

“Workplace Conflict as a Predictor of Workplace Bullying: A Cross-Section Study on the Mental Health Implications”

Kanishka Sagar

kanishkasagar07@gmail.com

(M. A. PSYCHOLOGY), Lovely Professional University

Abstract

Workplace bullying is one of the major threats to numerous organizations that negatively impact not only the behavior of individuals and their performance but also the organization as well as the society at large. The present paper focuses on exploring the relationship between work-related conflict and bullying on the basis of empirical evidence gained from the responses of 150 workers in both private and public enterprises. According to the frustration-aggression theory and the social interaction model of conflict escalation, the following measurement tools were used to conduct the study – NAQ-R and ICAWS, where the latter tool includes three types of conflict – task, relational, and process.

The findings reveal that work-related conflict is a significant factor predicting workplace bullying. After controlling the effect of gender and age on the variables, it was noted that the relationship remained controversial. Conflict among individuals may act as an indication of bullying behind the scenes. If coworkers do not have harmony among themselves, the environment of the workplace becomes hostile, and the hostility could create bullying. Conflict can be classified into two types: Task conflict involves differences in opinion regarding the nature of the work, while Process conflict involves disagreements on how to accomplish the task.

Such conflicts are common in many work environments; however, when they result in bullying, the situation becomes quite negative. It is always advisable to manage such conflicts through harmonious ways since such a step will go a long way in preventing bullying. Bullying in the workplace is unethical, thus the need for preventive measures.

Keywords: Workplace Bullying, Work-Related Conflict, Task Conflict, Process Conflict, Conflict Escalation, Employee Behaviour, Organizational Performance, Conflict Management.

Introduction

The office is a place where different thoughts and intentions meet through working together. There are limited resources, and the stress is intense, leading to disputes and even bullying. If an individual is being bullied in his/her workplace, he/she suffers and there are no winners in that organization. Scholars specializing in organizational studies have spent the last three decades trying to find out what happens in cases where disputes escalate to bullying. People devote a significant amount of time to their workplaces, meaning it is important to understand how conflicts can turn into workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying is generally characterised as repeated and systematic exposure to negative acts by one or more individuals who target a person who has difficulties protecting him/herself (Einarsen et al., 2011). Bullying and interpersonal conflicts can be differentiated based on how often they occur, the period for which it occurs, and the power disparity involved amongst others. Bullying could be done in several ways, such as open hostility, verbal attacks, ostracism, undermining, and isolation. Epidemiological studies estimate that 10-20% of the working population in Western countries experience bullying in any given year (Nielsen et al., 2012), with higher rates in demanding occupations, such as nursing and teaching, and industries, such as financial services. Psychological

outcomes of workplace bullying are well-documented and include increased rates of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, somatic symptoms, burnout and suicidal ideation (Thoits, 2011; Verkuil et al., 2015). But then there are other consequences of bullying that go beyond the one who is bullied. Even bystanders and even bullies may be affected if the situation escalates to very serious levels. There are also organizational issues caused by bullying. The result of bullying behavior in the workplace includes absenteeism, presenteeism, turnover, and litigation.

A number of research works have been undertaken regarding bullying, which either consider individual perspectives or organizational setting; however, very few have addressed bullying resulting immediately from organizational conflict. Conflict results when there is a difference in goal, interest or social identity among the parties involved, and it normally culminates into bullying behavior.

According to the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989) frustration resulting from thwarted goal attainment provides a motivational impetus to engage in aggression; in the workplace, unresolved conflict might represent such a frustration source. The social interactionist view of aggression (Felson & Tedeschi, 1993), which conceptualizes aggression as a strategically deployed tactic within heated interactions, also suggests that escalating conflict offers both a proclivity and a social script for bullying behaviour. As such, the purpose of this study is to bridge this gap by investigating the possible relationship between various types of organizational conflict, whether task, interpersonal, or procedural, and workplace bullying among a sample size of 150 employed persons. Through the use of psychometrically sound measures (NAQ-R and ICAWS), adjustment for major sociodemographic confounders, and a hierarchical regression approach, the study seeks to identify the specific dimensions of conflict that are most closely associated with bullying perpetration and victimization, and to provide important insights for both theoretical development and practical intervention.

Objectives Of the Study

The research has the following objectives:

1. It aims at determining the predictive ability of ICAWS subscales with respect to workplace bullying according to the NAQ-R scores in a simple two-dimensional framework.
2. It aims at determining the predictive power of different conflict dimensions for workplace bullying after taking into account sociodemographic characteristics.
3. For Comparing conflict and bullying scores between both genders in both sectors.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There will be a significant, positive correlation between overall organizational conflict (ICAWS scale) and overall organizational bullying (NAQ-R).

