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Pakistan

**Exploring Bullying Against Academics in Pakistan:  
A Corrosive Workplace Issue**

Thesis  
submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology)**  
at  
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by  
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## Abstract

The issue of workplace bullying in academia, particularly within the realm of education, has garnered attention and concern in various Western and Asian countries. Workplace bullying poses significant risks to educators, not only compromising their individual well-being but also detrimentally affecting the overall learning environment. This study makes a novel contribution by examining staff being bullied within the higher education sector in Pakistan, an unexplored focus that has received modest attention.

The study aims to explore workplace bullying factors using qualitative methods, focusing on academic staff members' firsthand experiences and coping strategies in university settings.

The results showed several risk factors associated with workplace bullying in HEIs in Pakistan. The finding shows that gender and culture are linked and should be considered when examining workplace bullying in the educational sector. Key themes emerging from the study link instances of workplace bullying to the volatile economic conditions and heightened competition in Pakistan's higher education sector that act as barriers to formally report bullying incidence. Moreover, organisational culture and socio-cultural norms were also identified as significant contributors to the occurrence of workplace bullying in academia.

Based on the study's findings, suggested strategies to combat workplace bullying may include raising awareness and fostering respect for cultural diversity among all university staff, including administrators and managers, within Pakistan's higher education institutions (HEIs). The research aims to educate academics, particularly women, about workplace bullying, empowering them to develop effective strategies for prevention and resolution.

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# Chapter 1

# The Problem

## 1.1 Introduction

The evolving landscape of the academic profession reflects profound shifts that reverberate globally, altering not only the nature of faculty work but also the dynamics of interpersonal relationships among faculty members, their interactions with students, and their rapport with institutional administrations (Farnham, 1999; Altbach, 2005). This transformative trajectory encompasses a multitude of factors, ranging from the imperatives of diversification and entrepreneurialism to the influences of corporatisation, rapid technological advancements, and the pervasive impact of social media. Concurrently, governmental regulations, escalating productivity expectations, resource constraints, and concerns about accountability and professional autonomy contribute to the recalibration of academic roles and responsibilities that sometime can foster instances of incivility and bullying among faculty members (Twale, 2017; Beale & Hoel, 2011; Hollis, 2017). From a legal standpoint, workplace bullying is gradually gaining recognition worldwide through the development of relevant legislation (Kemp, 2014; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011).

However, the issue of workplace bullying in developing nations, particularly in Pakistan, remains inadequately addressed, receiving scant attention amid prevailing challenges such as poverty, insufficient healthcare provisions, educational disparities, and infrastructural deficiencies. Within these contexts, the imperative of confronting workplace bullying is often marginalised, leaving affected individuals exposed and without effective recourse (Gadit & Mugford, 2008; Ahmad,

Kalim, & Kaleem, 2017; Bibi, Blackwell, & Margraf, 2021). This thesis seeks to explore the occurrence of workplace bullying against academics in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan. While researchers have acknowledged and studied incidents of bullying across various sectors, its recognition and understanding- particularly at the tertiary level in Pakistan- remain limited.

In a broader context, the objective of this study is to expand the body of research on workplace bullying, with a particular focus on the factors that contribute to its occurrence in the academic domain. The research participants in this study are 15 faculty members, including myself, working in academia. Data were collected in three phases: autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, and semi-structured interviews, to examine occurrences and the related subtleties surrounding workplace bullying events, drawing out implications and effects on educators in academia. The findings highlight the concept that educators subjected to workplace bullying tend to seek support from a trusted colleague, friend, or family member in the absence of support from management.

It is anticipated that this exploratory endeavour will contribute to the understanding of this corrosive workplace issue, serving as a further step toward enabling statutory bodies to formulate policies that recognize and prevent this abominable behaviour within academia in Pakistan.

## 1.2 Exploring Workplace Bullying: A Theoretical Perspective

In the realm of workplace bullying, there is no universally agreed upon definition among scholars. International academic discourse, however, widely utilizes the following description to identify the issue of bullying in the workplace (e.g., D'Cruz and Rayner, 2012; Samnani and Singh, 2012; Zapf, et al., 2011).

Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. For the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it must occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalated process during which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003, p. 15).

Research on workplace bullying has evolved significantly since its inception in 1990, with Heinz Leymann's pioneering study. Leymann's findings revealed parallels between bullying behaviours observed in playgrounds and those prevalent in the workplace. Later research by Einarsen, Raknes, and Matthiesen (1994) affirmed the widespread occurrence of workplace bullying within organizations, ranging from subtle acts like gossip, personal jokes, and withholding critical information to more overt forms such as insults, threats to quit one's job, and even physical violence. Bullying actions/events can be either work-related, such as excessive workloads and criticism, or person-related, including belittling and aggression. An individual can be recognised as a target of bullying when they report experiencing one or more of these behaviours frequently and persistently in their workplace (Baillien, et al., 2009; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007; Bulutlar, & Unler Oz, 2009; Fox, & Stallworth, 2010). This multifaceted approach to understanding workplace bullying emphasizes its significance as a widespread issue across all types of organizations, while also highlighting the complexity of its causes.

Researchers have shown considerable interest in exploring this phenomenon, particularly in Western societies such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Norway, and New Zealand (Carter et al., 2013; Johnstone, 2017; Nielsen et al., 2010; Plimmer et al., 2017). There remains a dearth of

research in academic settings where the ramifications of bullying extend beyond individual victims, significantly affecting educational institutions. The deleterious impacts include decreased faculty and staff morale, heightened absenteeism, increased turnover rates, compromised collegial relationships, and a negative overall institutional climate (Rai, & Agarwal, 2016; D’Cruz, Noronha & Mendonca, 2021; Jain, & Torres, 2021).

Recognising and addressing these broader consequences is imperative for fostering a healthy and conducive learning and working environment within educational institutions (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2010; Hutadjulu et al., 2017). A significant contribution to the investigation and assessment of workplace bullying comes from Einarsen and Guy Notelaers (2009), who introduced the Revised Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R), a survey instrument consisting of 22 items designed to probe the issue of bullying. This survey questionnaire has been extensively employed in both qualitative and quantitative research endeavours, as evidenced by its use in studies conducted by Bentley et al. (2012), Sharma (2017), Saleem et al. (2021), and Plimmer et al. (2017).

### 1.3 Background to the Study

Bullying in workplace settings extends beyond specific sectors or industries, as highlighted by Namie (2003; Lester 2013). Even higher education institutions, often idealized as intellectual centers, are not immune to this pervasive issue (Murtaza & Hui, 2021; Hollis, 2015; Farnham, 1999). Despite decades of research on workplace bullying across various work environments (D’Cruz, Noronha, & Mendonca, 2021; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003), Keashly, Fox, and Lituchy (2012) argue that the academic sphere remains a fundamental yet underexplored domain for bullying research, as scholars often overlook their own workplaces in their studies. Furthermore, some scholars (e.g., Fogg, 2008; Porter, 2014) suggest that academics

may presume themselves immune to bullying, believing their enlightened status precludes such behaviour. Despite the susceptibility of academic institutions to bullying, they may outwardly appear as exemplary workplaces, worthy of emulation by other organisations (Lines, 2007).

Such a perception views academia as an arena embodying exemplary workplace behaviours and decorum (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). However, McKay (2008) asserts that this idealized facade does not prevent these institutions from engaging in bullying. Instead, it serves as a veneer behind which bullying can thrive, hidden from view (Raskauskas, 2010). There are reports indicating that higher education institutions (HEIs) often shield such behaviours to safeguard their public image, fostering a culture where this conduct goes unaddressed (Fogg, 2008). This may have contributed to the ease with which negative workplace behaviours, such as bullying, are overlooked within the higher education sector (Hollis, 2015)

Despite progress in the field of research on workplace bullying, there remains a critical need for HEIs to reflect on interpersonal conduct within their work environments (Hollis, 2015; Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Branch and Murray (2015) argue that workplace bullying in academia still lacks sufficient research attention. Bullying incidents often go unreported by individuals in academic settings (Agervold, 2009), and when they are reported, institutions frequently lack adequate policies and procedures to address them (Hollis, 2015; Salin, 2013). Academia is characterized by strict hierarchies (McKay et al., 2008), significant power imbalances (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Ngale, 2016), and increasing competition and financial constraints (Dow, 2014), all of which create conditions conducive to bullying. Competitive environments may influence the functioning of HEIs (Hollis, 2015). Contrary to traditional objectives focused on knowledge delivery and skill development (Bosman, Coiacetto, & Dredge, 2011), these institutions are increasingly driven by

financial considerations to survive in a fiercely competitive landscape (Chang, 2013; Gravois, 2006).

Knowledge about the remediation of bullying in academic settings is limited compared to our understanding of its dynamics and apparent high prevalence (Lester, 2013). The effectiveness of intervention programmes to address bullying has not been adequately evaluated, which would enhance our theoretical understanding compared to remedies and practical solutions (Leiter et al., 2011; Osatuke et al., 2009). While it is often suggested that developing and implementing effective policies and practices to combat workplace bullying is important and necessary, it may be premature to assume their value without a comprehensive understanding of their effectiveness. To determine which strategies and practices are truly effective, it is necessary to explore how individuals typically respond to bullying and evaluate their own perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies they employ. By collecting data on individuals' experiences and assessing the effectiveness of different approaches from their perspectives, this greater understanding increases the likelihood of identifying strategies that work, improving those that are ineffective, and developing new practices based on evidence-based insights. This approach aligns with the central theme of adopting an evidence-based methodology to explore bullying.

#### 1.4 An Introduction to Workplace Bullying in Pakistan

While workplace bullying has garnered increased attention in Western countries, there remains a significant dearth of knowledge in Asia. Most studies on workplace bullying literature come from countries such as India (D'Cruz, Bisht, & Noronha, 2021), Jordan (Al Muala & Ali, 2016), Malaysia (Mokhtar & Kamaluddin, 2021), Sri Lanka (Premadasa, Wanigasooriya, Thalib, & Ellepola, 2011), and China (Han, Zhang, & Zhang, 2017). While there has been research on

workplace bullying in academia, it has generally been infrequent and conducted outside Pakistan. There have been no comprehensive studies of workplace bullying in academia in Pakistan, highlighting the need to explore the prevalence and significance of this behavior within Pakistani academic work settings.

As Malik and Björkqvist (2019) argue, workplace bullying remains largely unexplored in Pakistani academic contexts, underscoring the need to investigate how this behavior manifests within the sector. One issue lies in the role that culture plays in shaping various activities, whether progressive or non-progressive, within Pakistani society. The cultural interplay of power imbalance and gender disparity cannot be ignored when considering bullying (Anjum & Muazzam, 2018; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). Simply using gender categories to differentiate between men and women in studies has often overlooked the impact of socially constructed gender norms on bullying (Keashly, 2012; Liaquat et al., 2007).

Another factor contributing to lack of understanding of this issue is the predominant use of quantitative methods. While researchers have often focused on statistically measuring behaviors that contribute to workplace bullying, its prevalence, and its effects on victims, they have largely neglected a detailed exploration of the subjective perspectives of those targeted by bullies (Zapf et al., 2011; Baillien et al., 2009). Tracing the complex nature of individual perspectives and the factors influencing them can lead to a fuller and better conceptualization of bullying (Parzefall & Salin, 2010). To better understand the perspectives of individuals and the factors influencing them, a greater range of qualitative studies is warranted. Such studies can offer new alternatives more tailored interventions to reduce workplace bullying within organisations.

To gain insight into workplace bullying in a country, it is important to understand the influence of culture not only through references to external factors but also by considering cultural variations

between regions that influence such behaviours. To explore bullying conduct in Pakistan, it is pivotal to examine it in relation to the cultural and social norms prevalent in society, providing insights into the underlying causes and mechanisms. In this regard, the thesis also introduces the concept of “Seth culture,” a synonym for the culture of cronyism used in global studies, which is sometimes referred to as 'old boy networks' in Western contexts, as an antecedent to workplace bullying in organizations in Pakistan.

This culture restricts employee participation in decision-making, hindering innovation and efficient resource management. The adverse effects include placing incompetent individuals in key roles and treating employees as servants rather than as stakeholders. The present study criticises Seth culture for impeding effective management, particularly in family-run businesses, and its negative impact on job satisfaction and motivation. Hill and Hurley’s (2021) research emphasizes that Seth culture prioritises “buying people” over trust-building, further affecting institutional well-being. The dissection of the autocratic and loyalty-focused nature of Seth culture reveals how it hinders innovation, creates inefficient resource management, and leads to underreporting of bullying cases, highlighting broader implications for organizational cultures that prioritize authority and loyalty over inclusivity and competence.

The exploration of Seth culture in Pakistani organisations significantly contributes to body of research in research on organisational behaviours and workplace dynamics. The literature identifies the interplay of Seth culture, synonymous with power imbalances and hierarchical structures, as a factor that may contribute to workplace bullying, thereby enhancing our understanding of bullying culture in Pakistan.

The analysis in Chapter 3 explores the prevalence of 'Seth' culture in Pakistani organizations, characterized by a hierarchical, patriarchal structure centered around a paternalistic senior figure.

While Seth culture in Pakistan may be seen as an antecedent to bullying in various organizational contexts, my optimistic perspective led me to anticipate its absence within my study domain. I believed that Seth culture would not serve as an indicator of bullying in my research, a hypothesis based on my experiences and affiliation with the academic community in Pakistan.

### 1.5 Geographic and Demographic Factors

Pakistan, located in South Asia, boasts rich geographic diversity and is densely populated with a heterogeneous demographic that encompasses various ethnicities, languages, and religious beliefs. Islam is the state religion, and Urdu is the official language, while regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi are also prevalent. This demographic diversity and religious significance shape Pakistan's social fabric, cultural practices, and political contestations, contributing to its complex yet vibrant national identity.

Pakistan's higher education system does not rank prominently among the world's best in terms of quality. The quality of higher education depends on various factors, including an appropriate educational environment, infrastructure, faculty, curriculum, feedback mechanisms, research capabilities, and evaluation systems (Abbas et al., 2023; Murtaza & Hui, 2021; Mahmood et al., 2015). Since gaining independence, the Pakistani education system has grappled with numerous challenges, prompting concerted efforts by the central government to formulate new and effective education policies. However, these policies have often fallen short of meeting the necessary educational standards.

Persistent issues in Pakistan's higher education system include a shortage of academic space and faculty, declining research standards, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, low student enrollment rates, outdated teaching methodologies, waning student enthusiasm, poverty, and

gender discrimination (Murtaza & Hui, 2021; Ullah et al., 2011). Recognising the evolving global educational landscape, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan acknowledges unprecedented challenges that confront the higher education system. In addition to the challenges related to deteriorating standards, lack of facilities, and reports of private education providers exploiting students in rural areas, there is also a growing concern about the prevalence of bullying within educational institutions. Given that Pakistan's educational institutions are inherently gendered, it is crucial to examine workplace bullying in academia through a gendered lens.

Bullying, coupled with Pakistan's alarming rank of 152nd out of 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, underscores the significant gender disparity in the country. The key areas of gender discrimination include economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival. In these categories, Pakistan ranked 144th in educational attainment (Nasir, 2021), highlighting the persistent challenge of closing the gender gap, as efforts in this regard have thus far yielded limited results. Nasir (2021) predicts that at the current rate of progress, Pakistan would require 136 years to achieve gender parity, underscoring the urgent need for more effective measures to address this pressing issue. Among other reasons for the low participation of women in the economic development of the country one reason is the organisational culture, particularly the prevalence of a bullying culture, which serves as a substantial barrier to the professional advancement of women. Therefore, this thesis aims to examine the phenomenon of bullying from a gender perspective, contributing to the objective of prompting actionable measures by authorities to address and mitigate this issue within Pakistan's HEIs.

## 1.6 Research Questions

This study explores the factors influencing workplace bullying and its consequences within Pakistani academia. Grounded in qualitative research, it focuses on the personal experiences of educators affiliated with HEIs. The discussion highlights both the commonalities and differences when compared to Western studies and existing research within academia. Within this framing, this research inquiry addresses these main questions:

Q1. How do academics perceive workplace bullying in their professional environments?

Q2. How do academics understand the concept of bullying within the context of their own workplaces?

Q3. What are the potential long-term effects of workplace bullying on the overall well-being of women academics?

Q4. What coping strategies are employed to address and manage workplace bullying?

Q5. To what extent do organisational policies and support mechanisms influence victims responses to workplace bullying?

## 1.7 Research Design

This study is anchored in scholarship on workplace bullying from a broad range of economically developed or Western countries, incorporating relevant concepts to guide the examination of workplace bullying within Pakistani academia. Given the focus on academics' perceptions and personal experiences, this research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing social constructionist and interpretivist frameworks to explore, identify, comprehend, and analyse workplace bullying as perceived and experienced by the participants. The research is conducted in three phases:

through autoethnographic inquiry, collaborative autoethnographic methodology, and exploratory semi-structured interviews. Utilizing diverse forms of data provides a significant advantage—the ability to create a ‘thick description’ that captures both detailed content and rich context about the experiences being described (Geertz, 2008). The analysis of the collected data is approached from a cultural perspective, emphasising Acker’s (1990, 2006) theory of gendered organisation and Sidanius and Pratto’s (1999) social dominance theory. For a more detailed discussion, please refer to Chapter 4, Methodology

### 1.8 Purpose of The Research

This research aims to explore the instances of workplace bullying among tertiary level teachers in Pakistan and its impact on their well-being. While bullying is a globally recognised issue with established policies in developed countries, the organisational circumstances in Pakistan, as an underdeveloped country, present a distinct context. The study seeks to shed light on workplace bullying from an insider’s perspective in Pakistani academia, aiming to raise awareness about the widespread bullying culture. By identifying factors that negatively affect academics' well-being, the research enhances understanding of the tertiary education sector and helps develop potential directives to address this persistent problem.

The motivation for conducting this study stems from my personal experiences of negative workplace behaviours and witnessing bullying, which had a significant impact on my mental and physical health. Sharing these experiences with the participants emphasised the significance of recognising these adverse behaviours as a proactive measure to preventing their occurrence in the workplace. The successive phases of the thesis research involve exploring workplace bullying through the perspectives of fourteen other academics, drawing on their experiences in current and

previous workplaces. The interviews were analyzed using the NAQ-R survey questions (Einarsen et al., 2009). The findings of this study may differ from those of Western studies due to cultural differences and contextual influences on individuals' perceptions, interpretations, and responses to workplace bullying.

## 1.9 Thesis Chapters Outline

The structure of the thesis follows a conventional chapter format, progressing through the IMRAD framework: Introduction and Theory, Method, and then the presentation of Results and Discussion. A key feature of this thesis is the preparation of four manuscripts that have been submitted to peer-reviewed journals. These manuscripts are placed in the chapters at appropriate points in the thesis sequence, with each introduced by a reflective piece. The chapter titles indicate when an article has been included. Overall, four article manuscripts are featured within the nine chapters of the thesis (two published and two under review). Each reflective introduction comments on the learning gained during and after the preparation of each journal manuscript, as well as the contribution of each manuscript to the overall thesis argument.

**Chapter 2 Article 1.** Titled: *Bullying research progress review: Women academics in Pakistan's university sector* has been published in *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*. This article explores the published empirical studies about academics being bullied in Pakistan's higher education. This chapter begins with a reflective section highlighting the interconnectedness of this manuscript with the overarching thesis argument.

This article is a scoping review of published research from studies conducted in the last two decades in Pakistan focusing on workplace bullying directed at academic staff by colleagues and administrators. The discourse features a notable absence of qualitative studies, which holds back

the understanding of the bullying issue. It notes the apparent lack of support from management and administrative staff to mitigate this problem.

**Chapter 3 Article 2.** Titled: *Gender disparities: Antecedents to bullying against women academics in Pakistan*. This article manuscript has been submitted to a journal. It further contributes to my literature review as it examines the common themes prevalent in the existing studies regarding factors that contributes to bullying within the realm of higher education in Pakistan, bringing an awareness of the wider global literature to reading the Pakistan literature and higher education environment.

The chapter opens with a reflective segment emphasizing on how the article enriches the ongoing discourse and fills the literature gap targeted by the thesis.

**Chapter 4. Research Methodology** This section of the thesis focuses on the research methodology, emphasizing the exploratory nature of the three methods used: autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, and exploratory interviews. These methods are applied to study workplace bullying among and between academic staff. The chapter highlights the methodological effectiveness of these multiple exploratory approaches while also acknowledging their limitations

**Chapter 5. Article 3.** Titled: *Bullying and autoethnography: A personal narrative of harassment in higher education*. This submitted manuscript presents Phase 1 of my findings: an autoethnographic account of my experiences with bullying as a tertiary teacher. Beginning with a reflection on the article, this chapter explores my understanding of the issue through self-analysis. This article employs an interpretative framework, retrospectively examining events chronologically and endeavouring to establish connections among details that collectively

contribute to the narrative of my encounter, highlighting the ramifications of this experience on my physical and social well-being.

**Chapter 6. Article 4.** Titled: *Breaking the silence: Three Pakistani women academics' accounts of being bullied*, has been published in the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. It is a collaborative autoethnographical account of three educators who were victims of bullying in academia. This article is introduced in this chapter with a reflective section, serving as a multifaceted tool for examining both the contents of the article and the second phase of my research findings. These educators were brave enough to overcome the current silence that leaves bullying conduct underreported. This situation contradicts universities' role as houses of learning and agents of progressively improving culture and society. The goal is to spur a dialogue to promote accountability and equity in HEIs.

### **Chapter 7. Interview Participants' Experience of Isolation and Ostracism**

This chapter focuses on examining the research findings derived from semi-structured interviews, exploring the perspectives of the participants. Through this analysis, the chapter aims to provide insights into the experiences, attitudes, and behaviours of the individuals involved.

### **Chapter 8. Exploring the Ramifications of Workplace Bullying and Adaptive Responses: Pathways to Resilience**

This chapter encompasses a discussion of coping strategies related to the theme of personal resilience. It draws explicit connections between the findings and the initially posed research questions, evaluating the extent to which the study's aims were achieved and whether the research questions were adequately addressed.

### **Chapter 9. Conclusion**

The final chapter offers an overview of the thesis process and argument, presenting contributions made by this research and proposing potential avenues for future exploration.

### 1.10 Conclusion

As previously outlined, this study constitutes an exploratory inquiry aimed at initiating research on gender and workplace bullying within the specific national and educational context under consideration. This research project has been influenced by global scholarly investigations that highlight the seriousness of workplace bullying, prompting the development of relevant legislation and policies in many places (Blackwood, 2015). Recent efforts have focused on devising effective management strategies and preventive measures to address this issue. WorkSafe New Zealand (2014), the country where this thesis research is based, has initiatives under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 that exemplify a proactive regulatory response. These initiatives promote a positive safety culture through education, awareness campaigns, and collaboration with stakeholders. They serve as a model for research and the integration of findings into policies, aimed at improving organisational practices and creating healthier work environments. Given the absence of state-led policies in Pakistan, adopting measures akin to those in New Zealand is imperative for addressing workplace bullying effectively. Adopting a similar proactive approach is vital for safeguarding the well-being of employees and enhancing workplace health and safety standards at the national level.

As is the feature of qualitative research that uses small numbers in contrast to survey research, scholars unfamiliar with this kind of investigation may not appreciate that the purpose is not to comprehensively encapsulate rates, prevalence and statistics of workplace bullying in quantitative metrics. Rather, within specific settings the exploration of personal narratives leverages the

insights and perspectives of the educators involved in telling their accounts of being targets of bullying by colleagues and seniors. Through this exploration, the study seeks to illuminate the interactional mechanisms and power relations within the norms operating in those situations. It does not attempt to measure the prevalence of such bullying behaviour but speaks to the broad cultural knowledge that influences workplace bullying in higher education institutions. The overarching goal is to highlight the potential for effective resolution and intervention through increased awareness, and the impact of personal stories such as those presented here, thereby contributing to addressing this issue in the workplace environment in higher education institutions in Pakistan.



# Chapter 2

# Article 1: Bullying Research Progress Review: Women Academics in Pakistan's University Sector

## Reflection

This chapter constitutes the first substantive engagement with the thesis topic in presenting the manuscript of an article prepared as part of the literature gathering process. Conventionally the literature review of a thesis establishes the frame for the subsequent empirical and analytic work that is the contribution the thesis makes. This thesis is no different in that purpose, except that the thesis literature is presented and discussed in the form of two journal articles: manuscripts one already published in an academic journal, the other under review for publication. In this thesis the review and integration of literature is presented in this and the next chapter (Chapters 2 and 3).

The current reflection on Chapter 2, based on the scholarly discourse regarding workplace bullying directed at academic staff, represents a significant achievement, as it is successfully published as a refereed article. The input from external reviewers, who meticulously inspected and commented on the discussion, has not only facilitated its publication but has also enhanced the overall quality of the thesis. Engaging with critiques from reviewers during the peer review process, along with careful evaluation by editors, prompted constructive revisions that improved the manuscript based on their feedback. This process contributes meaningfully to the academic discussion on workplace bullying in academia in Pakistan, highlighting the need for more qualitative research studies on this underexplored issue.

Chapter Two presents a scoping review of the topic of bullying, particularly focused on Pakistan's higher education sector. In Chapter Three, the literature analysis is continued in another manuscript prepared for publication.

Going beyond conventional preparation of the material in thesis chapter format, to preparing it in journal manuscript format, involved refinement and further tightening of the central theoretical and research ideas. These ideas were developed in studying the literature and its application to the thesis topic and necessitated fitting them within the respective journals' differing formats. These journal requirements included manuscript word length, the distinctive referencing and paragraph formatting used by each journal and shaping the material within each journal's style directives and overall "aims and scope." Each chapter in this thesis which presents a manuscript prepared and submitted to a journal follows the format of also including an introductory reflection section. These introductory reflections variously describe elements of the learning process, insights gained during or since the manuscript was prepared and offer connections to the place and contribution of each manuscript within the overall thesis project.

In recent years, the pervasive issue of bullying has gained heightened attention as a complex social phenomenon. This increased focus has included studies examining various dimensions of bullying to understand its far-reaching impacts. The recognition of bullying as a multifaceted challenge emphasises the need for efforts to develop effective intervention strategies. By initiating the present investigation into the issue of bullying against academics in Pakistan, the aim is to bring together existing scholarly discourse on this problem and develop methods and methodological approaches to facilitate effective interventions.

Scoping reviews provide a valuable strategy to explore the literature around complex or under-researched topics, using a tight focus that filters out related but less central articles to the topic,

and help in identifying research gaps and summarising heterogeneous bodies of literature (Peters, 2015; Tricco, 2018). Thus, the scoping review presented in this chapter was used to identify and review the most relevant studies addressing bullying of academics within the Pakistani higher education context. It involved multiple iterations working with my supervisor to sift through, select and repeatedly check the relevance of empirical studies for inclusion based on the criteria that we had established (Munn, 2018).

Commencing with an initial pool of over 50,000 articles on bullying in academia in the university databases, the task of filtering down to 47 articles of relevance proved to be demanding. Moving from the initial search for titles to the wider scrutiny of abstracts allowed me to eliminate numerous articles that were incongruent with, or which only minimally addressed my chosen topic. After several rounds of further filtering articles, a final selection of 37 studies referencing the 47 articles directly related to the academic landscape of Pakistan was made.

My rationale for conducting a scoping review is to locate research within my home environment, addressing the global issue of bullying and harassment against women academics in higher education. This approach emphasises cultural nuances and the importance of avoiding generalisations, as seen in D’Cruz, Noronha, and Bhatt’s ‘culturalist thesis,’ which integrates global research while acknowledging national and regional specificities. However, the generalizability of Western studies to Eastern and Global South societies often lacks emphasis on context-specific knowledge essential for effective interventions. Therefore, there is a pressing need to explore existing local empirical work in detail.

