasons and outcomes of workplace bullying. Quantitative analysis would be able to demonstrate whether workplace bullying influences self-esteem and whether defense styles moderate the relationship. However, qualitative

interviews can explain how bullying occurs in academic settings and what practical strategies may reduce it. In the current paper, the authors employed the tools of workplace bullying, self-esteem, and style of defense in the quantitative phase, and semi-structured interviews with university teachers in the qualitative phase. This is an effective method since this approach allows the study to not only identify statistical relationships but also real workplace experiences such as; misuse of power, workload pressure, personality clashes, and unhealthy work environments.

Overall, the literature suggests that workplace bullying is harmful for employees' psychological well-being and may reduce self-esteem. It also shows that defense styles are pertinent psychological reactions to stress and can potentially affect the way people respond to bullying. However, limited research has examined the moderating role of defense styles in the relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem, especially among university teachers in Pakistan. Thus, the current study fills a significant research gap by investigating the nature of workplace bullying, self-esteem, and defense styles through a mixed-method design.

3. Materials and methods

The research design employed in this study was a mixed-method explanatory sequential research design. In this design, quantitative data were collected and analyzed during the first phase, and qualitative interviews during the second phase to further explain and support quantitative findings. The quantitative phase investigated the statistical association between workplace bullying, self-esteem, and defense styles, whereas the qualitative phase explored the lived experiences of teachers in relation to what causes bullying at work, and what strategies may be used to reduce bullying and enhance self-esteem. This design suited well since the study was not only trying to test the relationships among the variables but also to learn the workplace experiences behind the relationships. This is an explanatory research design. This study employed survey and interview methods. There are two phases of this research.

3.1. Phase 1: Quantitative Method

The quantitative phase was conducted through cross-sectional survey method. The population sampled was university teachers and interviews were conducted via standard questionnaires. The aim of this stage was to test the effect of workplace bullying on self-esteem, determine the relationship between workplace bullying, self-esteem and defense styles, compare gender differences, and test the moderating role of defense styles.

3.1.1. Population and Sample

The data was collected from public and private universities (Islamia University Bahawalpur, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Institute of South Punjab Multan, COMSATS Vehari, University of Agriculture Faisalabad Sub Campus Burewala) in South Punjab, Pakistan. Sample size was taken from G-Power which was consisted of 119 university teachers (female 58, male 61). Random sampling techniques were used in this. Age range was from 25 to 55 years.

The study target population was a group of university teachers working in both public and privately-owned universities across South Punjab, Pakistan. The sample size consisted of 119 university teachers comprising of 61 males and 58 female's respondents. The sample used to create the respondents was selected universities in Bahawalpur, Multan, Vehari, and Burewala. The participants were represented by the age group 25-55 years. Since the data collected from selected universities, the sampling procedure should be clearly explained. In case the respondents were identified based on availability and willingness to participate, the sampling technique should be reported as convenience sampling. However, if a complete list of teachers was obtained and respondents were selected through a random procedure, then the randomization process should be clearly described.

The sample size was determined using GPower. To enhance the methodological transparency of the study, the authors ought to disclose the assumptions they made in GPower, such as effect size, alpha level, statistical power, number of predictors, and minimum required sample size. Such information will be used to justify the claim that the sample size of 119 was sufficient to conduct a regression and moderation analysis.

3.1.2. Research Instruments

In the research, three standardized tools were employed to gauge the key variables. Anjum et al. (2019) developed a scale of workplace bullying. The scale is composed of 21 items. The scale is scored on a five-point Likert scale where Never scored as 1 Daily as 5. This was due to two factors: person-related and work-related bullying, which explained 60% of the variance. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for work-related was 0.77 and person-related bullying was 0.87 and 0.88 for the overall workplace bullying scale (Anjum et al., 2019).

The self-esteem scale of ten items self-esteem scale by Rosenberg (1965) was used which assesses the positivity and negativity of self-perceptions. The scale is one-dimensional. A 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement, is used to score each item. The scale is high in test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and predictive validity (Schmitt & Allik, 2005).

This scale is developed by Andrews et al. (1993). A variety of statements about personal attitudes are included in this questionnaire. There are no correct or incorrect responses. A total of 9 that you strongly agree. The statistical analysis show that the DSQ-40 is valid and reliable scale (Tuisku et al., 2006).

The collection of the data is conducted in a manner that is ethical. The study purpose was explained to the participants before they completed the questionnaire. The respondents volunteered to participate and were assured that their data would be kept confidential and would only be used to conduct academic research. All the participants signed informed consent. The subjects were also informed that they were at liberty to withdraw at any time in the research without any discipline. The results did not report any personal identifying information.

