

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Workplace Bullying and Intention to Leave among Academic Employees in a South African University

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Abstract

Given the severe effects of workplace bullying in the workplace, it has emerged as a serious problem on a global scale, and is drawing increasing interest from researchers. This paper's primary goal is to investigate the association between workplace bullying and intention to leave among academics at a South African university. Using a convenience sampling method, a sample size of 180 respondents (n=180) was selected from the 335 (N=335) target population. Data was gathered using a standardised questionnaire, and SPSS version 28 was utilised to analyse the results. An exploratory factor analysis was performed to identify critical dimensions of workplace bullying. The study employed Spearman's rho correlation analysis and regression analysis to investigate the association between workplace bullying and intention to leave. The five elements of workplace bullying and the intention to leave had strong positive associations. The regression analysis results showed a predictive association between workplace bullying and intention to leave. In light of these findings, the study recommended that universities explore preventative and intervention strategies to manage workplace bullying.

Keywords: workplace bullying; higher education; intention to leave; employees

Introduction

Workplace bullying, as a persistent pattern of mistreatment, has long been recognised as an organisational problem (Reddy and Naidu, 2024: 79). It involves acts of deliberate interpersonal hostility through a repetitive sequence of persecutions, humiliations, and attacks, all aimed at harming the targeted person's physical, emotional, or economic status (Al-Jawazneh and Smadi, 2017: 15). Human Resources (HR) and management must educate employees on respectful workplace behaviours, and also with regard to which actions could constitute workplace bullying, in order to build a workplace culture that promotes zero-tolerance for workplace bullying (Botha, 2019: 11). The impact of workplace bullying is not limited to the victims, however; it also disrupts working relations within organisations. The ultimate cost is borne by employers in the form of decreased efficiency and productivity (Asamani, 2016: 54). The harsh reality is that this behaviour is often under-reported, leaving victims feeling degraded, humiliated, offended, or intimidated (Higazee and Rayan, 2017: 3; Yaman, 2010: 571). HR and management should encourage employees to report workplace bullying, because the gravity of the situation is so severe that some employees may even contemplate leaving their current jobs when faced with hostile working conditions such as workplace bullying (Reknes *et al.*, 2021: 10).

Around the world, universities have drafted policies and procedures to address workplace bullying. However, insufficient awareness efforts have been made to highlight positive managerial actions that can be taken against bullying behaviour (Meriläinen *et al.*, 2016: 629). A South African study (Barkhuizen and Schutte, 2016: 4) revealed that academics expressed helplessness in this regard, because higher educational policies do not protect them

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against bullying. HR and management should ensure that well-devised procedures are in place for responding to workplace bullying, so that bullying complaints are addressed and measured. Employees will likely report cases of workplace bullying if they feel that there is sufficient faith in the procedures, and if there is some assurance that these will be applied when required (Badenhorst and Botha, 2022: 11).

The exodus of academic employees from higher education institutions (HEIs) engenders what is referred to as a "brain drain," which poses a significant challenge for South African higher education institutions. Studies such as those by Theron, Barkhuizen, and Du Plessis (2014: 3) have highlighted this trend's detrimental effects. In the present study, "brain drain" refers to the migration of highly educated and skilled academics from one institution to another, locally or internationally (Wanniarachchi, 2018: 117). There is little statistical data available regarding workplace bullying in HEIs in the South African context. Yimer *et al.*'s study (2017: 21) indicated that 75.6% of academics at Madda Walabu University, South-East Ethiopia intended to leave their university positions. It would be pertinent to determine whether a similar trend is occurring in South Africa. High turnover rates not only incur costs related to recruiting and training new academic staff, but also tarnishes the institution's reputation, potentially deterring other talented academics from considering applying for vacancies (Razzaghian and Ghani, 2014: 41). Addressing this issue is crucial for sustaining the quality and stability of HEIs in South Africa.

Workplace bullying has emerged as a significant concern and liability within South African HEIs. Limited research could be found on workplace bullying in this specific environment (De Wet, 2014: 13). Existing studies predominantly concentrate on bullying among students in primary and secondary schools (De Vos and Kirsten, 2015: 2; Jacobs and De Wet, 2015: 53), with relatively little attention given to bullying experienced by academics in higher education (Tolentino, 2016: 20). Given this gap, the current study seeks to investigate the predictive relationship between workplace bullying and the intention to leave among academic employees in a university in South Africa. This study aims to shed light on how workplace bullying, when present in higher education settings, impacts the retention of academic staff. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing and mitigating the negative consequences associated with workplace bullying in South African HEIs.

