Impact of Workplace Bullying on Work Performance Moderated by Loneliness: A Case study of Indonesia

M.Fachri Hidayat[1], Dr. Henddy Ginting[2]

[1]Postgraduate Student of School of Business Management

[2]Professor of School of Business Management

Institute of Technology Bandung

Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The issue of bullying within the workplace is a constant pursuit by scientists. The effect studied regarding the issues varies and has a large list of mediators and moderators. A common result of workplace bullying is its effect on working performance. Being one of the variables that hold a unique position as to cause and cause by, loneliness may introduce an updated perception of what bullying could have. Using a purposive sampling online survey, the data was collected from employees of multiple organizations and state-owned companies in Indonesia, especially West Java and North Sumatera. One hundred twenty-six valid data were gathered and processed for this study. The questionnaire was designed using COPSOQ III to assess the workplace bullying variable, the UCLA loneliness scale for the loneliness variable, and Koopman's individual work performance (IWP) assessment for the work performance variable. The result shows a relationship between workplace bullying and work performance, though it is insignificant, and loneliness elevates bullying's effect on work performance. The implication of these findings is to enrich understanding of workplace bullying within the workplace, but further research is still advised.

Keywords: *Loneliness, Psychosocial, Well-being, Workplace Bullying, Work Performance.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying that happens within a community is not a rare sight. It happens to any generation, from children to adults, from the past generation to our current generation society. In general, bullying may affect someone physically and mentally. It was said that the victim of the bullying often reported having headaches, sleep problems, and abdominal pain (Li, Sidibe, Shen, & Hesketh, 2019). Throughout the decades, works of literature have enlisted the psychological effect of bullyings, such as anxiety (Moore et al., 2017; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019), depression (Moore et al., 2017; Murshid, 2017), loneliness (Moore et al., 2017; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019), suicidal behavior (Moore et al., 2017; Romo & Kelvin, 2016), substance use (Pengpid and Peltzer 2019), injury (Pengpid and Peltzer 2019), and aggression (Moore et al., 2017; Romo & Kelvin, 2016).

To the organization itself, the existence of bullying within the firm also brings bad influences on the working environment, and management has the responsibility to keep their employees well-being in check. Bullying is a major cause of work-related stress, and exposure to bullying risks health and psychological related problems and other negative effects on the employee. Work stress may result in physical and mental health problems, burnout, demotivation, low job satisfaction, increasing intention to leave, and diminishing work commitment (Sharon, 2020). These factors clearly will affect work performance in the organization.

Bullying defined itself as an act of intentional negative behavior that occurs in a cycle continuously within a period and is always directed to the person with notable differences in terms of power (hierarchically or socially), where the victim has difficulty defending themself (Chai, Xue, and Han 2020). There are varieties of methods of bullying that people can act. Some bullying included verbal bullying, where the victim would be name-called or be the target of gossip or mockery. Then there's also physical bullying, where the situation rises to the victim experiencing physical violence like being kicked, shoved, or punched. Next is relationship bullying, which may have a connection to verbal bullying. The difference is that other people are included, so the victim's image will be affected, resulting in social exclusion and the spreading of bad rumors. The last on the list is cyberbullying, where most abuse happens on the internet (Glassner 2020).

Workplace bullying itself doesn't fall far from bullying in general. Fritz (2016) mentioned that the act of workplace bullying has several categories: name-calling in public, attribution of a scapegoat, hassling work pressure on individuals, sexual harassment by hierarchy, and physical violence on vulnerable staff members. They still can be classified as verbal bullying (name-calling), physical bullying (physical violence on vulnerable staff), and relational bullying (scapegoat attribution). Rajalakhsmi (2018) also included sexual harassment, gossip, isolation, and work-related criticism in addition to physical abuse, verbal abuse, and relational bullying within the workplace. Workplace bullying also can be classified into four categories based on the direction of the perpetrator and victim which are downward bullying (superior to subordinate), horizontal bullying (peer to peer), upward bullying (subordinate to superior), and inward bullying (external source, e.g., costumer) (De Cieri et al. 2019).

