

# Workplace Bullying and Job Satisfaction: The Buffering Effect of Social Support

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**Abstract** Linkages between social support, incidents of workplace bullying, and job satisfaction have received limited attention in the workplace bullying literature. Hence, the purpose of this study is to contribute to this particular literature by examining (1) the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction and (2) the moderating effect of social support on this relationship. A total of 249 Canadian workers from various organizations, in both private and public sector, took part in this study. As expected, results of this study showed that workplace bullying negatively affects job satisfaction. Furthermore, hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that social support is a moderator for the workplace bullying and job satisfaction relationship. This study provides clarity on some of the negative effects of workplace bullying. It also suggests that social support can protect workers from a particular damaging consequence of workplace bullying. Such support appears to function as a buffer for targets of workplace bullying by providing them with resources to cope with these types of difficult workplace situations. Implications from the findings and suggestions for future research are presented.

**Keywords** Workplace Bullying, Job Satisfaction, Social Support, Psychological Harassment

## 1. Introduction

Workplace bullying, psychological harassment, mobbing, and emotional abuse are example of terms currently utilized by researchers and practitioners in identifying a pervasive but typically subtle type of harassment in the workplace (Einarsen, 2000; Keashly & Jagatic, 2000; Leymann, 1990; Soares, 2002). Scientific research in exploring this phenomenon started in Europe in the early 1990s (see Einarsen, 1999; Leymann, 1990, 1996; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996). Since then, a growing interest from the academic community was developed and workplace bullying was named the “research topic of the 1990s” in workers’ health, performance, and well-being (Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 1999)

and has achieved international recognition as an occupational concern (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011). Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2002) argued that there is sufficient evidence indicating that bullying is a powerful psychosocial hazard in the workplace with substantial negative implications for individuals and organizations alike. In fact, workplace bullying can be an intense source of stress (Niedl, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996) that has similar effects to other workplace stressors (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Although single acts of harassment or normal conflict occur fairly frequently in everyday interactions at work, it is argued that they inflict severe health problems on targets when occurring on a regular basis (Einarsen, 1999, 2000; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Keashly & Jagatic, 2000; Meseguer, Soler, Sàez, & Garcia, 2008).

### 1.1. Definition of Workplace Bullying

Einarsen et al. (2011) defined workplace bullying as “harassing, offending, or socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work” (p. 22). These researchers added that in order to refer the situation as bullying, the negative behaviour has to occur repeatedly, regularly, and over a period of time. Moreover, they argued that a situation should not be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal strength are in conflict. Workplace bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative behaviours (Einarsen et al., 2011). According to Einarsen and Hoel (2001), negative behaviours that are harassing in nature can be manifested through various forms such as physical intimidation and exaggeration (e.g., *threats of violence or physical abuse*), excessive supervision (e.g., *excessive monitoring of your work*), social isolation (e.g., *being ignored, excluded or avoided by others*), impossible job demands (e.g., *being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines*) or job isolation (e.g., *having your opinions and views ignored*).

### 1.2. Prevalence of Workplace Bullying

Despite some differences in methods utilized and occurrence rates found, most would agree that workplace bullying, considered as the psychological form of harassment, is more present in workplaces than physical and sexual harassment (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Hirigoyen, 2001; Leymann, 1996; Rayner & Hoel, 1997; Soares, 2002). Prevalence rates of workplace bullying differ somewhat from country to country and also from study to study. Yet, the typical figure is that from 5% (i.e., severe cases) to 10% of the European population is exposed to some form of psychological harassment at any given time (Einarsen et al., 2011). For the few studies conducted in North America, rates are higher. For example, Keashly and Jagatic (2000) surveyed a sample of American workers and found that about 59% had experienced at least one type of emotionally abusive behaviour. A Canadian study by Soares (2002) revealed that 39% of the sample had experienced workplace bullying. Another Canadian study found that over 27% of the research sample had been the target of one or more negative behaviours on a regular basis (Carroll, 2006). Those rather alarming prevalence rates should garner the attention of human resources practitioners, employers, policy makers, and governments.