Workplace Bullying and Intention to Leave

Workplace bullying involves behaviours that harass, offend, or socially exclude employees (Farley *et al.* 2023:347). This behaviour involves frequent exposure to mistreatment (typically six months or longer) and manifests due to the power imbalance between the target and the perpetrator (Einarsen *et al.*, 2020: 13; Leymann, 1996: 168). Repeated unwelcomed offensive actions are categorised into several dimensions: negative communication, humiliating behaviour, isolation behaviour, frequent changes of tasks to punish someone, and the threat of violence (Leymann, 1996: 170).

Negative communication involves withholding information or providing incorrect information to employees (Jiang, 2019: 3). This can lead to stress, low productivity, and unmet expectations. It can also disrupt a company's workflow, and can create misunderstandings, missed deadlines, low employee morale, and poor job performance (Bradley *et al.*, 2015: 541; Hussain *et al.*, 2018: 8). Humiliating behaviour includes actions by bullies who belittle their victims, making them feel inadequate and unworthy. This behaviour can impair morale and create an uncondusive work environment (McCauley, 2017: 256). Isolation behaviour comprises intentionally ignoring, avoiding, or not paying attention to others (Leymann, 1996:170). It allows bullies to exert control over their victims, and can lead to feelings of self-doubt and isolation, potentially causing mental and emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, and burnout (De Wet, 2014: 9; Jung *et al.*, 2022:3). Frequent changes of tasks subject victims to unnecessary duties and functions and may appear to punish them. Frequent changes of tasks can also lead to frustration and confusion, and hinder personal and professional growth (Ntsiful *et al.*, 2018: 2; Omansky *et al.*, 2016: 3). The threat of workplace violence includes physical assault, threats, intimidation, and verbal abuse (Yao *et al.*, 2014:389). Exposure to such acts can result in a loss of motivation, reduced self-esteem, anxiety, irritability, depression, and stress (Nowrouzi-Kia, 2017: 675; Vincent-Höper *et al.*, 2015: 2). If not addressed, it may escalate to physical illness, psychological disorders, or substance abuse (Bordignon and Monteiro 2016: 940). These dimensions illustrate the varied forms that workplace bullying can assume, all of which contribute to creating a hostile and detrimental work environment for those affected.

Intention to leave refers to an employee's decision to leave an organisation to seek employment elsewhere (Engelbrecht and Samuel, 2019: 2). It can have significant adverse effects, and hurt employee morale, decrease job performance, and give rise to presenteeism. Presenteeism refers to individuals who are physically present but

mentally absent at work, thus not fully functioning (Demerouti *et al.*, 2009:51) and can cause employee disengagement. Presenteeism negatively impacts employees' performance, which leads to alienation, dissatisfaction, and less commitment toward the organisation thus increasing turnover intention (Chun and Song, 2020: 6). Low employee morale causes the individual to be non-committed to the organisation, and to feel disengaged, unmotivated, and lose interest in his/her job (Elzohairy *et al.*, 2019:179). Disengaged employees are less likely to meet job expectations, feel motivated or contribute positively to team efforts (Zafrul, 2017: 51). Intention to leave correlates with inferior job performance, and employees experiencing intention to leave may feel stressed and need help to perform their duties effectively (Arshadi and Damiri, 2013: 706; Othman *et al.*, 2019: 87). The outcome of continued intention to leave is actual turnover (Liu and Liu, 2021:3). This means that employees who are thinking about leaving their jobs at some point in the future translate this thought into action, and usually look for alternative jobs (Sarigül, 2024: 312). This suggests that turnover intention harboured by employees is considered as the last point of decision-making before following through with actual leaving an organisation (Haque *et al.*, 2019:3).

Theoretical Framework of Workplace Bullying and Intention to Leave

Two theories, the Theory of Attribution and the Theory of Reasoned Action, underpin the current study. The Theory of Attribution is best used to understand workplace bullying, whereas the Theory of Reasoned Action is used as a foundation to unravel the process of intention to leave. The Theory of Attribution was pioneered by Fritz Heider (1958: 272). It is used to appraise "how people perceive their behaviours and that of others, and to understand why people behave the way they do". The theory purports that people observe others, analyse their behaviour, and develop their explanations relating to such behaviour. Heider (1958: 272) propounds that peoples' behaviours could be attributed to either internal (dispositional attribution) or external factors (situational attribution). Internal factors are those behaviours innate to an individual, while external ones emanate from the environment. Furthering these attributions, Bridger *et al.* (2023: 470) describe dispositional attribution as ascribing the cause of behaviour to the internal traits of an individual and personality traits. On the other hand, situational attribution pertains to attributing the cause of an individual's behaviour to some situation or event outside a person's control (Alpatanni, 2015: 4), such as a person's reaction towards bullying behaviour in the workplace.