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Relationship conflict is expected to be the best predictor of organizational bullying, followed by task and process conflicts.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Correlations among the types of conflict and organizational bullying will still be significant after controlling for sociodemographic variables.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Workplace Bullying

The concept of workplace bullying was developed towards the end of the twentieth century through different researches conducted in Scandinavia. One of such researches was that conducted by Leymann, who used the term "mobbing" to describe the deliberate targeting and harassment of another individual within the workplace setting in 1990. Subsequently, Einarsen et al. defined workplace bullying as deliberate actions against another employee for no less than once weekly for a period of six months, as well as the unequal power status between them.

Eventually, researchers discovered that workplace bullying is not limited to only one type. Overt bullying entails actions that can be observed by others, such as verbal abuse and even physical violence. Indirect bullying consists of actions that are done covertly by the aggressor, such as ignoring the targeted individual and spreading rumors about him/her. Targeted bullying includes harassing an individual without reason, while dispute bullying occurs when conflict arises among people leading to bullying..

The NAQ-R (Einarsen et al., 2009), used in the present study, defines bullying through 22 specific behavioural items on three factors: work-related bullying (e.g., denying information, excessive supervision, giving trivial tasks), person-related bullying (e.g., spreading gossip, social ostracism, negative verbal remarks) and physically intimidating bullying (e.g., threatening gestures, invasion of personal space). This behavioral definition avoids the problem of self-labelling that is common in self-report surveys that ask respondents to identify as being "bullied," and has been shown to have good reliability and validity across a range of occupational setting

Workplace Conflicts: Dimensions and Consequences

Three main forms of intragroup conflict have been identified by organizational conflict theorists (Jehn, 1995). Conflict over tasks occurs when there are differences of opinion concerning the execution of the task, the approach to use, and the interpretation of the task itself. Relationship conflicts, however, occur due to personality clashes among team members, while process conflicts happen when there is a disagreement about the process or procedure to follow in completing the task.

According to Amason in 1996, there is some merit in disagreements since they can push people into thinking hard. However, according to De Dreu and Weingart in 2003, all forms of conflicts among workers are correlated with job dissatisfaction.

ICAWS (Intragroup Conflict and Workplace Stress scale) is an instrument designed to assess the effect of conflict on individuals working in a group setting. The scale examines the emotional and cognitive reactions of respondents to various kinds of conflicts present within the workplace. The scale consists of 12 items distributed across three sets of four items each measuring conflict over work tasks, interpersonal relations among coworkers, and work procedures. It is considered a useful instrument due to its brevity and comprehensive nature. Previous research using the scale found that all types of intragroup conflict were associated with stress, exhaustion, and job satisfaction and organizational commitment as measured by Spector & Jex (1998).

Theoretical Framework: Conflict to Bullying Escalation

There are various theories which help us understand how workplace conflict leads to bullying. One such theory is the frustration-aggression hypothesis presented by Berkowitz in 1989. According to this theory, workplace issues tend to make people frustrated since they cannot achieve their objectives. The buildup of this frustration without any possible solution could lead to anger. Anger might then be projected against anyone close. This theory is significant since it enables us to understand why people become aggressive in the workplace setting. Conflict is likely to cause anger due to its emotion-laden and ego-threatening nature.

The group norm perspective (Robinson & Bennett, 1995) provides a related explanation: when conflict is seen as acceptable within groups, group norms break down, increasing tolerance for deviant workplace behavior such as bullying. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1973) also suggests that witnessing violent methods of conflict resolution, especially among supervisors, may predispose subordinates to engage in such tactics. The resource depletion model (Hobfoll, 1989) also holds that recurrent conflict drains cognitive and emotional resources required for prosocial functioning, increasing the likelihood of aggressive action.

Empirical Evidence

Research is emerged in supporting links between bullying and conflict . Salin (2003) found that competitive conflict is an important enabler of bullying, while Hoel and Salin (2003) have shown that unclear authority and goal conflict provide a context in which bullying can occur. Zapf and Gross (2001) reported that "unresolved conflicts" preceded

bullying for most retrospective reports from bullying victims. Agervold and Mikkelsen (2004) showed that a high conflict climate was a longitudinal predictor of bullying victimization, even after personality factors were taken into account. Nielsen and Einarsen's (2012) meta-analysis of 66 studies found climate factors, many related to conflict, as among the strongest predictors of bullying.

Methodology

Research Design

The current study used a method to look at things at a single point in time. This approach was chosen because the study needed to measure how strong and in which direction the relationships between things are test some ideas that were thought of before and make statements from a small group to a bigger group of people (Creswell, 2014; Field, 2018). This kind of study, where all the information is collected at one time is often used in research about organisations and psychology to look at how things like conflict and bullying are related (Einarsen et al., 2020; Jehn & Mannix 2001). This method allowed the study to quickly collect information from a lot of people and still be able to look at how things are related and make predictions about the study's objectives.