Previous studies regarding the effect of workplace bullying to work performance have been done before, like one by Meriläinen, Kõiv, and Honkanen (2019), who studied workplace bullying's effect on performance and engagement among academics, Devonish (2013) studied the mediating effect of psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and work-related depression to the relationship between workplace bullying and performance, and Creasy and Carnes (2017) who studied workplace bullying effect to innovation and work success. In general, each study about workplace bullying and bullying has asserted their issues regarding loneliness. Bullying may result in the exclusion of the victim from their workplace environment and those could end up with the feeling of loneliness. Aside from what bullying causes, loneliness, as well as some other traits like withdrawn attitude, anxiety, avoidance of society, and depression, can make an individual vulnerable to bullying (Mohanty and Mohanty 2017).

All of the cases of loneliness to work performance have been studied and the result indicates that both loneliness and workplace bullying are negatively related to work performance. This parallel reaction of both loneliness and bullying to performance indicates that, as both are the causes of decreased work performance and have a vice-versa relationship, a connection between loneliness and bullying may have a new reaction to work performance. The latest response to loneliness and workplace bullying would become a new addition to existing theories about workplace bullying. This study tries to figure out the relationship by assuming the role of moderator to loneliness and the basis of this claim lies in the fact that loneliness and workplace bullying have a vice-versa relationship.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Workplace Bullying and Work Performance

Workplace bullying defines itself as the situation where an employee is being harassed continuously (physical or non-physical mistreatment) by their colleague at work for a prolonged time and the victim has difficulties in defending themself due to differences (Chai, Xue, and Han 2020; Nielsen et al. 2020). Literature has introduced us to the possible effect of workplace bullying as a main psychosocial predictor, like increasing absence (Grynderup et al. 2017), sleep problems (Nielsen et al. 2020), burnout, and turnover intention (Kim, Lee, and Lee 2019). Workplace bullying is a bad practice in the work environment among employees, which resembles injustice business outcomes. In this current scenario, the relationship between employee and employer is becoming higher risk due to workplace bullying (Rajalakshmi and Naresh 2018).

According to Koopman's IWP, assessment criteria of work performance mainly talk about task performance, with the addition of contextual performance, adaptive performance, and counterproductive behavior. Task performance talks about individual proficiency with which individuals perform the core substantive or technical tasks central to their job; Contextual performance can be defined as behaviors that support the organizational, social, and psychological environment; Adaptive performance can be defined as the extent to which an individual adapts to changes in the work role or environment; CWB can be defined as behavior that harms the well-being of the organization (Yoo and Lee 2018).

When discussing performance, we can see that the bullying victim's impact will certainly decrease their expected result from the assessment. Their lack of motivation crumbled relationships between co-workers and burnout would significantly hinder organization work performance either in a task or contextual aspect. It will also impede individual adaptive capability to the problem and elevate their absence and turnout intention. Based on this explanation, we propose that:

H1. Workplace Bullying negatively affects Work Performance

2.2 Workplace Bullying and Loneliness

Loneliness is often defined as the negative psychological state that arises when people are dissatisfied with the quantity or quality of their social relationships (Kerr and Stanley, 2021). Loneliness is a signal that reminds you are in need of a companion. Loneliness might result and enhanced depression symptoms, sleep problems, and other clinical problems (Kerr & Stanley, 2021a). Loneliness also contributes negatively to well-being, increasing medical services and economically decreasing employee health (Barreto et al., 2021).

In the previous section, many studies explained the association between workplace bullying and loneliness. We also already explained that their relationship is a two-way relationship where bullying causes loneliness and loneliness makes bullying happen. Bullying creates distance between peers that cause loneliness, yet loneliness makes the person vulnerable to bullying. Lonely people are also less respected by their peers, which often happens to the bullied person. Previous studies have proven that loneliness has a mediating effect on bullying (Cao et al. 2020) and moderating effect on work ostracism and performance (Osman, n.d.).