Workplace bullying in HEIs can manifest itself through bullying leadership, and there are attributes and behaviours (dispositional attribution) that bullying leaders display that result in workplace bullying (Olabiyi *et al.*, 2024: 2). Akella (2016: 8) submits that bullies are skilled social manipulators and perceives them as having the need to control other employees, and as having poor impulse control, a sarcastic disposition, and a propensity to hurl insults. Shangar and Yazdanifard (2014: 2) support Akella's view and emphasise that workplace bullies typically exhibit the aforesaid negative attributes. Such bullies are often driven by self-centred and self-serving motives, and prioritise their interests and goals over those of others. Additionally, workplace bullies are characterised by a lack of respect for other employees and tend to disregard others' opinions and feelings. They also show little regard for the impact of their actions on others. Regarding situational attribution, bullying behaviour can be explained by jealousy of others' accomplishments, strengths, sterling performance, and the praise or attention they receive (Peng and Zhao, 2020: 2). The competitive HEI environment is conducive to workplace bullying. In an academic career, making one's name known within a certain area becomes a prerequisite through conference presentations, publications of articles and books, successful acquisition of research grants, and the like (Tight, 2023: 126). All these activities, including seeking promotion, are sanctioned within an informal process called peer reviewing, during which a small group of academic peers evaluate whether one deserves to be promoted (Tight, 2022: 223). The reputations of others are at the heart of these scholarly activities, and bullying academics might be better known not for their own work, but for their destructive criticism of junior or less experienced academics. Additionally, in academia, peer bullying occurs mostly horizontally, in which case more experienced faculty members with high levels of achievement bully junior members of staff (Hodgins *et al.*, 2024: 3). Such experienced academics find it easy to bully others without considering the grave consequences to the careers of bullied academics (Lemon and Barnes, 2021: 206).

The Theory of Reasoned Action, developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1975, is a social psychology theory that aims to predict and understand an individual's intention to engage in a particular behaviour. According to this theory, "people behave in a particular way because they intend to do so, and nothing can prevent them from carrying out their intention" (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010: 20). Thus, employee intentions are deemed to be a predictor of behaviour. Their actions emanate from rational decision-making (Hackman and Knowlden 2014: 102). This

theory is used in the present study to argue that academics may intend to leave the higher education institution where they are employed, because they have made an analysis of their situation or rationally thought about it, and thus arrived at the decision to leave. The Theory of Reasoned Action elaborates on an individual's behavioural intention, including attitude and subjective norms. Attitude refers to an individuals' judgment of or assessment of their behaviours (Yean *et al.*, 2015: 144). Jain (2014: 7) asserts that an attitude arises from the cognitive processes (thought), values (beliefs), and affection (emotions) towards a particular object. Haddock and Maio (2008: 131) believe that how employees act can only be understood by using their work attitudes as a basis. Jain (2014: 3) suggests that the behavioural aspect of an attitude may manifest in the actual behaviour. In light of this, academics' behaviour is often related to their feelings towards working in a particular HEI environment. A hostile working environment could likely encourage academics to leave their jobs (Rajendran *et al.*, 2020: 479). According to Ajzen (2020: 315), subjective norms are determined by the perceived social pressure from others for an individual to behave in a certain manner and their motivation to conform to those people's views. Trafimow (2009:509) adds that subjective norms refer to the support and approval from influential people for a particular action or behaviour. To avoid compliance with social norms that employees do not espouse, they may well take a rational decision to leave their current employing organisation (Sheeran and Webb, 2016: 508; Jung *et al.*, 2020: 6).

Conceptual Framework

The literature review serves as the basis for developing the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1. The framework proposes that the five dimensions of workplace bullying are positively correlated with intention to leave.