The study looked at how things are related and tried to predict some outcomes, which is in line with what the study was trying to do: (a) see how often certain things happen (b) look at how two things are related and (c) see if conflict can predict bullying when considering demographic information. It is known that this kind of study does not allow us to say for sure what causes what. The ideas about which way things affect each other are based on a lot of theory and evidence, from the past.

Participants

We studied 150 people who are employed full time (78 men and 72 women). Their average age was 33.7 years, and most people were aged 26.9-40.5 years. We selected these people from various groups in cities, using a technique called "snowball" sampling - we started with some and asked them to refer others. To join the study, people had to have worked full time for at least six months, be at least 20 years old, and be able to read and answer questions in the language we asked them questions in. We checked that they had answered most of the questions - we did not use people's answers if they left more than 10% of the questions unanswered. Fortunately, all 150 people we asked, completed the study, so we were able to use their responses.

Research Instruments

The sample was surveyed using a questionnaire that included three parts: (A) a sociodemographic information sheet, (B) the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R), which assesses workplace bullying, and (C) the Intragroup Conflict and Workplace Scale (ICAWS), which assesses workplace conflict.

Section A: Sociodemographic Information

The first section collected background information about the participants. This included:

- Gender, which was either male or female

- Age, which was how old they were in years
- Educational qualification, which they reported themselves.

We put these into three groups: undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral. We used these details as control variables in a kind of analysis to see how much conflict affected things separate from who the participants were. We also used gender to compare two groups using a t-test. The demographic details helped us understand the participants better.

Table 1. shows the characteristics of the people who took part in the study. The people in the study were split evenly between men and women. There were 75 men and 75 women. Most of the people who took part were between 21 and 25 years old. This is because the study mostly included adults who work. The average age of people in the study was 23.25 years old. The ages of the people, in the study ranged from 18 to 45 years old.

Variable	Category	n	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	75	50.0	50.0
	Female	75	50.0	100.0
Age Group	18–20	33	22.0	22.0
	21–25	87	58.0	80.0
	26–30	25	16.7	96.7
	31–35	3	2.0	98.7
	36+	2	1.3	100.0
Age (continuous)	M = 23.25, SD = 3.80, Range = 18–45	150	—	—
Note. Total N = 150. Gender: 1 = Male, 2 = Female.				

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 150)

Questionnaire-Revised is used to measure workplace bullying. This questionnaire is very popular. It is used a lot in studies about workplace health and psychology. The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised looks at how people experience bad behaviour at work. It does not ask people if they think they are being bullied.

The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised has 16 questions about behaviour at work. These questions are divided into three groups:

- Work-related bullying is about behaviour that makes it hard for people to do their job. This includes things like not giving people the information they need giving them much work to do or taking away their responsibilities.
- Person-related bullying is about behaviour that is meant to hurt someone. This includes things like making fun of someone saying mean things to them or spreading rumours about them.
- Intimidating behaviours are about behaviour that is scary or threatening. This includes things like yelling at someone making threatening gestures or getting too close to them.

People answer these questions by saying how often these things happen to them. They can choose from five options: Never, Occasionally Often or Always/Daily. All the answers are added up to get a score. A higher score means that someone experiences behaviour more often. The total score can be anywhere from 16 to 80.

In this study the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised was very consistent. This means that it is a tool, for measuring workplace bullying. The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised is a tool because it has been tested many times before and it always gives consistent results. The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised is used to measure the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised scores. The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised scores are important because they help us understand how often people experience behaviour at work.

Part C: Intragroup Conflict and Workplace Scale (ICAWS)

We used the Intragroup Conflict and Workplace Scale (ICAWS) to measure workplace conflict. The ICAWS was designed to measure the three theoretically and empirically distinct dimensions of intragroup conflict identified in the seminal organisational behaviour research (Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Mannix, 2001):

- Task Conflict (C1): The extent to which group members or colleagues disagree about the nature of the tasks, goals and responsibilities of their work. Task conflict relates to disagreements over tasks.
- Relationship Conflict (C2): The extent to which there are personal incompatibilities, tensions, and frictions among group members or colleagues that are not work or task focused.
- Relationship conflict is interpersonal antagonism and affective incompatibilities.
- Process Conflict (C3): Disagreements about the process of task completion - in particular, the division, delegation and management of group tasks.
- Additive Conflict Item (C4): An additional conflict item on general workplace interpersonal antagonism and hostility.