Bullying and loneliness have similarities to each other in terms of their impact. They both have an effect on job performance (Osman, n.d.) (Mohanty and Mohanty 2017), work engagement, motivation, absentee (Mohanty and Mohanty 2017) (Commer et al. 2019), and work commitment (Steele, Rodgers, and Fogarty 2020) (Ayazlar and Güzel 2014). Loneliness also affects several other aspects of the workplace, including relationships between co-workers and initiating knowledge hiding (Garg and Anand 2020).

2.3 Moderating Role of Loneliness

This study examines loneliness's role in moderating workplace bullying and work performance. We try to find out any possible explanation on how loneliness that created one of the impacts caused by workplace bullying may affect the decreasing individual work performance. Loneliness creates a gap between peers and superiors that may hinder the flow of information within the organization. Loneliness is a subjective social isolation state stemming from a person's painful experience of not being accepted by others (He et al., 2014). Literature has studied the possible links between loneliness and work performance contributing to fear of rejection (Commer et al. 2019) and knowledge hiding within the organization (Jung, Song, and Yoon 2021). Loneliness impacts the psychology of affected individuals by way of outcomes such as decreased social support, poor communication, and inadequate relationships (Osman, n.d.). The impact may fail to engage with the work expected by the organization, decreasing will and motivation, and loss of commitment to the work. Seeing the similarity between how both loneliness and bullying effect on work performance, it seems as expected. But there is a question to whether the workplace bullying effect on work performance changes with the impact from loneliness. We can assume that bullying decreases the work performance to a certain degree. And loneliness amplifies the effect. Thus, we can make a hypothesis as follow

> **H2.** Loneliness negatively affects Work Performance

> **H3**. There is a moderating role of loneliness between Workplace Bullying and Work Performance

The conceptual model in Figure 1.1 visualizes the concept presented by the hypothesis.
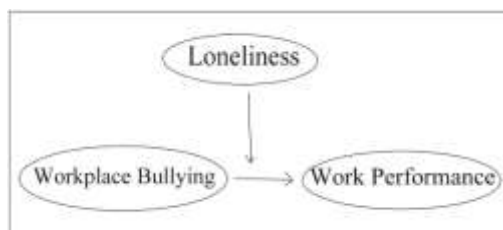

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Model

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design and Method

This study was designed using quantitative research and the data was gathered using an online questionnaire. We adopted purposive sampling due to the criteria that need to be fulfilled. The questionnaire was developed online and distributed via social media (i.e., WhatsApp, LINE) to the respondent that fulfilled the criteria of being an office worker, working in Indonesia, and having experience with unpleasant treatment from their colleagues. The questionnaire was sent to several LINE and WhatsApp groups that consist of office workers from many sectors (i.e., state-owned companies and the private sector). A total of 156 data were returned and after reevaluating the data by removing blank data and outliers, only 126 were considered valid for the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consists of 4 sections: Demographics, Workplace Bullying assessment, Loneliness assessment, and Individual Work Performance (IWP) assessment. Some items have been modified to achieve the purposes of the survey. After it is spread out, we do some preliminary tests to check for data reliability and validity, and the result came out as the data are both valid and reliable. We do the correlation analysis to determine the relation of each variable and regression analysis to determine the moderating effect of loneliness on the relationship.

3.2 Measure

a. Workplace Bullying

To measure workplace bullying, we use Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) III items, especially from the conflict and offensive behavior section. We include seven sub-sections from the conflict and offensive behavior section to construct the question regarding workplace bullying, namely: unpleasant teasing, threat of violence (TV), sexual violence (SH), physical violence (PV), harassment in social media (HSM), gossip (GS) and bullying (BU). This construct is based on the previous definition of what is considered bullying in addition to the sub-section bullying, where we use this question to check to the respondents acknowledge themselves as being bullied or not. Respondents were asked to answer each question using scales of 1 to 4, in which each number represents answers as follows: (1) Yes, daily; (2) Yes, weekly; (3) Yes, monthly; (4) Yes, a few times; and (5) No. If respondents answer yes, they will be asked to indicate the perpetrator of each violence. The perpetrators are grouped as colleagues, managers or superiors, subordinates, and clients or customers.