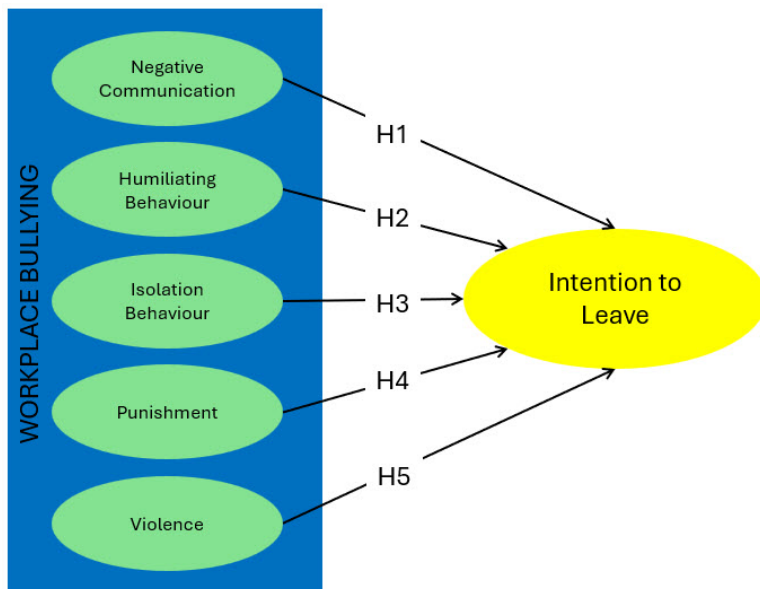


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Given the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were posited:

- H₁: There is a significant relationship between negative communication and intention to leave.
- H₂: There is a significant relationship between humiliating behaviour and intention to leave.
- H₃: There is a significant relationship between isolation behaviour and intention to leave.
- H₄: There is a significant relationship between frequent changes of tasks to punish someone and intention to leave.
- H₅: There is a significant relationship between threat of violence and intention to leave.

Methodology

Turin *et al.* (2024: 3) state that a research paradigm includes basic assumptions and ways of thinking that shape academic researchers' work and studies. Common research paradigms include positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and realism (Keong *et al.*, 2023: 5857). The authors of this study chose the positivist paradigm, because it

is primarily quantitative, relying on numerical measurements and statistical analyses to investigate social phenomena. The positivist research design serves as a blueprint that integrates all elements of quantitative research, ensuring that the results are reliable, unbiased, and generally applicable (Asenahabi, 2019: 77).

There are three main types of research designs: descriptive, exploratory and explanatory (Audu, 2022: 71). The descriptive design utilised in this study can be classified into observational, case study, and survey designs (Asenahabi 2019: 77). A descriptive design aims to provide details and characteristics of the phenomena under study (Pawar, 2020: 48), which in this paper are workplace bullying and intention to leave. The study used a survey design in combination with correctional design to gather quantitative data and examine the connection between workplace bullying and intention to leave. Using a structured questionnaire, respondents were required to provide answers about the study's variables. The study's target population consisted of 335 male and female academics working permanently at a Gauteng university for at least one year. Academics are lecturers, senior lecturers, department heads, executive deans, associate professors, and professors who engage in teaching and learning activities, research, citizenship and community engagement. Convenience sampling was used to choose the study's 180 respondents based on their availability for data collection.

A three-part questionnaire was given to the respondents. Biographical questions were asked in Section A, workplace bullying was measured in Section B using a questionnaire adopted from Leymann (1990: 119), and academics' intention to leave the university was evaluated in Section C using a questionnaire from Landau and Hammer (1986: 385). Using a 5-point Likert scale of (1) = "Strongly disagree", (2) = "Disagree", (3) = "Neither disagree nor agree", (4) = "Agree", and (5) = "Strongly agree", respondents indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements in the questionnaire. Zachariadou *et al.* (2018:341) used "Leymann's Inventory of Psychological Terror (LIPT), an instrument developed by Leymann (1990: 119) to measure workplace bullying. Güllü *et al.* (2020: 185) used the turnover intention instrument developed by Landau and Hammer (1986: 385) to measure intention to leave. In these studies, Cronbach's alpha reliability test scores for both instruments were 0.8 and 0.881, respectively, which are above the minimum threshold of 0.7 (Taber, 2018: 5).