Chapters two and three together constitute the literature assessment underpinning this thesis project. Undertaking the scoping review that is presented in article format as the main body of this chapter, grounded my reading in a consistent investigation of the literature that was available. It

guided me to confirm my area of research in several ways. First, some articles caught my attention more than others and suggested different ways of investigating bullying in higher education. Second, as noted in the article itself, the strong emphasis on justifying inquiry into bullying conduct often seemed to make assumptions that did not appear to me fully justifiable on the limited survey numbers that researchers used even in quantitative studies. These were at ‘arms-length’ study and reflection from personal and first-hand experiences of being on the receiving end of bullying by colleagues. Third, the flip side of that was a positive experience of the research process, that sometimes a vignette or a phrase in the research article spoke to me, given my own experiences of being bullied. How to get the frisson of that kind of insight more fully developed and able to be expressed, brought me back to the potential of qualitative methods for gathering more of this evidence.

The review explores three key themes in studies on bullying against academics in Pakistani higher education. It emphasises the need to uncover bullying accounts of anyone, but particularly women academics facing coercion, cruelty, and power struggles. It also addresses the challenge of incorporating culturally hidden bullying practices into research for societal improvement. Finally, it advocates for the development of concepts to navigate cultural complexities, aiding universities and the public sector in enhancing workforce well-being and institutional effectiveness.

This scoping review collected data from electronic databases, adhering to Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) reformulation of the protocols for reporting items from systematic reviews and meta-analyses to be open to more qualitative modes of research. The scoping review process encompassed five stages, namely: (1) formulation of research questions; (2) identification of pertinent studies; (3) assessment of the included studies based on characteristics and themes; and (4) reporting and discussion of the findings. Exploration for relevant studies encompassed a search

across five electronic scholarly databases during May-June 2022, employing the following inclusion criteria: Full-text English-language articles published between 2000 and 2022; Research articles featured in academic peer-reviewed journals; Articles reporting empirical studies conducted in Pakistan; Studies specifically addressing bullying against academics in higher education. Moving from the initial search for titles to the scrutiny of abstracts allowed me to eliminate numerous articles that were unrelated to my chosen topic. After several rounds of filtering, a final selection of 37 studies directly related to the academic landscape of Pakistan was achieved. Quantitative surveys constituted the predominant research methodology, with over eighty percent of the studies employing this approach (n=31, 83.8%). Conversely, less than one-quarter of the studies exclusively utilised qualitative interviews (n=6, 16.2%). This process was double checked by my supervisor for validity.

One of the interesting findings from the scoping review, in terms of numbers and percentages, was a comparison between the academic databases searched and the results obtained from using Google Scholar. Despite the carefully curated databases providing access to journal sources worldwide, the list generated by Google Scholar was almost identical to that of the entire group of academic databases. This raises questions about academic efficiency and convenience. I have discussed with my supervisor the possibility of publishing a short piece on this implicit comparison of literature search methodologies. At a practical level, academic databases are very good at allowing cumulative filtering and selection on several variables, such as year or keywords. Google Scholar, despite its breadth in gathering literature references, including several that were not evident in the multiple academic databases, has a very non-user-friendly front-end for entering search terms and adding filtering criteria. This efficiency/useability dilemma is evident to other scholars who note the same contrast between academic databases and Google Scholar found in the present research

process (e.g., Houshyar, & Sotudeh, 2018). The lack of automatic truncation in field searches was one of the most important issues necessitating the refining search strategies.

Another notable concern in the review was the comparatively shorter history of bullying research in Pakistan compared to Western higher education scholarships. This emphasises the current disinterest, or at least underdevelopment of consciousness and actions, of management and other stakeholders in Pakistan's higher education sector for the development of effective strategies, concepts, and policies aimed at fostering improved working conditions. Rather the studies identified organisational inertia within HEIs as a contributing factor in exacerbating workplace bullying, particularly affecting women in lower academic echelons who confront gendered caste-like exclusion.

The article helped identify a research gap regarding bullying and ostracism in Pakistan's expanding higher education sector, emphasising the detrimental impact bullying can have on the well-being and confidence of academics, and consequently, on the nation's educational and economic outcomes. The pronounced disparity between research findings on bullying behaviours and the lack of implementation of administrative regulatory measures undermines the imperative for collective action to address this issue in the workplace. The proliferation of universities in Pakistan in recent years, coupled with a conspicuous dearth of studies on the subject, serves as the motivating force behind the initiation of this research project.

The examination of these empirical studies revealed three distinct areas that warrant further attention in this academic domain. Firstly, it highlighted the inadequacy of research output addressing workplace bullying among tertiary level teachers over the past two decades. Secondly, it confirmed the scarcity of qualitative studies in this area and thirdly, it brought attention to the

obvious lack of investigations pertaining to gender within the existing body of research on this issue.

Engaging with the topic of bullying academically, while collecting data and writing the thesis, has reshaped my understanding and deepened my awareness of how gender structures the personal impacts on women in a hierarchical, status-driven society. Ellen Isaac's (2013) anthropological perspective in her concept of "the hidden obvious" was particularly helpful at this time in articulating the near-universal cultural practices, understandings and expectations from which bullying emerges, but which remain unaddressed in efforts for change. However, as a researcher familiar with the culture but also exposed to an external national learning environment, I have increasingly become aware of the disjunction between the apparent nature of bullying and harassment practices—only partially documented in the literature I found—and my evolving understanding of the issue. I add as a note here this progressive exploration throughout my thesis is seen at one point in time in a conference paper presented during my enrolment working on this hidden-yet-apparent aspect of bullying in Pakistan higher education (Kamran & Burns, 2022).

Despite widespread workplace bullying, the evidence suggests limited research effort, particularly in addressing the insidious gendered bullying affecting women in lower academic positions. In documenting the shortage of qualitative research on bullying in Pakistan, the article also highlights the value of future research that examines higher education in the country through qualitative inquiries. Such work would continue to scrutinize the significant negative impact of bullying on the well-being of the academic workforce, particularly women, and its implications for the country's development. The need for national-level innovations, stronger policies, and a focus on addressing the deeply entrenched issue of bullying is emphasized to improve working conditions and academic outcomes



### Abstract:

Empirical research about academics being bullied in the Pakistan higher education sector has been an emerging field in the last decade. This small thread of important research has begun to explore the gendered experiences of women academics facing multiple forms of bullying and harassment against them. This scoping review identified 45 refereed articles based on 37 studies conducted over the past two decades that investigated bullying targeted at academic staff by colleagues and administrators. While these studies included both men and women participants who had been recipients of bullying conduct, this generalist focus has underplayed the gendered nature of bullying tactics. Bullying behaviours directed at academic women, and academic women's experiences of being targeted by such bullying conduct, have negative impacts on women academic's well-being, productivity, and careers. The present discussion of these empirical studies explores the limitations of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Positively there are opportunities for developing this small body of research and associated concepts that over time can support significant changes in telling the "hidden obvious" stories of Pakistani academic women. Articulating their stories will have flow-on benefits for non-academic women, for men, and more efficient and fairer administration of HE.

**Keywords:** bullying; ostracism; higher education, incivility; harassment; Pakistan, women academics; tertiary sector; university administration

### Introduction

The international literature has documented bullying and harassment against women academics in the higher education (HE) sector in many national jurisdictions, even before looking into specific

studies undertaken in any one country (Burns, Fogelgarn, and Billett 2020). The ‘culturalist theses proposed by D’Cruz, Noronha, and Bhatt (2021) aimed to integrate global research findings while also understanding bullying within the specifics of national and administrative jurisdictions. These authors affirm that ‘workplace bullying, emotional abuse, and harassment... [have a] universal presence... across the globe’. Importantly, their culturalist perspective resists homogenising interpretations that experiences of being bullied, the mechanisms of bullying, and the higher education institutions (HEI) across the sector in which bullying flourishes, are the same, or work in the same way, across different countries, genders, and cultures.

Instead, these authors argue for the need to identify configurations of bullying, harassment, and incivility like other aspects of culture, which differ over time and place.

*Most insights into the phenomenon [of bullying] come from Western inquiries conducted on Caucasian samples in the developed world, underscoring their limited generalisability and applicability to the Eastern and Global South societies. Indeed, while the field of workplace bullying has been researched internationally for about 25 years, studies from Asia have been undertaken for a little over 10 years. Yet deepening country-specific knowledge uniformly is especially important to inform and facilitate the design and execution of interventions customised to suit the context such that the (potential) effectiveness of action efforts is maximised. (p. 1)*

D’Cruz, Noronha, and Bhatt’s (2021) review of bullying and harassment research across a range of Asian cultures is complemented by Ahmad, Islam, and Kaleem’s (2021) discussion of ‘workplace bullying’ in Pakistan. They apply broad concepts of ‘social cynicism’ in considering the ‘Muslim Work Ethic’ in relation to the ill-treatment of staff (Ahmad and Owoyemi 2012). For

western social scientists trained on Weber's (2002) *Protestant Ethic*, offers a corrective perspective by bringing to the study of bullying the perspective of a different culture, time, country, and faith.

Westoby et al.'s (2021) recent review narrated national experiences of women in HE in the United Kingdom. The present scoping review collected empirical studies that investigated bullying directed against academic staff in Pakistan's HE sectors. Mubarak (2019: 4-5) described bullying in national terms as not simply affecting HE, schools, but the administration of all kinds of organisations. Bullying against university teaching staff, especially women academics, was seen as emblematic of a cultural disposition to assert social power hierarchically in university administration:

*Bullying is an issue which rarely gets the attention it deserves in Pakistan. The evidence of this is that literature or research pertaining to the issue is almost non-existent in the country. It is common knowledge that, usually, any complaints by victims are swept under the rug by administrative authorities. Most of the perpetrators get away with a slap on the wrist at best.*

The cultural disposition that Mubarak (2019) says requires fuller investigation includes gendered roles, social class, economic power, and cultural patriarchal traditions in the Pakistani national context. Even the simple act of enabling women to participate educationally is frequently perceived as challenging and even undermining traditional beliefs about men and women, masculinity, and leadership. Empirical investigation of bullying and related poor conduct in Pakistan's HEI is a relatively new research area, though Pakistani scholars have been actively working across many organisational and sectoral contexts. The hidden obviousness of gender differences—that Pakistani women experience more bullying (even though it is also a problem for

men)—is confirmed by authors such as Mujtaba and Reiss (2015: 51). They observe that ‘patriarchal values in society impact females’ own perceptions of their abilities and aspirations’. HE participation is shaped by the cultural context long before women become educators in universities. This comes about through social and cultural mechanisms that sociologist Bourdieu (2004) called ‘structuring structures. At every career stage, these perspectives frame bullying and ostracism as situational processes in particular faculties or university departments, that at the same time draw on gendered cultural capital (O’Neill and Gidengil 2013). These beliefs and attitudes reflect deep-seated processes of cultural creation and social practice (Shorey et al. 2023). Mistreatment of Pakistani women academics thus combines proximal causes as it emerges from the background cultural context that generates patriarchal and sexist expectations. That such norms are sometimes contested today has so far been insufficient to bring about administrative change in the education sector, even at the university level of HE (Savigny 2014). Researchers’ willingness to publish about bullying that targets woman provides an academic forum for further widening scholarship, benefitting HEIs, not only women. This, in turn, contributes insights into the international project of gender equity from Pakistan’s women academics who have been bullied.

### 1.1 Research Objective.

This scoping review examined empirical research done in bullying, also described here as ostracism, harassment, or incivility directed against Pakistani academics. Generic treatment of gender in this literature about bullying is considered in relation to the organisational reality that academic teachers and researchers who are women are the predominant targets of bullying in Pakistan’s HE sectors. Two research questions guided the review:

1. What scholarly research has been reported about colleague bullying against academics in Pakistan?

2. How visible are women's experiences in empirical Pakistani studies about bullying against academics?

## 2. Methods

This scoping review gathered data from electronic databases following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) protocol for reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The review stages included (1) formulating the research questions (above); (2) using an iterative process to identify relevant studies; (3) assessing the included studies in terms of characteristics and themes; (4) finally, reporting and discussing the findings.

### 2.1 Identifying Relevant Studies

Five electronic scholarly databases were searched for relevant studies, using the following search criteria (during May-June 2022).

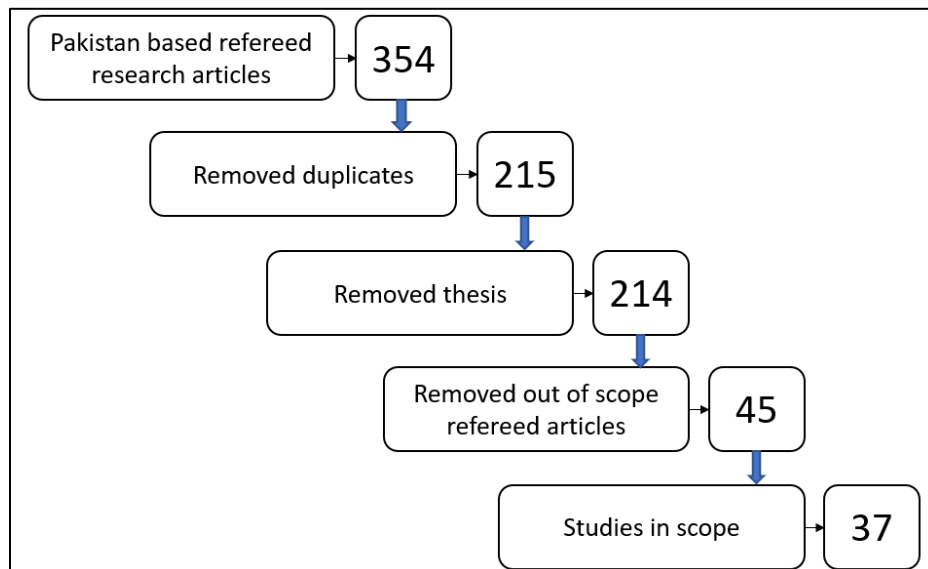
- Full-text English-language articles published in the years 2000-22
- Research articles published in academic peer-reviewed journals.
- The articles reported empirical studies in Pakistan.
- Studies focused on bullying against academics in HE
- Excluded were newspapers, conference papers, blogs, books, dissertations.

From initial testing search-term effectiveness, Table 1 presents word combinations used for database searches.

Search line	Search terms	EBSCO Academic	Scopus	WoS Core	Proquest Central	Psych INFO*
1	'bullying' or 'bullied' or	26,462	24,245	18,566	414,876	12,877
AND	'ostraci*'					
2	'academia' or 'higher	13,074	547	10,753	32,282	10,522
AND	education' or 'universit*'					
3	'Pakistan'	91	23	80	97	63
AND						
Totals		91	23	80	97	63

**Table 1.** Keywords used to identify relevant literature in five databases.

The final row of Table 1 shows the totals for the searches in each academic database. Together these total 354 potential articles. Figure 1 shows the subsequent selection steps. Duplicates (169) and one thesis (1) were removed, leaving refereed articles fitting the formal search terms (n=214). Articles with significant content focused outside the study questions were eliminated (e.g., about students, children, schools, administrative staff, adolescents, high schools, or multi-country studies). This left refereed articles in scope (n=45).



**Figure 1.** Refereed article selection from five databases for review.

The final 45 refereed articles were examined and shown to be based on 37 different empirical studies. One study published six articles (Anjum and Muazzam 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Anjum, Muazzam, Manzoor, Visvizi, Pollock, and Nawaz 2019a; Anjum, Muazzam, Manzoor, Visvizi and

Nawaz 2019b; Muazzam, Anjum and Visvizi 2020). Three studies published two articles each: Fatima, Bilal, Imran, and Iqbal (2021) and Fatima, Bilal, Imran, and Sarwar (2021); Fatima, Bilal, and Imran (2019) and Fatima, Bilal, and Imran (2020); Fatima, Bilal, Imran and Ayub (2021); Fatima, Bilal, Imran, Ayub and Arshad (2022).

## 2.2 Data Analysis

We created a spreadsheet of the 37 studies, identifying the 45 refereed articles by study, and examined variables of interest within each to compare the empirical investigations. This showed key article variables: author/s, year, journal outlet, concepts explored, method/s used, and study region within Pakistan. Each author cross-checked the study's details for consistency.

## 2.3 Limitations

First, studies outside English-language journals were not included. Second, surveys at one point in time have limited insight into the experience of bullying over a long-time duration. Third, self-report surveys used in most quantitative studies risked recollection bias and the possibility of common method variation. Fourth, small qualitative sample sizes in several studies seeking depth of individual experience may be viewed from a quantitative perspective as having limited generalisability.

## 3. Results

A broad answer is now available to the first objective of this scoping review. Nearly fifty refereed articles (n=45) have been published from three dozen empirical studies (n=37). This important but slim research corpus has been additional to studies of bullying in other spheres of business and public life. Other administrative domains where bullying has been investigated in Pakistan include the civil service, business corporations, schools, and health sector. Studies of school children and

youth, cyber-bullying, and peer-to-peer bullying, complicate the recognition of the seriousness and widespread description of bullying.

Less clear in the data in the present scope is an answer to this review's second question: How visible are women's experiences in empirical Pakistani studies about bullying against academics? Addressing this evidence can start cross-nationally. The ratio of men and women being bullied varies between countries. Internationally, Zapf et al. (2020: 112) suggested that bullying often takes place over long periods (months and years), citing studies reporting bullying episodes ranging from 16-60 months. From this international perspective, these authors:

*carried out an analysis based on 80 samples of bullying victims... which reported gender distribution among victims. Weighted percentages about sample size (total sample size n=14,119 victims; n=79 samples) showed that 65.8% of victims were women and 34.2% were men.*

### 3.1 Research Approaches

The problem of being a target of bullying can be understood as greater for women than men in Pakistan, given the country's very low gender equality ranking at 154 out of 159 nations on the United Nations Human Development Index, 2020 (<https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>). Undercounting, under-reporting, the taboo attached with bullying and harassment situations, the absence of reporting mechanisms, and patterns of public discourse, all contribute to invisibilising this problem and undermining well-being in HE workplaces. The studies in this review make it clear that both men and women are the subject of bullying conduct in HE, some studies alleging situational and contextual factors, some personal factors, and others invoking cultural causes.

Table 3 summarises the methods used in these bullying research studies. Over eighty percent of the studies conducted quantitative surveys (n=31, 83.8%). Less than one-quarter of the studies were solely qualitative interviews (n=6, 16.2%). Most survey-based articles stated they used random sampling; four studies reported convenience sampling. Sample size in two-thirds of the quantitative studies (n=21) ranged from 200-400; seven studies had <200 participants and three studies had sample sizes above 400. Sample size for qualitative studies ranged from 6-37 participants: most using purposive sampling.

In some studies, researchers undertook separate qualitative and quantitative stages as part of their overall interest in investigating bullying directed at academics in, HE, for example, Bilal, Farooq, and Hayat’s (2019) survey, alongside Bilal, Tehreem, and Imran’s (2019) interview study. One study adopted a mixed-methods approach, using interviews and a survey, Anwar, Sarwar, Awan, and Arif (2011).

**Table 2.** Pakistan studies of bullying against academics (2000-22).

<b>Research methods used</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Survey/ questionnaire	30	81.1
Interview	6	16.2
Mixed methods	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

In these Pakistani studies, the majority of HE teachers reported being under moderate to severe stress. In some studies, women academics reported greater levels of workplace duress than men, but other studies reported no difference. The administrative context linked these results to gender expectations and roles placed on women between their home lives, workplace, and civil society. Studies indicating women faculty were more likely than men to experience work-related stress included Anwar et al. (2011), Bilal et al. (2021), and Fatima et al. (2021). In the quantitative studies gender was not treated as a significant factor for workplace bullying (Ahmad et al. 2017a; Anjum et al. 2018; Anwar et al. 2011). According to Durrani and Khan’s study (2010: 46) the:

*[i]ssue of ‘harassment’ is still a sub rosa topic generally in Pakistani culture and society and particularly with reference to the HE, where it is not considered a recognised serious issue. People usually believe that sexual harassment is something that may be swept under the table. In the same way, women usually take it as a routine matter of their working lives.*

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Looking for academic women’s experience</b>	<b>n</b>
Bhatti and Ali (2020)	Women’s leadership and discriminative practices; cultural norms limit women’s participation; gender stereotyping and labeling, harassment and critical attitudes; family-profession ‘balance’ discursively constructed.	11
Bilal, Fatima, and Imran (2019)	Exclusionary work environment; detailed negative psychological impacts; collectivist culture tolerates ostracism. ‘Both genders are victims of ostracism’; ‘psychological impacts... no gender differences were traced.’	25
Bilal, Fatima, Imran and Iqbal (2021)	Nature of victims (provocative or passive) and their experiences are prime factors in workplace ostracism; retaliation, contextual factors ‘allow’ ostracism; 17 men, 13 women.	30
Durrani and Khan (2010)	Women academics face sexual harassment, including psychological, and physical. But ‘not recognised sexual harassment as a serious issue in Pakistani society’; ‘nameless issue’ confuses women too.	6
Fatima, Bilal, and Imran (2019)	Experiences of ostracised academics; 7 women, 13 men; inherently contextual impacts on behavioural outcomes, from availability of other jobs, peers, ‘collectivist nation’ with ‘social relations highly valued’.	20
Saleem, Ali, Ashiq and Rehman (2021)	Women aware of physical and psychological workplace harassment and about legislation among university women library staff. Most staff did not participate; need organisational harassment committees.	35
Anwar, Sarwar, Awan, and Arif (2011)	‘Male teaching staff... more deviant than the female teaching staff’; 26 men, 24 women, keyword gender; ‘sexual harassment, aggression, bullying, and incivility, etc.’; catalogues of short definitions.	50

### 3.2. Qualitative Studies

What did the articles report? Looking for answers or clues to how visible women’s experiences of being bullied were as academics in Pakistani HE, we focused on qualitative studies. From prior research experience and preliminary viewing when selecting studies for this review, it was likely that these studies would provide greater detail and information about direct and indirect affects for women. Table 3 summarises the main themes and findings in the seven studies that used qualitative interviews.

**Table 3.** Qualitative studies of bullying against Pakistani academics.

## 4. Discussion

Three themes are explored below. These reflect on perspectives and methodologies used in these studies and suggest ways to progress this important field of research. Each theme emphasises the place of women within the general findings of bullying targeting academics in Pakistani HE, to better explore the answer to the second research question. First, where are the accounts, the stories, of women academics being bullied by colleagues and administrators in their coercion, and cruelty, within games of status-power? Second, how can the nameless quality of the culturally hidden but obvious practices of bullying, much wider than the HE sectors, be brought into this research purview to become part of the stories, and ultimately the amelioration of this societal corrosion? Third, as part of this scholarly progress, what concepts can researchers develop to strengthen their ability to see through the cultural fog that surrounds this topic and could assist universities, and the public sector enhance the lives of their workforces and their institutional effectiveness?

### 4.1 Seeking Women's Stories of Being Bullied

The few qualitative studies available offered the promise of documenting the hidden obviousness of women academic's experiences of being bullied (Isaacs 2013). 'Qualitative research allows the researcher to gather rich contextual insights into people's live experiences of policies, programs, and power dynamics' (Nicker and Goger 2021: para. 4). Describing individual stories assumed the ability of interview studies to draw out fuller accounts of these complex experiences. However, taboos about discussing bullying intersected with the gendered rules of Pakistani culture. We hoped personal accounts might break through readers' consciousness and create a more profound understanding than accumulation of means and percentages. But there is much work to be done. Quantitative surveys mostly failed to illuminate the human depth of hurt, trauma, and the economic damage, and convey the not-easily-measurable, but practically important, circumstances of being

bullied. Table 3 lists the qualitative studies found in this scoping review. Sample sizes found of 20-40 academic participants are common for this type of exploratory research (Trotter 2012).

As Table 3 above showed, the emancipating gender possibilities of qualitative research were for the most part not realised in these studies, or only partly. One example might show the contours of this research dilemma. Bilal, Fatima, and Imran (2019: 811) state that ‘less females (35%) as compared to males (65%) reported ostracism. This shows that both genders are victims of ostracism’, and that regarding ‘psychological impacts... no gender differences were traced in terms of outcomes. This raises a series of problems much wider than this individual piece of research.

First, such findings are countered by other studies pointing to greater stress and harassment experienced by academic women, noted earlier. If this was the only issue, this might simply be the process of working through research processes and outcomes.

Second, notwithstanding these authors’ concluding invitation for further research to be conducted, this kind of research offers no defence to quantitative objections about generalisability because of small numbers and locations.

Third, the suggestion that a collectivist culture tolerates ostracism is, among other things, an implicit acknowledgement of the lack of a satisfactory account of women’s experience of being bullied. Sympathetically, one might add, and the difficulty of the research task.

Fourth, the proposed strength of qualitative methods is its ability to bring together the many interacting variables in the lived place and circumstances, rather than isolating them from the cultural construction of gender and local, individual bullying. Durrani and Khan (2010) are a rare instance here of uniting these perspectives, in their study of bullying and harassment.

Fifth, the offer of theoretical framing, in this case, phenomenology, did not bring out the distinctive experience of either men or women. It is possible that without detailed reflection, formal framing

may continue to obscure the general social problem of bullying, and the experiences of women (Cahill 2007). Interviews tended to share the methodological issues more commonly associated with quantitative work, rather than gaining the depth derived from qualitative inquiry.

The complex interactions of bullying in an experiential narrative were surprisingly lacking. Internationally, some qualitative studies can explain how social power is simultaneously gender power, but not the same thing. Individualising frameworks mean that researchers simply do not have the tools to recognise the significance of gender or other structural patterns. For example, the following assertion completely inverts a sociological understanding, missing the fundamental importance of gender: ‘Certain work environments permit employees to do ostracism-related activities because of surface-level features (gender, race) that deviated from existing norms’ (Bilal Fatima, Imran, and Iqbal (2021: 39). The thinking reflected in this kind of expression indicates a barrier to real progress in addressing bullying. Individual impacts of being bullied in HE included work-related contributions being neglected, unnecessary work monitoring, delaying responses by colleagues or seniors on critical topics, or being subjected to negative feedback (Ahmad et al. 2017b). Giorgi observed that ‘workplace bullying is a kind of organisational virus that may lead to a toxic work environment’ (cited in Ahmad et al. 2017b: 207).

This scarcity of qualitative research on workplace bullying and ostracism of academics in Pakistan HE settings offers great potential for expansion and development. The present shortfall of studies is not simply a failure of conceptualising caught between individualising conceptions and assumptions about cultural collectivism. It is also a call for integrating the evidence of everyday administration of academic institutions into accounts that give voice to the depth of women’s experiences and making public this obvious problem hidden at the center of society. Unless these academic women’s personal experiences are carefully brought to public attention, they remain

unvoiced stories, untold; or to use a different metaphor of social critique, they remain invisible and unseen (Hatton 2017). Unless the narrative of such adverse conduct is set out and the deep impacts on individual women, and women collectively, properly chronicled, it can be argued that culturally they did not happen. The corollary is there is no organisational pressure to change, Durrani and Khan (2010: 47) described one kind of bullying and harassment:

*Most people, including women, either deny [sexual harassment's] existence or take it as a part of the normal routine of working life. ...The academy in Pakistan inadvertently supports this policy by denying its presence in HEI.*

It is this kind of more treatment of the context—cultural or organisational—in which women find themselves enmeshed in universities, which lifts the quality of scholarly analysis. The particulars of individuals and group relationships are only part of the bullying situation, and the impacts of these framing expectations, motivations, and norms must be inferred from what participants and respondents say and have done. This interpretative dimension of research desirably comes not simply from an article's background literature but from the data collected and studied in relation to the sociocultural setting. It is not fully articulable.