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always/Daily), with one item also having a 6 (Very Frequently) response option, in line with the greater variability in the nature of some of the conflict items. The overall sum of the items formed an ICAWS Total conflict score (range: 4-20) and each item was used as a subscale independently to allow for testing of the different predictive validity of specific conflict items. In the current sample, the ICAWS exhibited satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .731$), with the more stringent criteria of $\alpha \geq .70$ generally recommended for research instruments (Field, 2018; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Instrument	Construct	Items	Scale	Alpha	Subscales / Notes
NAQ-R	Workplace Bullying	16	1-5	.880	Single total score; items cover workrelated, personrelated, and physically intimidating negative acts
ICAWS	Workplace Conflict	4	1-5	.731	C1: Task; C2: Relationship; C3: Process; C4: Additional Conflict item

Table 2. Overview of Psychometric Instruments Used in the Study

Procedure of Data Collection

Step 1: We made a questionnaire using the NAQ-R and ICAWS components. We told people what the study was, about, which is understanding working experiences on the page. We also said that nobody would know who was answering the questions and that they did not have to do it if they did not want to. We asked them to take the survey.

Step 2: Before we asked a lot of people to answer the questions, we tried it out with a group of ten working adults. We wanted to make sure the questions were clear and the questionnaire was easy to use. We also wanted to know how long it would take to finish, which was eight to ten minutes. Some people told us what they thought so we made a small change to make it look better. We did not change any of the questions.

Step 3: Distribution of the Digital Survey

Ethical Considerations

- **Consent:** Before they started the survey we gave everyone a document that explained what the study was about what they would have to do and that they could stop at any time. If they filled out the questionnaire it meant they agreed to take part.

- **Participation:** People only took part if they wanted to. We didn't give them anything to make them take part. We didn't punish them if they didn't.
- **Right to withdraw:** We told people they could stop the survey at any time and that it wouldn't cause them any problems.
- **Anonymity and confidentiality:** We didn't ask for any details, like names or contact info.

Everyone's answers were completely anonymous. We only looked at the data as a group not as people.

- **Data security and storage:** We kept all the data safe on a platform that only we could access and we followed the rules about protecting people's data.
- **Sensitive content disclosure:** Some of the questions, in the survey might have been upsetting so we warned people on the page that they might come across things that made them feel uncomfortable.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) and verified using Python (SciPy and Statsmodels libraries). The descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alphas for all scales were calculated in IBM SPSS Statistics software package. Bivariate correlations between the variables of interest (i.e., EI, PsyCap, and academic flow) were evaluated via Pearson correlation analysis. Independent predictive power of EI on PsyCap, EI on flow, and PsyCap on flow was explored through simple linear regression analyses.

Preliminary Analysis

Three types of analysis were done to make sure the data was good and to check if we can use certain statistical tests:

- **Data screening:** We checked how the data was distributed looked at statistics and made sure there were no missing values or errors in the data for all the things we were interested in. This helped us find any mistakes in data entry values that didn't make sense and patterns in missing data.
- **Reliability:** We calculated a score called Cronbach's alpha for two sets of data: NAQR and ICAWS. For NAQ-R the score was .880. For ICAWS it was .731. These scores told us that we could trust the data and use it for analysis.
- **Normality assessment:** We used a test called the Shapiro-Wilk test, on the NAQ-R and ICAWS data. For NAQ-R the test showed that the data was pretty normal. For ICAWS the data was a bit skewed. We still used parametric methods because our sample size was large (150 people). NAQ-R and ICAWS data were. We used parametric tests. NAQ-R scores were reasonably normally distributed. ICAWS scores were slightly skewed.

Scale-Level Descriptive Statistics – Table 3

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurt	Alpha (α)
NAQ-R Total (Bullying)	150	39.49	11.23	16	80	0.32	0.51	.880
ICAWS Total (Conflict)	150	9.95	3.61	4	20	0.26	-0.43	.731
C1 – Task Conflict	150	2.49	1.16	1	5	0.42	-0.59	—

C2 – Relationship	150	2.37	1.14	1	5	0.42	-0.78	—
C3 – Process Conflict	150	2.59	1.24	1	5	0.34	-0.89	—
C4	150	2.51	1.30	1	6	0.61	-0.53	—

Scale-Level Descriptive Statistics for All Study Variables (N = 150)

The mean NAQ-R total score was 39.49 (SD = 11.23, range 16–80), suggesting a moderate level of experienced workplace bullying (theoretical range: 16–80). The mean ICAWS total score was 9.95 (SD = 3.61, range 4–20), indicating low-to-moderate workplace conflict (theoretical range: 4–20). Process conflict had the highest subscale mean (M = 2.59), followed by task conflict (M = 2.49) and relationship conflict (M = 2.37). The NAQ-R total was approximately normally distributed (W = 0.986, p = .147), satisfying parametric test assumptions.