Results and Discussion

The quantitative data was the foundation for analysing findings, presentation, and interpretation. A response rate of sixty percent was attained, which Fincham (2008: 1) considers adequate. The purpose of presenting the biographical information is to provide a representation of the spread of the biographical information of participants without making comparisons, as the latter was not the purpose of the study. According to the demographic profile, 44.7% of the respondents were men, and 59.3% were women (n = 64). Regarding race, Black Africans comprised the most significant percentage of responders (72.2%, n = 78), followed by Whites (19.4%, n = 21). Indians/Asians comprised 2.8% (n=3) and Coloureds, 5.6% (n=6) of the population, respectively. Most sample respondents (42.6%, n = 46) were between 36 and 45 years of age, and 82.4% (n = 89) held post-graduate diplomas or degrees. The results demonstrate that the respondents were reasonably experienced, with a significant portion of the sample (63%, n=68) having worked for their current employer for more than nine years.

Items from the workplace bullying questionnaire were subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify critical components. In this study, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests were used to assess the dataset's appropriateness for EFA. The Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) test affirmed sample adequacy in this study with a value of 0.916, greater than 0.5 (Kulshrestha and Reddy, 2019: 2; Noor *et al.*, 2016: 216). Bartlett's test yielded an approximate Chi-Square value of 3993.682, another sample adequacy measure. The significance level of Bartlett's test was 0.000, which was lower than 0.001. According to these results, the data was eligible for factor analysis (Table 1).

Table 1: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test and test of sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.916	
Bartlett's test of sphericity	χ^2	3993.682
	Degrees of freedom	528
	Significance level	0.000

The cumulative percentage variance and the Kaiser-criterion rule were considered appropriate for identifying the number of components in the original 30-item questionnaire. Because the scree plot depends on the observer's

visual interpretation of the eigenvalues curve on the scree plot, it was not chosen due to a lack of precise measurement (Holand, 2019: 5). These techniques were used to derive five factors related to workplace bullying illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Eigenvalues and cumulative percentage of variance for workplace bullying factors

Factors	No of Items	Eigenvalues	% of Variance	% of Cumulative
Negative communication	10	18.111	54.883	54.883
Humiliating behaviour	5	1.563	4.737	71.988
Isolation behaviour	6	2.211	6.699	61.582
Frequent changes of tasks to punish someone	5	1.871	5.669	67.251
Threat of violence	7	1.111	3.366	75.354

The components for which the eigenvalues were less than 1 were excluded using the Kaiser-criterion rule. When eigenvalues exceed 1, the component was deemed noteworthy. This study's principal component analysis (PCA) identified five variables (Table 2) with eigenvalues greater than 1. The five components were further extracted by the cumulative percentage variance, which reached 75.354% and was above the suggested criterion of 60% (Duri and Van Zyl, 2018: 114). The threshold led to the adoption of the five-factor framework.

The five-factor structure of workplace bullying

Large data sets can have their dimensionality reduced by using PCA, a dimensionality-reduction technique (Mishra *et al.*, 2017: 61). This is accomplished by reducing a sizable set of variables into one that retains most of the data from the original set (Dar, 2021: 240). A factor must include an item considered significant with a factor loading of 0.50 or above. Since they were cross-loading, items B3 and B21 were eliminated, and item B20 was omitted since the loadings were less than 0.5. The loading matrix was generated after this process, as shown in Table 3.

- Ten indicators (B1, B2, B5, B9, B10, B13, B14, B18, B25, B27) made up Factor 1, dubbed "negative communication" and explained 54.883% of the variation. The factor made up the largest eigen value of 18.111, thus demonstrating that negative communication was the dominant behaviour in terms of workplace bullying.
- According to Table 4, every one of the ten items was higher than the generally accepted lower loading limit of 0.50 when conducting research with EFA (Samuels, 2017: 2). The Cronbach alpha for negative communication was .954. These results indicate that the internal consistency of all ten items was strong.
- Six items (B4, B6, B7, B22, B23, and B26) in Factor 2 related to "humiliating behaviour" and explained 4.737% of the variation with the eigen value of 1.563. With a Cronbach alpha of .924, this component demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. Humiliating behaviour has been described in the literature review as behaviour that reflects behaviour aimed at degrading or belittling others.
- Factor 3 was loaded with eight items (B11, B12, B16, B17, B19, B24, B31, and B32) labelled "isolation behaviour." Three factors explained 6.699% of the variation and constituted an eigen value of 2.211. With an internal consistency of .939, as shown by the Cronbach alpha, this component was deemed to have relatively high internal consistency. In the literature review, isolation behaviour was considered as behaviour aimed at degrading or belittling others.
- Two items (B8, B15) made up Factor 4, and were named "frequent change of tasks to punish". These explained 5.669% of the variation and comprised an eigen value of 1.871. This behaviour refers to the deliberate reassignment of tasks as a form of harassment. For this factor, the Cronbach alpha value was .701.
- Four indicators, B28, B29, B30, and B33, were connected to the "threat of violence" to make up Factor 5, which explained 3% of the variance and consisted of an eigen value of 1.111. This behaviour indicates the presence of intimidation or threats in the workplace. The factor had good internal consistency, as seen by its acceptable Cronbach alpha value of .924.