#### 4.2 Culturally Invisible Stories of Women Being Bullied

In most of these quantitative and qualitative studies adding a gender variable was somewhat simplistically put forwards as identifying women's relationship to the issue of bullying that the surveys and interviews described. At best this can be only a first analytic step since it makes multiple assumptions that need to be questioned:

First, the willingness of women participants to *report bullying or harassment*. And separately, individual women's ability to *articulate* the issues. However, these elements of agency are

precisely what has been eclipsed by the personal hurt and damage to the well-being of having been the recipient and the target of bullying.

Second, Pakistan's sociocultural norms of *not speaking about* workplace bullying, physical or psychological encroachment, or harassment, are redoubled as taboos against *women* speaking out, as somehow gender inappropriate. Pragmatically, women themselves have typically internalised this cultural prohibition (Ali et al. 2011). This makes it a 'nameless issue' and raising it can be confusing for women as well as men (Durrani and Kahn 2010).

Third, even supposing a repeating research assessment of men and women's responses to being bullied was confirmed as the same (though the data trends opposite), the structural positioning of women in careers and domestically in Pakistan society means that more of them proportionately are impacted. Specifically, mid-level teaching academics are predominantly women.

These limitations undermined to varying degrees the explanatory value of any study that did not, as a minimum, self-consciously reflect on this invisible evidential problem (Anjum and Muazzam 2018). Thus, statistical exactness in reporting results tended to assume that statistical significance bore a simple relationship to substantive significance but offered little insight into practices and beliefs that generated or allowed bullying to happen. In these studies, workplace bullying occurred within implicit culturally defined positional power imbalances needing more focus to be empirically useful. Among HE academics, downward bullying corresponded to Pakistan's hierarchical society, often reinforced by what in the nursing profession has come to be called 'horizontal violence' or 'lateral violence' meaning colleague ostracism and bullying (Becher 2012).

Pakistan has strong traditional and patriarchal sociocultural belief systems within which women are supposed to focus on marriage, childrearing, and household duties (Ali 2011). This constrains

women from developing their professional skills for administrative positions and contributing to leadership roles. To overcome these multiple constraints, women in Pakistan's HE need resourcing to achieve and sustain leadership positions against this cultural backdrop (Bhatti and Ali 2020). Anjum and Muazzam (2018a: 493) asserted that not a single study has been conducted on the gendered nature of bullying in the HEIs of Pakistan. This is despite the sorry evidence of what can be readily observed:

*Women employees were much more likely to identify bullying behaviours as severe, unlike their men counterparts. Further, a person-related form of bullying prevails more frequently among female employees. Overall, results indicate that bullying cannot be separated from gender and that such negative behaviours need to be seen in a gendered context.*

The obviousness of the problem, the extent of the problem, and the severity of the problem have yet to significantly dent the hegemonic denial of bullying's universality within Pakistan culture, or enable public naming and speaking about it, even among university leaders and policymakers. Quantitative studies in this review struggled to get beyond essentialised, biological definitions, often repetitively using the words 'male' and 'female'. This mimics previous generations of Western men doing research; they found it difficult to get past pre-modern gender prescriptions and norms. Countries rapidly modernising today also find it difficult to soften existing patterns of disrespect for women's intellect and competence beyond the domestic sphere. Studies in this review mostly emulated 'male'—'female' terminology from Western academic disciplines. Doing so tends to reinstate traditional binary thinking. Using this outdated Western terminology has the effect of continuing to reinforce existing Pakistani cultural patterns under the academic guise, of

survey averages, percentages, scales, and models. This is academic neo-colonialism that could be shed (Ergin and Alkan 2019).

The quite proper concern with statistical significance in quantitative studies only weakly addressed the substantive significance of gender inequality in these articles. It has been women who have carried the greater burden of being bullied via explicit and implicit assertions of patriarchal norms and adverse conduct in contemporary HE institutions. According to Anjum et al. (2018b), the primary mechanisms of bullying in universities derive from administrative positions and job promotions; such bullying behaviours are general but often directed at women, or more *strongly* directed at women (an understudied aspect). These authors state that in HE workplaces ‘Women had more exposure to bullying as compared to men’ (Anjum et al. 2018b: 51).

For women, here again, *exposure* is a different measure to intensity, frequency, a mix of bullying and harassment, the status differential between target and perpetrator, formal versus social ostracism, gendered expectations, and other variables. Part of the puzzle in researching women’s experiences of being bullied is that the studies documented personal and emotional costs for not just women but also for men as well. The victims in one study (Fatima, Bilal, and Imran 2019: 2767):

*revealed they suffer negative emotions, the participants reported that they felt a lack of inclusion in formal and informal organisational networks, they were not included in conversations and their opinions were not invited and appreciated. An interesting theme emerged that participants said that sometimes they were invited in formal meetings, but they were signalled clearly that they were unwanted. They are treated as they were non-existent by ignoring to invite their opinion.*

In situations of experiencing bullying, women were more likely to leave their jobs than men (Anjum et al. 2018c). Qualitative studies showed negative events, and bullying periods were linked to life stories arising from local culture which structured situational interactions. Mujtaba and Reiss (2015: 53-54) traced the lifetime context of such treatment for women well before becoming an academic:

*There are many reasons why girls are disadvantaged in Pakistan's education system, some of which relate to poverty, others to cultural expectations, and some to the quality of schooling... cultural[ly] it is not seen as important to educate girls, particularly as they get married and become part of another family... Though little has been written about the widespread sexual harassment of women in Pakistan ... this is a fourth barrier toward women's participation in education and employment.*

Most studies showed minimal capacity to tell the story of Pakistani HE is bullying from the data presented. A significant opportunity exists for qualitative research to document bullying situations and cases. Personal, official, and cultural threads woven together might better fill this discursive gap by narrating these stories in human terms for a wider public. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the reduction in generalisability in qualitative studies increases the ability of this approach in a key respect. It enables the research to make explicit layers of denial and suppression of these human accounts when done successfully. Often the administrative configuration of bullying and harassment remained invisible in the studies despite the purpose of raising concern about impacts on the functioning of the HE sectors from the unfair gender treatment of women. At least in the published qualitative outputs, excerpts of conversations and experiences of being bullied were

starting to appear, building towards documenting, and connecting the parts of the national bullying problem in HEIs.

### 4.3 Bullying Concepts and Forms of Bullying

A third area of interest in this new empirical field of HE bullying research is the collation of terms for conceptualising bullying and harassing behaviour. These ideas form the nucleus of this body of research, laying the foundation for further work. Table 4 presents a range of different terms used across both qualitative and quantitative studies in these articles interpreting researchers' study findings. Ostracism was a distinctive emphasis in the language describing bullying behaviours that target university academics. At present this relevant and distinctive term is not emphasised internationally as much as it might be in developing the field's lexicon of terms for describing bullying and harassment behaviours (Burns, Fogelgarn, and Billett 2020). From the qualitative accounts, important links with other international researchers could be developed (Ayoko 2022).

Bilal, Fatima, and Imran (2019: 818) affirm that:

*In general, the ostracised faculty... indicated that they were invited in formal meetings, but they were not treated as per the social norms of the department. They were deprived of work-related advice, information, friendships, social and emotional support from peers. This kind of exclusion was more evident in female faculty, and stronger for the employees having a lower designation, i.e. lecturers.*

And again, Bilal, Fatima, and Imran (2019: 820), even with the biological language, offer ambivalent explanations about whether there is or is not a women-men difference: 'In our findings, in contrast to the western context... ostracism was not directed only toward the females but impacted male faculty equally, though ostracised female faculty reported higher negative emotions

than male.’ In contrast, Fatima, Bilal and Imran (2019: 2760) point to women being more socially ostracised. The tensions between these opinions slows communication of research addressing bullying against women academics more cleanly and strongly:

*More recently the concept of ostracism has been examined in academia when Zimmerman, Carter-Sowell, and Xu (2016) found female faculty to be more ostracised in university settings in terms of social ostracism. In Pakistan, two studies focused on the construct of workplace ostracism in HEIs where it was found to lead towards counterproductive behaviours and silence (Fatima, Ilyas, Rehman, and Imran, 2017; Nasir, Khaliq, and Rehman, 2017).*

Many of the concepts used in the studies of bullying against academics in HE can also be found internationally; some of the ideas are derived from other jurisdictions (Table 4). The most consistently developed conceptualisation in this literature is the concept of ostracism of the targeted academic person. The distinction in this Pakistani research work suggests a valuable contribution to the larger international field of bullying and well-being. The overlaps and distinctions conceptually and culturally of terms such as bullying, harassment, and ostracism, and the lived experience of being subject to these processes might bring together the individual and contextual art of the stories. A third of the articles (n=16, 35.6%) considered causes of workplace ostracism in HEIs. The main causes identified were lack of active interest or involvement by organisational leaders, patriarchal culture, a ‘big man’ seth mindset, the national collective sociality of extended family and community networks, and a culture in which belonging is more important than confronting or objecting to adverse personal interactions (Anjum et al. 2019b; Anwar et al. 2011; Khan et al. 2021b).

Long-term exposure to workplace ostracism was reported (n=15 articles, 33.3%) as having had negative impacts on the creative and productive performance of academic employees in the HE sectors (Abid 2022). In acute cases ostracism led to withdrawal from work, decrease in performance, and triggered job insecurity. Chronic exposure could lead to resignation from work (Ahmad et al. 2020; Anjum et al. 2018b; Ashraf and Khan 2021). Bullying reduced job staff productivity and had adverse effects on the physical health of academics (Anjum and Muazzam 2019). According to Fatima et al. (2022) the hidden cost of failing to address workplace bullying in HE institutions became evident in instances when peers discontinued sharing information. Sometimes this was individually targeted; at other times a wider toxic culture existed (Malik 2017; Khan et al. 2021).

**Table 4.** Explanatory concepts and bullying terms used in Pakistan empirical studies.

Concept or phrase	Refereed article example
Workplace ostracism	Fatima et al. (2019).
Toxic culture; environment; atmosphere; work ethic; organisational climate	Anjum et al. (2018) ; Khan et al. (2021c) ; Qureshi et al. (2014) ; Khan et al. (2021a).
Incivility	Jawahar et al. (2021) ; Anjum et al. (2022).
Ostracism; ignoring; the silent treatment; social isolation	Bilal et al. (2021) ; Ali et al. (2011).
Co-worker ostracism; workplace ostracism	Fatima (2022); Fatima (2020); Fatima et al. (2019).
Bullying; workplace issues, harassment	Anjum et al. (2019) ; Saleem et al. (2021); Malik and Björkqvist (2019); Israa1 and Suneel (2018).
Ethical leadership	Khan et al. (2021a, b); Ahmad et al. (2019).
Mistreatment; emotional exhaustion; self-compassion	Anjum et al. (2020a, b).
Occupational stress	Malik (2017).
Turnover intention	Ali and Khan (2011); Bhatti and Ahmed (2021); Ahmad (2022).
Coping strategies	Muazzam (2020); Anjum et al. (2019).
Mobbing	Qureshi et al. (2015).

Concept or phrase	Refereed article example
Workplace ostracism	Fatima et al. (2019).
Provocative victims; submissive victims	Bilal et al. (2019).
Gender; resettlement; violence	Durrani and Khan (2010); Anjum and Muazzam (2018).
Fear of negative evaluation; belief in reciprocity	Khair and Fatima (2017).
Emotional damage; anxiety; emotional exhaustion	Mirza et al. (2020).

The studies revealed ways that bullying against academic staff was practiced, for example, burdening faculty with heavy workloads, close deadlines, ignoring efforts made, and inconsiderate attitudes of supervisors (Ahmad et al. 2017a; Bhatti et al. 2011; Bilal et al. 2011; Bilal et al. 2021; Mirza et al. 2020). Some studies identified the cultural expectation that women were considered easy targets for bullying behaviour (Anjum and Muazzam 2018a; Anwar et al. 2011; Bhatti and Ali 2020; Fatima et al. 2021; Saleem et al. 2021). Sometimes excluded academics were provided with key work-related information, but then made to feel unwelcome or non-existent by failing to subsequently solicit their viewpoint, or through incivility such as not extending greetings when individuals met one another (Ahmad et al. 2020). Other examples showed how work achievements might be disregarded, administrators might choose to engage in micro-managing, individuals being subjected to negative comments, or receiving personal criticism (Bilal et al. 2021; Malik 2017).

Other concepts in these studies stand out by their omission, such as the positive significance of educator wellness, particularly for women academics, an issue that is acknowledged in contemporary worldwide literature (Amaya et al. 2019). Since the vast majority of the active HE teaching workforce in Pakistan are women but located in the lower ranks of the academic hierarchy, the neutrality of framing bullying research as a generic problem, misses the point that it is substantially about women's gender inequality, and this ingrained perspective contributes to maintaining gender inequality.

Undertaking the scoping review made it clear how widely the term ostracism had been used in Pakistani research to analyse bullying and incivil behaviours in many organisations, not solely in HE institutions. Ostracism deprived an individual of culturally expected social connections. In such circumstances, being accepted and affiliated with other individuals was not fulfilled, and a person's self-esteem was compromised (Ferris et al. 2008). An ostracised individual felt lonely, worthless, and demotivated (Mirza et al. 2020). Taking opportunities for scholarship in Pakistan to contribute to the international conversation can be seen in Ayoko's (2022) recent article leading with Pakistani literature about ostracism in discussing bullying and psychological safety.

According to Nasir et al. (2017) speaking of Pakistan generally, influence over other people was less desired than feelings of belonging. Pakistani public discourse inhibits the ostracised individual from retaliating; instead, she or he suffers depression from this emotional setback. Prolonged exposure to such behaviour sometimes resulted in resigning from the university as a last resort to get free from the punitive situation (Malik 2017). In societies placing high value on social bonding, ostracising behaviours are correspondingly highly threatening (Powell, Francesco and Ling 2009). Cohesive social group relationships mean that striving for social approval, in these studies may perversely generate opportunities for harassment, bullying, and incivility.

In some instances, ostracism was used positively if HE academics were able to gain skills to undermine later bullying behaviours. Significantly, a positive or negative resistance trajectory depended on when it was started; a greater focus in the initial stages by an individual to achieve a positive outcome tended to reduce over time (Fatima, Bilal and Imran 2019).

Resourcing against adverse targeting by bullies emerged as another concept from these studies in the lack of support for women to attain senior academic and administrative positions in universities. The desired support to overcome obstacles would include assisting them in dealing

with harassment and bullying, both implicitly and explicitly, aimed at them by an individual perpetrator, or via a ‘groupthink’ of men’s gendered perspective, either route effectively undermining women’s career advancement (Bhatti and Ali 2020: 28):

*The dominant masculine discourses present in society often stereotype women as weak and unfit for leadership roles. Moreover, if a woman becomes strong and confident, she is stereotyped as ‘being a male’. Previous leadership research explicitly elaborates that gender stereotypes systematically favour men at top leadership positions.*

In gender terms this invidious situation attempts to exclude and harass women one way or another, allowing no ‘right’ way to progress. Among the 45 articles based on bullying, ostracism, or incivility, only a few highlight the centrality of gender in such behaviour. Yet studies like Anjum (2019: 8) were clear in documenting how women academics:

*are more bullied as compared to male teachers as females are supposed to be trained less, self-assertive, less aggressive, and less skilled to defend themselves as compared to men. Furthermore, men usually hold strategic positions more than women and they use their power to harass women.*

A first inference administratively is that research closer to the subjective experience of being the target of bullying—the inequity of this, and its human and social cost—reveals more sharply the gendered experience that women more than men suffer from such abuse. A second inference is that with one exception (Anwar et al. 2011), qualitative studies have only appeared in this literature since 2019, hopefully the start of a much-needed research reorientation in furthering both HE equity and university effectiveness. Now in this research field, qualitative studies are urgently needed to provide multiple in-depth accounts of those who have been bullied; exploring and

reporting the personal, organisational, and cultural contexts often omitted or not fully utilised to interpret results.

## 5. Conclusion

Bullying research in Pakistani higher education faces a positive and much-needed future for the good of its academic workforce, especially women, and for the good running of the country's social and economic development. The hope is it will expand and develop ideas from the evidence, comparing results from different studies. This scoping review assembled research about bullying culture prevalent in the academic environment of the university sector. These empirical studies documented multiple forms by which bullying is practiced in Pakistan HE, and women academics' coping mechanisms in attempting to survive incivil, ostracising, and harassing behaviour. At present there is insufficient political and administrative willingness to curb bullying conduct. The review confirmed D'Cruz et al.'s observation, noted in the introduction, that Pakistan bullying research has a shorter history than research about bullying and harassment in Western HE situations and cultures.

Even though workplace bullying by colleagues and managers is a widespread and persistent problem in Pakistan, the evidence of this review is of only a modest program of investigation by a small number of active and interested researchers. Limited research means less attention has been garnered for developing options, concepts, and policy settings that would create improved working conditions. HEIs have yet to demonstrate organisational intent to address issues of workplace bullying. Until expectations change, the insidious culture of bullying against those in less powerful positions will only change marginally if at all. This is particularly a problem for academic women

who are the majority cohort occupying the lower echelons of academic organisations. Women exist in gendered caste-like exclusion from senior ranks and interpersonal respect in Pakistan HEIs. Patterns of bullying directed against academic women in Pakistan include many naturalised but openly gendered bullying behaviours that detrimentally affect their lives and careers. We term this the hidden obviousness of gendered bullying behaviour against women academic staff. Publicly telling stories of unwanted receipts and consequences of unprofessional bullying and harassing conduct is both a scholarly and equity task. Doing so will reveal the administrative damage and constraints to women's contribution to HE in Pakistan, and the potential future gains to be achieved. Failing to conceptualise bullying in gendered terms misses this hidden obviousness in HE organisational culture.

Findings of these studies accentuated the need for several national-level innovations: first, developing broad-based institutional action (Ahmad et al. 2017a) that is nationally mandated. Second, longitudinal research multi-level design is needed to expand the study of the issue of bullying from various perspectives (Ahmad et al. 2020; Anjum et al. 2018). Third, government administrators, although themselves implicated in the national culture, should direct policy makers and university executives to develop much stronger and explicit anti-bullying policies and codes of conduct. These could include audit and enforcement regimes to curtail incivil behaviour for front-line academic staff in Pakistan's tertiary education sector (Ahmad et al. 2017a).

The concept of ostracism is a feature of this body of research. What mix of Pakistan culture, or simply an emerging research tradition, shapes this conceptual framing is an important consideration for adding value to future research. Both bullying behaviours and efforts of resistance to bullying showed oblique, almost furtive, strategies rather than face-to-face expressions of power, hostility, and avoidance. In elaborating and investigating the concept of

ostracism as a bullying strategy, ideas about culturalist arguments, patriarchal traditions, gender demeaning, and seth culture, are tools to bridge the international literature about bullying to the specifics of Pakistan's current situation.

Typically, workplace bullying consists of a pattern of negative episodes that have a corroding impact on victims' social, workplace, and psychological well-being and confidence. Given the destructive consequences of bullying and ostracism in an expanding HE sectors, there is an urgent need to address this deeply entrenched behaviour in Pakistan's educational settings. It not only harms the mental health of many academics, but also the effective delivery of desired educational and economic outcomes for the country. Clearly the road from research findings to administrative and regulatory implementation is long. Pakistan has tripled the number of universities over the last two decades, but little attention has been paid so far to implementing policies and practices that address and rein this issue.

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# Chapter

# 3

## Article 2: Gender Disparities: Antecedents to Bullying in Academia in Pakistan

### Reflection

Following the identification of the lack of research on the pervasive issue of bullying in Pakistan in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 shifts focus to exploring the antecedents of workplace bullying in organizations within the country. This sets the stage for a deeper examination of bullying—an issue that is both obvious and hidden, due to its widespread occurrence and limited exposure in public discourse. The Chapter's article showcases the evolution of my understanding regarding the obstacles hindering the exploration of bullying among academic staff in Pakistan. It examines the interplay of culture and social interaction in academic organizations, highlighting themes from existing literature that impede the study of this phenomenon in this educational context. Addressing this issue, particularly concerning women facing discrimination in education and the job market, is essential, despite repeated affirmations of the principles of equality in Islamic ideology (Jahangir, 2023).

This chapter's article manuscript reviews and synthesizes key elements of the socio-cultural systems in Pakistan that sustain gender discrimination in higher education. More specifically, it focuses on the challenges faced by women academics, including instances of bullying as described by Pakistani scholars (Ahmad, Kalim, & Kaleem, 2017; Bari & Pal, 2000; Fazal, Naz, Khan, & Pedder, 2019). The portrayal of women as recipients of bullying and the widespread occurrence of such behaviour adversely affects the mental well-being of female academics (Durrani et al., 2010).

The reported absence of support from senior colleagues and university administrations reveals institutional complicity, undermining any semblance of gender equality and underscoring the need for systemic change. Writing this article highlighted several key learning points regarding the challenges faced by women in higher education within the context of Pakistan's patriarchal culture, thereby laying the foundation for my own thesis research exploring bullying in the higher education sector.

This article also helped crystallize my exploration of this issue from a gender perspective, as it underscores the deeply ingrained gender role expectations that confine and define women to domestic responsibilities, thereby constraining their participation and human capital development, as explored by scholars (Mujtaba & Reiss, 2015). The thesis acknowledges that men also experience bullying; however, it asserts that public and educational discourse often fails to recognize the abuse faced by women in their organizational roles and in relation to their gender. The intersection of gender and power dynamics identifies women as the primary targets of bullying, perpetuated by societal norms enforced through concepts like "izzat" (honour), a term frequently referenced in studies about Pakistan that sustain male dominance (Ali, 2022). The interconnection of socio-cultural factors with gender at the centre offers a significantly different perspective compared to much of the existing literature. This conjunction in the thesis exploration confirmed an aspect that requires further study.

This literature analysis of workplace bullying in the Pakistani context has been instrumental in refining my research topic. The exploration of themes such as gender discrimination, patriarchal culture, Seth culture, and the taboo surrounding bullying has provided a much deeper understanding of the complex dynamics that sustain bullying behaviour in organizations. These themes are typically overlooked and often disappear in discussions about bullying and workplace

culture in Pakistan. The breakdown of these themes, supported by research findings and examples, has helped me identify specific areas of interest within the broader topic of workplace bullying.

The insights into gender discrimination and its impact on women in higher education, combined with the exploration of patriarchal and Seth cultures, added essential layers of complexity to my understanding. Examining how societal norms, cultural expectations, and organizational structures contribute to bullying illuminated the interconnected factors influencing workplace relations in Pakistan. There is an interconnected impact that seems greater than the mere addition of each element. Moreover, the discussion of the taboo and shame associated with bullying, commonly found in both Western and Eastern studies (see, for example, Radcliffe-Brown, 2014; Farberow, 1963), prompted me to acknowledge the role of societal attitudes and perceptions in shaping responses to workplace bullying. This awareness helped reposition my understanding of the need to investigate cultural obstacles that impede open discourse on the subject. Along with the practical progress of my thesis work, it alerted me to potential challenges I might encounter in connecting with appropriate participants for my research study.

An interesting observation when reflecting on this Chapter 3 article manuscript is found in the Global Gender Gap (GGG) Report 2021 published by the World Economic Forum, which ranked Pakistan 143rd out of 146 countries on the gender parity index. As of 2023, Pakistan's rank has improved to 142nd among 146 economies. Despite remaining among the lowest globally, Pakistan has demonstrated extensive progress in all indicators within this subindex, particularly in the representation of women in technical roles and achieving wage equality for comparable work. This statement offers a valuable snapshot of Pakistan's status in terms of gender parity, providing specific metrics and highlighting improvements since the conceptualization of this thesis article. The acknowledgment that the achieved parity level is still among the lowest

globally prompts further critical reflection on the contextual factors contributing to this persistent low global ranking. As more in-depth explorations of the challenges and barriers that hinder gender parity in Pakistan are undertaken, these efforts could provide valuable insights and help elevate the status of women and of Pakistan nationally with respect to the Global Gender Gap (GGG) index.

I recognise that academia still upholds a degree of fairness in position allocation, emphasising meritocracy and competency as key criteria. The appointment of individuals to senior positions within academic institutions is typically guided by a commitment to identifying candidates based on their qualifications, expertise, and contributions to their respective fields. This dedication to merit-based selection fosters an environment where professional competence and accomplishments outweighs other considerations. However, it is essential to acknowledge that, despite efforts toward fairness, challenges related to bias and power dynamics persist, requiring ongoing scrutiny and proactive measures to ensure equitable opportunities for all qualified individuals in academia. This transparency can be achieved by selecting the most suitable candidates for hierarchical positions, based on qualification irrespective of gender. More work is needed in this area.

The narrative aligns women's strategies for success with bullying, emphasizing the urgent need for systemic changes to address gender discrimination and support women's career progression. Fazal, Naz, Khan, and Pedder's (2019) study underscores the struggles women face and the lack of support from colleagues and administrations in Pakistan. It advocates for transformative shifts in institutional culture that could be achieved by opening discourse on the underlying issues within organizations to pave the way for meaningful change. This became the impetus for the research project. Overall, this Chapter 3 analysis not only refined my research focus but also provided a

solid foundation for exploring the intricacies of workplace bullying in higher education within the Pakistani context, with an emphasis on gender dynamics and cultural influences.

## Gender Disparities: Antecedents To Bullying Against Women Academics in Pakistan.

### Abstract

Bullying directed against Pakistani women academics does not 'just happen' but arises from underlying gender disparities. Pervasive cultural drivers generate negative behaviours towards university colleagues, mostly women. Bullying is largely invisible, shielded by social taboos against discussing it or admitting being bullied. Beyond specific incidents, interpersonal mechanisms are continuously reproduced that lead to bullying against women academics. Undermining women's confidence and creating self-doubt within bullied individuals is professionally and personally damaging, a blot on Pakistan's higher education sector. Bullying behaviour is culturally maintained and resists correction because of prior cultural norms and expectations. These deeply embedded views create gender disparities in every sphere of life including employment. Four antecedent cultural components that enable higher education bullying are explored here. First, gender discrimination is a constant pressure against including women in Pakistani society and education. Second, patriarchal culture rhetorically proclaims women as the honour of a family but simultaneously denies them fair participation in university workplaces. Third, traditional Seth culture relies on patronage rather than competence as the basis of opportunities, against the interests of both universities and their talented women academics. Fourth, taboo mechanisms work against openly naming bullying conduct, and this too allows such behaviours to continue.

Bullying; Pakistan culture; higher education; gender exclusion; treatment of women

## Introduction

In dissecting the major gender disparities that permeate various facets of Pakistani society, it becomes evident that these imbalances set the stage for a concerning issue: the targeted bullying of higher education academics, particularly women. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this article contends that the root cause of such challenges does not lie solely in education itself but rather in the amplification of existing inequalities within the academic sphere. The objective of this article is to meticulously examine the substantial disparities between men and women that precede instances of targeted bullying and associated forms of detrimental behaviour, such as harassment and ostracism. Analysis restricted to events, and local situations in which bullying takes place is problematic for at least two reasons. First, such focus obscures broader contributing cultural influences. As a result, incidents remain unknown or misunderstood, remedies for unacceptable behaviour are not discussed, and this social cancer does not get addressed. Second, even some degree of resolution of a specific problem event or situation has little bearing on the default settings of Pakistan culture and public discourse and hence has little to no effect in changing endless repetitions of similar behaviour.

The position of women has improved little despite Pakistan's more than seven decades of independence (Zhang, 2013). Pakistan is ranked 154th among 159 countries on the UN Human development index (2020). In the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 published by the World Economic Forum, Pakistan ranked 153rd out of 156 countries on the gender parity index, making it seventh among eight countries in South Asia, higher only than Afghanistan. The gender parity score was 0.553 in 2006 and 0.556 in 2021, showing that all efforts to reduce the gender gap have been futile in Pakistan. The report indicated Pakistan would need 136 years to close the gender gap at the existing rate of change (Iqbal, 2021).