### 1.3. Consequences of Workplace Bullying

The significance of the consequences of workplace bullying has been demonstrated in various studies. For instance, research indicates that workplace bullying can produce serious negative consequences on an individual's quality of life, health, and well-being (Notelaers, De Witte, & Einarsen, 2010). In fact, exposure to workplace bullying seems to be considered a severe social stressor at work (Niedl, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996) and has more crippling and devastating effects than all other work-related stressors put together (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010). Einarsen and Raknes (1997) found a significant negative correlation between exposure to bullying and psychological health and well-being ( $r = -.23$ ). Also, Vartia-Väänänen (2003) observed that targets of bullying reported job dissatisfaction, overall stress, symptoms of mental distress, and feelings of low self-confidence more often than observers and non-targets. In a comprehensive meta-analysis, Bowling and Beehr (2006) looked at various consequences of workplace harassment and found that they were linked with the targets' well-being. More specifically, they observed that harassment was positively associated with generic strain ( $r = .29$ ), anxiety ( $r = .25$ ), depression ( $r = .28$ ), burnout ( $r = .33$ ), frustration ( $r = .30$ ), negative emotions at work ( $r = .38$ ), and physical symptoms ( $r = .25$ ) and was negatively associated with positive emotions at work ( $r = -.21$ ), self-esteem ( $r = -.17$ ), life satisfaction ( $r = -.18$ ), job satisfaction ( $r = -.32$ ), and organizational commitment ( $r = -.30$ ). It should be noted that Bowling and Beehr (2006) based their meta-analysis on several negative workplace behaviours such as abuse, aggression, bullying, interpersonal conflict, and incivility. It seems that they did

not make a distinction between varying concepts. Thus, results of their study reflect general workplace harassment.

### 1.4. Impact of Workplace Bullying on Job Satisfaction

There is abundant research reporting the negative effect of workplace stress on job satisfaction (Cooper & Marshall, 1976; Naumann, 1993; Terry, Nielsen, & Perchard, 1993). Workplace bullying has been recognized as a major occupational stressor in various studies (Hauge et al., 2010; Leymann, 1996; Quine, 1999). As with stress, it can be expected that workplace bullying has an adverse impact on job satisfaction. As already indicated, Bowling and Beehr (2006) revealed in their meta-analysis that general workplace harassment is negatively associated with job satisfaction ( $r = -.32$ ). Similar results were confirmed in a longitudinal study by Rodriguez-Muñoz, Baillien, De Witte, Moreno-Jiménez, and Pastor (2009) who found that targets of workplace bullying reported a lower level of job satisfaction compared to non-targets. They also argued that workplace bullying could be considered a cause rather than a consequence of job-related (negative) well-being. Furthermore, Lapierre, Spector, and Leck (2005) conducted a meta-analysis and found that job satisfaction has been recognized as one of the primary indicators of employees' general attitudinal reaction to the quality of their overall work experience. Lapierre et al. (2005) found that nonsexual aggression had a significantly stronger negative relationship with targets' overall job satisfaction ( $r = -.41$ ) than did sexual aggression ( $r = -.32$ ). This finding is particularly interesting considering that in North America, legislation, organizational policies, and media appear to give more attention to sexual aggression than nonsexual aggression (Lapierre et al., 2005). Results of their meta-analysis suggest that targets of nonsexual harassment can be more negatively affected in terms of job satisfaction than targets of sexual harassment. Finally, as suggested by Barling, Rogers, and Kelloway (2001), employees who experience interpersonal aggression at work would likely experience greater fear and negative mood at work. Those negative outcomes will likely have an adverse impact on one's job satisfaction. Based on the aforementioned findings, we postulate the following:

*Hypothesis 1: Workplace bullying will be negatively related to job satisfaction.*