Table 3: The workplace bullying loading matrix

Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4		Factor 5	
Item	Loading	Item	Loading	Item	Loading	Item	Loading	Item	Loading
B1	.769	B4	.665	B8	.683	B11	.650	B28	.858
B2	.799	B6	.760	B15	.750	B12	.727	B29	.773
B5	.601	B7	.633			B16	.750	B30	.879
B9	.660	B22	.755			B17	.778	B33	.717
B10	.711	B23	.834			B19	.518		
B13	.669	B26	2.08			B24	.537		
B14	.685					B31	.627		
B18	.616					B32	.661		
B25	.605								
B27	.557								
$\alpha = .954$		$\alpha = .924$		$\alpha = .939$		$\alpha = .701$		$\alpha = .924$	

Extraction technique: PCA with Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Correlation Analysis

Table 4 presents the statistical results of the correlation study between the five dimensions of workplace bullying (independent variables) and the intention to leave (dependent variable). The association between the intention to leave and the five dimensions of workplace bullying – humiliating communication, humiliating behaviour, isolation behaviour, frequent changes of tasks to punish someone, and the threat of violence" was examined using Spearman's correlation. Because the convenience sample approach was used, which prevented respondents from being chosen at random, Spearman's correlation analysis was chosen. The results verified the high, moderate, and weak positive relationship between the dimensions.

Table 4: Correlation analysis results

		Negative communication	Humiliating behaviour	Isolation behaviour	Frequent changes of tasks to punish someone	Threat of violence	Intention to leave
Intention to leave	ρ (rho)	.523**	.432**	.457**	.214*	.329**	1.000
	p-value (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.026	<.001	
	N	108	108	108	108	108	108
**. Correlation at a p-value of 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
*. Correlation at a p-value of 0.05 level (2-tailed)							

Regression Analysis

Table 5 displays the findings of the regression analysis. The dependent variable was the intention to leave. In contrast, the independent variables included five dimensions of workplace bullying: "negative communication, humiliating behaviour, isolation behaviour, frequent changes of tasks to punish someone" and "threat of violence".

Model 1 – Hypothesis 1

Model 1 shows a linear regression analysis of the intention to leave as the dependent variable and negative communication as the independent variable. At the significance level of 0.001, the data revealed a beta value of .567 ($\beta=.567$; $p < 0.001$), indicating a predictive association between negative communication and intention to leave. Additionally, an adjusted R-square of .315 was shown in the results, indicating that 3% of the occurrence of intention to leave was caused by negative communication. These results supported hypothesis (H1), which states that “There is a significant relationship between negative communication and intention to leave”, and this relationship was positive. The results are consistent with the findings of Nurdiana *et al.* (2021: 227), who found that negative communication between management and employees occurs when communication is not transparent, or when managers are not accessible, employees are not respected, and direction is not clear and understood, thus increasing intention to leave. According to De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia (2017: 1049), workers whose communication with their managers is not effective report feeling very frustrated and dissatisfied with their jobs, which makes them very likely to want to leave their current organisation.

Model 2 – Hypothesis 2

Model 2 displays the findings of a linear regression that assessed humiliating behaviour as a predictor of intention to leave. At the significance level of 0.001, the results showed a beta value of .468 ($\beta=.468$; $p < 0.001$), indicating a predictive connection between humiliating behaviour and intention to leave. The intention to leave episodes were accounted for by humiliating behaviour in 2% of cases (Adjusted $R^2 = .212$). The hypothesis that “There is a significant relationship between humiliating behaviour and intention to leave” (H2) was accepted in light of the results. The relationship between the variables was positive. These findings are supported by the research of Tag-Eldeen, Barakat and Dar (2017:9), who found that academics who suffer humiliation in the workplace are more likely to consider leaving their jobs than those not exposed to humiliating behaviour.