Upon retrospective consideration of Pakistan's extensive historical trajectory towards independence, it becomes evident that Islamic ideology played a pivotal role in articulating the national struggle and affirming women as honourable and respected individuals. Butt (2011) expresses how Muslims' holy book reiterates equal social, political, and economic status for women (Qur'an 4:7, 9:71, 58:14, 60: 10-12). Such principles were reaffirmed by the first governor general of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam:

'No nation can make progress in the true sense unless its women participate in the development and construction work along with men' (Butt 2011, 593).

Thus, a compelling philosophical argument can be constructed asserting that the Islamic faith played a foundational role in endorsing women's rightful participation in contemporary Pakistani society. Nevertheless, the venerable spirit of Islam, which initially championed the value and protection of women's participation, appears to be absent in the post-independence era.

Women in Pakistan pursuing a career are never treated equally with men in any professional field because their social and economic mobility is restricted under the veil of cultural norms and values (Raza & Murad, 2010). Patriarchal discourse and the concomitant ubiquitous gendered inequality in Pakistani society impacts negatively on women in the labour market. Academic research on gender issues consistently concludes that discrimination pervades in the educational sector: first, girls and women students' study from textbooks that reflect gender bias (Chaudhry, 2009), second, boys are favoured over girls in gaining education (Pervaiz et al., 2011), third, boys are preferentially encouraged to study science subjects and obtain qualifications in science and technical fields (Mujtaba & Reiss, 2015).

Contrary to the preceding fact education has functioned as a tool for Pakistani women to challenge the constraining structures within their families and communities, as articulated by Khurshid

(2018). This is facilitated by non-conforming parents who advocate for equal educational opportunities for their children, irrespective of gender, as evidenced by the research of Fazal et al. (2019). Such supportive parental dynamics have the potential to yield women who exhibit prowess in academic pursuits, pursue advanced education, and ultimately achieve success in their professional endeavours, as indicated by Karelaia and Guillén (2014) and Sattar, Yassin, and Afzal (2012). However, the commendable endeavours of these women do not invariably translate into commensurate advancements within the job market, a fact documented by Gioli, Khan, and Scheffran (2013). Despite acquiring qualifications, women encounter discriminatory practices perpetuated by cultural constraints, as discussed by Khan (2007) and Sadaquat (2011). This disparity is further compounded by limitations on mobility (Fazal et al., 2019) and the entrenched gendered roles and familial responsibilities that women grapple with, as expounded by Chaudhry (2012).

Within the framework of pre-existing gender disparities in society, women who embark on professional careers frequently encounter unarticulated, unacknowledged, and unaddressed forms of destructive communication within their workplaces. More precisely, they may confront instances of bullying perpetrated by superiors or male colleagues, resulting in consequential impacts on their overall well-being, as documented by Lutgen-Sandvik (2003), Nielsen (2010), and Zabrodska & Kveton (2013).

Globally, research on uncivil workplace culture indicates that gender-based bullying and harassment constitute contemporary challenges transcending cultural, religious, and ideological boundaries, as evidenced by studies conducted by Glasø, Nielson, and Einarsen (2009). Demographic factors, including gender, age disparities, and organisational hierarchies, serve as

pertinent parameters for identifying individuals at a heightened risk of experiencing workplace bullying, as elucidated in the works of Garrosa, and colleagues, (2008) and Salin, (2003).

Recognising the universality of workplace bullying, it is imperative to note that in Pakistan, there is a conspicuous absence of concrete measures addressing this pervasive issue. At the national level, the examination of adverse behaviours within the workplace remains in its nascent stages. Consequently, a lack of comprehensive public awareness and the absence of collective efforts for change have hindered substantive progress in mitigating unacceptable workplace behaviours. Individuals, in the absence of effective measures, find themselves compromising their well-being and enduring such negative conduct in silence (Knoll, Hall, & Weigelt, 2019). Some contemplate resignation for more conducive working conditions. The prevalence of a bullying culture exacerbates the challenges already faced by women in Pakistani society, where cultural definitions of women serve as a primary impediment to progress for all women.

This paper does not intend to be an exhaustive literature review but rather draws upon diverse sources pertaining to gender and Pakistani culture. The objective is to emphasise the significant relevance of a spectrum of behaviours encompassed within the umbrella term of bullying. Due to the limited research conducted on the culture of bullying in Pakistan and the challenges associated with obtaining explicit discussions on this issue, this paper aims to accentuate four principal antecedent elements gleaned from the literature. These elements are identified as critical factors hindering endeavours to effectively address workplace bullying within the higher education sector. The ensuing discussion focuses on the common themes identified from the existing literature that compel bullying behaviours to prevail in organisations in Pakistan.

## Theme 1: Patriarchal Culture

Patriarchy, a feminist concept, is often seen to examine for the structured establishment of male supremacy and female subordination, signifying the dominance of men over women. This concept holds deep roots in various Asian contexts, permeating norms, values, and customs to an extent that disassociating it from Asian culture, specifically, and life in general is deemed inconceivable by many (D’Cruz, 2021). Within the framework of Pakistan’s patriarchal societal structure, women find themselves relegated to subordinate positions, perpetuating their subservience to male dominance. Culturally predefined roles assign women primarily to domestic chores, encompassing responsibilities such as caring for children and husbands, preparing meals, and managing household cleaning and other domestic labour (Avais, Wassan & Shah, 2014).

Long-embedded patriarchal values in Pakistani culture prescribe social responsibilities based on an ossified artificial divide between production and reproduction, placing women in reproductive roles as mothers and wives in the private domain of home and men in productive roles as breadwinners in the public arena (Ali et al., 2011). This has led to low levels of investment in women by families and the State. Thus, we see minimal development of:

women’s human capital, compounded by the ideology of purdah (literally ‘veiled’) ... restrictions on women’s mobility... [has] become the basis for gender discrimination and disparities in all spheres of life (Bari and Pal 2000, 9).

In Simpson and Cohen’s (2004) study of occurrences of workplace bullying they identified agents perpetrating bullying as primarily men, with women mostly the targets of bullying. These authors suggested that bullying should be explored in relation to gender and power rather than from an organisational culture perspective. Chronicling Pakistan’s historical and cultural formation traces

the current prevalence of gender biases throughout Pakistani society, institutions, and organisations, including higher education (Sadaquat, 2011).

Anjum and Muazzam's (2018) cross-sectional study, which distinguished between 'work-related bullying' and 'person-related bullying' in the higher education sector, provides evidence supporting the assertion that bullying is influenced by patriarchal culture. Their findings support Simpson and Cohen's conclusions, indicating that women in higher education institutions are more likely to be victims of person-related bullying than their male counterparts. The research accentuates the importance of considering gender dynamics when conceptualising workplace bullying, underscoring the need to explore instances of gender-based bullying within this specific context. In the context of a patriarchal society such as Pakistan, there is observable restraint and limited independence among women, even those possessing high levels of skill. Women frequently forgo job opportunities due to challenges associated with commuting and, instead, tend to opt for opportunities situated near their homes. This observation, as articulated by Sadaquat (2011), underscores that while supportive parental guidance empowers women to pursue challenging roles in organisations, an ingrained fear of the unknown acts as a substantial barrier, hindering women from assuming professional positions situated far from their homes.

Furthermore, Pakistani society employs double moral standards and a culturally ingrained concept of 'izzat,' honour, to regulate women in both public and private spheres, thereby reinforcing male dominance. Women undergo socialisation into pre-established cultural patterns, the implications of which have profound consequences for their career progression (Bhatti & Ali, 2020). Masculine leadership discourses are disseminated and used to manipulate and keep women silent, invisible, and under constant surveillance (Shah & Shah 2012). In research with women college principals

in Pakistan, these authors discovered that women are unable to use their power due to the smothering effect of normalised masculine ideals. Such gendered discourse is strengthened via men's interpretations of religious texts to de-power their women colleagues. In predominantly women professions such as nursing or social work, men and women targets of bullying and harassment identified women and men as perpetrators (Whitaker, 2012).

Another significant theme derived from patriarchal discourse is the 'ownership' of females by their families and the concept that females must submit themselves to their primary and secondary families. The common use of the biological term 'females' rather than 'women' reflects the underlying essentialism of patriarchy (Stone, 2004). This patriarchal discursive framing is reflected in three typical uses of *female* in the rest of the present paragraph: *females* are considered responsible for safeguarding relationships. Women rather than men are the ones who must sacrifice themselves and their aims. A key element in this cultural challenge is that *females* cannot make their own decisions, and instead, they must rely on decisions already made for them that restrict their career development. *Females* are considered the house's honour, expected to behave according to implicit patriarchal rules.

Hegemonic patriarchy is a big part of why most organisations give women positions involving supposedly emotional functions and less often what are usually defined as strategic/logical decision-making roles. Further, women find it challenging to balance work and family life because of the uneven distribution of housework. Most Pakistani women, including highly educated women professionals, constantly feel tired and have difficulty managing paid employment (Sadaquat, 2011). Women in Pakistan constitute more than half of the population but comprise only twenty-five per cent of its labour force because of cultural taboos and restrictions (Malik, 2021)

A massive amount of human capability thus remains untapped in Pakistan, neither contributing to economic development nor enhancing the overall well-being of society. Women are hindered at the lower and of the socio-economic scale by their lack of education and at the higher education level by their restricted participation in senior positions. Women's labour-force participation in Pakistan is among the lowest globally, reflecting that women cannot participate fairly because of these societal barriers. Women face inequality in access to education, financial resources, and entrepreneurial opportunities. This non-inclusive culture is a significant barrier to development of women in professional life as leaders and successful managers (Noor et al. 2014).

Bhatti and Ali's (2020) qualitative study of Pakistani women's leadership found that their participants, all occupying strategic positions in universities, shared the common experience that even in these powerful roles, the community has legitimised men to victimise women. Verbal and non-verbal harassment is a tool for men to reinforce their power in community and organisations.' One participant's view on male dominance was that 'sexist hostility is deeply rooted in organisational structure and is evident in the form of harassment against women. "Men often articulate undignified jokes or statements that also contain elements of harassment" (p. 24).

To understand the intricacies of workplace discrimination, it is imperative to direct our examination towards the organisational structure and the positioning of women within it.

## Theme 2: Gender Discrimination

Within the framework of workplace dynamics there has been an increasing acceptance of women in the domain of paid employment. As economic and social norms have evolved to recognise women as almost equal contributors to economic and social advancement, women have gradually integrated into the workforce, approaching numerical parity with their male counterparts. Throughout this progression, they have gained access to the patriarchal hierarchy, where qualities

like power, tangible accomplishments, assertiveness, competitiveness, resilience, and presence hold significant value (Marvin, 2006). The existence of women in workplaces and the persistent underrepresentation of women in higher leadership positions remains an ongoing debate, posing questions about inclusion, equality, and equity for women in the realm of paid employment (Bagues and Campa, 2020). This factor is at the top of list in the scholarly exploration in Asian context (D’Cruz, 2021). Unveiling complex patterns shaped by gender discrimination research findings not only highlight the involvement of both women and men in fostering a culture of bullying but also underscore a distinctive tendency where females act as perpetrators exhibiting a heightened propensity to target other women. This paradox of women as the victim and the perpetrator can best be understood from Marvin(2006) Queen Bee Syndrome. The queen bee in an organisation symbolises the singular female leader who has successfully risen to a leadership position. The professional advancement of women is often impeded by ingrained gendered normative standards pervasive in academic institutions, which tend to favour men. Faced with such challenges, women may resort to bullying tactics to enhance their standing among departmental colleagues or to attain parity with men by adopting assertive tactics and behaviours, as indicated by Twale (2017).

The strategies employed by women to achieve success in higher education often exhibit parallels with the conceptualisation of bullying. In the context of constructing their professional identities within competitive academic environments, women may, for instance, engage in behaviours that, inadvertently, align with definitions of bullying. To circumvent the perception of weakness or diminished competence, women might adopt actions that inadvertently offend their peers. Rather than engaging in direct confrontation with male colleagues, women may opt for a subtler approach by demeaning their female counterparts to subtly elevate their own standing. The utilisation of

such indirect forms of aggression or passive-aggressiveness as a means of professional advancement may be perceived by female colleagues as strategic, calculated, unfeminine, and potentially uncivil, as articulated by Rashidi (2020). In doing so, render women's participation in such environments a formidable and uphill struggle.

Adding complexity to the dynamics, women frequently manifest more pronounced emotional reactions to instances of bullying and harassment than their male counterparts, thereby engendering potential misunderstandings within the workplace (Drabek & Merecz, 2013). Women occupying hierarchical positions contrasting with traditional gender roles, despite their elevated status, are susceptible to instances of bullying. In contrast, men situated at the lower ranks of the hierarchy face an elevated risk of being targets of such behaviours. Drawing upon the sex-role spillover theory, Drabek and Merecz argue that women operating in male-dominated domains are often subject to stereotypical assessments based on their gender, rather than being evaluated solely on the merit of their work. Consequently, they become more susceptible to being singled out for bullying behaviours.

Experienced faculty members who engage in positional competition and seek advancement within their peer group are also prone to being an easy target of bullying conduct. An understanding of the organisational culture provides avenues for seasoned faculty to perpetrate peer-to-peer abuse, as highlighted by Lutgen-Sandvik and Arsht (2013). This form of abuse extends to novice faculty members who, while transitioning from practitioner roles to academia, may become targets as they navigate and acclimatise to the new culture and normative standards. Additionally, faculty lacking sufficient qualifications may find themselves subject to bullying by colleagues with higher credentials, as observed by Twale (2017).

In disciplines within higher education, there are prevalent gender dynamics that often result in the marginalisation of female faculty members within departments dominated by men. It is fundamental to evaluate how women are perceived within the cultures of departments, institutions, and the broader professional sphere. This evaluation is particularly significant due to the potential for unequal treatment by male colleagues, which, in turn, creates an unwelcoming environment within the organisational unit. This hostile atmosphere contributes to a diminished sense of self-worth among women and adversely affects their physical and emotional well-being. Gender discrimination, serving as a pervasive foundation, leads to explicit bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Historically, women have also been underrepresented in leadership roles within higher education institutions even in western countries such as the United States (Ahad & Gunter, 2017). Although researchers have identified gender diversity as a positive fundamental for experiential learning, gender inequity still exists in higher education leadership within the academy particularly at executive and deanship levels (Teague, 2015). Traditional societal expectations of women leading to their marginalisation, the weight of absorbing of gender bias, institutional sexism, lack of formal support or inadequate supportive practices generally, the complexity of work-life balance, and specific academic bullying and harassment conduct are some of the factors that are antecedent to women's role academia. (Baker, 2021).

The utilisation of the labyrinth metaphor has been an endeavour to elucidate the dynamics of work-life balance experienced by women. This metaphor highlights obstacles such as sex discrimination and societal expectations disparities that prioritise domestic and home life responsibilities for women (Martin, 2017). The intent behind introducing this metaphor is to enhance comprehension and facilitate gender equality within the workplace. It advocates for changes across various

dimensions, encompassing “the culture, the organisation, the family, and the individual” (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). While the labyrinth metaphor challenges the notion of women being precluded from attaining leadership positions in higher education, it simultaneously underscores the infrequency of women assuming influential roles due to the myriad challenges they encounter along their paths to leadership accomplishments.

Pertinent to this discussion is Fazal et al.’s findings that underscore the pervasive gender discrimination prevalent in the male-dominated tertiary education sector, acting as a formidable barrier to the career progression of women academics. Insufficient support from senior male colleagues and university administrations further compounds the challenges faced by these women academics in Pakistan, emphasising the pressing need for comprehensive measures to address these systemic issues and foster gender equity within the academic setting.

### Theme 3: Seth Culture

Culture is collective learned behaviour that keeps on evolving. It is how people behave, think, handle situations, and respond to their social environment. As populations and groups learn to adapt a particular behaviour or circumstances this is passed to new members of society, infusing its organisations and communities (Islam, 2004). A company’s corporate culture comprises values, beliefs, short- and long-term goals, products, services, and other operational aspects (Sarros, Gray and Densten 2002). Employees face bullying and harassment if they do not understand the organisational and hierarchal structure if they occupy a vulnerable position (Saqib, Allen & Wood 2021).

In Pakistani organisations ‘Seth’ culture is prevalent. An Urdu-Hindi word meaning rich man or high-status individual, in a literal sense the presence of Seth discourse in an organisation is about

the way people are managed with an ‘emphasis on authority,’ the welding of hierarchical rank narrowly focused on upholding the top man’s status (Shah and Shah 2021).

It is common in Pakistani society to prefer working in multinational enterprises where greater power sharing and decision-making is not so closely safeguarded but delegated among staff. Rahim’s (2017) *Managing Conflict in Organisations* describes more positive power cultures where employees at every level are involved, and many employees are given the power to speak and share opinions (Rahim 2017). In local Pakistani organisations, however, Seth culture prevails, effectively prohibiting employees from participating in decision-making, power remaining concentrated among a few privileged individuals favourably positioned in this autocratic form of decision-making. Seth relationships were originally devised in a world prioritising tribal or village loyalty, but nepotistic organisational governance is neither efficient nor effective in modern organisations. Saqib, Allen and Wood (2021, 11) explain:

The roots of Seth culture are based on a paternalistic style of management in which traditionally the male head of the family or the business is seen as the patriarch who ‘looks after’ his charges; this element is also manifested in HR practices that defer to the management ‘patriarch (11)

Though gendered autocratic leadership is unlikely to be eliminated altogether, its predominance could be markedly reduced in higher education by training and induction programs of prospective leaders to facilitate employees’ motivation (Fiaz et al. 2017; Mukhtar, Baloch, and Khattak 2019).

The top-down imperatives of autocratic and aristocratic leadership styles are kept alive in educational organisations applying the small business Seth mindset of favours-for-loyalty for an

inner circle of connected individuals. Such personality-driven traditions emphasise ‘cozying up’ to the main man at the centre of the network. Administrative effectiveness often appears to be incidental. In small business enterprises preoccupation with profit or status disregards maintaining human-friendly culture. When instantiated in higher education and other complex organisational settings, a similar self-centred perspective undermines efficient use of financial and human resources towards achieving the institutions’ learning and research goals. Seth culture undermines Human Resource Management (HRM) from sharing employee benefits and militates against quality higher education.

Mukhtar’s (2021) article in the nationally distributed *Tribune* newspaper in Pakistan defined and critiqued Pakistani organisational culture. He identified the practice of Seth culture in Pakistan as having parallels to Handy’s (1976) ‘power culture’ revolving around one governing individual. This creates detrimental effects for how an organisation functions:

This culture depends on a central power source, with... power and influence spreading out from that central figure. They are connected by... specialist strings, but the power rings are the centres of activity and influence. This organisation works on... the wishes and decisions of the central power sources. ...Control is exercised by the centre mainly by selected key individuals. (Handy 1976, 69)

Seth culture has adverse effects right across the organisation. First, it impedes innovation and growth; second, it hinders efficient management of resources; third, it negatively affects HRM handling of employees directly or indirectly connected with management (Saqib, Allen & Wood 2021). As a result, innovative ideas are not entertained but are ignored. Conversely, incompetent individuals are placed in strategic roles within the organisation. The authoritative positions are

reserved for family members or associates irrespective of whether they can do what the position requires. There are odd parallels between traditional Seth imperatives and elements of modern neoliberal university managerialism, even though universities in wealthy nations formally recognise human-oriented processes and principles of gender equity, the struggling nations finds it challenging to ignore the presence of Seth culture in organisations (Phipps, 2020).

In organisations where the concentration of power is in the hands of few there is meagre job satisfaction and lack of motivation is evident as owners extract the maximum labour from their employees: ‘The Seth approach leans towards the “owner and worker” model rather than the “employee as a stakeholder and contributor” (Khakwani & Case 2012, p.192). These authors identify three major causes for the practice of Seth culture: ignorance, lack of entrepreneurship, and the absence of medium-sized firms. In Pakistan, small enterprises tend to be either corporations or family-run businesses. Seth culture is nurtured despite its jeopardising effect on effective management and the development of human capital.

Unfortunately, Seth culture permeates service-providing entities not simply the business sector. As a result, educated employees are also directly affected by its intrusion into organisational culture (Khakwani & Case 2012). Hill and Hurley (2021) in their research about men and women’s perceptions of academic departmental cultures assert that Seth culture is more about ‘buying people’ rather than ‘buying their trust.’ Employees are treated as servants rather than stakeholders or participants. This mindset of employers and managers adversely affects the institution.

The examination of Seth Culture and its detrimental impact on employees positions it as a precursor to workplace bullying within organisations. Seth Culture may contribute to the underreporting of bullying cases, as victims may fear repercussions for responding to such behaviour, thereby fostering a culture of silence within such organisations.

#### Theme 4: Taboo And Shame Attached to Bullying

The cultural frame around bullying types of behaviours is the avoidance of explicit or public discussion of such conduct. From a sociological point of view, any topic that is controversial for hegemonic societal norms will be considered taboo (Evans, Avery & Pederson, 2000).

Taboos are permitted and the prohibited, the dos and don'ts and are developed by society for its members out of self-preservation, tradition enhancing motives (Evan et al 2000)

Victimisation from bullying and non-sexual harassment at work has for a long time been treated as a non-existent issue in organisational research, a taboo area in discussing organisational life (Einarsen, 1999). Taboo in its primary meaning of forbidden can be applied to any sort of prohibition (Radcliffe-Brown 2014). The scholarly framing of gender bullying in Pakistan is that it is unacceptable behaviour that 'cannot' or will not be spoken about because it is so pervasive yet clearly not justifiable. Bullying behaviour is a shameful act and treated covertly as taboo at all levels of Pakistan society.

Shame... includes... embarrassment, guilt, humiliation, and related feelings such as shyness that originate in threats to the social bond (Scheff 2003, 255).

Since naming such behaviour by the targeted person would make its abhorrence publicly apparent, strong social sanctions against speaking out create a taboo zone of non-disclosure. This has the effect of internalising corrosive self-questioning by the person bullied.

Shame experienced from being bullied conventionally starts with unforeseen hesitance, develops into troubled assessment of oneself, and grows into significant feelings of torment. These mostly stay private and uncommunicable, exacting a cost on individuals and their families. Shame reverses an individual's self-assurance, often leading to withdrawal from feeling secure and

positive. Taboos isolate the individual, often leading to self-blaming and self-perception of being a despicable person; personality becomes a separated and unacceptable self-identity. Shame described here is not about personal wrongdoing but is the human response to an experience in which basic rights are not given appropriate respect by others (Kaufman, 1974). People feel vulnerable sharing a shameful experience with others. Sedighimornani (2018) describes the paradox:

We are ashamed of our shame. People do not find it liberating to talk about shame; they would rather say they are ‘I am angry/sad/nervous’ than to say, ‘I am ashamed.  
(75)

It is a general cultural perception in Pakistan that shame or the acknowledgement of shame are signs of weakness (Mansoor et al., 2021).

The feeling of belonging and acceptance is very dear to people in Pakistani culture. Hence, people endeavour to adapt to unfavourable organisational environments. Targeted individuals, too, do not want to talk about bullying or harassment, much less report incidents. Few are willing to participate in studies that involve sharing their experience of being undervalued or degraded, as they feel ashamed to give their input about such topics. This is the simplest interpretation of the scant research on bullying behaviour in organisations (Radcliffe-Brown, 2019; Samnani and Singh 2012): the issue is not addressed since bullying is a taboo topic; thus, bullying behaviour occupies an irrevocable position in local organisations in Pakistan. An employee faces this dilemma more than once in his or her life (Sedighimornani,2018).

Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2002) refer to the limited research on bullying as a topic of shame. Bullying is about the misuse of authority and control. It combines cultural and organisational

power against other staff in weaker positions (Salin 2003, Samnani & Singh 2012; Zabrodzka & Kveton, 2013). The person targeted by bullying suffers the bad behaviour silently as bullying develops feelings of deep disgrace and shame for the victim. Bullying is directed towards a less senior person whom the bully perceives as having vulnerabilities, either personal or related to their professional work role (Ahmad, Kalim & Kaleem 2017).

The victims of bullying and harassment in Ahmad, Kalim and Kaleem's study were ashamed to talk about what they knew would be publicly perceived as their personal weakness. Thus, they suffered silently and as a result the negative behaviour continued unreported and unaddressed. Another factor signalling the presence of social taboos around bullying and harassment is that people commonly do not want to share their experience of workplace bullying. In previous research responses to the study of bullying in Pakistan, Ahmad, Kalim and Kaleem (2017) had a 50% survey response rate and Bhatti and Ali's (2020) job stress survey had a 67% response rate. In Saleem and Farzan's (2021) interview study of library workplace harassment and levels of awareness about relevant legislation among working women in Pakistan, only 8 of 34 women consented to participate. In most cases this was due to privacy concerns and the taboo nature of the topic in Pakistani society.

With struggling economy, where there are issues of health, poverty, and gender discrimination, bullying in workplaces adds to the misery of already-marginalised women in Pakistan. For the most part, workplace violence reflects and maintains gender bias throughout a patriarchal society (Mujtaba & Reiss, 2015; Bhatti & Ali, 2020; Mubarak & Nazeer, 2019).

Instances of bullying often go unreported, especially when the victims are women, as a sense of shame and guilt becomes associated with such incidents. Within organisational hierarchies, senior managers may lack the necessary support, and there is a deficiency in both internal and external

reporting channels to address such misconduct (Samnani & Singh, 2012). The prevailing taboos surrounding discussions about bullying contribute to a reluctance among individuals to openly address the issue, fearing potential consequences they might find unbearable.

## Conclusion

Professional women face challenging situations in their workplace and behaviour in their workplace and higher institutions are no exception. In the absence of administrative laws, incivil behaviour continue and flourish. Any effort to address this issue is brushed under the carpet. The factors that hinder this discourse are discussed comprehensively in the preceding sections. The fact that these factors have characteristics that overlap with each other brings us to acknowledge one distinct fact that fosters its growth in organisations, which is culture.

Pakistan has a deep-set cultural norm that acts as a barrier to address bullying issue. The prevalent patriarchal culture gives man the birth right to protect women by discouraging them to participate in economic activity beside men. The progressive woman when tries to attain financial liberty by working side by side with man face gender discrimination in form of bullying.

The present account argues that although Pakistani society is competing with developed countries regarding societal norms and values, it has done very little to eliminate gender disparities that have existed since before independence. Women in Pakistani society still struggle to create a position for themselves in this male-dominated society. Even with one foot in the job market, and good qualifications, women face discrimination and unjust bullying behaviours at the hands of male counterparts.

Education is not the issue that perpetuates gender disparities in Pakistani society, though bullying reproduces them. The causes are rooted in gender discrimination, unreflective patriarchal privilege, above all Seth culture, within the protocols of taboo and shame and the unsupportive

attitude of the wider society. These collectively precede and foster bullying. Within these antecedent culturally inscribed discourses women are easy targets. These discourses marginalise their efforts to defend themselves against gender inequality and contribute to society.

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# Chapter

# 4

# Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, the thesis transitions from reviewing existing literature on workplace bullying in academia in Pakistan (Chapters 2 and 3) to discussing the methods used in the empirical phase of data collection. Motivated by personal experience and a desire to address this issue, the chapter outlines three qualitative research methods employed in the study, each contributing uniquely to deepening the understanding of the problem. Drawing on Stebbins' (2001) definition of exploratory research as an inquiry into areas lacking empirical evidence and warranting fresh exploration, the literature reviewed in earlier chapters highlights the lack of attention to workplace bullying in Pakistan's higher education sector. The optimal combination of methods depends on the specific needs of the research and the diverse input required for the study.