### 1.5. Moderating Role of Social Support on the Workplace Bullying and Job Satisfaction Relationship

According to Karasek and Theorell (1990), social support refers to "the overall levels of helpful social interaction available on the job from both co-workers and supervisors" (p. 69). Social support is considered as one of the most influential factors in stress reduction (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Nahum-Shani & Bamberger, 2011; Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005; Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006; Thoits, 1986, 1995; Uchino, 2004; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999). House (1981) suggested that social support can work

to reduce stress in three ways: a) directly (i.e., by fulfilling human needs), b) indirectly (i.e., by reducing the stressor), and c) through the moderating effect. The moderating effect, also known as the *buffering effect*, of social support has received some attention in the organizational stress literature (Dormann & Zapf, 1999; Frese, 1999; Nahum-Shani & Bamberger, 2011). According to Dormann and Zapf (1999), stressors cannot always be reduced or eliminated; hence, the negative effect of high stressors can be mitigated by increasing social support. The moderating effect would be that social support modifies the relationship between the stressor and strain and is only effective when the stressors are present (Nahum-Shani & Bamberger, 2011). In other words, social support acts as a buffer preventing stressors from affecting individuals by contributing to a person's physical and mental well-being in general (Malecki & Demaray, 2002). From a psychological standpoint, receiving social support contributes to a positive sense of self in addition to a feeling that one can overcome demanding circumstances (Hobfoll, 2002). As per some research on job strain, workers in jobs characterized by high demands, low control and low social support experience more occupational strain, psychological distress and job dissatisfaction than workers in other jobs (Johnson, Hall, & Theorell, 1989; Johnson & Hall, 1988).

Social support is one of the most commonly suggested moderating variables by occupational stress researchers (see Viswesvaran et al., 1999). The buffer hypothesis would be that social support moderates the negative impact of high strain. This logic could be applied to the workplace-bullying context. As suggested by Bowling and Beehr (2006), it is possible to assume that social support might be the antithesis of harassment (i.e., if everyone is supportive, then there is no harassment). Consequently, one can postulate that workplace stress will have a greater impact on the health of those who perceive having less social support. In this vein, Vigoda-Gadot and Talmud (2010) found that workers with high levels of social support reported higher levels of job satisfaction compared to workers reporting low levels of social support. Moreover, social support seems to be influenced by workplace-bullying situations. Zapf et al. (1996) found that workers who have identified themselves as targets of bullying have reported low levels of social support (i.e., supervisor and colleagues). As such, it is conceivable that social support may be an antecedent of workplace bullying in that low social support could contribute to workplace-bullying situations. As noted in Hauge et al. (2010), exposure to non-supportive or destructive interaction is likely to be a potent social stressor in itself and would involve as severe consequences as those of other more frequently studied job stressors (Keashly, Hunter, & Harvey, 1997). Working in an environment where the nature of the tasks requires a lot of teamwork is a potential source of conflict (Einarsen, 2000; Zapf et al., 1996). Defective social situations combined with a lack of social support can lead to competition or conflict, creating situations conducive to workplace bullying episodes (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen,

2007; Rayner & Hoel, 1997; Zapf et al., 1996). From the foregoing, it can be postulated that having a work environment where a worker perceives to have social support from his or her supervisor and colleagues can contribute positively to his or her job satisfaction despite the presence of workplace bullying. Therefore, we expect this deduction to have an influence on the workplace bullying and job satisfaction relationship and formulated the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: Social support will moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction, such that participants who experience workplace bullying but perceive high levels of social support will be less likely to experience a decrease in their job satisfaction level.*