Results

Objective 1 and H1: Looking at how ICAWS and NAQ- R are Connected

The first thing we wanted to do was see how well each part of the ICAWS test can predict bullying at work. We thought that the total score, from the ICAWS test would be an indicator of bullying as measured by the NAQ-R test. So we did some tests to see how they are connected. The results are shown in Table 4 below

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. C1 Task	1.00					
2. C2 Relationship	.43***	1.00				
3. C3 Process	.39***	.49***	1.00			
4. C4	.41***	.28***	.44***	1.00		
5. ICAWS Total	.74***	.72***	.78***	.73***	1.00	
6. NAQ-R Total	.58***	.49***	.47***	.33***	.62***	1.00

Pearson Correlation Matrix: ICAWS Subscales and NAQ-R Total (N = 150)

All ICAWS variables had significant positive correlations with bullying (NAQ-R total) (all $p < .001$). ICAWS total had the highest correlation with bullying ($r = .62$, $p < .001$). Of the subscales, task conflict was the strongest ($r = .58$, $p < .001$), followed by relationship conflict ($r = .49$, $p < .001$) and process conflict ($r = .47$, $p < .001$). These results fully support H_1 : workplace conflict significantly and positively predicts workplace bullying.

Hypothesis 2 is about the Relative Predictive Strength of Conflict Subscales.

If we look at the correlations in Table 4— Pearson Correlation Matrix we see that this is not the case. We can see that task conflict has the link with a value of 0.58 then relationship with 0.49 and process conflict with 0.47. We also ran a regression in the table4 Block 3 and the results show that task conflict is the main predictor with a value of 0.384 and it's very significant.

There is also process conflict with a value of 0.223 and it is little stronger than relationship conflict (0.211). So Hypothesis 2 is half right. We believed that relationship conflict would be the strongest followed by task conflict. Then process conflict. But what we found is task conflict is the strongest, then process conflict and relationship conflict are equal. Hypothesis 2 is, about the Relative Predictive Strength of Conflict Subscales. It is not fully supported by our results.

Objective 3 and H3: Hierarchical Multiple Regression

Objective 3 was to check if workplace conflict can predict bullying and if so how strong this prediction is, after taking into account things, like age and gender. We did a kind of analysis called hierarchical multiple regression.

- We used a questionnaire called NAQ-R to measure bullying.
- In the step we added age and gender to see how they affect the results.
- In the step we added the total conflict score from ICAWS.
- In the step we broke down the total conflict score into four smaller parts, labelled C1 to C4.

The results of this analysis are shown in Table 5 below.

We looked at workplace conflict and bullying. How age and gender play a role. Workplace conflict was measured using ICAWS. Bullying was measured using NAQ-R. The results show how conflict affects bullying.

Block / Variable	B	SE	β	t	p	R ²	ΔR^2	Model F
Block 1: Sociodemographic Controls						.012	—	
Age	-0.023	0.244	-.008	-0.096	.923			
Gender	-2.396	1.845	-.107	-1.299	.196			
F(2, 147) = 0.869, p = .422 (ns)								
Block 2: + ICAWS Total Conflict						.398	.387	
Age	0.135	0.192	.045	0.702	.484			
Gender	-2.281	1.444	-.102	-1.579	.117			
ICAWS Total	1.943	0.201	.624	9.683	< .001			
F(3, 146) = 32.201, p < .001 $\Delta F(1,146) = 93.769$, p < .001								
Block 3: + ICAWS Subscales (C1–C4)						.444	.433	
Age	0.120	0.188	.040	0.638	.524			
Gender	-2.114	1.416	-.094	-1.493	.138			
C1 – Task	3.727	0.719	.384	5.180	< .001			
C2 – Relationship	2.068	0.735	.211	2.813	.006			
C3 – Process	2.028	0.709	.223	2.859	.005			
C4	0.153	0.625	.018	0.245	.807			
F(6, 143) = 19.060, p < .001 $\Delta F(4,143) = 27.839$, p < .001								

Table 5 : Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Workplace Bullying from Conflict Dimensions (N = 150)

Block 1 only looked at age and gender. It did not have an impact on bullying. The results showed that age and gender alone did not explain much about bullying. The numbers were $F(2, 147) = 0.869$, $p = 0.422$ and $R^2 = 0.012$.

Block 2 added the total ICAWS score to the model. This model was very significant. The ICAWS score had an impact. The numbers were $F(3, 146) = 32.201$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.398$ and an adjusted R^2 of 0.386. The ICAWS score helped explain a lot of variance in bullying. The change in R^2 was 0.387. The ICAWS score was very important in predicting bullying. It had $B = 1.943$, $\beta = 0.624$, $t = 9.683$, $p < 0.001$.

Block 3 replaced the ICAWS score with its subscales. The results were $F(6, 143) = 19.060$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.444$. This was an increase from Block 1. The change in R^2 was 0.433. The ICAWS score and its subscales are useful in understanding bullying.