In scenarios where the research question is exploratory and not rigidly defined as in a pre-set survey, this investigation instead accesses in-depth personal accounts, offering rich narratives for exploring academic bullying. Additionally, exploratory interviews provide shorter narrative accounts, further extending the investigation from a slightly different perspective (see, for example, Ellis, Janjic-Watrich, Macris, & Marynowski, 2011; Ottmann & Crosbie, 2013; Petchamé, Iriondo, Villegas, Riu, & Fonseca, 2021; Liu, Huang, Gao, & Stebbins, 2024). This was true both in terms of empirical evidence and the recognition of the serious consequences of workplace bullying. The lack of scholarly research on this issue in Pakistan, as evident from

existing studies, has required the adaptation of global research concepts on workplace bullying to the Pakistani context.

In this chapter, integrating the literature with the methods used helps to more deeply uncover the personal and harmful practices of bullying. Each method examines the social and cultural aspects, exploring the consequential effects of bullying as perceived and experienced by educators. The ultimate purpose of building this empirical base is to open public discourse on bullying in higher education and to influence policymakers to initiate programs aimed at curbing this issue at the university level. The thesis primarily employed cultural perspective and social dominance theory to analyse workplace bullying. These frameworks were chosen to address the complex dynamics of power, identity, and social structures within Pakistani academia. As a result, feminist theory received less emphasis throughout the thesis. While feminist analysis is mentioned in some sections, the focus is on broader cultural and social frameworks. To investigate the issue of bullying this study adopts three qualitative methods; these are autoethnography (AE), collaborative autoethnography (CAE), and exploratory semi-structured interviews (SSI). The methodological discussion in this chapter encompasses the significance of qualitative research for this study and this topic of research and sets out the research design. It links my personal understanding with the interpretative approach adopted, the role of an insider researcher, followed by an exposition of the data collection processes and ethical considerations.

## 4.2 Research Design

Reflecting on the scope of my research topic involving exploration of teachers' personal perspectives and experiences of workplace bullying, it becomes evident that opting for a qualitative research approach offered a suitable method to elicit hard-to-access evidence about

workplace academic bullying. While quantitative design offers systematic data that can be analysed to identify some of the patterns and relationships, qualitative design powerfully captures the richness of individuals' experiences - the central element for this research inquiry (Glesne, 2011). The late twentieth century saw a period of methodological expansion, which introduced a diverse range of qualitative research strategies and formats for exploratory investigation. This shift extended the study of subjective experiences across many fields, counterbalancing the mid-century dominance of quantitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Merriam (2009) explains that qualitative researchers aim to understand how individuals construct their worlds, interpret human experiences, and attribute meaning to those experiences. Qualitative methods developed with the belief that people's experiences and perspectives are shaped by their social, cultural, and historical contexts—elements that may be difficult, if not impossible, to capture through quantitative methods alone. Techniques such as focus group discussions, structured interviews, observations, and semi-structured interviews are particularly valuable for gaining deeper insights into complex issues. For this thesis research, I needed an approach that emphasized the subjectivity of individuals, places, and cultures, and welcomed diverse perspectives and realities while exploring the normatively charged topic of bullying (O'Leary, 2017; Merriam, 2009).

Within the specific scope of workplace bullying, my intent was to understand the foundational rationales and perspectives that emerged from the subjective experiences and reflections of those targeted by colleague bullies in higher education in Pakistan. This involved both participants' descriptions of their experiences and an analysis that drew upon scholarly literature. The goal was to gain a broad understanding of the issue, revealed through the intricacies of individuals' experiences, beyond what numerical data and statistical analyses could offer. Qualitative modes

of investigation allowed bullying to be explored from cultural and organizational perspectives, uncovering the contextual factors that shape and influence how, when, and why it occurs. The aim has not been to arrive at an objective conclusion but to explore, gather, understand, and interpret perceptions and feelings toward workplace bullying within the context of Pakistan's higher education sector. Experiences and perceptions serve as credible data that are significant to this research, contributing to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

To help unpick the often-elusive topic of teachers being targeted by workplace bullying from colleagues and seniors, my thesis employs three distinct research methods. The first and second methods involve successively using an autoethnography (AE) and collaborative autoethnography (CAE) approaches to explore and reflect on my own experiences and then on other academic experiences of uncivil behaviour in academia. The AE and CAE approaches were followed by a third round of data collection through a series of exploratory interviews conducted with staff who experienced bullying in their professional life as academics. The objective of gathering data from these diverse sources was to capture both commonalities and differences in experiences of adverse treatment in bullying experiences. The intention was to draw insights that shed light on the factors fostering and perpetuating this toxic behaviour within the educational setting and to understand the multifaceted nature of bullying in academia.

#### 4.3 Motivation for Chosen Methods

When I first started thinking about my research project, my goal was to explore workplace bullying that affects teachers' well-being in academia. I planned to conduct semi-structured interviews (SSI) to collect data for my topic. I deemed it the most suitable mode of data collection, as it is conducted in a conversational style with one participant at a time and would give me the flexibility to employ a combination of closed- and open-ended questions, supplemented with follow-up

queries such as “why” or “how.” (Adam, 2015; Glesne, 2011). Unlike standardized surveys that rigidly adhere to verbatim questions, SSI allows for a more flexible, relaxed, and engaging discussion that may meander around agenda topics and even explore unforeseen issues (Bell, 2015; O’Leary, 2017).

Anticipating the time-intensive nature of semi-structured interviews (SSIs), I recognized the challenge of accumulating a substantial volume of data for analysis. The successful execution of SSIs demanded a disciplined approach on my part, both as an interviewer and later as an analyst. Upholding research integrity while striving to unveil authentic insights into bullying required a conscientious commitment to this method. I had to train myself to be sensitive to the research inquiry, choosing appropriate language and manner for interacting with participants. In initial meetings with my supervisors, after discussing my motivation for this project—stemming from my own experience of being bullied as a tertiary-level teacher—they suggested an autoethnographic approach as a means to explore experiences of bullying.

Thus, the selection of autoethnography as the research methodology for this qualitative study was rooted in my personal experiences, a perspective that is valued by Ellis and Bochner (2001). The concept of autoethnography captivated my interest because I aimed to conduct an “intentional” and “systematic” inquiry (Dinkelman, 2003, p. 8) into my own experiences of bullying and subsequently empower my participants to share their stories. AE seemed to align perfectly with this purpose, as it offers more delimited ethical requirements compared to other qualitative methods (Emmerich, 2019), focusing on personal experiences and reflections within the research context. An ethic of care surrounding the identification of individuals and organizations with which my own experiences intersect is a crucial consideration in the autoethnographic account. Having experienced bullying in academia myself, I understood the sensitivity of this issue when

inviting others to share their experiences. My interest in eliciting the stories of others who endured similar traumatic events could only be realized through careful reflection on my language and a deep engagement with the emotional nuances of my topic. This approach aligns with Barkhuizen and Wette's (2008) concept of "sensitizing" oneself to inquiry.

Autoethnography has been characterized as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 1). While the field continues to expand and evolve, incorporating various terms such as personal narratives, narratives of self, personal experience narratives, and self-stories (Bochner & Ellis, 2002, p. 739), its methodological essence remains rooted in understanding cultural and social-structural experiences through the lens of personal encounters. My reflection on personal narratives broadened my perspective on how culture and individual experience intersect, leading to a deeper understanding—often merely a heightened sense of questioning—of the social dynamics at play in society. Thus, integrating my own experiences into the research process not only enhanced my understanding but also increased my sensitivity to the gravity of this pervasive issue within our educational system.

After spending considerable time exploring my own experiences of bullying, I began engaging in conversations with other academics who shared their experiences of incivility. Building trust through our common experiences, several agreed to explore this issue by writing a collaborative autoethnography (CAE), a platform for jointly collecting and reflecting on our autobiographical information within a team context (Hernandez, 2021). While none of us individually had access to each other's worlds, together we possessed the necessary elements for conducting a group autoethnography. Although we came from various disciplines and institutions, we shared the common experience of bullying in academia and aimed to educate others about this incivility that

is regrettably tolerated, accepted, and often unreported. Collaborative autoethnography (CAE) is characterized by Lapadat (2017, p. 589) as an approach in which a collective of researchers—typically two or more individuals—share their personal experiences. These narratives can unfold either in parallel or in an interwoven fashion, accompanied by an ethnographic examination of the organizational, social, or cultural context. The aim is to analyze the implications of these experiences within a broader framework, providing insights into the multifaceted dynamics of the given context and the specific issue. Our shared interest lay in unveiling the factors that foster bullying in academia, a pursuit that I believed could not be fully undertaken in isolation. Coming together in a collaborative approach enabled us to explore the underlying forces within the educational setting, enriching our narrative with diverse insights.

Similar to other qualitative research methods driven by a strong motivation to conduct inquiry, my learning and understanding throughout the thesis emerged in a non-linear fashion. I often found myself oscillating between possibilities, questioning whether an idea could contribute meaningfully to the understanding of the issue. Nevertheless, after outlining several methodological strands for data collection, this chapter will now discuss how each of these three methods contributes to the overall exploration of bullying in higher education, including the limitations associated with each method, to demonstrate their applicability in addressing the research objectives.

#### 4.4.1 Research Method 1: Autoethnography (AE)

Autoethnography (AE) has surfaced as a burgeoning research design within sociology, originating in the identity turn from the mid-1980s. Its inception was driven by a desire to examine the expanding recognition of the interior and fluid dimensions of both cultural and individual identities. AE acknowledges that identity formation is influenced by an array of factors,

encompassing culture, history, societal setup, and personal experiences. It reflects a paradigm shift that seeks to capture the richness and complexity inherent in the understanding of identity (Ellis, & Bochner, 2000).

The word “autoethnography” is self-explanatory where “auto” stands for “self” and “ethnos” “ethnicity” (race, culture, people) “graph” meaning “writing”. The term was introduced by an American anthropologist and cultural critic, James Clifford, in the 1980s to encapsulate this new form of writing that focused on the author’s personal experiences and subjectivity. Since then, autoethnography has become an established approach within the field of qualitative research, and is used across a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, education, and cultural studies. Despite its relatively recent emergence as a distinct method, autoethnography builds on a long tradition of self-reflection and self-expression and has contributed to the development of new ways of understanding the relationship between personal, societal and cultural identities (Holman, Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2016).

Autoethnography is a distinctive form of writing that incorporates elements making research more relatable, revealing multiple layers of consciousness and forging connections between the personal and the cultural (Ellis et al., 2011). Its essence lies in the belief that when we share our experiences publicly, they transcend the private sphere and assume political significance. This research approach uniquely intertwines personal narratives with political, social, and cultural dimensions, offering compelling insider accounts that are often emotionally charged. Such narratives encourage readers to reflect on and view the situation through the author’s perspective (Carpenter, 2017; Sparkes, 2000).

AE is parallel with addressing issues of social justice and fostering social change by empowering indigenous researchers to rediscover their voices as “culturally liberating human beings” (Whitinui (2014, p. 456):

Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) support the use of autoethnography as a suitable approach for exploring issues in teaching. By narrating their experiences, teachers inherently engage in reflection, thereby deriving meaning from these experiences. In doing so, they attain a deeper understanding of their teaching knowledge and practice. (p. 374)

While autoethnography allows for various approaches, I find Ellis’s (2007) depiction particularly helpful, as it emphasizes that engaging in autoethnography involves a continuous oscillation between experiencing and scrutinizing a vulnerable self, while also observing and revealing the broader context of that experience (p. 14).

Thus, the choice of autoethnography as a research method resonated with the purpose of this study. Stemming from my personal encounter with being bullied, it took me three years to muster the courage to share this experience with others. The lingering impact of the suffering and emotions prompted me to find a constructive outlet, aiming to alleviate the distress of those currently facing or having experienced similar challenges in their professional journeys. Thus, a cathartic process commenced with the disclosure of my innermost fears, articulated through the medium of this autoethnographic narrative.

In encouraging readers’ engagement, my intention was to achieve not only cognitive but also affective resonance with this research, aspiring to leave a lasting impact that extends beyond the conclusion of a reader’s experience. This study is positioned to serve as a guiding resource for educators grappling with similar crises, providing reassurance to those who have confronted similar adversities. Out of this work I plan to cultivate a culture of shared experiences, aiming to

inform newcomers, administrative bodies, and management about unacceptable and intolerant behaviour within educational institutions—an issue frequently underreported and swept under the carpet. The rationale behind opting for autoethnography is its inherent capacity to probe this sensitive subject about which the individual has deep knowledge, expertise that is not available in averaged, statistical summations of a large cohort or general population. In the structure of this thesis the autoethnography facilitates interpretation of participants' narratives gathered by the other two methods.

Narrating my own personal story has prompted profound reflection on my own encounters, fostering a heightened sense of empathy for the emotional experiences and reactions of the participants as they revisited their predicament during interviews. This introspective process served as a valuable precursor to engage with the narratives of others, establishing a deeper connection with shared challenges within the context of workplace bullying. Autoethnographic writing has increased my flexibility to acknowledge and accommodate my subjectivity, and emotionality as a researcher. Moreover, I realise that traditional methods of conducting and thinking about research are not “self-evident” – all research methods have constraints, limits, and can be used in parochial ways by individuals holding various perspectives.

Several factors can contribute to these positional differences, including race (Boylorn, 2006; Davis, 2019), gender (Evans et al., 1994; Keller, 1987), sexual orientation (Foster, 2008; Glave, 2005), age, and class (Donetta, 2003). When a researcher adheres to conventional rules, they not only overlook alternative methods of understanding but also imply that those methods are inadequate or invalid. In contrast to traditional definitions of meaningful and useful research, autoethnography expands the investigative framework, providing a more inclusive lens on data in the world. This approach also fosters an understanding of how our self-perceived or externally

perceived identities impact the interpretation, study, and articulation of the subjects we investigate (Adams, 2008; Denzin, 2008).

#### 4.4.1.2 Benefits of Autoethnography

While there are many benefits to using autoethnography (AE) for research purposes, I will restrict this discussion to the value AE provided for my project. One significant merit of this method was its potential to enrich the lives of others by prompting reflection and fostering empathy through the narratives it presents (Pavlenko, 2002). Immersing myself in the cultural and social aspects of my experience unveiled previously unconsidered realities, enhancing my informed inquiry. I believe that research endeavours should be beneficial and practical for all involved parties. Although the objectives of autoethnography may vary as widely as the topics it explores, the overarching aim of writing research accounts is always to inform and educate others. Establishing connections with readers through personal experiences—not merely reflecting for myself—helped clarify and deepen my understanding of the adverse times I experienced bullying. This process offered catharsis, therapy, and self-empowerment. Achieving a substantial written account in the first findings chapter of my thesis feels like a significant accomplishment in communicating the impact of such poor conduct by university academics, allowing others to hear these experiences—an ethical advantage emphasized by Plummer (2001).

The selection of narrative style, specifically the choice between first-person and third-person perspectives, constitutes an additional methodological advantage within autoethnography. Researchers commonly grapple with the decision of trying to maintain objectivity by adopting a third-person or “gods-eye” narrative or instead embracing subjectivity through a first-person perspective when crafting personal narratives. Using the third person may afford a perceived distance from the events and individuals under consideration for certain individuals. As explained

by Denzin (1997): “I was just going to disguise myself because I still didn’t have the freedom to—I hadn’t given myself the freedom to—write that narrative in the first person.” (p. 317).

For others, the first personal approach seems to be the only way to completely convey the experience being analyzed. “The choice of narrative in first person or third person is for the researcher... how close we choose to position our readers. (Wyatt, 2006 p. 814). Expressing my experiences in the first person afforded me the autonomy to function as an insider in my research, as opposed to an outsider (Emmerich, 2019). Autoethnographic writing for me transcends being merely a research method; it embodies educational research. Following Bochner and Ellis’s (2006) perspective, “It serves to showcase individuals in the intricate process of discerning their paths, determining how to navigate life, and deciphering the significance of their struggles” (p. 111).

In these evocative narratives, people are not only constructing meaning within their own lives, but the narratives also extend an opportunity for others to reflect on analogous experiences. This reflective engagement, in turn, empowers individuals to undertake actions that are not only beneficial to themselves but also have the potential to positively impact others (Richards, 2008). Another advantage of the autoethnographic method lies in the ethical considerations it alleviates, given that the narrator is also the researcher. Exploring critical periods in individuals’ lives can pose challenges, as those involved in such narratives may find it inappropriate to share their experiences and consequently may withhold consent from further use or publication (Ellis, 2007; Wall, 2008).

#### 4.4.2.3 Limitations of Autoethnography

While acknowledging the merits of employing autoethnography (AE) as a research approach, although I did not encounter obvious limitations, sociologists and anthropologists often interrogate the process of incorporating personal narratives. The traditional role of a researcher is construed

as that of impartial observer and analyst, maintaining a level of invisibility and muting their own voice. This conventional stance is primarily sustained with the expectation that quantitative researchers confine personal reflections to a brief methodology section, separating factual accounts from unverifiable elements (Denzin, 2006). Deviating from conventional writing styles may introduce confusion for both readers and researchers, as the blurring of genre boundaries can lead to an overlap between facts and fiction, ultimately challenging the validity of the presented account.

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Yet epistemologically, such a stance presumes an objectivity that reflects Western models of self-assuredness, failing to acknowledge the cultural positioning of Western researchers themselves. A range of social science theoretical trends have problematized this belief, including post-colonial studies, Indigenous studies, and alternative frameworks developed by non-Western researchers, such as Southern Theory (Connell, 2007), along with perspectives concerning disability, sexuality, and health marginality

Thus, the limitations of autoethnography cannot be simply contrasted with scientifically objective and dispassionate research, as even this method is culturally shaped and configured (Kuhn, 2012). Several strategies can help address these acknowledged limitations, such as cross-referencing diaries, email dates and content, and other formal documents from the time of the incidents. Additionally, specifying the place and time of occurrences and incorporating corroborating narratives from others can serve as anchor points for the data. However, the “truth” of any account can never be complete, finished, or fully known. Nonetheless, when told effectively, it can evoke a narrative of truth that may resonate more profoundly than the “truth” of statistical evidence in fostering social change; it certainly serves as a viable alternative strategy for achieving that goal.

Despite these concerns associated with autoethnography, Ellis (2007) posits that the primary criterion to bear in mind is that “autoethnography itself is an ethical practice” (p. 26). Engaging in autoethnography necessitates a commitment to ethical and honest representation of events, including the content of words expressed by individuals involved in these events. To reduce personal biases and unexamined assumptions, and to strengthen the credibility of the research, this thesis explored bullying through two other forms of inquiry: CAE and SSI.

Adopting three modes of inquiry for this research provided a form of triangulation, which helped validate my own experiences as a researcher—something that would have been difficult to achieve using a single method. While autoethnography offers an ethical space for personal reflection, it must be balanced with the protection of those involved in the narrative. Personal authenticity is crucial, but it should not come at the expense of disclosing sensitive information about others. Careful curation and editing of personal details, in consultation with supervisors and colleagues, are essential to maintaining the ethical appropriateness of research reporting.

#### 4.4.2 Research Method 2 - Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE)

Collaborative autoethnography (CAE), like autoethnography (AE), contributed to this study by deepening the understanding of adverse behaviour against academic staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan. Similar to AE, CAE involves self-driven research, drawing on the researcher’s self-knowledge and often giving voice to an internal dialogue that may have previously been suppressed (Holman, Adams, & Ellis, 2016). By collectively making sense of their experiences, researchers engage with each other, explore various facets of their identities and work environments, and articulate the contextual factors shaping these experiences within their specific academic settings. CAE focuses on the role of individuals who serve as both the

researchers and participants, engaging in examination of their “self-and/with others” or “self-in relation-to others” (Hernandez & Ngunjiri, 2013; Dinham, Baguley, Simon, Goldberg, & Goldberg, 2024). It is autoethnographic work that is done in collaboration with other researchers (Hernandez, 2021).

The CAE began with descriptive-realistic writing about our personal experiences and then moved towards an analytical-interpretative approach which “incorporates theoretical and conceptual literature sources... [and] supports socio-cultural analyses and interpretations.” (Chang, 2013, p. 119).

Reflecting on my experience of adverse behaviour in academia, I began dialogues with a few fellow academics about their own experiences. Sharing my story empowered them to open up about their encounters with this kind of conduct. As a result of these initial conversations, a collaborative autoethnography was undertaken with three academic peers, in which I assumed the role of narrator. This intentional positioning gave me the confidence to scrutinise and articulate my collaborators' experiences in a way that transcended individual perspectives while avoiding the simple assembly of themes that could diminish the particularity of their personal accounts. We all shared the overarching goal of offering insights that could benefit a wider educational audience.

#### 4.4.2.2 Benefits of Collaborative Autoethnography

CAE benefited my research topic in various ways. Through CAE, the educators were not only given the opportunity to speak about their experiences of incivil behaviour but also to listen and engage with sympathetic others whose voices, like their own, might have remained unheard. This collaborative endeavour brought these voices to the forefront and encapsulated them in written form, fostering a deep and inclusive dialogue within the academic space. We shared a collective sense of enriching the scholarly discourse on bullying with diverse perspectives and narratives that

might otherwise remain underrepresented. The mutual catharsis and therapeutic support within this safe space allowed for open discussion of taboo subjects, eliciting valuable narrative accounts through our shared sense of bonding and understanding.

Another advantage of this method is its multivocality, which can enhance theoretical progress in several ways (Ngunjiri, Chang & Hernandez, 2017). It challenges positivistic conceptions of truth, encourages reflection on academic assumptions about the merits of research, and fosters interdisciplinary connections (Holman, Adams & Ellis, 2016). This approach allowed me to develop writing practices that maintained a slight distance from, yet remained empathetic to, the experiences of my CAE co-authors, who had been targets of incivil behaviour in their workplaces. In educational settings that champion principles of equality and equity, and are expected to serve as torchbearers for a just society, obtaining a genuine understanding of undesirable power dynamics can be a formidable task (Dinham, Baguley, Simon, Goldberg & Goldberg, 2024). However, through collaboration with insiders, CAE becomes a valuable tool, offering deeper insight into workplace bullying in these environments.

Co-constructing findings ensured unveiling of insights, interpretations, and perspectives, steering clear of a singular academic narrative dominating the analytical landscape that Canagarajah (2012) suggests becomes a conduit for storytelling. CAE weaves together diverse narratives that contribute to written accounts examining the multiple meanings and interpretations of language and composition. It cultivates a holistic approach that embraces the social, cultural, and technological dimensions of writing, ultimately enriching the scholarly discourse and shaping the evolving landscape of effective written expression. As these stories proliferate through CAE, writing gains a more inclusive understanding, through empathetic commentary and expression of

similarities and differences. How writing functions across varied cultural contexts affirms the importance of diverse storytelling both within and beyond the academic sphere.

Approaching the issue of workplace bullying in academia through CAE allowed me to understand the teacher's perspective, which involved a process of trial and practical application for all of us. Our data collection incorporated various elements, such as personal memory, archival materials, self-reflection, self-analysis, and conversational interviews, in our collective approach to reflection and analysis. Each team member individually gathered data before we collaboratively synthesized it, engaging in mutual interviews—both asking and responding—while deconstructing and co-constructing experiences. This integrative practice of shared self-reflection deepened our understanding of the issue.

#### 4.4.2.3 Limitations of Collaborative Autoethnography

The matter of relational ethics poses distinctive challenges in research, particularly the responsibilities and obligations to safeguard the identities and vulnerabilities of individuals associated with or implicated in our studies (Hernandez & Ngunjiri, 2013, p. 270). It was necessary to confront these ethical challenges, and in our discussions, we employed various strategies to address them. For instance, this sometimes involved the deliberate omission of specific details, and at other times, the decision to amalgamate individuals' narratives to mitigate the risk of identification. These measures demonstrated to participants a conscientious approach to navigating the ethical dilemmas inherent in this research method.

Another challenge encountered in this mode of research was time constraint. Despite the collective enthusiasm of participants for the project, my objective extended beyond the production of a collaborative autoethnography (CAE) as this in turn was part of the bigger thesis project. Participants in the CAE study, while consenting to participate in the project, prioritised other

commitments. This led to scheduling conflicts that disrupted the anticipated smooth flow of collaboration, although eventually coming together in the successful culmination of our joint effort.

Collaborative autoethnography and autoethnography constitute valuable methods in the field of social inquiry, carrying substantial implications for both scholarly pursuits and practical applications within and beyond academic settings (Hernandez, & Ngunjiri, 2013). Within academia, the engagement of autoethnographic methods has afforded researchers the opportunity and freedom to chronicle and analyze personal narratives, allowing them to authentically foreground the stories and motivations that underpin their scholarly endeavours. This methodological approach not only enhances transparency but also enriches scholarly discourse by infusing it with individual perspectives based on lived experiences.

The exploration of how collaborative autoethnography (CAE) paved the way for meaningful dialogues with academic staff was conducted through semi-structured interviews. The organic emergence of a substantial reservoir of data, from informal discussions pertaining to my research focus, simply needed to be formalised. The process of writing AE and CAE augmented my comprehension of the complex, personal and intricate dimensions surrounding the taboo issue of workplace incivility within HEIs in Pakistan and the impetus to explore the issue with a wider constituency.

#### 4.2.3 Research Method 3 - Interviews

By engaging in self-reflective inquiry and collaborative scholarly endeavors, each step successively refined and extended my understanding of colleague bullying. To further elaborate insight about the problem of personal bullying experience, I then undertook a series of exploratory

semi-structured interviews (SSI) with other academics working in various HEIs in Pakistan. The rationale for choosing this method in the thesis inquiry was that exploratory SSI still allows participants to provide considerable detail in the descriptions of their experiences and viewpoints, but less introspectively or in-depth, compared to the earlier two autoethnographic methods used.

Once again, this method contributed to setting out individual information in participants' accounts rather than averaged or generalized data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Research shows that exploratory SSIs are useful when looking for timed or spontaneous information regarding occurrences, such as unpleasant workplace behaviour (Baillien, et al., 2009), especially when exploring issues with respect to education (Adams, 2015). Given that *talking about bullying* is still considered taboo in conservative societies (Rahm et al., 2019), the educators I approached showed some inhibition in sharing their experiences of being bullied, expressing caution around concerns of the possibility of repercussion. To overcome this hurdle, my initial discussions consciously enabled many to pull back from participating in interviews if they were worried. By using a snowball sampling method and providing assurances of anonymity while allowing participants to review questions in advance, I secured individuals who felt comfortable enough to get involved.

#### 4.2.3.1.1 Snowball participant recruitment

Through snowball sampling, participants were invited to refer other individuals for the study who met the research criteria (O'Leary, 2017) and who might be willing to participate. This technique is frequently employed when dealing with populations that are challenging to identify or reach (Shaghghi, Bhopal & Sheikh, 2011). It enabled me to construct a purposive sample for interviews by asking initial contacts to introduce others with similar experiences who might be willing to discuss their participation. This approach facilitated the process of contact, invitation, joint

discussion, and ultimately moving towards a decision on whether to participate or decline further involvement in the study.

To identify an initial participant, I utilized my professional connections. I reached out to friends working at various public and private universities in Karachi, Pakistan. I requested this participant's assistance in introducing other academic staff who had encountered workplace bullying and were open to sharing their experiences. Subsequently, I was able to arrange meetings and schedule interviews dates and times. Initially, some of the referred participants expressed willingness to participate in the research, however, reading the participant information sheet (PIS), three participants declined to be part of the study. Two participants did not respond to my call to set up a time for interview although they had earlier agreed they would take part in this study. One participant presents at the interview initially consented but later changed her stance regarding audio recording, expressing discomfort. I respected her decision without persuasion. However, she introduced me to two of her acquaintances willing to be part of the study. Thus, I was able to collect data from 14 educators who self-identified as victims of bullying in academia.