4. Data Analysis

The SPSS version 26 was used to analyze quantitative data. Descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation were used to calculate the major study variables. The relationships among workplace bullying, self-esteem, and defense styles have been analyzed using Pearson correlation analysis. Linear regression analysis was used to analyze the effect of workplace bullying on self-esteem. The independent sample t-tests were applied to compare male and female university teachers in terms of workplace bullying, self-esteem, and defense styles. Moderation analysis was conducted with a resulting creation of an interaction term between workplace bullying and self-esteem to assess whether the degree or direction of the relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem was altered by the defense styles. The statistical significance level was predetermined to $p < .05$.

4.1. Phase 2: Qualitative Method

The qualitative phase followed the quantitative phase to elaborate on the statistical results further. The reason why the semi-structured interviews were employed was the fact that they enabled the participants to express their experiences, perceptions and suggestions about workplace bullying and self-esteem. The qualitative step was aimed at defining the factors that can cause workplace bullying and the procedures that can be used in order to reduce bullying and enhance self-esteem of university teachers.

4.1.1. Sampling and Selection

The sample was collected from 10 university teachers (Islamia University Bahawalpur, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Institute of South Punjab Multan, COMSATS Vehari, University of Agriculture Faisalabad Sub Campus Burewala) in South Punjab, Pakistan. The qualitative sample was made of 10 university teachers who were chosen in the same regional environment as the quantitative phase. The participants were chosen to have further insight on the experiences of workplace bullying, its causes and possible solutions. The authors ought to explain whether the participants of the interviews were chosen using purposive sampling, convenience sampling, or using their willingness after the survey period. This explanation is significant in the sense that qualitative sampling must be associated with the intention of acquiring informative and enriching information. Researchers utilize theme coding in thematic analysis to obtain authentic and correct codes using data analysis. This approach consists of three steps; Open Coding, Axial Coding, Selective Coding.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out with university teachers to discuss their experiences and perceptions of workplace bullying. The interview questions were aimed at identifying the causes of bullying in the workplace, the impact of bullying on self-esteem, and the potential measures that could be taken to reduce bullying in academic institutions. The semi-structured design enabled the researchers to pose follow-up questions where appropriate. The participants were made to understand that their responses would be confidential, and their names were not to be revealed when reporting the findings.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis took three steps, namely open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Important words, phrases, and ideas were found out of the responses to the interview questions in open coding. Similar codes were clustered into larger groups in the process of axial coding. In selective coding, there were major themes that were developed to explain the causes of bullying at the workplace and how bullying could be reduced and self-esteem improved. The process assisted in linking the qualitative results with the quantitative results of the study.

5. Results

The findings are given based on the objectives and hypotheses of the study. Firstly, the impact of workplace bullying on self-esteem was studied by using regression analysis. Second, the relationships between the workplace bullying, self-esteem, and defensive styles were tested using Pearson correlation analysis. Third, male and female university teachers were contrasted regarding workplace bullying, self-esteem and styles of defense through independent sample t-tests. Finally, a moderation analysis was conducted to examine whether the defense styles moderate the relationship between self-esteem and workplace bullying. The qualitative findings are presented after the quantitative findings to further clarify the causes of workplace bullying and possible ways to reduce bullying and increase self-esteem.

A regression analysis was used to determine whether workplace bullying was a significant predictor of self-esteem among university teachers. Workplace bullying was the independent variable, and self-esteem was the dependent variable. Table 1 results indicate that the negative influence of bullying in the workplace on self-esteem among university teachers was significant. The value of $R^2 = .06$ indicates that workplace bullying explained 6% of the variance in self-esteem. The negative beta shows that the higher the bullying at the place of work, the lower the self-esteem.

Table No 1
Regression analysis of Workplace Bullying on Self Esteem

Variables	B	β	SE
Constant	24.38***		.66
Workplace Bullying	-.04***	-.24	.01
R^2	.06		

Note. $N = 119$.

*** $p < .001$.

According to the results of Table 2, workplace bullying has a significant negative correlation with self-esteem among university teachers. This means that teachers who encounter higher rates of workplace bullying will tend more to report lower rates of self-esteem. The results also show that workplace bullying has a significant positive relationship with defense styles at the $p < .01$ level. Moreover, there is a significant negative association between self-esteem and defense styles at the $p = .05$ level. Overall, these results indicate that workplace bullying correlates with low self-esteem and high usage of defense styles among university teachers.