## 1.6. Present Study

This research conceptualized workplace bullying as a situation that may impede workers' job satisfaction level. The aim of this study is twofold. First, it investigates the nature of the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. Secondly, it explores the possibility that social support, as perceived by workers, could play a moderating role between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. As indicated earlier, some studies have investigated the link between workplace bullying and job satisfaction, and some other studies looked at workplace bullying and social support; no known studies has investigated all three variables and their relationship simultaneously. Additionally, this study was designed to prevent some methodological shortcomings. First, some studies have utilized self-selected samples of individuals who have been highly exposed to (and/or been the target of) bullying. As stated by Notelaers et al. (2010), results from these studies may have been tainted by the usage of biased samples (i.e., addressing only the most severe cases). Hence, the interpretation of findings of such studies might merit some forethought. Secondly, most studies have relied on homogeneous (compared to heterogeneous) samples, which may have diminished the possibility for generalization (Shen et al., 2011). Thirdly, with regard to hypothesis testing, it appears that some researchers have relied mainly on bivariate analyses as opposed to more robust analytical strategies. Based on these points, this paper aimed to examine via hierarchical regression analyses the workplace bullying phenomenon and its influence on job satisfaction within a heterogeneous sample of workers.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Sample

A total of 252 respondents completed a questionnaire related to their perceptions of their work environment. Data from three participants were withdrawn from the sample due to an excessive number of unanswered questions. Thus,

statistical analyses were based on 249 participants consisting of 57% (142) women and 43% (107) men. The mean age was 35.04 years ( $SD = 12.6$ ). Tenure was measured by the number of years working in the organization (8.3 years;  $SD = 9.5$ ) and the number of years occupying the present position (4.9 years;  $SD = 5.8$ ). Participants reported working in a range of different fields and occupying various positions in both public and private sectors. More specifically, respondents described working in a number of sectors (i.e., government [21%; 53], finance/banking [20%; 51], education [14%; 34]) and occupying various positions (i.e., professional [44%], managerial [15%], technical/clerical staff [15%]). Most participants reported being employed on a full time basis (90%; 222); while 10% (26) were doing part time work. For job status, it was reported that 73% (182) of participants are permanent, 17% (42) are doing contract work and 10% (23) are seasonal. According to the educational level completed, 13% (33) had a high school diploma, 25% (63) had a college diploma, 38% (94) had a bachelor degree, 16% (39) had a graduate degree and 8% (20) reported "other" (where most indicated that they were currently enrolled in an undergraduate program).

## 2.2. Instruments

**Workplace Bullying.** The Negative Act Questionnaire (NAQ) was developed by Einarsen and Raknes (1997) and is probably the most widely used instrument to measure workplace bullying (see Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Notelaers et al., 2010; Notelaers, Einarsen, De Witte, Vermunt, & Witte, 2006; Salin, 2001). A revised version produced by Einarsen and Hoel (2001) (i.e., NAQ-R) was used for this study. This version consists of 22 items describing a number of negative acts, which may be considered as workplace bullying when occurring on a regular basis. Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency, based on a Likert-type scale (ranging from 0 = Never to 4 = Daily), to which they have been subjected to a list of behaviours over the past 12 months. All items are formulated in behavioural terms with no reference to workplace bullying per se. The NAQ-R thus seems to prevent an underestimation of the problem that may occur when using methods where individuals are asked to label themselves as targets of bullying (Carroll, 2006; Hoel, Faragher, & Cooper, 2004; Soares, 2004). The NAQ-R contains items referring to both direct (e.g., *spreading of gossip and rumours about you*) and indirect (e.g., *someone withholding information which affects your performance*) behaviours<sup>1</sup>. A higher score indicated a more frequent,

arguably higher, level of experience of workplace bullying. Studies which have utilized the NAQ-R have reported high scale score reliabilities with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .83 to .93 (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007). In the present study, we found an  $\alpha$  of .89 for this instrument (95% confidence interval: .87 to .91).

**Job Satisfaction.** The job satisfaction measure was developed by Daoust (1996). It is a measure of general job satisfaction that consists of three items asking participants to indicate to what degree (based on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Totally disagree to 9 = Totally agree) the elements mentioned contributed to their satisfaction (e.g., *In general, you are very satisfied with your work*). A higher score indicated a higher level of job satisfaction. Albert (2002) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .89 of this measure. In the present study, this instrument yielded an  $\alpha$  of .88 (95% confidence interval: .85 to .91).