Table 6. Demographics of the Participants

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Bullying Experiences: Time Since Encounter</b>
P#01	F	4.5 yrs	Teaching Facilitator	3 years
P#02	F	4-5 yrs	Lecturer	Choose not to comment
P#03	F	10+	Lecturer	4 years
P#04	F	7yrs	Teaching Facilitator	3 years
P#05	F	9yrs	Lecturer	9years
P#06	F	16yrs	Lecturer	Choose not to comment
P#07	F	12yrs	Head of the department	Choose not to comment
P#08	F	19yrs	Lecturer	5 years
P#09	F	10yrs	Lecturer	Choose not to comment
P#10	F	8yrs	Lecturer	5 years
P#11	F	12yrs	Head of the Department	3years
P#12	M	10yrs	Lecturer	Choose not to comment
P#13	F	6-7yrs	Lecturer	2years
P#14	F	4yrs	Lecturer	Choose not to comment

#### 4.2.3.1.2 Exploratory Data

The data collection mode through exploratory semi-structured interviews once again highlighted the complexities of recounting participants' experiences, which for many required thoughtful organization, particularly as people were still recovering from the aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the Zoom revolution in communication, I was able to provide participants with the flexibility to choose between a face-to-face interview, an online session via Zoom, or the option to articulate their responses in writing at their convenience via email. This approach not only addressed practical issues of options and convenience but also allowed potential participants to select a mode of communication that felt sufficiently safe for them.

Thus, eight participants consented to provide written responses to the interview questions via email (n=8), while six participants agreed to undertake in-person interviews (n=6) which were subsequently audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, none consent to give interview via Zoom. The interview questions were designed to elicit descriptive responses from participants. Prompts and follow-up questions were used to help participants provide detailed information and maintain focus on the main topic. All major and minor questions were shared by the participants who opted to give written responses. Using minor questions as prompts was useful when participants tend to digress, especially when recounting personal conflicts (Bell, 2015). According to Hood, Hopkin and Kirkhart (2015) a general recommendation in interviews is to allow interviewees to share their real-life experiences in their own words/ language. Recognising the sensitivity and complexity of the research topic, I choose to adhere to this supportive style of conversation with them in posing the questions.

#### 4.4.3.2 Benefits of Interviews

The long history of social science research shows the advantages of employing an exploratory semi-structured interviews approach outweighs its limitations. Adams (2015) advocated this mode of research saying it enables individuals who face challenges in reading and writing to actively participate in research studies, although this form of adjustment of language was not required in the present study as participants had strong educational backgrounds. But while interviewing I adjusted the language used in the questions to elicit responses to my research queries, thereby minimising the likelihood of ambiguity in their responses. Additionally, through interviews I was able to pick up nonverbal cues that helped clear participants' thoughts when they found it difficult to articulate their ideas verbally. This not only provided participants a valuable avenue for expression, but also enabled me as a researcher to interpret responses through their non-verbal cues and make necessary adjustments during our interaction. Subsequently, utilising conventional audio-recording facilitated analysis as I was able to revisit the conversation multiple times. This method proves particularly effective when investigating topics that involve exploring emotions and expressions of feelings, while maintaining some "shape" "and consistency" in the sequences of interviewer-participant exchanges (Bell, 2015).

The mode of collecting data through semi-structured interviews (SSI) provided an opportunity to gain insights into teachers' perceptions of bullying due to its ability to elicit narrative responses. The semi-structured interviews deepened my understanding of participants' experiences and viewpoints, further illuminating what was happening within higher education institutions (HEIs). Interviews conducted via email were also productive, as participants could provide their responses with the flexibility of time, eliminating the need for travel or formal attire; additionally, the cost

associated with email interviews is negligible (Burns, 2010). Overall, despite its limitations, the interview technique proved to be an effective approach for examining this issue.

#### 4.4.3.3 Limitations of Interviews

A prominent inhibiting factor in conducting interview research is the question of trust or apprehension of the consequences of participating in an interview (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006). Participants may refrain from sharing their experiences or withhold information due to reservations regarding the researcher's credibility or concerns about potential negative repercussions, including legal or social consequences. Although the potential participants I approached did not express reservations about my credibility in using data for my thesis research, they felt apprehensive about sharing their experiences and dreaded the potential consequences for their current status. As a result, some participants withdrew from the research project after initially consenting to take part. This reaction is common in studies exploring sensitive topics (Garcia-Moreno, 2006).

Holland (2008) points out that time constraints may pose a significant unwillingness in participants to contribute to research studies. Individuals who want to participate may struggle to find time from their work or personal commitments, affecting their availability for interviews. Lack of interest or motivation is another hindrance: people are sometime disinterested in the research topic or fail to recognise its relevance to their experiences, something particularly noted in studies on health promotion (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), although this did not seem applicable among my participants. Studies indicate that participants may be constrained and feel uneasy communicating in the researcher's language, or they may have cultural beliefs that discourage engagement. This can pose a barrier for participants from consenting to take part in studies (Glesne, 2011). I aimed to minimise this issue by being adaptable in the mode of communication,

clearly communicating this flexibility prior to the commencement of the interviews to maximise participation.

Another limitation for this mode of data collection was participants' uncertainty. Even after addressing their reservations and providing information on the research project through the Participant Information Sheet (PIS), when I formally approached them via email and with the consent form, most of the potential participants previously contacted backed out as they did not want to have anything on record about their experience. Lastly, previous negative experiences with research, where participants felt coerced or exploited, may instil hesitancy and reluctance to participate in further studies. This dilemma of finding willing participants for a research project is not new in qualitative research (Boylorn, 2006) as the personal aspect of qualitative studies often demands the engagement and cooperation of individuals in sharing their experiences, perspectives, and insights. This challenge has been a persistent concern throughout the evolution of qualitative inquiry, requiring researchers to navigate strategies for effectively recruiting and engaging participants (Clarke & Braun, 2013; McMullin, 2023; O'Leary, 2017).

#### 4.5 Data Analysis of HEI bullying experiences

The objective of qualitative data analysis is to generate fresh insights through the examination and interpretation of data obtained from various sources, including interviews, group discussions, and observations (O'Leary, 2017). It is "constructed to be flexible and dynamic and [is] subject to change as research studies unfold" (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011, p. 16). The approach to data exploration can be either inductive, allowing themes or theories to emerge organically from the data without preconceived notions, or deductive, involving the application of predetermined ideas or theories while searching for potential confirmation within the data (Gephart, 2019).

I employed both inductive and deductive reasoning to explore and present the insights into workplace bullying in Pakistan HEIs. This culminated in the emergence of new themes while also identifying themes I had read in literature. Following O’Leary’s (2017) guidance, I prepared and analysed the gathered data through a process illustrated in Figure 1.

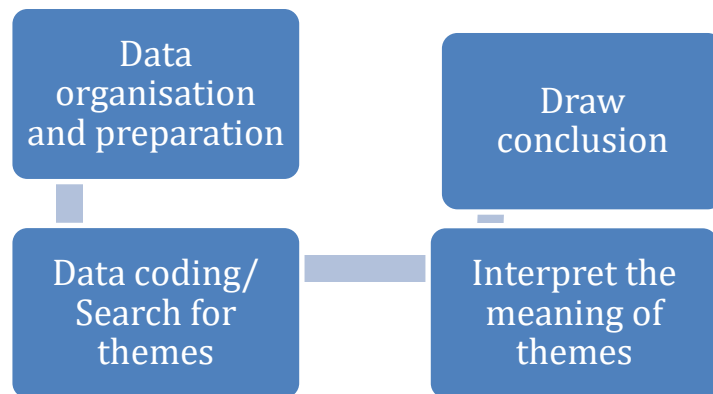


Figure 1. Data analyses process (Source: Adapted O’Leary (2017, p. 325))

For my autoethnographic (AE) research, the primary method employed for data collection revolved around an introspective exploration of my personal experiences. This process involved engaging in thoughtful internal reflection, probing my own encounters, and unravelling the layers of meaning embedded within them, including reading in the academic literature. I think of this as *reflecting against the literature on my experience*, growing in my understanding as I did. Lapan and colleagues (2011) suggest “this open-ended approach leads to a free association of thoughts, deep introspective sharing of experiences, and construction of multiple narratives” (p. 121). This self-reflective journey served as the cornerstone for my autoethnographic inquiry, enabling me to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural, social, and personal dimensions of the issue under investigation.

Throughout this phase of the thesis project, a series of in-depth discussions transpired with my supervisor, serving as pivotal moments of intellectual exchange and guidance. These dialogues were not only informative but also served as catalysts for pushing me to explore further the complications and consequences of my experiences. These initial discussions facilitated the exploration of various dimensions in new ways, encouraging me to critically analyse, interpret and reinterpret the significance of my encounters of adverse behaviour. The iterative quality of these considerations allowed for a continuous refinement of my autoethnographic narrative. I was able to articulate and crystallise thoughts, transforming raw reflections into more coherent and structured representations of my autoethnographical journey. This collaborative process fostered an interplay between personal insights and scholarly discourse, improving the depth and accuracy of the autoethnographic account. In essence, the data collection process for my autoethnography was an iterative and introspective endeavour. The internal reflection and dialogues with my supervisor, not only shaped my autoethnographic exploration but also cultivated the understanding of the cultural and personal dimensions embedded within my experiences.

The data collection method for collaborative autoethnography (CAE) mirrored that used in the autoethnography (AE) investigation, with the distinction that the authors engaged in mutual correspondence, reflecting both with and against each other. We participated in a collaborative exchange of conceptual insights derived from relevant literature, striving to discern parallels and distinctions between our experiential narratives and those documented within scholarly discourse. This divergence manifested in collaborative discussions about our respective experiences, along with the reciprocal exchange of each other's drafts. The preliminary drafts of our written narratives were shared as part of this methodological approach, facilitating the identification of themes. The data analysis for the exploratory SSIs commenced after the completion of interviews conducted

mostly in English, through email and face to face. The data was analysed manually by highlighting the information without relying on qualitative data analysis software. I read and reviewed the data highlighting meaningful concepts and developed categories. Constant comparison of notes helped identify patterns and themes, which were then carefully reviewed for consistency and documented transparently to ensure accuracy and reliability in the findings. While software can streamline certain aspects of analysis, manual approaches allowed a distinctive understanding of the data. There are many benefits in using qualitative data analysis (QDA) software like NVivo, Dedoose and Delve for thematic analysis, but for this project I relied on the slower manual process. This allowed me to consider the sensitivity of the topic for my participants and I was concerned my understanding might be compromised from my own experiences. Hence, for the purpose of this research I adhered to my own slower process of reading and interpreting the data. I transcribed the interview recordings myself, transcribing each spoken word and non-verbal cue for accuracy and fidelity to the original content.

This hands-on transcription process allowed me to intimately engage with the data, enabling a deeper understanding of contextual factors, tone, and expressions that I knew would be crucial for the subsequent phases of analysis. Moreover, personally transcribing the recordings enhanced my familiarity with the data and contributed to the development of detailed contextual interpretation during the analytical phase of my research. This is close to what is the now-traditional idea of “immersion in the data” (McMullin, 2023, p. 142). For the interviews that were sent via email, I analysed them based on the information participants provided, examining the written responses for key themes, patterns, and insights. This method of analysis involved scrutiny of the textual content (effectively already transcribed), identifying recurrent motifs and the exploration of participants’ perspectives. While lacking the immediacy of face-to-face interviews (Bell, 2015),

the email format is “a much slower dance of communication” (Burns, 2010. p. 16), affording the opportunity for thoughtful consideration of responses and provided my dataset for analysing themes. It supported participants' self-care by allowing them to choose what they wanted to share or avoid. This approach helped synthesize commonalities from these highly individual, personal, and difficult experiences. These exploratory interviews added another dimension to my understanding, enabling a deeper analysis of each participant’s context and their encounters with workplace bullying behaviours.

#### 4.6 Ethics Approval

Prior to commencing fieldwork, I obtained ethical approval from the Human Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato (HREC 2021#88). The approved ethics forms are included in Appendix 1 to Appendix 6 of the thesis. Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms were provided to potential participants before the scheduled interviews, allowing them sufficient time for review. Additionally, a verbal explanation was given via mobile phone before the confirmation of interview appointments. To safeguard confidentiality and minimize concerns about exposure, participants were instructed not to disclose the name of their organization, and their identities were anonymized by assigning a number to each participant. I recognise the sensitivity of researching workplace bullying, acknowledging the potential for emotional distress and concerns about public or employer exposure. To address emotional distress, I observed my participants’ reactions, paying close attention to their voice and facial expressions while maintaining sensitivity in my questioning approach. During one interview, I noticed a participant expressing anger while discussing bullying experiences, prompting me to inquire about her well-being and willingness to continue. Prioritising the well-being of my participants, I enlisted before starting the study the services of a psychologist who was willing to provide counselling support in case participants experienced emotional distress

while recounting their experiences. The psychologist granted consent to provide a complimentary consultation for a single session, subject to scheduling an appointment if the need arose (Appendix 6).

#### 4.7 Conclusion

Qualitative research methodology was used to investigate workplace bullying with respect to the perceptions and coping strategies of participant educators. The purpose and role of qualitative research is to explore the significance of human actions and responses by describing them (Glesne, 2011) from an insider point of view. The data collection was based on participants sharing their feelings, emotions and ideas about their experiences. Their reflections as well as their stories are part of the evidential basis of the research.

Each method played a role in advancing the exploration of the issue, starting with personal autoethnographic reflection and progressing to staff groups recounting and reflecting on their bullying experiences. This progression expanded further with exploratory interviews and emails, infusing new perspectives into the discourse on bullying. The exploration of this social dilemma, present in academia yet concealed in public discussions, was enriched by cultural knowledge, facilitating the interpretation of participants' accounts. Although as Flick (2002) suggests the aspiration to access and tell the 'real' truth is something that cannot be fully explained because we are all actors in the society in which we live and interact, these qualitative methods help better understand this problem of bullying in each culture, community, or organisational setting.

The present methodology chapter has laid out the methods used in collecting data for this thesis project. It has highlighted data collection methods and ethical considerations in laying the foundation for the subsequent finding chapters and the analysis of the data presented in them. It is

to the first finding chapter presenting the results of the autoethnographic method that the thesis now turns.

# Chapter

# 5

# Article 3: Bullying and Autoethnography: A Personal Narrative of Harassment in Higher Education

## Reflection

The thesis now turns to the findings chapters, which present the data gathered and analyze the issue of bullying in Pakistan's higher education sector. Building on the methodology chapter just completed, these chapters focus on the personal, private, and individual experiences of bullying. The qualitative approaches outlined in Chapter 4 serve as the foundation for each findings chapter. The aim of uncovering hidden and submerged stories is part of a broader strategy to highlight the reality and negative impact of bullying in higher education.

The conceptualisation of the article that constitutes the main body of the present Chapter 5 is an autoethnographic exploration of my own experience of being the target of adverse behaviour as a tertiary level teacher. Mills (2023) asserted that any social study which neglects to reassess the challenges arising from biography, history, and their intersections within a society is inherently incomplete in its intellectual inquiry. To achieve this intellectual objective, I embarked upon an exploration of the issue of workplace bullying, prompted by my personal experience of encountering negative conduct within academia. This experience served as the impetus for initiating the present research project.

This Chapter 5 introductory reflection is prepared for the purpose of positioning the manuscript in this chapter within the overall arc of the thesis argument. Perhaps oddly, it is a further reflection

on the autoethnographic reflection that forms the substantive contribution of the article in this chapter on my experience to advancing the thesis exploration of the topic of bullying. Here, I step back from the intellectual and emotional effort involved in reading, writing and honing the manuscript to tell something of my story along with implications that spring from it about the wider social issue of bullying, organisational life and higher education culture.

This chapter's manuscript and self-reflection on my experiences proved beneficial to me as a researcher. While chronicling my bullying experiences, I underwent a transformative journey that led to significant personal growth in my relationship with the academic environment. This development involved a heightened awareness of the dynamics at play in my surroundings, as well as a clearer understanding of how my personal experiences intersected with the broader context in which they occurred. Norman Denzin (1997) notably emphasized the power of self-narratives as vehicles for fostering empathy towards others' struggles (p. 201), advocating for the recognition of emotions and emotionality to humanize ethnographic disciplines (p. 215).

I was able to gain vital insights from this introspective inquiry, which not only increased my self-awareness but has also expanded my capacity to navigate and engage with the world around me in a more informed and powerful manner. I felt an increased sense of empowerment, strength, and heightened awareness of my surroundings. This experience, along with numerous others that I encountered empowered me to be more resilient and to speak up during my research as I later found versions of similar experiences reflected in the experiences of my participants.

Secondly, this self-reflection and self-analysis of my own experience helped me better understand my positionality and assumptions, beliefs and biases taken into my research topic. Preparing the autoethnography manuscript has pushed my learning about how this experience shapes my perceptions for myself and for approaching the research topic. It puts a brake on over-asserting

how the experiences are felt by other participants and making assumptions about others beyond the scope of my experience or of this thesis study. By increasing my understanding of the levels of variation and nuance in different peoples' experiences, this assist building a grounded analysis for exploring the complexities of the widespread-but-private experience of bullying (Ahmad, 2021).

The underlying objective of aggregating, narrating, and reflecting upon difficult experiences lies in the shared aspects, or at least the shared predicament of being the target of unfavourable behaviours from colleagues. The efficiency and extensive reach of surveys, yielding statistical averages and thematic patterns, confer distinct advantages to such research endeavours. However, from the literature review chapters, additional approaches are needed to overcome the sense of simplification that has yet to move the needle in broadening attitudes and changed actions. What this qualitative thesis aims to do is to let the particularity of individual experiences of the common threat of being bullied shine through. Exploring my experiences through autoethnography provided a holistic understanding of the topic, sensitizing and preparing me to empathize with and better understand other participants as we explored the issue together. Expanding my understanding has been a significant gain in advancing the purpose of this form of narrative study (Mhaka-Mutepfa & Rampa, 2021).

The process of writing an autoethnography helped me challenge dominant narratives that only focuses on the adverse effects of bullying conduct. It forced me to reflect on my own entanglement with those dominant discourse in society—the potential for personal inner conflict between good mother, good professional, primary roles prescribed culturally for husbands and wives, teamwork roles in academic departments within a hierarchical organisational structure. Reflecting on my narrative, I was able to see the flip side of this conduct which later in the narratives of my

participants I was able to explore more fully from their respective points of view. Denzin (2000) describes in *Qualitative Research*, the value of identifying a counter-narrative to dominant perspectives that challenges existing stereotypes and assumptions, leading to more critical, reflexive, and balanced approach to the research.

Preparing this article on autoethnography enhanced my learning by offering exploration of the personal experience of bullying within a HEIs about which I had a great deal of insider knowledge! The use of an autoethnographic approach utilised a firsthand account, revealing fine-grained elements of how academics can be targeted by senior figures and, at times, complicit colleagues. Even so, I expect I will continue to reflect and see new insights in future years, connecting with other people and their experiences, leading me to adjust, further resolve, and extend my own current understanding.

The most beneficial aspect of writing an autoethnography is the fact that it liberated me as a researcher to dig into feelings and beliefs in personal parts of the narrative without the constraints of formal inspection or surveillance from institutions and authorities that a taboo culture engenders. This fostered in me a more authentic and unfiltered exploration of my lived experiences, a common value in autoethnographic research. I did not have to mask my reactions to my own reflections because some official inference might be drawn about me or what I thought. But it was emotionally and cognitively hard work and continues to shape my understanding as I re-read the academic literature.

Sometimes in my literature reading and analysis I noticed things that had not been apparent to me before in reflecting on my own experience. At other times the literature gave me words for what I had noticed about the experience but had not until then been able to easily express. The very social power of taboo, in effect, exercises a constraint beyond speaking about bullying in public.

Internalised as a value and cultural practice, the bullying taboo against speaking also acts as an impediment internally too, even to one's own thinking and feelings about what happened, a kind of locked gate. This freedom allowed for a deeper and more introspective examination, also empowering me to navigate the complexities of others' narratives with honesty and emotional depth, greater personal insight ultimately contributing to a richer understanding of the thesis subject matter.

In this narrative, the chronological organisation of the retrieval of career-threatening events that unfolded over an extended period sheds light not only on the specific incidents but also captures the cumulative impact on individual and professional life, including personal and family stress, mental and physical health issues, the breakdown of relationships, and self-isolation. This compartmentalising of my own experience helped me when it came to thesis writing to organise the narratives of my participants broadly according to the order of events occurring, from subtle to serious.

Although in one sense an autoethnography is a very individual, one-participant, form of data gathering and presentation, it acts as a case-study with many personal and situational variables at play that can be turned over and inspected. Writing the present Chapter 5 also make even with many instances in the existing body of research from different studies on this issue. This highlights challenges faced by individuals reporting bullying incidents, describing incidents, even thinking about incidents of adverse behaviour from colleagues' bullying and harassing actions. Even now, as I write this reflection piece for the start of this chapter, I emphasize the common suppression of such accounts due to cultural and organizational protocols. Framing bullying in this way is something I continue to develop in my understanding and capacity to discuss professionally and objectively, moving beyond the need to defend or justify myself regarding the details of what

occurred. Addressing the suppression often associated with the taboo surrounding bullying also enables a more comprehensive discussion of broader issues, such as the harm, damage, and loss of staff welfare, productivity, and goodwill. The narrative suggests that institutional hesitance to acknowledge and confront bullying hinders meaningful action against its corrosive effects on academics.

The inclusion of references to international literature contextualises the experience within a broader framework of similar incidents worldwide, emphasising the universality of the issue. By encouraging readers to consider the broader implications and social justice aspects, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the need for institutional reform and proactive measures to counteract the negative impact of bullying in academic community.

## Bullying and Autoethnography: A Personal Narrative of Harassment in Higher Education

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### Abstract

This article explores the first-hand experience of one academic being bullied in a higher education institution. By using an autoethnographic approach the narrative discloses features of how academics can be adversely targeted by their seniors and often complicitly by colleagues. A broad chronological method is used to retrieve and organise, and then recount, career-threatening events over a period of many months of being harassed and bullied by the faculty manager. Personal and family stress, mental and physical ill-health, loss of relationships and self-isolation created a vicious downward spiral from the abuser's misuse of university institutional position. Commonly, cultural and organisational protocols suppress such accounts of bullying and harassment as taboo or implode blame onto a person reporting having been bullied. This means that insights about the hurt, damage, and loss of staff welfare, productivity and goodwill, are all too rare. This militates against institutional action and willingness to curtail the corrosive effects of bullying against academics. The events described here and reflections on this experience that transpired in Pakistan are referenced against international literature of similar experiences. When read together they convey a sense of the much wider practical and social justice issue that needs to be addressed.

*Keywords:* bullying and harassment; higher education; autoethnography, taboo, workplace bullying

## Bullying And Autoethnography: A Personal Narrative of Harassment in Higher Education

This article explores the personal and emotional experiences of one individual's experience of being bullied in higher education. The presentation of this corrosive experience considers the mechanisms through which bullying and mobbing are perpetrated and perpetuated. It is important to acknowledge at the outset that distressing life events like workplace bullying and mobbing profoundly affect the core of individuals targeted and often prompts in them questions about the "meaning of life" (Henshaw, 2017), while also impacting their overall health, well-being, and career.

Academic institutions are places of learning, intellectuals coming together for common aims such as teaching and knowledge acquisition (Panton, 2013). Reality, however, can deviate from these beliefs. In pursuing academic success, scholars and senior staff may sometimes form factions and advocate incivility toward colleagues whom they perceive as possible threats to their status (Mhaka-Mutepfa & Rampa, 2021). Academic institutions worldwide, regardless of their cultural or geographical context, face accusations of fostering harassment, bullying, and mobbing within their campuses (Keashly, 2021).

Bullying in academic settings worldwide continues despite institutional efforts to implement policies to curb it (Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Misawa, 2010, 2015). Factors that create an environment conducive to workplace bullying could include competitive processes of tenure and promotion (Sanberg et al., 2014). Some research findings hold management accountable for perpetuating bullying in higher educational settings (Aranda, 2018). Others have identified the bureaucratic nature of institutions, insecure positions, financial repercussions, fear of job loss or victimisation, and concerns about future job recommendations, as major causes of the lack of attention to this

issue, in addition to the underreporting of cases (Keashly & Neuman, 2013; Blackburn, 2017; Moss, 2018).

Workplace bullying can be defined as repeated mistreatment or abusive behaviour that is threatening, intimidating, or humiliating, whether verbal or physical (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2021). It is an area of interest to researchers in developed countries as it has long-lasting effects on both those who experience it and those who witness it (Misawa, 2010, 2015).

Harassment, bullying, and mobbing are detrimental societal issues that require active involvement from all parties to mitigate their adverse impacts on organisations and their employees. Unfortunately, addressing these problems can be challenging as management may be responsible for perpetrating such acts, causing hesitation and uncertainty in reporting such behaviours (Aranda, 2018; Keashly, 2021). Keashly further asserts that the broader social, political, and economic contexts play a pivotal role in influencing the occurrence, workplace environment, underlying subtleties, and consequences of bullying, mobbing, and harassment within academic settings. However, the limited reportage of bullying within the academic sphere may be attributed to underreporting, as observed by Moss in 2018. She outlined various reasons why individuals often refrain from reporting instances of bullying. These include the bureaucratic nature of academic institutions, which can pose challenges in reporting incidents, uncertainties regarding the security of the victim's position, financial repercussions, the fear of termination, concerns about potential victimisation, and anxieties related to future job recommendations. According to Moss, bullying and mobbing within academia have recently gained increased attention from various stakeholders, and social media, and as a result, larger institutions are now implementing stringent measures to address and reduce their occurrence.

However, the situation in institutions in low to middle-income countries, such as Pakistan is not as promising. For example, there is a lack of established reporting guidelines for addressing bullying issues, and documented interventions are still absent (Naveed et al., 2020; Kamran et al., 2023). Moreover, there is a significant lack of research and limited evidence regarding the prevalence of bullying, especially in the context of Pakistan and other Asian countries. Previous studies have predominantly focused on Anglo-Saxon countries, with limited literature available from Asia countries about the influence of different cultures and taboo attached to the issue.

Likewise, there is a need to establish psychologically safe environments, as psychologically unsafe settings often result from workplace bullying and mobbing. Unfortunately, the creation of such safe environments is not a prioritised agenda, particularly in economically challenged countries, where more immediate issues like poverty, labour strikes, pandemics, and unemployment demand attention (Mubarak et al., 2019). The absence of intervention in cases of harassment serves as a form of positive reinforcement, enabling bullies to pursue their undisclosed agendas and perpetuate bullying and mobbing behaviours within academic settings.

The aim of this article is twofold: conducting an autoethnographic examination of the experience of incivil behaviour by self-examination, reflection, and evaluation of lived experiences and making meaning of this experience as suggested by Ellis and colleagues (2011). The research questions to structure this inquiry are as follows:

RQ1. What transpired to categorise certain behaviours as workplace bullying and mobbing?

RQ2. How do I interpret, comprehend, or derive meaning from the events that transpired within my workplace?

## A Cluster of Concepts

Harassment entails actions that belittle or cause mental distress to an individual. Repeated instances of such behaviour are commonly referred to as bullying. Kakumba et al. (2014) conducted a study on bullying within the academic context in Uganda and established a model categorising bullying into three primary domains: inactions (e.g., delaying critical actions), subtle actions (e.g., interrupting during meetings), and actions (e.g., unfounded criticism, sabotage, and efforts to undermine credibility) (Cassell, 2011). This type of behaviour has been succinctly termed “incivility in higher education” by previous authors (Aranda, 2018; King & Piotrowski, 2015).

Workplace bullying represents a form of pervasive psychological harassment that has detrimental effects on organisations. It contributes to issues such as increased absenteeism, high turnover rates, and impact on the physical and mental well-being of those targeted (Caza & Cortina, 2007). Although bullying and mobbing are defined differently, the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) use the term interchangeably because both result in “health-harming and career-ending misery” (WBI, 2012, p. 1). The consequences are similar, including diminished self-confidence and morale, compromised sense of integrity and productivity, heightened stress, and deteriorating health (Bonell et al., 2018).