Table 5: Regression analysis results

Model 1		Dependent Variable: Intention to Leave			
Independent variable: Negative communication	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficient		
	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
	.610	.086	.567	7.085	<.001
R=.567^a		R²=.321		Adjusted R²=.315	
Model 2		Dependent Variable: Intention to Leave			
Independent variable: Humiliating behaviour	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficient		
	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
	.623	.114	.468	5.451	<.001
R=.468^a		R²=.219		Adjusted R²=.212	
Model 3		Dependent Variable: Intention to Leave			
Independent variables: Isolation behaviour	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficient		
	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
	.667	.107	.518	6.236	<.001
R=.518^a		R²=.268		Adjusted R²=.261	
Model 4		Dependent Variable: Intention to Leave			
Independent variable: Frequent changes of tasks to punish someone	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficient		
	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
	.409	.162	.239	2.533	.013
R=.239^a		R²=.057		Adjusted R²=.048	
Model 5		Dependent Variable: Intention to Leave			

Independent variables: Threat of violence	Unstandardised coefficients	Standardised coefficient			
	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
	.635	.148	.385	4.289	<.001
R=.385^a R²=.148 Adjusted R²=.140					

Ul Hassan, Ikramullah and Iqbal (2022: 199) highlight that employees value their dignity most in the workplace, and therefore, abusive or offensive remarks may contribute to their intention to leave.

Model 3 – Hypothesis 3

Model 3 shows a predictive association between isolation behaviour and intention to leave, with a coefficient of .518 at the significant level of 0.001 ($\beta=.518$; $p < 0.001$). Isolation behaviour contributed 3% (Adjusted $R^2=.261$) to the prediction of intention to leave. Considering the findings, the hypothesis that “*There is a significant relationship between isolation behaviour and intention to leave*” (H3), was maintained. The data demonstrated a positive relationship between the variables. Alzayed and Murshid (2017: 19) suggest that a deficiency of social support from superiors leads to employee dissatisfaction and frustration, generating a high degree of intention to leave the company. Kaymaz *et al.* (2014: 45) elaborate that humans are social beings, and the inability to meet emotional expectations and inadequate social dialogue in the workplace cause individuals to experience feelings of loneliness. These can contribute to employees wishing to leave their current employment.

Model 4 – Hypothesis 4

Model 4 reflects that the intention to leave and the frequency with which tasks are changed to punish someone have a predictive relationship. At the significant threshold of 0.13, the findings show a beta coefficient of .239 ($\beta=.239$; $p < 0.13$). The results also showed an adjusted R square of .048, indicating that 5% of occurrences involving intention to leave were caused by frequent task changes intended to punish someone. Considering this empirical evidence, the hypothesis that “*There is a significant relationship between frequent changes of tasks to punish someone and intention to leave*” (H4), was accepted. The finding demonstrated a positive relationship between the variables. De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia (2017: 1049) note that when employees' responsibilities are frequently changed to interrupt their work and goals, their dominant reaction is increased turnover intention to avoid distress and harm. Zeng *et al.* (2021: 2) further note that frequently making unauthorised changes to tasks as a form of punishment increases the desire of the victims to leave their current employment. Constantly shifting work expectations and creating unrealistic or unattainable expectations as punishment in the workplace also contribute to the intention to leave (Kanbur and Canbek 2017: 370).

Model 5 – Hypothesis 5

The threat of violence was shown to have a beta value of .385 at the significant level of 0.001 ($\beta=.385$; $p < 0.001$) in the linear regression analysis of the relationship between the threat of violence and intention to depart (Model 5). The findings revealed that the threat of violence could predict 1% (Adjusted $R^2=.140$) of the intention to leave. Thus, the hypothesis “*There is a significant relationship between threat of violence and intention to leave*” (H5), was sustained. The results indicated a positive relationship between the variables. Yeh *et al.* (2020: 2) reveal that employees who are exposed to violence in the workplace become emotionally agitated and mentally and physically stressed, which give rise to the intention to leave. Furthermore, incidents of violence experienced in the workplace by employees can hurt their feelings towards work or the organisation, which could cause those who experienced or witnessed workplace violence to consider leaving their jobs (Aytac *et al.*, 2016: 6).