**Social Support.** Social support was measured with Imbault-Jean's (2004) adapted version of Karasek's (1988) concept of social support. It contains four items measuring the degree of support obtained in the work environment; that is, support from the supervisor (e.g., *My supervisor is concerned about my welfare.*) and support from coworkers (e.g., *I work with people who take personal interest in me.*). For this measure, respondents answered the items using a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = Totally disagree to 9 = Totally agree. Perceived social support was calculated using the total for coworkers and supervisor support. A higher score indicated a higher level of perceived social support. An  $\alpha$  of .74 was found for this measure in the present study (95% confidence interval: .67 to .79).

## 2.3. Procedures

A pilot study was first conducted in order to detect any problem related to the content of the questionnaire such as the possible use of misleading sentences or expressions, as well as procedural and technical difficulties. Then, for the data collection phase, a total of 23 Canadian organizations were approached to participate in this study. Nine of them accepted; six refused providing a justification (e.g., completed a survey not too long ago, no time/too busy), and for the rest (i.e., eight), no clear answer was obtained, as it was difficult to connect with the relevant contact person. In cases where a manager or human resources director accepted to cooperate on behalf of the organization, an e-mail was sent to their employees/colleagues in order to solicit their participation in this study by completing a questionnaire entitled "Workplace Survey". It can be noted that there was no reference made to workplace bullying in our cover letter. In the end, it was decided to not limit the sample to the organizations solicited; thus, individuals from the general Canadian population were invited to participate. Further contacts were made on a one by one basis or via e-mail, which allowed an additional participation of approximately 25 percent of the sample. As a result, 550 people were

<sup>1</sup> Although Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers (2009) make a distinction between three types of workplace bullying (i.e., person-related, task-related bullying and physical intimidation), this distinction does not seem to be retained in published studies on the subject. It can be noted that most published studies using the NAQ treated workplace bullying as a unitary construct in their analyses (see Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Glasø, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007). This can be explained by the fact that the correlations between sub-factors of the NAQ are very high (i.e.,  $r = 0.96$ , see Einarsen & al., 2009; p. 31). Based on these arguments, we chose to create a composite measure of workplace bullying.

solicited to take part in the study yielding a response rate of 46%. The options provided to complete the questionnaire included a paper version and an electronic version. Most participants completed the online questionnaire. No differences were found in the way participants completed the questionnaire. In the introductory letter, it was clearly indicated that completion of the questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary. It was also stated that completion and submission (see return) of the questionnaire was an acknowledgement of the participant's informed consent to participate to this study. Respondents did not receive any form of payment.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive statistics were conducted to verify characteristics of respondents who experienced one or more negative acts from occasionally to a daily basis. Approximately 92% (N=228) of the sample reported having been a target of at least one of the negative acts listed in the NAQ-R. Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations, Skewness, Kurtosis and variability coefficient (VC) for the variables in the present study, as well as zero-order correlations for all variables.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Variables

Variables	M	SD	Skew.	Kurt.	VC	1	2	3
WB	1.41	.39	1.61	2.63	.28	---		
JS	7.00	1.73	-1.38	1.83	.25	-.44**	---	
SS	7.01	1.53	-.95	.51	.22	-.51**	.55**	---

WB = Workplace Bullying; JS = Job Satisfaction; SS = Social Support; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

#### 3.2. Hypotheses Testing

Our first hypothesis aims at determining if workplace bullying has a negative relation with the job satisfaction level experienced by workers. As illustrated in Table 2, workplace bullying is negatively associated with the level of job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.47$ ). In other words, participants who reported more incidents of workplace bullying reported lower level of job satisfaction. Hence, our first hypothesis is confirmed.

The other hypothesis intended to verify the buffering role of social support on the workplace bullying and job satisfaction relationship. Following Baron and Kenny (1986) procedures, and Aguinis and Gottfredson (2010) recommendations, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted, for which the dependent variable was the job satisfaction level as reported by workers. Blocks of variables were then added to the regression models. The first block was composed of workplace bullying. The second

block consisted of social support. The third block was formed by the products of the variables accounted for in the first two blocks (i.e., workplace bullying  $\times$  social support).