Mobbing can be defined as a collective effort by a group of individuals who may feel indirectly pressured or fear social exclusion to engage in what is termed “reluctant complicit mobbing” (Henshaw, 2017; Keashly & Wajngurt, 2016). In this process, they participate in persistent acts of humiliation, exclusion, unjustified criticisms, and emotional abuse, often driven by malicious and vindictive motives to force the target out of their workplace (Pheko, 2018; Westhues, 2006). This group of “reluctant complicit bullies” may receive rewards for supporting the main perpetrator,

while those who refuse to support, may face potential exclusion for not aligning with the bully boss.

The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) has proposed that all mobbing typically originates with the bully boss, and any bullying behaviour quickly escalates into mobbing. It's important to recognise the significance organisational culture of to understand how these cultures influence the enactment, experience, and responses to bullying and mobbing.

### [Academic Culture and Bureaucratic Structures Contribute to Bullying](#)

The principles of academic freedom, shared governance, and tenure adhere to a standardised global framework, as expounded by Keashly and Wajngurt in 2016. Similarly, the institutional framework promoting elements of envy and competition, whether covert or overt, is common, as demonstrated by Aranda in 2018, Wanasika et al. in 2011, and Westhues in 2006. It is worth noting that Pakistan is not exempt from these global trends. Previous research indicates that faculty members tend to be more susceptible to bullying from their peers, while other staff members are more vulnerable to mistreatment from their direct supervisors (Minibas-Poussard et al., 2018). Nevertheless, once bullying commences and is allowed to persist, it tends to involve other colleagues, regardless of their preferences, evolving into a form of mobbing.

Within the academic environment, bully bosses often receive acknowledgment and respect without needing to actively seek attention, particularly when their bullying behaviour is coupled with workplace mobbing. This combination can foster a heightened sense of camaraderie among the perpetrators. In situations where targets of bullying attempt to seek intervention, especially in settings lacking well-defined administrative procedures for addressing bullying, management

often tends to support the bully bosses. This can be covered by the assertion that the bully bosses are merely performing their job duties of keeping a professional environment.

Moreover, individuals who are targeted may be perceived by their co-workers as troublemakers because they are under criticism from authority figures. These co-workers might inadvertently or deliberately provide personal information that substantiates damaging rumours, as noted by Henshaw (2017) and Pheko (2018). Consequently, co-workers, whether intentionally or unintentionally (as reluctant complicit bullies), may socially ostracise the victims because they wish to avoid being associated with individuals who stir up problems, as discussed by Thornberg and Wanstrom (2018). Additionally, managers may perceive the targets as overly suspicious, leading them to interpret these actions as personal conflicts and, consequently, fail to offer protection to the targets, a viewpoint described in the work of Henshaw (2017) and Westhues (2006). These situations tend to become cyclical, leaving the targets in a state of uncertainty.

In institutions characterised by highly structured systems such as universities, a lack of open-door policies, limited communication channels, inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms, the absence of established policies, ineffective leadership, a lack of teamwork, and a failure to address workplace bullying can be observed (Bonell et al., 2018). This situation implies that the indifference displayed by leaders towards bullying serves to perpetuate the behaviour, a viewpoint supported by Hollis (2019) and King and Piotrowski (2015). Consequently, like operant conditioning where behaviours are influenced by experiences of reinforcement and punishment, bullying and mobbing may evolve as methods for managing junior staff members and communicating with and overseeing colleagues.

However, establishing bullying and mobbing in workplaces is a challenging endeavour. In the United States, 32% of respondents reported instances of bullying, and 41% witnessed bullying

within the preceding 12 months (Keashly & Neuman, 2013). The prevalence in Pakistan might potentially be higher, given the cultural emphasis on respecting authority figures. Nearly 60% of university teachers in Pakistan reported experiencing bullying at the hands of their colleagues and superiors (Khan and Ahmed, 2020). In another study, by Farooq and colleagues (2020) 52% of participants reported verbal abuse, threats, and humiliating behaviour in their university environment.

In many Asian countries, leadership often assumes a paternalistic nature, where leaders are granted authority, power, respect, and wisdom based on their positions (Beugre & Offodile, 2001; Wanasika et al., 2011). Additionally, Pakistani culture places a significant value on relationships (Samnani, 2021). This inherent reverence for leaders is deeply rooted in the respect for elders, a fundamental value across most Asian cultures. Alongside this respect for authority comes a tendency to defer to authority, where the leader's voice is regarded as paramount (Beugre & Offodile, 2001). Some leaders exploit this by creating an environment characterised by "obedience or deference" (Wanasika et al., 2011, p. 235), where individuals have little choice but to defer to the leader's authority due to deeply ingrained cultural norms. The system of cronyism contributes to the persistence of mobbing behaviours within departments while dissuading victims from reporting due to the fear of potential reprisals.

Awareness of the harmful consequences of bullying can lead employers to show empathy toward victims and take steps to address workplace bullying and mobbing. While research on workplace bullying in academia remains limited, Pheko's (2018) writing stands as an exception. In her work, she candidly shared her experiences with bullying and mobbing, employing a coherent and credible autoethnographic approach to analyse workplace bullying characterised by rumours and gossip that was often instigated by management (Pheko, 2018). This subject aligns with the focus

of this article. Her research, combined with existing literature, has shed light on the impact of these behaviours on workers.

When targets of bullying seek intervention in environments where administrative procedures for dealing with such concerns are missing victims' complaints may be viewed negatively by their coworkers, who may regard them as troublemakers because management supports the incivil act. Coworkers may unknowingly or unwillingly engage in bullying by socially isolating victims to avoid association with perceived troublemakers (Thornberg & Wänström, 2018). Managers may also view victims as paranoid, mistaking activities for personal conflicts and failing to protect the target as a result (Westhues, 2006).

Researchers in Pakistan have only recently undertaken empirical studies on workplace bullying against faculty members. Though limited in number, the available research has examined the issue from various perspectives, encompassing numerous global paradigms and contributing nuanced insights to this concern. One study found that bullying is prevalent among academics with up to half of faculty regularly exposed to practices in the form of excessive work monitoring, undermining of professional competence, lack of recognition of work contributions, and obstruction of important work-related matters (Ahmad, 2021). An additional scholarly investigation has established a significant correlation between adverse conduct and heightened levels of psychological strain, with gender, age, and occupational status serving as influential factors in the manifestation of such behaviour (Anjum et al., 2019). Hameed et al. (2023) identified emotional exhaustion and psychological distress as elements in the experience of being bullied.

Holmes and Rahe (1967) suggest that adverse changes in an individual's way of life can result in a cumulative level of stress. For example, issues such as conflicts with a supervisor, alterations in work hours or conditions, disruptions in sleep patterns, allegations of legal violations, changes in

the frequency of disputes, termination of employment, modifications in recreational activities, and various other factors can take a toll on individuals. When these changes occur, the connection between life events and health issues becomes evident, subsequently impacting overall well-being. The stress score, as measured by the Rahe and Holmes Scale, can reach significant levels, sometimes exceeding 300, and may lead to weight loss, further affecting a person's health. However, the prospect of abrupt life changes can be challenging to address, particularly due to the influence of cultural values, such as respect for chiefs and leaders, which emphasise the importance of upholding these values (Kakumba et al., 2014; Pheko, 2018).

Members of the academia and teaching faculty have either been targets of workplace bullying or have witnessed the detrimental effects it has on individuals, departments, and universities. The culture within academia, and within specific organisational units, significantly shapes how bullying is enacted, experienced by recipients, and responded to. The personal account presented here follows the protocols of autoethnographic method in connecting the individual and personal with the contextual and situational. This helps make better sense of one person's experience and how the cultural and organisational framing subjugates and make invisible this significant social injustice in higher education that needs to be aired and changed.

### [The Personal as Method](#)

Autoethnography served as the method through which I examined physical, psychological, and emotional aspects of my experience of adverse behaviour in my workplace. This investigative journey applies the viewpoint of an individual participant to gain insider hard-to-elicited knowledge insights (Creswell, 2009). Ellis's perspective cited in Creswell 2009 affirms this research and writing approach in elucidating personal experiences with the broader aim of comprehending the

cultural context they inhabit. The major gain in this methodology is direct access to private experiences, yielding a wealth of otherwise inaccessible and valuable data (de Wet & Jacobs, 2014). In creating value for others, the insider description of bullying identifies the unfairness of bullying conduct, and the possibility of change in higher education. Beyond merely self-interest of the narrator, an autoethnographic account actively works between the individual experiences and the environment and culture within which the events occur, and which sustain them (Ellis et al., 2011).

Adopting this approach naturally invites uncertainty, the presentation of subjective perceptions, and the utilisation of personal knowledge. This multifaceted exploration is a qualitative methodology like the perspective articulated by Clandini and Connelly (2000) that emphasises the importance of “writing of the heart.” In this article, I have adopted the assertion that engaging in autoethnography entails a continuous interplay between immersing oneself in the circumstances and scrutinising a vulnerable self, while simultaneously observing and elucidating the broader context of that experience, echoing the words of Ellis (2007, p. 24). Exploring life experiences can assist individuals in understanding themselves and discovering ways to apply the knowledge and lessons learned to other aspects of life and society (Ellis et al., 2011, Bochner, 2002; Crepeau, 2007; Denzin, 2006).

The use of narrative writing builds recognition through allowing reflection and analysis of personal experiences, as described by Clandinin and Connelly in their premise of “diving into an experience” (2000, p. 50). Using their perspective, narrative writing allowed me to examine my feelings and emotions, look at external influences such as the toxic work environment, and the impermanence of past, present, and future events. Sharing my own story has allowed me to reflect on my unpleasant experiences while also eliciting empathy from those who could connect to my

emotional journey. As Mendez (2013, p. 282) noted, through reading a cultural or social account of an experience, people gain awareness of realities they may not have previously considered, making autoethnography a valuable form of inquiry. Self-report narratives thus have emancipatory potential to educate and inform others about these experiences.

The potential persuasive capacity in the offer of insights to private experiences has a different contribution to make than quantitative research. Humans generally, and policymakers particularly, comprehend concepts and phenomena through storytelling. Personal accounts and narratives have significance within social science research because they help to make sense of the chaotic and confused world around us (Gilbert, 2002). Incorporating elements of experience, thinking, and emotion into one page or text can aid researchers in locating a central theme or themes that can clarify what was previously ambiguous, which is advantageous for readers of such works (Metta, 2016). Presenting research in an autobiographical narrative not only enables authentic lived experiences to be conveyed, but also provides them with a valuable tool for addressing moral and legal dilemmas. This approach can help mitigate feelings of vulnerability and exposure, particularly in already distressing circumstances (Moriarty & Parks, 2022).

For an autoethnography, the aim of sharing experiences in writing is not just fanciful stories written to for the entertainment of readers. It has a deeper implication on the lives of the writer as well as on the reader. It can be therapeutic in some cases as it tends to explore the complex nature of sharing personal stories (Helps, 2018). Personal stories have the power to shed light on circumstances that many people may not have personally experienced. Research examining human stories is frequently seen as the ‘flip side’ of established academic debate as it can contradict dominant societal narratives, by “carry[ing] rhetorical weight” (Garro & Mattingly, 2000, p. 5). It is highly appropriate for feminist qualitative research seeking to confront patriarchal and

misogynistic discourse (Jane, 2017). Methodologically, however, autoethnographies run the risk of being stuck in stories that, once published, may have negative rather than beneficial legal and ethical repercussions for both them and others (Moriarty, 2020).

The ethical concerns related to discussing other people's experiences and feelings in the article have been addressed. Anonymity is maintained by not mentioning names, and selectively omitting other details to prevent individual identification. The moral philosophy of right and wrong is reconciled by recognising that publishing the account serves the greater good, as it enables people to identify and address bullying and mobbing early on. In the creation of this autoethnographic account, Ellis and colleagues' (2011) processes have been followed. These encompassed exploring lived experiences and self-reflection, data collection and validation, drawing comparisons between personal experiences and those of others, looking at mechanisms of deriving meaning, re-examining and reflecting on data to elucidate personal interpretations of adverse events, behaviours, and thought processes.

### [Being Bullied, An Autoethnographic Story](#)

The inner workings of problematic situations that autoethnography can reveal also face the dilemma of verification against external opinions and dominant views. The elements of my experience of being bullied in an academic environment portray an invidious abuse of positional power. However, it is obvious that the perpetrator, or even previously silent colleagues, or academics without knowledge of the events, would offer different interpretations. One of the autoethnographic strategies to corroborate an individual story like mine is borrowed from lawyers preparing affidavits with their clients: what happened and when? In doing so, it is at first difficult, even painful, to recall events, feelings, and decisions, but gradually the story comes out. That is, by starting at the beginning, and using dates where possible, but with care for privacy, what events

or interactions took place? What feelings were associated with these events? What reactions can be recalled in responses to these moments? What did the other person do, when; and what did they say? Why do you think they acted like this? How did your own understanding change over time?

Cumulatively, the story begins to come together as it is retrieved, the chronological order giving consistency and detail that testifies to the accuracy of the narrative. The account is not a reified story but has particulars that the judge in the courtroom, or the reader of an autoethnography can follow of actual events. This moves the bullying experience from inside the victimised person's head, to external times, places, interactions, and sometimes written documents. Second, this shows coherence to the outside listener or reader. It allows them to feel the story; it narrates the experience for them, making it easier to understand and feel the internal truth of it (Ricoeur, 1991). Third, it shows an overall factual pattern pre-empting dismissive or negative viewpoints, such interpretations now having to speak to the factual chronology outlined.

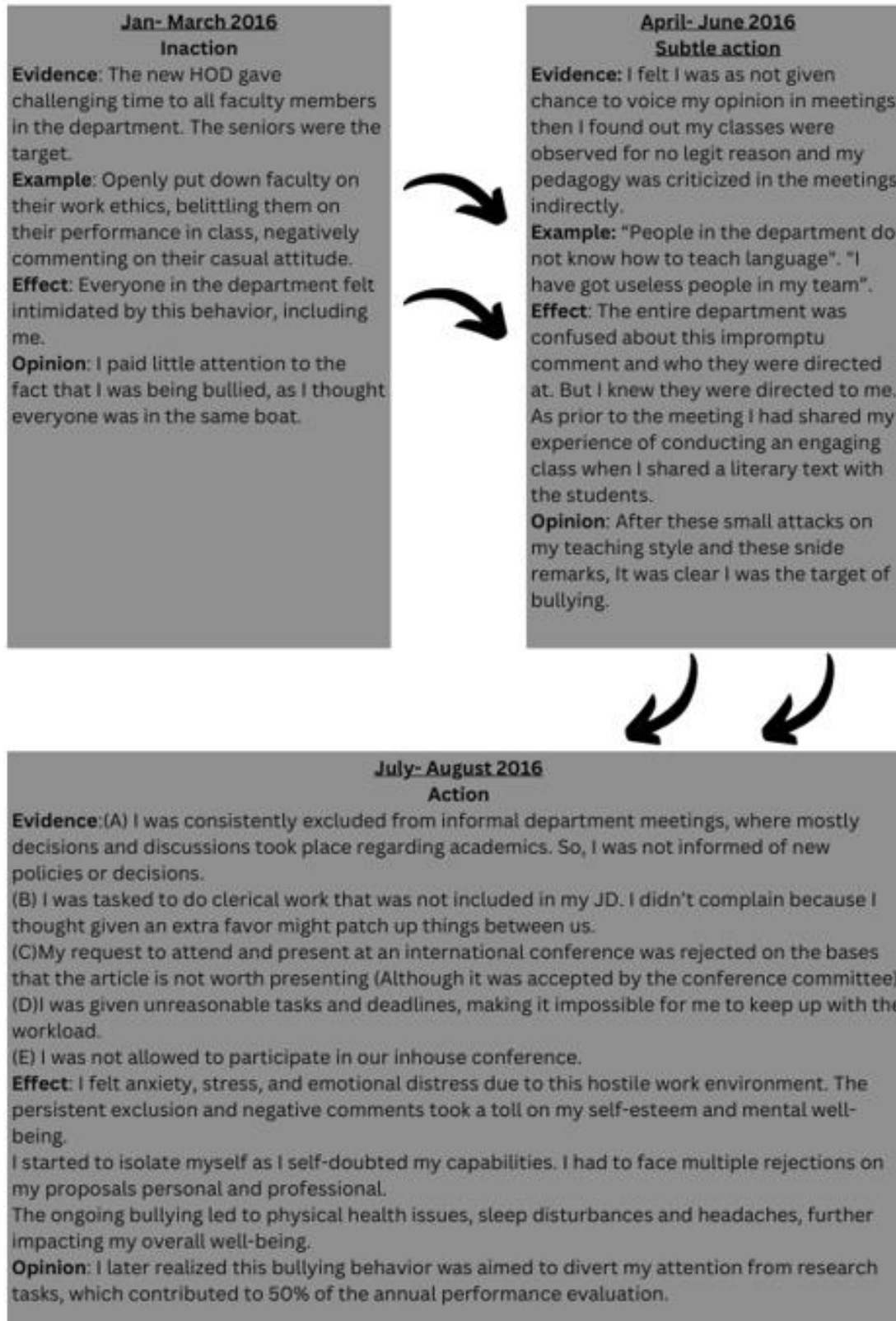


Figure 1. Chronological timeline of key events, feelings and interactions of the twelve-month period in which I was bullied by my new university Head of Department.

## The Beginning of The End

For a period exceeding six months, I endured protracted episodes of covert and overt workplace bullying against me, manifested through verbal and social intimidation, along with deliberate acts aimed at undermining my professional standing. The summary of what transpired from the beginning of 2016 is shared in Figure 1. The ill-treatment that was initiated in discreet gestures that soon became explicit behaviours during various formal and informal meetings. This section specifically focuses on the episode that narrates the end of my tenure at this renown university, the third panel in Figure 1. With many covert and overt episodes, the new HoD showed some personal grudge against me.

I was under constant criticism; my lessons were micromanaged and the HoD made unannounced checks of my classroom while I was busy teaching. This behaviour was repeated on many occasions, leaving little doubt about her hostility towards me. Her criticism of my teaching style and methodology was not constructive but rather seemed to be aimed at breaking my confidence and causing me to doubt my abilities. I tried to ignore the HoD's behaviour at first, thinking that it was just her management style. However, this behaviour became more severe over time. I recollect being tasked with the responsibility of drafting faculty meeting minutes, but these were repeatedly returned for revision before the subsequent meeting, creatin a considerable clerical burden and a feeling of mental distress. The approval of one document would immediately lead to being required to compose another set of meeting minutes, and the unending cycle of document revisions continued.

The intention to end my tenure at the university began to form when I was nominated as an acting head of the department (despite all my flaws and faults) in the HoD's absence as she was away on

a week-long leave. The entire department was relaxed in the HoD's absence and enjoyed their work under my supervision as I never bothered anyone with undue tasks or work pressure. When she resumed her office, her incivility was beyond my capacity to tolerate. She levelled hurtful allegations against me for inefficiency during her absence, insisting on a written justification for permitting a faculty member to take a half-day leave due to illness and another who cancelled their class. This experience left me with a sense of being undervalued and lacking motivation.

Despite showing respect, working hard, and submitting to her wishes, her antagonistic feelings towards me did not let up. No matter what I did I failed to wipe that sign of disapproval from her attitude. This situation took a toll on my mental health, and I resorted to isolating myself from others, spending most of my office hours locked in my room. Due to constant mental strain, I had to take some counselling sessions, and my doctor advised me to keep my fatigue level low. A concern that I shared with my HoD as the semester was coming to an end and planning for the new semester was going on. In July 2016, I went to my HoD to talk about my deteriorating health and a request to lessen my workload of extra courses and other clerical work. The HoD was in a bad mood and this request did not sit well with her. She started shouting at me saying all sorts of rubbish things about me and then blatantly asked me to quit my job if I could not take the work pressure. I got up and left her office in tears. I knew the answer to my request. I knew she would not facilitate me.

End of the Journey: I remember September 15, 2016, a day before the commencement of the Fall 2016 semester. Part of the bullying game was that I was given no clue until the afternoon what my semester schedule would be or the courses that I had to teach that semester. I was given my timetable at the end of that business day, to overcome any sort of negotiations regarding the time or the course. Upon receiving my schedule for the semester, I was baffled and disappointed.

Despite my request to keep my stress level low, I was assigned four different courses to teach, with no consideration given to the fact that I would have to prepare for four different subjects simultaneously. Secondly, the classes were scheduled back-to-back, with six consecutive hours of teaching and only a fifteen-minute break between each class.

To make matters worse, the classes were in different buildings, each a fifteen-minute walk away. This meant that I had to use my precious fifteen-minute break between classes just to get to the next venue on time. On top of this already overwhelming workload, I was also asked to attend weekly departmental meetings every Wednesday afternoon and was given the task of drafting the minutes for that fateful semester—the very same semester in which I had requested to keep my stress level low. The sheer magnitude of these pressures left me feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. Despite my efforts to manage my stress levels and workload, I was given an unmanageable and unreasonable amount of work, leading to immense stress and exhaustion.

In that first week of the Fall semester, I looked forward to one thing: “weekends,” “holidays,” and “non-teaching days.” I was a completely confused person with low morale and low self-confidence. I started hating going to work. That impacted my teaching practices. I can recall countless such acts that went before this major incident and countless others that followed my request. But I lay stress on this incident because this resulted in the climax of my journey at this university. Six weeks into the semester I had a severe breakdown and had to take off for a week in the middle of the semester; later it converted into a semester break as I was advised by my doctor to an elective surgery.

During my break, I reflected on my situation and opted for resignation from my work. My journey in a toxic organisational culture ended with much heartbreak and the loss of wonderful students and colleagues from other departments. The lack of support from my Head of Department

combined with the negative attitude of colleagues from my department, impacted my mental and physical health. At this juncture, I had reached a point of sheer exhaustion as I continually found myself compelled to defend myself as being professionally worthy of my position. I teetered on the brink of surrendering. It was at this moment that I decided to release the burden and let go. Other members of the university community encouraged me to stand up and revealed that the person responsible had similarly targeted and dismissed nine faculty who resigned shortly after me.

The events transpiring from January to August 2016 had a profound impact on my physical and emotional health. I began to grapple with severe anxiety, heart palpitations, and recurring panic attacks. These symptoms also impacted my concentration and sleep, and they persist to this day. For instance, during a management meeting where the bully boss attempted to rationalise her actions, asserting that she was merely fulfilling her duties, my anger was so intense that it triggered a panic attack. This conduct exacerbated the situation as I had hoped she would recognise the harm she had inflicted and acknowledge her unjust tactics. I had anticipated an apology, but instead, she continued to defend her actions. In the ongoing process of seeking meaning in these experiences, I still struggle to comprehend why I was singled out, particularly given my responsiveness as I was made in charge of the department in the HoD's absence, and she nominated me.

The cumulative effects of these kinds of supervision exchange created an ultra-sensitivity to the already escalating deteriorate situation. These negative interactions and experiences took a toll on my emotional competencies, particularly affecting me in terms of my self-confidence and emotional self-regulation. As an illustration, I refrained from actively participating in departmental planning and became increasingly defensive when confronted with differing perspectives. I harboured the belief that others would now perceive me differently, possibly even as an imposter.

The need to address and rebuild my emotional competencies remains a crucial step in my journey towards personal growth and moving forward.

### Reflections And Implications

This autoethnographic narrative has opened an individual experience extending over many months that included physical, psychological, and emotional aspects that are largely invisible from the outside. These reveal, power dynamics within academia, as well as the “reluctant complicit mobbing” of colleagues, which had a substantial influence on incidents of bullying and harassment by the HoD. Just as in my experience, other employees experience harassment in silence, negatively impacting their performance, productivity, and overall well-being. The effect of university hierarchical culture dictating one-way respect for persons in authority can be understood to create space for bullying and mobbing of individuals, with little recourse against negative leadership or management conduct (Wanasika, 2011).

My autoethnographic study connects to prior research that highlights bullies’ techniques for persecuting and harassing their victims. Making false accusations of errors that were not committed, dismissing the target’s contributions and worth, creating arbitrary rules that they themselves do not follow, discrediting high-quality work despite the evidence, subjecting the victim to punitive and persistent disparagement while holding them to a different standard, spreading derogatory rumours or gossip, and inciting others to turn against them, are all examples of these tactics. Furthermore, “reluctant complicit mobbing” entails influencing people to support fraudulent claims.

Duffy and colleagues’ (2012), work on rumours and gossip I found were strategically utilised against me for various purposes such as asserting social dominance, undermining others as well,

perpetuating the sense of oppression, humiliating academic and non-academic employees, in effect a psychological tactic to either widen the power gap. Individuals were coerced into endorsing false rumours after being manipulated, with those who aligned themselves with the bullying supervisor were rewarded with reduced teaching workloads. They were also granted influence in departmental decision-making and enjoyed other privileges.

In contrast, members of the department who refrained from involvement found themselves in turn motivated by the fear of becoming targets. This group of staff members was, nevertheless, frequently intimidated by the bullying supervisor, resulting in a reluctance to come to work. Our local departmental environment mirrored the paternalistic leadership prevalent in academia in Pakistan, where favours were exchanged in return for obedience and support (Beugre & Offodile, 2001; Wanasika et al., 2011). There was a prevailing deference to the authority of the bullying supervisor, coupled with a reluctance to voice dissent due to the apprehension of facing repercussions.

Equally, individuals who chose not to align with the bullying supervisor found themselves subjected to a range of adverse actions. They were socially excluded from most meetings, were burdened with a heavier teaching load, and often discovered important decisions, requiring collective input from the board, being disseminated without prior notice. These instances served as tangible evidence of the detrimental impact of bullying and mobbing on workplace productivity and overall departmental development, as it affected all members of the department.

Like other autoethnographic narratives on a similar issue, I found myself subjected to instances of bullying and mobbing by the bully boss and her allies (Pheko, 2018; Mhaka-Mutepfa, 2021; Kamran et al., 2023). This included the manipulation of meeting minutes, humiliation, fabrication of facts, unwarranted interpretations, and a deliberate attempt to tarnish my professional reputation

and career. My personal experiences allowed me to empathise with Mhaka-Mutepfa's ordeal and the experiences of other targets of workplace bullying. My experience resonated when listening to the three academics who had shared their experience with me of adverse behaviour in higher education in their collaborative autoethnography (Kamran et al., 2023).

Although I had not previously read articles on bullying, I sought them out after enduring similar mistreatment. These not only reassured me that I was not alone, but also prompted me to commence writing as catharsis, clarifying what happened and why, and thinking through what how my present understanding of the events and myself has merged over time (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). If I had been acquainted with this earlier research, it might have better equipped me to handle the actions of the bully boss. Pheko's (2018) research indicated that when targets of bullying seek assistance from higher authorities, management often sides with the bully bosses, Human Resources typically supporting management. However, this was not the case in my situation, as not all managers sided with my HOD; the management knew my reputation with the students but failed to support me.

Likewise, approximately half of the staff knew me but failed to support me for fear of repercussions. This, too, is in line with the existing literature, which frequently highlights the isolating nature of workplace bullying. I encountered a pronounced sense of isolation when I realised that I lacked the support of colleagues and specific managers. Nonetheless, those who supported the boss regarded my concerns as paranoia, aligning with the findings of Henshaw (2017) and Westhues (2008). They may have supported her due to her perceived indispensability to the position. Despite the evident shortcomings in her management style, the HoD retained her role for an extended period of 16 months, even as other staff members submitted petitions for her

removal. This validates the point that bullies often consider themselves irreplaceable in their given position, leading them to exploit the power of their role.