b. Loneliness

We will use the UCLA loneliness scale to measure individual interpersonal relationships. UCLA is a 20 – items scale designed to measure one subjectivity feelings of loneliness designed and revised by Russel. It consists of question items that use a 0-4 scale stating frequency from seldom to always. The measure has high internal consistency (coefficient alpha = 0.96) and a test-retest correlation over two months of .73 (Russell, D. 1996). In this study, we cut some items with positive tendencies or close similarities, resulting in a Cronbach alpha of 0.808. items we removed are "I *feel part of a group of friends," "I have a lot of common with people around me," "I am an outgoing person," "I can find companionship when I want it," "There are people who really understand me," and "There are people I can turn to."*

c. Work Performance

Work performance will be assessed using Koopman's individual work performance (IWP) assessment consisting of an originally 22 items scale modified to 14 items following the generic short scales. Some items are removed to match the model for all occupation sectors considering other items in the questionnaire. We adopt the items from the *task performance* scale, *Contextual performance* scale, and *counterproductive* scale. The person separation index (PSI) estimates the internal consistency of a scale. PSI is similar to Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) and their difference is that PSI uses the logit scale estimates instead of the raw scores. It is interpreted similarly; a minimum value of 0.70 is required for group use and 0.85 for individual use (Koopmans et al., 2012).

4. RESULT

Table 1.1 Demographic Features of Participants and Descriptive Statistics (N=126)

Demographic Features of Participant	N	Percent
Gender		
Male	75	59,5
Female	51	40,5
Age		
21-30	26	20,6
31-40	31	24,6
41-50	37	29,4
51-60	32	25,4
Position		
Manager	52	41,3
Staff	74	58,7
Working Period		
5-10 years	29	23,0

less than 5 years	24	19,1
more than 10 years	73	57,9

Demography of the data from Table 1.1 shows that the gender ratio favors the male, with 59.5 % of the respondent being male and 40.5 % female. 20,6 % belong to the age group between 21-30 years old, 24.6 % are aged 31-40 years old, 29.4 % are aged 41-50 years old, and 25.4 % are aged 51-60 years old. 41.3 % of the respondents are managers, and 58.7 % are office staff. 23 % of them have worked for 5 to 10 years, 19.1 % have worked for less than 5 years, and 57,9 % have worked for more than 10 years at the company.

Before the hypothesis testing occurred first, we did the preliminary test to determine whether the scales used were valid and reliable. The test to item validity shows that all items are valid except for three items from the workplace bullying scale. The three items are Sexual harassment (SH), Threat to Violence (TV), and Physical Violence (PV); note that this invalidity is due to the number of samples of data is insufficient to draw out results from the removed items. Aside from that, all the data are proven valid and usable.

In this test, we run the Cronbach Alpha reliability test to the result of each section of the questionnaire. Joko Widayanto (2010:43) stated that the basis of the conclusion drawing for the Cronbach Alpha reliability test is based on the result against their r (r table) values. When the result of calculated r is more than the value of r, the data is reliable, and when it is less than the value of r, the data is unreliable. As this data has N = 126, the value of r for this data is 0,176. The Cronbach Alpha test results show that all the item is more than our designated values of r (WB = 0,574; LON = 0,779; WP = 0,296). According to the data residual Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test using the exact p values approach (Mehta & Patel, 1996), the data is distributed normally since the residual sig. value of the data is more than 0,05 (sig. > 0.05). The result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is shown in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2 Normality Test One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

VARIABLES	Exact Sig. (2-tailed)
WB.WP	**0,125**
LON.WP	**0,327**
WB.LON.WP	**0,178**

After we have proved the validity and reliability of our data, we will try to comprehend the relationship between the variables. Data presented in Table 1.3 shows that the relationship between WB and WP is negative and there seems to be no significant correlation between bullying and performance (sig > 0,05). Hence it partially supports our H1, where we are able to prove that WB affects WP negatively even though insignificant. Another result that we have got is that the relationship between WB and LON is positive and there is a significant correlation between the variables (sig < 0.05). Lastly, the relationship between LON and WP is shown to be negative and holds significance to the correlation between variables (sig.< 0,05). This proves our H2 about the relationship between LON and WP.