Table No 2
Correlations among Study Variables

Variables	n	Mean	STDEV	1	2	3
Workplace Bullying	119	41.69	14.97	-		
Self-esteem	119	22.71	2.50	-.24**	-	
Defense Style	119	216.16	31.64	.42**	-.23*	-

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

According to the results of Table 3, a significant difference was found in workplace bullying between female and male university teachers, $t(117) = 2.69$, $p = .008$. The results indicate that female university teachers reported a higher level of workplace bullying ($M = 45.20$, $SD = 14.74$) compared to male university teachers ($M = 38.00$, $SD = 14.43$). This indicates that female teachers experienced more workplace bullying compared to male teachers.

Table No 3
T-Test for Workplace Bullying between Female and Male

Variables	Female		Male		t(117)	p	Cohen's d
	Mean	STDEV	Mean	STDEV			
Workplace Bullying	45.20	14.74	38.00	14.43	2.69	0.008	.49

According to the results of Table 4, the comparison of self-esteem between female and male university teachers was analyzed through an independent sample t-test. The results indicated that male university teachers had slightly higher self-esteem scores ($M = 22.74$, $SD = 2.17$) than female university teachers ($M = 22.69$, $SD = 2.80$). However, the difference between the two mean scores is very small; therefore, the reported t-value and p-value should be rechecked before making a strong conclusion about significant gender differences in self-esteem.

Table No 4
T-Test for Self Esteem between Female and Male

Variables	Female		Male		t(117)	p	Cohen's d
	Mean	STDEV	Mean	STDEV			
Workplace Bullying	22.69	2.80	22.74	2.14	.276	.009	.52

University instructors' protection mechanisms in relation to workplace bullying and self-esteem were examined (see table 5). Table 5 illustrates how self-esteem and workplace bullying are moderated by defense styles. With $F(2,115) = 5.24$, $p < .001$, the predictors in Model 1 explained 0.8 percent of the variation in the result, according to the R^2 value of .083. The results showed that defense styles and workplace bullying were inversely associated with self-esteem ($\beta = .16$) and $\beta = .19$, $p < .01$, respectively. With $F(3,114) = 3.46$, $p < .001$, the predictors in Model 2 explained 0.8 percent of the variation in the result, according to the R^2 value of .084. The results showed that self-esteem was negatively predicted by workplace bullying, defensive styles, and workplace bullying x defense styles with $\Delta F(1,114) = .006$, the variance of models 1 and 2 changed by 0.1%, as indicated by the ΔR^2 value of .001. The results indicated that self-esteem and workplace bullying were not moderated by defense style.

According to the results of Table 6, the comparison of defense styles between female and male university teachers was analyzed through an independent sample t-test. The results indicated that the difference in the defense styles between female and male

teachers was non-significant, $t(116) = 1.91$, $p = .236$. This shows that female and male university teachers were not significantly different in the use of defense styles.

Table No 5
Effect of Defense Styles as Moderators on Workplace Bullying and Self Esteem

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	β	SE	B	β	SE
Constant	22.76***		.22	22.77***		.24
Workplace Bullying	-.46**	-.19**	.24	-.45**	-.18**	.25
Defense Styles	-.38	-.157	.24	-.38	-.16	.25
Workplace Bullying x Defense Styles				-.02	-.007	.20
R^2		.083			.084	
ΔR^2					.001	

Note. $N = 119$.

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$

Table No 6
T-Test for Comparison of Defense Styles between Female and Male

Variables	Female		Male		t(116)	p	Cohen's d
	Mean	STDEV	Mean	STDEV			
Defense Styles	212.64	32.67	219.57	30.50	1.91	.236	.22

Table 6 revealed non-significant mean differences on Defense styles with $t(116) = 1.91$, $p < .05$.

5.1. Phase 1

The factors that are cause of workplace bullying are Environment of workplace, Misuse of power, Personality clashes, Incompetent Authoritative figure and Workloads. Stress level of workplace, attitude of team members, not having a resource person play a role in environment of workplace. In misuse of power, people do; excessive monitoring, invalid criticisms, undue blamings, unjustified exercise of power, bossy attitude of heads. Personality clashes explain; behavioral problems or clashes with administration which can cause workplace bullying. Employee workload is the observed association between the number of psychological computing power or resources necessary to execute a task (Ilies et al., 2010). Incompetent authority uses all the resources of organization to project its achievement rather than putting the resources in the best slot to uplift the organizational tire making it ideal working environment for the employees.