- Task conflict helped predict bullying. The ICAWS score and its subscales, including task conflict are important. Task conflict had $B = 3.727$, $\beta = 0.384$, $p < 0.001$.

-Process conflict was also a predictor of bullying. The ICAWS score and its subscales, including process conflict are useful. Process conflict had $B = 2.028$, $\beta = 0.223$, $p = 0.005$.

-Relationship conflict was significant. The ICAWS score and its subscales, including relationship conflict are helpful. Relationship conflict had $B = 2.068$, $\beta = 0.211$, $p = 0.006$. All these conflicts are part of the ICAWS score.

One conflict item, C4 was not significant. Its p value was 0.807. Age and gender still did not have an impact on bullying. The ICAWS score and its subscales are useful in understanding bullying. These results support the idea that the ICAWS score's important. The ICAWS score and its subscales are helpful, in predicting bullying.

Objective 4 : Gender Comparison in Conflict and Bullying

We want to see how conflict and bullying scores differ between males and females. We looked at scores from 75 males and 75 females. To get results we used a special test called Welch's independent-samples t-test. This test is helpful when the groups being compared have variances. The results of our comparison are shown in Table 6.

By comparing conflict and bullying in males and females we can better understand these issues. Males have conflict and bullying scores. Females have conflict and bullying scores. We analyzed these scores to check for differences between males and females. This will help us see if one group has conflict and bullying, than the other.

Variable	Male M	Male SD	Female M	Female SD	t	df	p	d	Sig.
NAQ-R Bullying Total	40.69	10.69	38.28	11.55	1.319	148	.189	.217	ns
ICAWS Conflict Total	10.01	3.49	9.89	3.69	0.203	148	.839	.033	ns
C1 – Task Conflict	2.57	1.18	2.40	1.12	0.917	148	.361	.151	ns

C2 – Relationship	2.37	1.09	2.36	1.19	0.071	148	.943	.012	ns
C3 – Process Conflict	2.52	1.20	2.67	1.26	-0.725	148	.470	-.119	ns
C4	2.55	1.23	2.47	1.37	0.375	148	.709	.062	ns

Table 6 Gender Differences in Workplace Conflict and Bullying: Independent-Samples tTests (n = 75 per group)

Comparison of differences between men and women regarding workplace conflict and bullying was done. It was revealed that there were no differences between men and women on any of the measures. Men scored higher in the measure of bullying behavior with mean of 40.69 and SD of 10.69. Women had bullying scores of 38.28 and their standard deviation was 11.55.

However, this difference was not statistically significant. Here are the statistics: $t(148) = 1.319$, $p = .189$, effect size (d) = .217. As to conflict, men and women had absolutely similar scores. Men scored 10.01. Women 9.89 in conflict.

Effect size was very small (.033).

These results mean that there are similarities in experience with workplace bullying and conflict between men and women. Workplace bullying and conflict are experienced similarly by men and women. Workplace bullying and conflict are experiences of both men and women. Workplace bullying and conflict affect men and women similarly.

Summary

The results show that problems at work are a reason for bullying at work. This is true for 44.4 percent of the people in this study. We looked at the numbers. We still found this to be true even when we considered things like age and where people are from. When we looked closer we found that problems with work tasks are the reason for bullying. This is a little surprising because we thought that problems with the people you work with would be the reason. We did not find any difference between men and women when it comes to problems or bullying at work. So what does this mean for companies? If they can reduce disagreements about work tasks and also problems, with relationships and processes they may be able to stop a lot of bullying at work. Workplace conflict is a deal and companies should try to reduce workplace conflict. Workplace bullying is closely related to workplace conflict. By reducing workplace conflict companies can reduce workplace bullying.

H	Hypothesis Statement	Key Finding	Outcome
H ₁	ICAWS total will significantly and positively predict NAQ-R bullying total.	$r = .62, p < .001$ (bivariate); $\beta = .624, p < .001$ (regression Block 2).	Supported
H ₂	Relationship conflict will be the strongest predictor, followed by task then process.	Task ($\beta = .384$) > Process ($\beta = .223$) > Relationship ($\beta = .211$). Task was strongest, not relationship.	Partially Supported
H ₃	Conflict will significantly predict bullying after controlling for sociodemographic.	$\Delta R^2 = .387-.433, p < .001$ after controlling for age and gender (both non-significant).	Supported

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Outcomes

Discussion

Result provides a detailed description of the methodology utilized in this investigation. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design involving the administration of a self-report questionnaire to a convenience sample of $N = 150$ employed adults (75 males, 75 females; M age = 23.25, $SD = 3.80$) was utilized to gather the required data. The 16-item NAQ-R with alpha reliability coefficient of .880 was applied to measure workplace bullying whereas the 4-item ICAWS with alpha coefficient of .731 was used to measure workplace conflict. Task conflict, relationship conflict, process conflict, and other dimensions of workplace conflict were included. Data collection was conducted using a structured digital survey approach while following accepted guidelines for ethical considerations of informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy. Statistical analyses included a sequence of statistical procedures such as descriptive statistics, frequencies at item level, correlation analyses, hierarchical multiple regression, and Welch's independent-samples t-tests to test each research hypothesis. The outcomes of statistical analyses are presented.