Table 1. 3 Correlation between Variables (n=126)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	0,60	0,493	1						
2. Age gap	2,60	1,082	-0,025	1					
3. Position	0,41	0,494	0,133	,405**	1				
4. Work Period	0,35	0,833	0,055	,602**	0,114	1			
5. WB	2,81	1,667	0,159	-0,145	0,067	-0,038	1		
6. LON	26,84	6,226	0,138	-,181*	-0,059	-0,036	,325**	1	
7. WP	36,48	5,372	-0,099	,254**	0,058	,195*	-,203*	-,314**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Gender: 1 = male; 0 = female. Age gap: 1 = 21-30; 2 = 31-40; 3 = 41-50; 4 = 51-60. Position: 0 = staff, 1 = Manager. Work period: -1= less than 5 years, 0 = 5-10 years, 1 = more than 10 years

WB = workplace bullying, LON = Loneliness, WP = work performance

Regression analysis from **Table 1.4** shows a moderating effect from the loneliness that influences the relationship between workplace bullying and work performance. The first simple linear regression between WB and WP resulted in an R Square of 0.041 (4.1%) and between LON and WP is 0,099 (9,9%). For the next step, we multiply the result of WB and LON, then use regression to calculate the second equation between WB x Lon and WP. The result of the R Square is 0.119 (11.9 %). This increase in R Square from both regressions shows a moderating role of loneliness in the relationship between workplace bullying and work performance, thus proving our H3. The value is rather low, indicating the effect is not strong for bullying to affect work performance.

Table 4.4 Regression Analysis

Variables and Step	Dependent Variable
Independent variables	Dependent Variables Workplace Performance
Workplace Bullying	1,008
R^2	0,041
Loneliness	-0,106
R^2	0,099
Interaction	
Workplace bullying x Loneliness	-0,051
R^2	0,119
R^2 change	0,078
F	5,484
Sig.	0,001

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

From this study, we determine that the correlation between workplace bullying and work performance in the study doesn't prove to be significant. It's not that there is no relationship at all, but the percentage of workplace bullying affecting performance is rather low. Though, The H1 of this study was supported partially.

As we already studied from the previous research, bullying does increase the risk of absentee, health conditions, etc. Yet, bullying is not the deciding factor that affects work performance. Rather, we have determined that the correlation between loneliness, workplace bullying, and work performance is proven to be significant. Considering this statement, we may as well say that loneliness plays the main role in this subject. We know that the bullying effect also includes loneliness, while the cause of loneliness itself is not always due to bullying. But the correlation has proven that loneliness holds more significance to work performance rather than bullying, at least in the Indonesian worker context. And with the correlation analysis, it is proven that the H2 is supported. The H3 is also supported through the regression analysis. Loneliness did elevate the effect of bullying on work performance even though by a small amount.

This study uses linear regression analysis to figure out the moderation effect of the subject, so it is simple and easy to understand. But it also leaves much more room for improvement in the development of the issue. The data collected also becomes the limitation of this study; the attempt to spread the questionnaire through media only returns such an amount it wouldn't be right

to consider it fully represented. Also, since we use the media to distribute the questionnaire, we can't exactly predict the rate of the responses. This study is also cross-sectional, which despite promoting the descriptive analysis and enabling us to access different results and exposure, is still vulnerable to bias.

This study suggest organization to reconsider the effect of loneliness to work performance as it has been proven by the study, the effect of loneliness on the relationship between workplace bullying and work performance is significance. By giving more attention to the loneliness factor among coworkers, we expected the quality of performance shown by employee will be increase and the issues regarding bullying among coworkers also decreases.

Further research is advised toward the advancing effect of loneliness and bullying. With how fast the world change, how organization creates work environment for their employees also changes alongside their issues. For example, nowadays the use of internet as coworking spaces has elevated due to the recent pandemic. The condition where there are minimum interactions between employees may promote loneliness and the study for such condition need to be assessed.

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