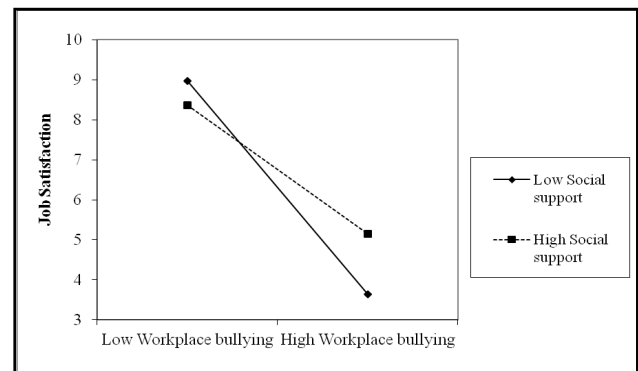
Before going further with the regressions analyses, multicollinearity tests were performed. More specifically, Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) and Condition Indexes (CI) were examined. In the present study, VIFs ranged from 1.02 to 2.85, well below the threshold value of 10.0 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1992; Kleinbaum, Lawrence, Muller, & Nizam, 1998). As for the CIs, the largest value was 10.47, again well below the threshold value of 30 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Table 2 shows the steps taken to conduct the hierarchical multiple regression analyses along with the results found. Results suggest that the model accounted for a total of 35% of the variance. For the first step of the analysis, workplace bullying significantly affected the dependent variable ( $\beta = -.47$ ). Then, social support was added to the equation (step 2); again, it contributed significantly ( $\beta = .20$ ). For the last step, it was found that the addition of the interaction term (i.e., workplace bullying  $\times$  social support) significantly influenced the model ( $\beta = .28$ ).

**Table 2.** Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining Social Support as Moderator of the Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Job Satisfaction

Steps	B	SE	$\beta$	F	R <sup>2</sup>	Sig.
WB	-2.14	.55	-.47	105.39	.30	$p < .01$
SS	.23	.13	.20	13.01	.33	$p < .01$
WB x SS	.53	.22	.28	5.83	.35	$p < .01$

WB = Workplace Bullying; JS = Job Satisfaction; SS = Social Support.



**Figure 1.** Interactive Effects of Workplace Bullying and Social Support on Job Satisfaction

Analyses showed that the relation between workplace bullying and job satisfaction is moderated by the level of social support reported by participants (see Figure 1). More precisely, despite the presence of workplace bullying, those reporting a high level of social support had higher job satisfaction in comparison to participants reporting a low level of social support. According to simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991), participants of different levels of social support did not differ in job satisfaction level under

conditions of low workplace bullying, but large differences were noted under conditions of high workplace bullying.

## 4. Discussion

Results of this study indicate that social support acts as a moderator, therefore mitigating the effects of workplace bullying on job satisfaction. Workers who reported being a target of workplace bullying but also reported a high level of perceived social support had significantly greater job satisfaction than their high bullying/low support counterparts. This observation is compatible with Bowling and Beehr's (2006) assertion that social support may function as a buffer against workplace bullying by meeting coping requirements related to the appraisal of self-esteem that are elicited when individuals experience such a stressful situation. Similarly, our findings also concur with Djurkovic, McCormack, and Casimir's (2008) point that some targets may be able to develop social resources that are essential for their protection against negative impacts of bullying. After all, one of the negative behaviours listed in the NAQ-R is "social isolation". One may argue that social support serves as an antithesis of this specific negative act (see Bowling & Beehr, 2006).