And the factors which can decrease the workplace bullying and increase self-esteem are Awareness and education, Impartiality, Communication & Empowerment, Healthy environment, Counselling & motivation. In awareness and education; there should be seminars or lectures, that will bring awareness to both sides' dominant and recessive. It will decrease workplace bullying and increase self-esteem. The theme impartiality explains that employees should not be biased or partial with colleagues and subordinates. In the workplace, communication can help to alleviate difficulties and boost productivity. The theme "empowerment" explains control and power, a certain level of decision making and the ability to speak up at workplace in employees. People choose to work where they feel satisfied and valued mentally and physically. Healthy environment is a key factor to decrease workplace bullying and increase self-esteem. Counselling provides a safe environment where employees can discuss their problems, mental states, thoughts and feelings. According to participants, by counselling and motivating teachers, workplace bullying can be decreased and self-esteem can be increased.

5.2. Discussions

The primary goal of this study was to measure the impact of workplace bullying on self-esteem. In a previous research workplace bullying is found to be connected with low self-esteem (Noor et al., 2016). The result shows that workplace bullying can weaken confidence, professional dignity, and a feeling of personal worth among teachers. Self-esteem of teachers in academic institutions is strongly associated with respect, recognition,

autonomy, and collegial relationships. As such, when they are exposed to criticism, humiliation, exclusion or the misuse of authority, they may experience a reduction in their self-evaluation as well as their professional confidence. Second, the link between self-esteem, defense mechanisms, and bullying at work was examined. The results show that low self-esteem is linked to a higher risk of experiencing bullying at work (Li et al., 2020). Workplace bullying has a favorable correlation with knowledge concealment (Zhu Yao et al., 2020). The positive relationship between workplace bullying and defense styles suggests that teachers who experience bullying may rely more on psychological defense mechanisms to manage emotional discomfort and workplace stress. At the same time, the negative relationship between self-esteem and defense styles may indicate that teachers with lower self-esteem may use more defensive psychological responses when facing difficult workplace situations. This finding highlights the importance of considering psychological coping patterns in workplace bullying research. Immature defenses were linked with high self-esteem instability (Zeigler-Hill & Showers, 2007).

Third, the level of workplace bullying in female university teachers as compared to male university teachers was estimated. According to Salin women reported higher rates of workplace bullying than males in workplace (Salin, 2003). Higher incidence of females subjected to unfavorable workplace actions as compared to males, (Campanini et al., 2006). This outcome can be an indicator of the power dynamics between genders, their social expectations, and workplace hierarchy in academic institutions, where female teachers might receive more criticism, exclusion, or unfair treatment than male teachers. Fourth, level of self-esteem in female university teachers as compared to male university teachers was identified. According to Kling males showed higher self-esteem as compare to females (Kling et al., 1999). Adolescent girls have poorer self-esteem and more unfavorable perceptions of their physical traits than boys (Kearney-Cooke, 1999). But the interpretation of this finding needs to be done with caution as the reported mean difference between male and female teachers is very small. Therefore, the t-test result for self-esteem should be recalculated and verified before making a strong conclusion about gender differences in self-esteem.

Fifth, the moderator between workplace bullying and self-esteem was measured as defense styles among the university teachers. There has been no previous study that supports the moderation of defense style between workplace bullying and self-esteem. The non-significant moderating effect of the styles of defense suggests that the styles of defense did not change the strength or direction of the relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem. The possible reason is that the style of defense can be more of a coping mechanism than a protective factor that can diminish the negative impact of bullying on self-esteem. The second potential cause can be the rather small sample size that might have restricted the statistical power to perceive an interaction effect. Future research can also consider mature, neurotic and immature defense styles individually to understand their contribution to workplace bullying experiences. Sixth, use of defense styles in female university teachers as compared to male university teachers was explored. According to research there were no significant differences of using defense styles between gender (Petraglia et al., 2009). This observation indicates that gender alone may not be as influential as individual personality, job stress, and organizational climate are in determining the use of defense styles among university instructors.

5.3. Phase 2

The qualitative results can be used to further explain the quantitative results by showing how workplace bullying takes place in academic institutions and how it can be mitigated. The themes that were identified during interviews also concur with the quantitative result that workplace bullying has a negative impact on self-esteem. The participants presented workplace environment, power misuse, personality conflicts, incompetent authority figures, and workload as key factors that caused workplace bullying. The organizational factors of Workplace Bullying led to the emergence of five main themes. Environment of workplace, Misuse of power, Personality clashes, Incompetent Authoritative figure and Workloads. The first theme Workplace Environment, placement in a less experienced or uncomfortable location Faghihi et al. (2021) leads to bullying. The second theme is "misuse of power" workplace bullying is typically caused by an imbalance of power (Perez-Fuentes et al., 2021).