Interpersonal Principal Findings

The finding that relationship conflict was found to be the strongest predictor of workplace bullying ($\beta = .38$) is theoretically plausible and supported by literature. The antipathetic and emotionally incompatible nature of relationship conflict makes it the most proximal to the motivation and social forces believed to trigger bullying. Once interpersonal antipathy sets in amongst colleagues based on their personalities, incompatible beliefs, or status rivalry, the restraint that prevents the manifestation of hostility may wear thin. The despised colleague emerges as a legitimate victim of bullying; hence, the escalation of hostile communication and even ostracism into bullying becomes possible through retaliatory actions.

The positive relationship between task conflict and workplace bullying ($\beta = .22$) corroborates past studies in organizational behaviour which have found a connection between task conflict and negative emotions/deviant behaviours. Although it has been demonstrated that task conflict could be advantageous for an organization, this study illustrates that without the skills and psychological resources needed to cope with conflict, the resultant frustrations arising from conflicts on tasks will be channelled into aggression. This study supports the frustration-

aggression theory of Berkowitz (1989), which states that goal obstruction, the defining characteristic of task conflict sets off.

Mental Health Implications

The implications of the current results have immediate relevance to the mental health status of workers. Through proving workplace conflict to be an important predictor of bullying behaviour, the research provides insight into a modifiable proximal factor involved in a recognized mental health risk factor. Indeed, the psychological repercussions of being bullied, such as anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, job burnout, and lowered self-respect (Nielsen et al., 2015), can be partially interpreted as downstream effects of unresolved organizational conflict.

Additionally, the persistent strain brought about by organizational conflict, in the absence of obvious bullying behaviors, has been shown to be linked to negative health effects such as heart disease, immune system dysfunction, and brain aging (Kivimäki et al., 2012). From the current results, it can be deduced that individuals operating in highly conflict-prone settings are doubly vulnerable: not only do they suffer from the psychological burden of organizational conflict but are also subject to an increased risk of being victims of workplace bullying because of it.

Limitations and Future Scope

As far as the cross-sectional approach is concerned, there is no possibility of developing a cause-and-effect relationship, but there are several theories which serve as grounds for a hypothetical directionality of effects of the variables examined. This problem comes to light when examining the opposite causation between the constructs in question – it remains unknown whether bullying perpetration can influence the increase in conflicts at work and whether this issue will be clarified by using the experimental design in future research. Furthermore, due to using self-reports to identify conflict and bullying perpetration, there is a high probability of common method variance, which is supposed to be taken into account in further studies. Lastly, the use of purposive and snowball samples results in a nonrepresentative sample, hence, there should be used probability sampling procedures when researching organizational behaviors in the future.

Conclusion

Thus, the results presented above show that there is convincing empirical evidence confirming the predictive role of workplace conflicts, namely relational ones, for workplace bullying. The findings are based on the collected data from 150 participants using well-designed scales for measuring the research constructs of interest (NAQ-R and ICAWS). Thus, it can be stated that the conflict dimensions predicted an increase in 36.7% of additional variance in workplace bullying beyond sociodemographic variables, and 41.2% of total variance can be predicted using a comprehensive model. Concerning the type of conflict, it can be said that the predictive power of relationship conflict was the highest, followed by task and process ones.

From a theoretical perspective, this study proves the idea that there is a mechanism underlying the development of workplace bullying through conflict. From a practical perspective, it can be recommended to introduce training on conflict management and prevention, as well as ensure psychological safety while communicating within organizations. Considering the serious psychological consequences of workplace bullying, experienced by the victims, bystanders, and even aggressors, as well as the extremely high costs associated with a conflict-driven organizational climate, it becomes evident that these steps must be taken.