### 4.1. Implications

As already noted, workplace-bullying rates are typically higher in North America than in other parts of the world such as Europe. This type of harassment appears to be omnipresent in our workplaces and should not be neglected or avoided. Consequences associated with this workplace phenomenon are detrimental to all parties involved. As per our findings, social support seems to protect workers from some of the destructive effects of workplace bullying. Such support may function as a safeguard by providing resources to enable targets to cope with those types of difficult situations. For that matter, employers should aim in having an organizational culture that promotes a supportive work environment by encouraging support from management and amongst co-workers. This may serve as one strategy to alleviate the severity and consequences of workplace bullying. Furthermore, when informed of workplace-bullying situations, managers should clearly discuss with the alleged target(s) the organizational support and resources available and that the organization will not tolerate such behaviour(s) (Hoel & Salin, 2003). Along the same line, employee assistance programs could be provided to demonstrate support at the organizational level. In fact, stimulating a culture that provides evidence to its employees that the organization is concerned about their welfare ought to be beneficial.

### 4.2. Limitations

There are several limitations of this study that must be acknowledged. First, all variables were collected at the same

point in time through the use of self-report measures, thus relying upon respondents' perceptions of the negative acts (i.e., workplace bullying) and the work variables (i.e., social support and job satisfaction). Consequently, common method bias might have inflated the magnitude of the relationships observed between variables in this study (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). In order to examine this concern, we performed Harman's one-factor test. According to Podsakoff and Organ (1986), common method variance is evidenced by this test when a) a single factor emerges in a factor analysis comprising all variables and/or b) the amount of variance explained by the first factor extracted is considerable (i.e., more than 50%). The results of this test indicate that neither of those scenarios existed in the present study; it revealed a factorial solution comprising more than one factor and the first factor explained only 31% of the total variance. Although a dominant general factor was not found to account for the majority of variance of this study, future research would benefit from designing studies that more directly address common method bias. For instance, separation of independent and dependent variables measures would be one option for reducing common method variance. Such separation diminishes the likelihood that participants' prior responses will influence subsequent responses (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

Second, it must be emphasized that the present study cannot infer causality regarding the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. The data presented here are not sufficient to argue that an increase in workplace bullying causes a decrease in worker's job satisfaction. In fact, causal inferences cannot be made since computing regression analyses does not change the correlational nature of the data. However, the theories underpinning this study (among others) are generally causal in nature, and we hope to have provided evidence that will contribute, along with other sources, toward a better assessment of those theories. Futures research efforts could benefit from using more robust research strategies such as longitudinal study or an experimental design.

Third, the relatively small sample can be attributed to inopportune timing (i.e., summer vacations). A longer phase of data collection might help avoid this limitation. With a larger number of participants, results from the study may have been more diverse (e.g., in terms of occupations, field of work, age); which would have provided a more representative sample of the population. Having a larger sample could enable the possibility of making a distinction between various groups such as private versus public sector, types of industries and types of occupations for instance. Nevertheless, we believe that the use of a heterogeneous sample increases the robustness and the possibility to generalize our observations to some extent.

### 4.3. Future Studies

Future avenues for research could make a clear distinction between different types of social support (i.e., colleague and

supervisor) in the investigation of their impact on the workplace bullying and job satisfaction relationship. Furthermore, it could be worthwhile in identifying other intervening variables that are playing a role in the workplace bullying and job satisfaction relationship. Moreover, investigating other types of workplace relationship such as workplace bullying and absenteeism, or workplace bullying and job performance could help in creating a more comprehensive model of this type of workplace harassment. Indeed, investigating other factors that are considered as having protective roles merits more research attention. Setting up systems for supporting staff and for dealing with workplace bullying may have benefits for both employers and employees. Despite being the likely most used questionnaire in the workplace-bullying literature (Notelaers et al., 2006), future studies using the NAQ could gather additional information of one's experience of workplace bullying such as the impact level of the various negative acts. Lastly, future research efforts would benefit from a solid research design in examining the question of how workplace bullying and social support interact to influence workers' level of job satisfaction.

## 5. Conclusion

To our knowledge, studies examining the moderating role of social support on the linkages between workplace bullying and job satisfaction have received little attention within the workplace-bullying research (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). We believe that looking at workplace variables to better understand workplace bullying will contribute to its overall prevalence by being better positioned to address and manage it and, ultimately, prevent it.

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