The third main subject was "Personality clashes". University teachers come from a variety of experiences and perspectives, all of which influence their personalities. Problems emerge in the workplace when they fail to appreciate or embrace the variations in the other's personalities. Another theme that came from the analysis was "Workloads". Some abusive workplace actions, according to Faghihi et al. (2021), include: excessive workloads and working extra hours without pay (Faghihi et al., 2021). A strong theme was found from the analysis was "Incompetent Authority Figure". People with power become violent when they feel incompetence in their realm of power, according to studies (Fast & Chen, 2009).

Secondly, "What are the factors that can decrease workplace bullying and increase the self-esteem?" led to the emergence of five main themes which are Awareness and education, Impartiality, Communication & Empowerment, Healthy environment, Counselling & motivation. "Awareness and education" is the first theme of our 2nd research question. Analysis revealed that awareness and education is necessary to decrease workplace bullying and increase self-esteem. The second theme impartiality explains that employees should not be biased or partial with colleagues and subordinates. The third theme is "Communication & Empowerment". The study conducted by Thorlakson and Murray (1996) found that empowerment has a positive influence in the workplace. Another theme that came from the analysis was "Healthy Environment". Healthy environment is a key factor to decrease workplace bullying and increase self-esteem. Burton (2010) presented a model in which he described that employee can be influenced from mental health problems, conflicts and diseases. The theme "Counselling & Motivation" according to participants counselling should be done for employees who are bullied to increase their self-esteem. According to the findings of the research, counselling is typically helpful in treating psychological difficulties, has a considerable impact on illness absence, and also has a moderate impact on attitudes toward work (McLeod, 2010). Overall, the qualitative results supplement the quantitative ones proving that not only is the problem of workplace bullying an individual-level one but also an organizational-level issue. Misuse of powers, unfair workload, poor leadership, and unhealthy working environment are some of the factors that can create bullying experiences that lower the self-esteem of teachers. Likewise, creating a more respectful and supportive workplace culture in universities can be facilitated by awareness, impartiality, communication, empowerment, healthy environment, counselling, and motivation.

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed how bullying in workplaces affects self-esteem among teachers in universities and addressed whether defense styles mediate this relationship. The research provided both the statistical and the qualitative data of how workplace bullying takes place in academic institutions and how it affects the psychological well-being of teachers through a mixed-method explanatory sequential design. The quantitative results confirmed that workplace bullying has a strong negative effect on self-esteem, confidence and professional dignity that means that teachers who experience more bullying are more likely to report lower levels of self-esteem, confidence and professional dignity. The results also showed that there were strong correlations between self-esteem and the styles of defense and workplace bullying. However, defense styles did not significantly moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and self-esteem, suggesting that defense styles may not be strong enough to protect teachers from the harmful psychological effects of workplace bullying.

According to the gender-based results, female teachers were more likely to report greater levels of workplace bullying compared to the male teachers, which makes it essential to consider gender-sensitive workplace policies in higher education institutions. But the results pertaining to the differences in self-esteem between female and male teachers must be viewed with caution and confirmed by recalculating the statistical findings. The researchers further concluded that the defense styles did not show significant gender difference, and that the application of the defense mechanisms may depend on individual psychological patterns and workplace experiences rather than gender.

The qualitative results also supported the quantitative findings by establishing the key factors that lead to workplace bullying in academic institutions. These causes were poor working environments, abuse of authority, personality clashes, incompetent management and work overload. The qualitative results also indicated that there were several workable measures that could be implemented to curb workplace bullying and increase self-esteem, including awareness and education, impartiality, effective communication, empowerment, healthy working environment, counselling and motivation. These findings reveal that not only is workplace bullying a personal mental issue but also an organizational and administrative issue.

Overall, the paper contributes to the literature by identifying the negative consequences of workplace bullying on self-esteem of university teachers and by evaluating the role of defense styles in this relationship. The results indicate that universities must establish clear anti-bullying policies, enhance fair administrative practices, offer counselling support, promote open communication, and ensure respectful workplace behaviors. It is necessary to develop an academic environment that is supportive and psychologically safe to protect the self-esteem of teachers, to improve the relationships between teachers and colleagues, and to enhance the overall quality of higher education institutions.

Author Contributions

Maria Shafiq: Data collection and analysis

Umbreen Khizar: Topic selection and writeup

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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