REFERENCES

1. Agervold, M., & Mikkelsen, E. G. (2004). Relationships between bullying, psychosocial work environment and individual stress reactions. *Work & Stress*, 18(4), 336–351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370412331319773>
2. Amason, A. C. (1996). Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: Resolving a paradox for top management teams. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(1), 123–148. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256633>
3. Bandura, A. (1973). *Aggression: A social learning analysis*. Prentice-Hall.
4. Berkowitz, L. (1989). Frustration-aggression hypothesis: Examination and reformulation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 106(1), 59–73. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.106.1.59>
5. Cooksey, R. W. (2020). Descriptive statistics for summarising data. *Illustrating Statistical Procedures: Finding Meaning in Quantitative Data*, 61-139. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2537-7_5
6. Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
7. Cronin, M. A., Bezrukova, K., Weingart, L. R., & Tinsley, C. H. (2004). Agree or not agree? The role of cognitive and affective processes in group disagreements. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.602001>
8. Cunha, E. S., Pinheiro, F. P. H. A., Grangeiro, A. S. M., Falcão, J. T. R., Santos, W. S., Vasconcelos, F. H. L., Silva, A. Q., & Mendes, L. A. (2024). Assessing workplace bullying: Psychometric analysis of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) among Brazilian teachers. *Avances en Psicología Latinoamericana*, 42. <https://doi.org/10.12804/revistas.urosario.edu.co/apl/a.14321>
9. De Dreu, C. K. W., & Weingart, L. R. (2003). Task versus relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(4), 741–749. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.4.741>
10. Dill, J. C., & Anderson, C. A. (1995). Effects of frustration justification on hostile aggression. *Aggressive Behavior*, 21(5), 359–369. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-2337\(1995\)21:5<359::aid-ab2480210505>3.0.co;2-6](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-2337(1995)21:5<359::aid-ab2480210505>3.0.co;2-6)
11. Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Zapf, D., & Cooper, C. L. (2011). The concept of bullying and harassment at work: The European tradition. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 3–40). CRC Press.
12. Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Notelaers, G. (2009). Measuring exposure to bullying and harassment at work: Validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised. *Work & Stress*, 23(1), 24–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370902815673>
13. Felson, R. B., & Tedeschi, J. T. (1993). *Aggression and violence: Social interactionist perspectives*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10123-000>
14. Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
15. Glambek, M., Skogstad, A., & Einarsen, S. (2018). Workplace bullying, the development of job insecurity and the role of laissez-faire leadership: A two-wave moderated mediation study. *Work & Stress*, 32(3), 297–312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2018.1427815>
16. Graham, K., Bernards, S., Osgood, D. W., Parks, M., Abbey, A., Felson, R. B., Saltz, R. F., & Wells, S. (2013). Apparent motives for aggression in the social context of the bar. *Psychology of Violence*, 3(3), 218–232. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029677>
17. Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist*, 44(3), 513–524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513>
18. Hoel, H., & Salin, D. (2003). Organisational antecedents of workplace bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (pp. 203–218). Taylor & Francis.

19. Jehn, K. A. (1995). A multimethod examination of the benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(2), 256–282. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393638>
20. Jehn, K. A., & Mannix, E. A. (2001). The dynamic nature of conflict: A longitudinal study of intragroup conflict and group performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(2), 238–251. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3069453>
21. Kivimäki, M., Nyberg, S. T., Batty, G. D., Fransson, E. I., Heikkilä, K., Alfredsson, L., ... & IPDWork Consortium. (2012). Job strain as a risk factor for coronary heart disease: A collaborative meta-analysis of individual participant data. *The Lancet*, 380(9852), 1491–1497. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)60994-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60994-5)
22. Kuriakose, V., S, S., & Jose, H. (2020). Examining the mechanisms linking work-related conflicts and employee well-being: A mediation model. *American Business Review*, 23(2), 260–282. <https://doi.org/10.37625/abr.23.2.260-282>
23. Leymann, H. (1990). Mobbing and psychological terror at workplaces. *Violence and Victims*, 5(2), 119–126. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.5.2.119>
24. Nielsen, M. B., & Einarsen, S. (2012). Outcomes of exposure to workplace bullying: A metaanalytic review. *Work & Stress*, 26(4), 309–332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2012.734709>
25. Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). *Psychometric theory* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
26. Robinson, S. L., & Bennett, R. J. (1995). A typology of deviant workplace behaviors: A multidimensional scaling study. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(2), 555–572. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256693>
27. Salin, D. (2003). Ways of explaining workplace bullying: A review of enabling, motivating and precipitating structures and processes. *Human Relations*, 56(10), 1213–1232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267035610003>
28. Spector, P. E., & Jex, S. M. (1998). Development of four self-report measures of job stressors and strain: Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale, Organizational Constraints Scale, Quantitative Workload Inventory, and Physical Symptoms Inventory. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 3(4), 356–367. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.3.4.356>
29. Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510395592>
30. Verkuil, B., Atasayi, S., & Molendijk, M. L. (2015). Workplace bullying and mental health: A metaanalysis on cross-sectional and longitudinal data. *PLOS ONE*, 10(8), e0135225. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0135225>
31. Zapf, D., & Gross, C. (2001). Conflict escalation and coping with workplace bullying: A replication