The current study evaluated the association between academics' intentions to leave from a Gauteng university and workplace bullying. The findings of the correlation study showed a strong positive association between the five dimensions of workplace bullying and the intention to leave. The regression analysis results demonstrated a statistically significant predictive link between the intention to leave and the five factors of workplace bullying. In the main study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability test was used to gauge reliability. The intention to leave and workplace bullying had Cronbach's alpha values of .935 and .973, respectively. These high Cronbach values can be attributed to the wording of items in the questionnaires, which could have appeared to mean the same for respondents. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 indicates an instrument's dependability, meaning that the two research instruments had a high internal consistency (Taber, 2018: 5). These threshold alpha values suggest that

the study instrument's reliability was satisfactory. Additionally, it was shown that the workplace bullying components' alpha values were above the recommended threshold of 0.7. A pilot study was carried out to verify whether the respondents could understand the items in the questionnaire and assess the internal consistency of the research instruments before they were distributed for the main study. The reliability value for the pilot study was .952 for workplace bullying and .886 for the intention to leave. Fifty (50) surveys were dispersed and collected. The supervisor and co-supervisor of this study, as well as academics and HR professionals who are authorities in the field of industrial psychology at two different institutions, were contacted for guidance on what should be incorporated, modified, or eliminated from the instrument to help preserve its content validity.

The validity in the main study was assessed by analysing the correlation between the variables to prove the existence of convergent validity. The constructs' Spearman's correlation analysis results were as follows: intention to leave and negative communication ($r=.523^{**}$; $p<0.001$); intention to leave and humiliating behaviour ($r=.423^{**}$; $p<0.001$); intention to leave and isolation behaviour ($r=.457^{**}$; $p<0.001$); intention to leave and frequent task changes intended to punish someone ($r=.214^{**}$; $p<0.001$); intention to leave and threat of violence ($r=.329^{**}$; $p<0.001$). These findings validated the research instrument's convergent validity. In the main study, examining the factor loading matrix of the constructs allowed EFA to test the validity of the constructs. Five elements were used for PCA: the threat of violence, frequent task modifications intended to penalise someone, humiliating behaviour, isolation behaviour, and negative communication. The findings showed that there are five different dimensions of workplace bullying. In addition, Spearman's rho correlation, discussed in the paragraph above, was invoked to test construct validity. The test's findings demonstrated a connection between workplace bullying and the intention to leave, proving that each variable is independent.

The study employed discriminant validity in the main study to ascertain the distinctive nature of workplace bullying and intention to leave. To this end, a correlation study was carried out between the dimensions of workplace bullying and intention to leave. The findings revealed strong, moderate, and weak relationships. The degree of certainty with which the dimensions could be distinguished from one another was high, indicating the discriminant validity of the dimensions. Regression analysis was used to assess the predictive relationship between these dimensions of workplace bullying and the intention to leave. The predictive validity of the instrument was confirmed by the results, which showed a predictive connection between the dimensions. By understanding the multifaceted nature of workplace bullying, organisations can design policies addressing the root causes and impacts of each factor. Targeted interventions and effective strategies to mitigate these issues can also be put in place by HR and management.

Conclusion

Bullying at work remains a salient problem at South African universities. It is surprising how little attention has been paid to academics who are bullied in higher education institutions. Given the adverse consequences of workplace bullying, universities ought to explore preventative and remedial measures to address this matter. Improving faculty members' comprehension of bullying in the workplace and encouraging a bullying-reporting culture with full backing from management would benefit the higher education setting. It is crucial to carry out quantitative and qualitative research in various industries to understand the subjective experience and perception of workplace bullying more profoundly. To gain valuable insights into this area of research, it would be worthwhile to conduct a comparative study on workplace bullying and intention to leave among other universities. Alternatively, the study could include non-academic staff at these universities. The validated dimensions can also serve as the basis for further studies, including testing their impact on employee well-being and organisational outcomes. One limitation of the study was the use of self-report measures to evaluate the constructs; this meant that respondents might have given more socially acceptable than accurate answers. The results cannot be generalised to the target population of all universities, because only one institutional environment was studied due to accessibility issues, and a non-probability sampling method was utilised. To ensure better generalisability of results, probability sampling techniques and incorporating other universities in the study can be used in future research.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: The article demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach by integrating insights from the behavioural science field, which encompasses psychology, sociology, anthropology, human resource management and behavioural theories to explore preventative and intervention strategies to manage workplace

bullying in South African higher education.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (Moloi); Literature review (Moloi and van Rensburg); methodology (Moloi); software (N/A); validation (Radebe); formal analysis (Radebe); investigation (Moloi); data curation (Radebe); drafting and preparation (Moloi); review and editing (Radebe and van Rensburg). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

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