Unlike research such as Lowe (2010) the negative experiences I endured did not have a detrimental impact on my work performance, although I found the situation exasperating and awful. Rather than causing me to disengage from my work, these negative experiences served as a motivator, compelling me to work even harder. This underscores the variability in how individuals respond when dealing with anxiety or other psychological challenges. Existing literature and research consistently highlight disengagement as a common response among bullying victims (Caza & Cortina, 2007; Lowe, 2010). This suggests that the absence of disengagement does not necessarily indicate the absence of negative effects resulting from bullying. In my case, it is possible that some individuals might not have taken the issue seriously because my response appeared normal. During that year, I published more research papers than in previous years, despite having a heavier teaching workload. Immersing myself in my work served as a coping mechanism to manage the emotional turmoil. I was also determined to leave no room for the bully boss to assert that my work was not up to standard.

Consistent with Kakumba et al.'s (2014) findings, both senior and junior staff members in this educational organisation contributed to mobbing—the extension of bullying and harassment. They were driven by the fear of becoming victims themselves if they did not go along with the actions of the bullying supervisor. For example, co-workers were asked to provide information to substantiate damaging rumours propagated by the bully boss, a pattern consistent with the findings of Pheko (2018). Interestingly, a substantial number of department members refrained from attending work to avoid being embroiled in the distressing situation, underscoring the fact that the consequences of bullying extend not only to its direct targets but also to bystanders.

An additional insight gleaned from this autoethnography is the concept of bystanders disengaging due to witnessing bullying. Those who observe bullying and mobbing may also experience demoralisation, reduced work engagement, job dissatisfaction, emotional distress, and diminished performance, much like the victims themselves. Colleagues reported dissatisfaction and a decrease in enthusiasm for their jobs, with some contemplating resignation. Those who were involved in the mobbing displayed similar negative effects. Although literature often addresses mobbing, there is a limited discussion about “reluctant complicit mobbing.” In contexts of a paternalistic leadership style, regardless of gender of the leader, where refusal to comply with authority may be construed as a violation of cultural values, this sort of mobbing is likely to occur (Mhaka-Mutepfa, 2021).

The present account highlights how the psychological impact of workplace bullying extends beyond the bully and the direct victim, affecting the broader workforce, even if they can be said to have been complicit in the bullying. Consequently, we should not always associate trauma solely with disengagement. Future research should also examine the impact of mobbing on colleagues who are not directly involved in the bullying.

Research shows that bullying may occur when young and inexperienced bosses bully their senior colleagues, as they may feel that the senior colleagues are at an advantage due to their greater knowledge of the organisation (Hauge et al., 2011; Nielsen, 2013; O’Moore & Lynch, 2007). Alternatively, new bosses may target experienced employees to bring in their team and eliminate individuals whom they perceive as difficult to manage. Such behaviour is indicative of a boss’s desire to strengthen their position at the expense of others. This behaviour is often a result of a boss’s lack of necessary skills and poor management style and can be directed towards individuals who have a professional competence and independence of their own. Such behaviour can create a

toxic work environment that not only affects the senior staff but also impacts the overall performance of the organisation (Anitha & Begum, 2017). It is essential to recognise and address such behaviours to prevent the perpetuation of negative cultures in the workplace.

## Conclusion

I find myself in agreement with Ngujiri et al.'s (2010) assertion that individuals who are targets of bullying and mobbing often express their suffering through writing. The present findings regarding bullying and mobbing emphasise their detrimental effects on both individuals and organisations. To reduce this scourge in higher education managers must adopt strategies aimed at eradicating these issues. In my situation, there were no consequences for this behaviour that had started before I arrived at that institution. Perpetrators persist in their vindictive and malicious actions because authorities do not address incidents of bullying and mobbing. Inadvertently, this perpetuates these problems through psychological processes such as reinforcement and validation.

Henshaw (2017) recommends leaving an organisation if the bully is supported by management. In my situation, it was a stroke of luck that the individuals responsible for workplace bullying and mobbing eventually resigned, much to the relief of faculty members, but not before nine other members had resigned along with me. I am unsure whether higher authorities played a role that led to their resignations. It is possible that they felt embarrassed and believed their integrity was compromised, or that they might be the next victim. University managements should acknowledge their moral and ethical responsibility to shield employees from toxic and hostile work environments. Holding perpetrators accountable is the best form of justice for victims of workplace bullying.

Addressing harassment, bullying, and mobbing is a critical societal concern in which all parties involved must take the lead in limiting their negative impacts on both organisations and employees. This is complicated because some stakeholders may be culpable for such practices, causing hesitation. Bullying and harassment are substantial workplace stresses (Aranda, 2018). The occurrence, environment, driving forces, and impact of these challenges within the academic setting are influenced by broader social, political, and economic circumstances (Keashly, 2021).

Autoethnography has empowered me to analyse my experience and provided me with the opportunity to establish both the scope and constraints of my narrative. This allows me to place a stronger emphasis on the long-term benefits of this account for my audience. The primary objective was to offer insight through the authenticity of lived experience, employing such narratives to destigmatise discussions surrounding the taboo subject of bullying, to better prepare individuals to handle such behaviours. The research on bullying and mobbing underscores the significant negative effects that such behaviours can have on individuals and organisations. Managers, too, need to devise strategies dedicated to eliminating these harmful practices.

In my specific case there were no consequences, even for recurring instances of similar behaviour that impacted others. Perpetrators may be enabled to persist in their malicious actions because the authorities fail to act against such conduct. In my case, I was fortunate that I had no financial constraints to stop me from taking action to safeguard my mental health and well-being. To comprehensively address the issue within the workplace, writing personal narratives open discussion, thereby facilitating the development of concrete measures. This helps in establishing a secure environment where authors, professors, and students are prepared to take risks and switch between the personal and the political, the biographical and the historical, in line with autoethnography's objective to be inclusive, supportive, and democratic (Denzin, 2006). The

existing body of research on bullying in Pakistani universities underscores the pressing need for additional investigation and action into the issue of bullying and harassment in higher education.

Insufficient research on bullying in Pakistani universities currently hinders the formulation of policies and interventions aimed at curbing this deleterious behaviour. Only with further research will wider public, administrative and policy audiences grasp the character and magnitude of bullying behaviour in Pakistani universities. Only then will effective prevention and intervention mechanisms be established. Though underreported, bullying is a widespread in Pakistani universities that significantly undermines faculty academic performance and mental well-being. Although the current research provides some insight into the nature and prevalence of bullying, further investigations are necessary to devise evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies. It is therefore of utmost importance that researchers delve deeper into this matter to fully comprehend the scale of the issue and develop solutions grounded in sound empirical evidence.

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# Chapter

# 6

# Article 4: Collaborative Autoethnography

## Reflection

In alignment with the autoethnographic methodology explicated in Chapter 5, the present Chapter 6 reaffirms the importance of detailed exploration of bullying experiences among women academics. This chapter adopts a collaborative autoethnographic approach, offering new nuances in utilising an autoethnographic perspective, but this time doing so through shared narratives and reflections. The insights gained further disclose how workplace bullying within academic settings operate.

This introductory reflection on the description and analysis presented in this Chapter 6 manuscript looks back on this part of the thesis research in having successfully published it as a refereed article. The confirmation of external reviewers inspecting and commenting on the chapter has assisted further work revising and improving other parts of the thesis. Having to respond to the reviewers' scrutiny through the peer review process, and critical evaluation by the editors, usefully led me to revise the manuscript in accordance with their constructive feedback. Successfully navigating the journal standards meant moving up a gradient of understanding and learning to express qualitative research in an academic way that readers adhering to qualitative research standards and varying methodological perspectives can make sense of. In addition, a positive reflection on the thesis content generally is that this publication now adds to the academic discourse on workplace

bullying, providing further insights into collaborative autoethnographic methodology and contributing to the scholarly repository of qualitative studies.

Composing this article further strengthened my views on the issue of bullying, offering a new perspective that later compelled me to revisit my research questions. It expanded the analyses from my research inquiry through a related yet distinct methodological lens—a common practice in sociology. In many academic fields, particularly in social sciences, effective work often consists of a compilation of various studies rather than relying on a single one, whether empirical or otherwise. The depth of experience in detailed accounts of being the target of bullying illuminates the tension between self-blame and self-doubt on the one hand, while also revealing the structuring effects of departments, leadership, colleagues, and policies, which extend beyond the individual's personality or personal traits. Instead, this thesis project reflects a general social science approach by using multiple studies and methods as anchor points for overarching questions about bullying in higher education. It explores trends in research and the potential for socio-cultural, organizational, and political change. Therefore, refining and developing these anchor points has involved revisiting the ideas in the existing literature and developing further understanding based on the accumulated knowledge that Mills (1916–1962) calls the “sociological imagination.” The idea of “taboo” is an example of a concept capturing the tension between knowledge and ignorance of bullying, and the invisibility yet obviousness of practices that maintain those cultural behaviours both organisationally and discursively.

Although this process of research was iterative, as I gathered data and analysed the results, I discovered new insights and perspectives that prompted me to refine or adjust the previously developed research questions. This adaptability is considered a strength in sociological research as it allows researchers to respond to the dynamic and evolving nature of social phenomena as the

research progresses. It ensures that the research remains relevant and focused on addressing key aspects of the sociological issues under investigation (Mills, 2023).

Initially, this article was framed from the perspective of tracing the glimpses of existing literature discussed in Chapter 3, which focused on identifying antecedents to workplace bullying in academia, drawing from the narratives of bullying survivors, as presented in the autoethnographic format of Chapter 5. However, this article differs from autoethnography in many ways. First, CAE brought a new stance to my thesis research. While maintaining the emphasis on narrating the uncivil behaviours encountered by academics in their professional lives within academia, the expanded focus also brought into clearer view the perpetrators of such adverse conduct, revealing common/overlapping characteristics in the instigators themselves, rather than too-singular focus on the recipients of bullying. This added depth to the thesis's exploration of the interactions and underlying influences contributing to uncivil conduct. This increased understanding provides a platform for extending insights within this thesis, and beyond, into other contexts where and how bullying behaviours manifest and could be further explored.

Secondly, a background observation about the CAE part of the thesis research is the fact that bullying created disruption in these academic' workplaces and caused many stressful moments. At the same time, however, this adverse experience did not derail them from their profession of teaching, and they have continued in their careers. This does not tell us about that part of the cohort of people bullied for whom the career location was too intense, and who left the institution or their chosen career. The participants in this research found that the supportive group process in the collaborative autoethnography increased their confidence to retell their experiences, acknowledging that many others may have faced similar hurtful instances in their careers but were unable to overcome the damaging effects. As the thesis writer preparing this manuscript, this

experience underscored for me how beliefs in resilience, the conviction that positive meaning can be derived from adversity, the significance of self-development, and the capacity to withstand setbacks and emerge stronger, reflect a transformative process beyond mere survival (Dyer et al., 1996).

Collaborative autoethnographic accounts enhances reflexivity in qualitative research, as emphasised by Humphrey (2005).

[CAE] serves as a mechanism through which researchers can overtly interrogate and emphasise relevant thoughts and emotional encounters. They facilitate a stream of consciousness..., thereby enhancing the narrative with a depth unattainable through a conventional third-person perspective. Additionally, they offer a more fluid, descriptive, and insightful approach to writing, often rendering the text more engaging than traditional prose. (p. 853)

This method proved particularly useful in interpreting both proximal and institutional causes, shedding light on experiences that initially seemed intensely personal and ad hominem. The CAE study was organised into three main sections. Firstly, it examined the background literature on workplace bullying, exploring the gendered nature of such behaviours. Secondly, it outlined the autobiographical genre of writing and research, following the insights of Ellis and Bochner (2000). Finally, the article integrated personal accounts shared by three women university teachers who experienced bullying. This integration of methodology and content yielded firsthand insights into the dynamics of workplace bullying within the academic realm.

The academic collaborators acknowledged the difficulty of composing this piece, which involved revisiting the distressing experiences of being bullied. Despite the challenges faced, the overall

positive impact of sharing the narrative for a broader audience, including those who may be less experienced with such issues, outweighed the authors' initial difficulties. This process also served as valuable preparation for potential challenges in the third phase of data collection, which involved exploratory interviews with participants sharing their experiences.

In both this method and the first method the challenge of appropriate adapting to the feelings and decisions of participants and possible participants was a significant juncture in the research process after all the planning. Much thought beforehand had been given, partly from my own similar experiences, how to overcome the perfectly reasonable uncertainty and reticence that might be felt in considering participation. Authors in this study were given the option to withdraw themselves from the study, take time in deciding, to ask further questions if they were not initially comfortable in sharing their experience. This attention was repeated even when the authors were working back-and-forth in the collaborative autoethnographic process, and again later in the interviews, so they were not interrupted or uncomfortable when they changed topics in their narration.

Although the article added to my understanding of the topic it also re-established the repercussions of workplace bullying, found in the extant literature—things such as stress, depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances, significantly affecting the victim in the absence of limited availability of coping mechanisms. Dealing with the experience of such conduct compels the target of bullying to address bullying through a combination of problem-oriented or active strategies (including seeking assistance from others) and emotion-oriented or passive strategies (such as confiding in spouses, friends, or colleagues and considering leaving the organisation) that these academic women did.

In summary, Chapters 5 and 6 contributed crucial insights and patterns contributing to the thesis exploration of workplace bullying. Chapter 5 utilised an autoethnographic methodology for a

deeply personal examination of the issue, offering a firsthand perspective on these experiences. The narratives shared in Chapter 6 have contributed to a contextual understanding, illuminating the subjective realities of those affected. Building upon the Chapter 5 groundwork Chapter 6 employed a collaborative autoethnographic approach to further enrich the exploration. This collaborative effort not only broadened my perspective but also deepened my understanding of the complexities inherent in workplace bullying.

Together, these chapters provided more than just a glimpse into the intricacies of the issue; they also established a structured framework and empirical foundation for qualitatively exploring bullying in higher education. This framework is further elaborated in the subsequent interview phase of the thesis, extending the informed exploration of workplace bullying in Chapter 7. The insights derived from Chapters 5 and 6 have successively contributed to building a robust foundation for my greater understanding as both a researcher and practitioner, enabling me to navigate the multifaceted landscape of workplace bullying in academia.

## Breaking the Silence: Three Pakistani Women Academics' Accounts of Being Bullied

### Abstract

Women in Pakistan higher education face barriers that silence their voices from reporting experiences of being bullied by colleagues and superiors. This situation contradicts universities' role as houses of learning and agents of progressively improving culture and society. This group-autoethnography presents three accounts by women academics challenging this taboo against speaking out. Without the silence being repeatedly broken, this toxic social issue continues. Studies of women's personal stories of being ostracised and bullied complement the emerging quantitative literature about bullying against women academics in higher education institutions. The present narratives about being the targets of bullying individuals are framed within national and international literatures. Chronicling such bullying episodes increases recognition of personal, family and career trauma for women academics. More qualitative accounts will further document conduct by which women are ostracised, disrespected, and burdened with unfair extra work. Naming such behaviours overcomes the current silence which leaves this conduct unacknowledged.

**Keywords:** academic women, harassment, higher education, ostracism, teacher targeted bullying

### Introduction

Recounting personal stories of women academics who have experienced episodes of being bullied helps break the continuing silence around this unpleasant, unacceptable, but nevertheless widespread practice. Statistical enumeration of bullying conduct will not alone break the cultural scourge that allows such behaviour to damage lives and undermine organisational performance. Bullying against teachers in higher education is a serious problem that negatively impacts faculty and the reputations of these elite institutions (Taylor, 2012). Here, bullying and mobbing are

focused on acts of antagonism committed by one employee toward another (Twale, 2017).

Bullying and mobbing in the workplace include several potential elements: information control/manipulation, emotional abuse, unfair working conditions, unjustified professional discrediting and denigration, and even the devaluation of one's professional role—all or any one of which effect an employee's well-being (Escartín et al., 2011). The term bullying also encompasses a variety of offensive behaviours, including “harassment,” “offending behaviours,” “social exclusion,” and “negative criticism” (D’Cruz & Rayner, 2012; Samnani & Singh, 2012). Bullying or mobbing behaviours can either be of a personal nature, such as name-calling, teasing, and insulting, or organisational, such as increased workload, arbitrary removal of work or addition of tasks, and excessive surveillance of a targeted person's actions (Lewis & Orford, 2005). It includes any inappropriate and abrasive behaviours in the workplace that are frequent, persistent, and tending to worsen with time. Finally, there is a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target/s of the conduct. The targeted individual or group feels unable to protect themselves, believing they have less power (not necessarily hierarchical) than the attacker/s (Einarsen et al., 2011).

Bullying among adults in work environments came under wide discussion and investigation by scholars in the 1980s and 1990s (Leymann, 1990). A growing number of academics have been studying these and similar phenomena for the last two decades (e.g., workplace aggression and violence, mobbing, emotional abuse, etc.). A contrasting but related research genre has developed around teacher well-being (Akram, 2019; McCallum & Price, 2016). Despite research on workplace violence, academics have paid little attention to bullying in their own institutions, even though the evidence is accumulating that higher education institutions are no exception to the discourse maintaining this silence (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Most studies about bullying in

higher education focus on hostile, humiliating behaviours from students and professors in lectures (Braxton & Bayer, 1994). Yet there is a wealth of work on staff conflict and misconduct in higher education (Cameron et al., 2005; Euben & Lee, 2006; Holton, 1996) that emphasises structural and interpersonal chances for disagreement and possible hostile behaviour in these environments.

This article highlights personal experiences of bullying that women academics were recipients of in their teaching roles. To illuminate the experience of being bullied, and better explain how those events impacted their professional lives, the collaborating authors prepared and shared accounts of their individual experiences. Providing autoethnographic accounts is a research approach used to enhance reflexivity in qualitative research (Humphreys, 2005), in interpreting proximal and institutional causes of what can seem overwhelmingly personal and *ad hominem*. Three sections make up the present article. First, the background literature on workplace bullying, includes information on how bullying is gendered. Second, an outline of the “autobiographical genre of writing and research” is provided (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Third, the article brings together personal accounts of being bullied by three women university teachers. Integrating these co-authors’ narratives contribute first-hand insights into workplace bullying in academia.

## Contextualising Individual Stories of Being Bullied

### Bullying In Academia

Research indicates that workplace bullying in educational institutions is an insufficiently unexplored though hardly new (Ahmad et al., 2017). Bullying behaviour comprises multifaceted acts, not necessarily involving sexual harassment, but which do not get publicly discussed because bullying is considered a taboo subject (Razzaghian & Ghani, 2014). Educational institutions, according to Hubert and Veldhoven (2001), are collectively one of the sectors prone to undesired

behaviours on a regular basis. Typical behaviours used by bullies in educational institutions show a gradual progression over time (Krishna & Soumyaja, 2023).

First, in an identification phase the bully targets an individual and overloads the victim with a workload making the victim appear incompetent and less capable. The bully then enlists supporters to file multiple formal complaints. Finally, they intimidate the targeted person into silence by threatening them if they speak up about bullying (Hollis, 2019). Studies done so far report biases against people based on their ethnicity, age, or gender, can sometimes be the root of workplace bullying. However, statistics also show that teenage girls and staff members who are popular in the workplace are also likely to suffer bullying behaviour (Fox & Stallworth, 2009). Three types of bullying in adult and higher education are theorised by Misawa (2015): first, positional bullying; second, counter-positional bullying; and third, inadvertent conspiratorial positional bullying. Workplace bullying is a prevailing issue in both developed and developing countries. A comparative study conducted by Malik and Björkqvist (2019) investigated the impact of workplace bullying on occupational stress, including stress related to job responsibilities, personal challenges, and corporate culture, in Pakistan and Finland. The study analysed the effects of workplace bullying in the context of co-workers and/or family ties and found that gender (men vs. women respondents) and country of origin (Pakistan vs. Finland) were mitigating factors. Malik's research revealed that gender inequality remains a significant issue in Pakistan. Despite the considerable amount of research on workplace bullying in various settings, little is known about how people interpret certain experiences as bullying and how gender and other variables influence their decision-making in bullying situations (Escartín et al., 2011; Salin, 2011).

Numerous studies on gender issues have shown that women employees are more likely to experience workplace bullying than men (Anjum & Muazzam, 2018; Anwar et al., 2011; Avais,

Wassan & Shah, 2014; Simpson & Cohen, 2004; Stankovic et al., 2022). Understanding gender roles is critical to gaining insight into workplace bullying, particularly in Asian contexts where gender plays a crucial role in shaping workplace dynamics. It is not possible to separate bullying from gender, and it needs to be studied within its gendered context to gain a better understanding (Begum, Munir & Baig, 2019; Kanwal & Jami, 2019; Maran et al., 2019). Gender can significantly impact how a targeted individual responds to bullying, and it is important to consider this while investigating bullying.

Research has consistently shown that workplace bullying affects women more than men, with women also more likely to bully other women than men (Anjum & Muazzam, 2018). This may be since both women and men internalise gendered normative standards that favour men in academic institutions, making it difficult for women to establish their professional reputations. To overcome this, women may adopt traditional masculine behaviours, such as aggression, to assert themselves and gain parity with men colleagues (Twale, 2017). This can lead to bullying behaviour as a means of exerting influence over colleagues in their department or obtaining recognition and rewards that are otherwise dominated by men. Recognising the influence of cultural and gender norms in shaping workplace dynamics helps understand how these factors contribute to the prevalence of workplace bullying among women.

### Gendered Nature of Bullying

While most of the research on workplace bullying has focused on the frequency and types of bullying behaviours, some studies have shown significant differences in how targets perceive and respond to such behaviours. For instance, Salin (2003), and Jóhannsdóttir and Ólafsson (2004) found that women were more likely than men to categorise their unpleasant experiences as bullying. Similarly, Escartín et al. (2011) discovered that women tended to judge negative

behaviours as being more severe than men did, particularly in situations that involved emotional abuse, social isolation, and professional discrediting. Considering gender positionality in understanding these discrepant ways of categorising bullying, rather than assuming one-size-fits-all enables a more balanced and transparent analysis of the issue to combat workplace bullying.

Bullying frequently has a gendered subtext. Even though it is still usual for men to bully women at work, research done in 2018 by the Workplace Bullying Institute revealed that women bullies target other women 80% of the time. In a cross-sectional study, Anjum and Muazzam (2018) investigated the topic of gender-based bullying. Their purposive sample of 400 people (200 men and 200 women) from Pakistan's higher educational institutions identified gender roles to be at the forefront of this topic. The findings suggested that to understand bullying behaviours, researchers must apply a gender perspective. Anjum and Muazzam's findings support those of Tonini et al. (2011) who found significant gender disparities in employment experience.

A principal theme within this disparity is unfavourable stereotypes that present women as the 'weaker' sex and an easy target to violence and victimisation (Leo et al., 2014). In some cases, men might be the perpetrators of bullying, but the victims were mostly women (Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Bullying, according to these authors, should be investigated about gender and power rather than from the standpoint of the corporate culture. Anjum and Muazzam (2018) state from their Pakistan research that 60% of faculty in an educational institution are faced with bullying (35% women and 25% men). Men, however, tend not ask for assistance, whereas women generally seek out more social support and score higher on coping measures in reaction to workplace bullying. This suggests a mix of women being more adversely affected by bullying behaviours but also developing strategies to cope (Cortina et al., 2002). Further, women often use avoidance tactics, such as taking sick leave, asking for a transfer, or quitting.

Examining bullying in the context of patriarchal societies such as Pakistan shows that gendered positioning creates vulnerability for workplace bullying. For instance, the historical and cultural formation of Pakistani society shows gender biases exist throughout Pakistani society and its organisations, academia being no exception. Despite Pakistan's independence for more than seven decades, the situation of women has changed little (Zhang, 2000). The relationship between colonization, independence, and patriarchy in Pakistan plays a crucial role in understanding the current gender dynamics, particularly in the context of workplace bullying in academia. The colonial period in South Asia introduced and reinforced specific gender roles that aligned with the British administration's goals of maintaining control and order. By collaborating with conservative local leaders, the colonial authorities bolstered patriarchal structures that saw women as secondary to men, primarily responsible for domestic roles and excluded from public life. This alignment not only entrenched existing patriarchal norms but also introduced new forms of gendered power dynamics that have had long-lasting effects.

Upon gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan faced the enormous task of nation-building and defining its national identity. However, the continuity of patriarchal norms persisted, as the state, focusing on political stability and economic development, often sidelined issues of gender equality. The social reforms that could have dismantled the patriarchal structures established during the colonial era were not prioritized, allowing these norms to become even more deeply ingrained in Pakistani society.

This historical continuity has had implications for women in modern Pakistan, particularly within academia. Despite the country's progress in various sectors, the patriarchal legacy continues to manifest in the form of gender-based discrimination and workplace bullying. Women in academia, a field traditionally dominated by men, are especially vulnerable to such behaviours.

By understanding the historical context of colonization and its impact on gender roles, we can better comprehend the systemic nature of the issues women face today. The connection between Pakistan's colonial past, its post-independence struggles, and the persistence of patriarchal norms provides a critical backdrop for analyzing the experiences of women in academia. This approach not only situates the findings of this research within a broader socio-historical framework but also highlights the importance of addressing these deep-rooted issues to foster a more equitable and inclusive academic environment.

The United Nations Human Development Index places Pakistan 154th out of 159 nations; (Iqbal, 2021). Anjum and Muazzam's (2018) study in the Pakistani context found women experienced workplace bullying more than men. This supported Simpson and Cohen's (2004) assertion that women in higher education are more likely to be victims of bullying behaviour than men, aligning the Pakistan study with international studies on the gendered nature of workplace bullying.

Another exploratory study on the issues that working women encounter, 150 female professionals in Sukkar, a remote city in Pakistan, were interviewed, with results showing that working women faced harassment in one form if not in another. The research findings suggest that sexual harassment is a common occurrence among women working in underdeveloped regions, along with other underlying issues that add to the problems of women working in remote areas. The common view on curbing the issue for working women was government monitoring and implementation of legislation like the "Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010" (Avais, Wassan & Shah, 2014). In Pakistani institutions, particularly higher education, lack of adequate enforcement allows bullying to continue.

### Lacking Appropriate Power Equilibria

Power disparity is a key element for actions to be considered bullying (Nelson et al., 2019). This is why power plays a crucial role in the definition of workplace bullying (Patterson et al., 2018). Bullying is deliberate, goal-oriented, hostile behaviour of varying kinds in which the perpetrator takes advantage of a power differential to continually dominate the victim (Nelson et al., 2019). Workplace bullying research commonly problematises top-down exercise of power (Zapf et al., 2020), assuming that bullying is channelled downward in accordance with formal hierarchical power expectations (Einarsen et al., 2011).

Anjum et al.'s (2019) study conducted at a university in Pakistan suggests the absence of power equilibrium is the main factor fostering workplace bullying. Another factor in bullying against tertiary teachers is the trickle-down effect of bullying which corresponds with the hierarchical structure of Pakistani society. Forms of bullying experienced by Pakistani academics include, “work-related contributions ignored, unnecessary work monitoring, delaying action on important matters, and being subjected to negative behaviour” (Anjum & Muazzam, 2018, p. 493). Bullying relies heavily on the inappropriate exercise of power and control. The target's condition relates to a perceived power deficiency vis-à-vis the perpetrator, and power is understood in relative terms as an imbalance of power between the parties (Einarsen et al., 1994). Managers are often identified as the relevant prime actors in workplace bullying and harassment (e.g. Keashly et al., 2010). Other studies, however, report co-workers are the most common source of hostile workplace behaviour (Keashly & Rogers, 2010; Neuman & Baron, 1997). In a study of co-worker victimisation, Aquino (2000) found that higher-status employees were just as likely as lower-status employees to be victimised by their co-workers.

## Method

Group-autoethnography builds and shares information from a particular context or set of experiences. As academic colleagues, we came together to talk about our experiences of bullying, a topic of significance in each of our lives. Our primary concern was to support each other retelling experiences of being bullied in our professional lives. Drawing on the literature described above has helped us articulate what was silenced even within ourselves: what *could* be said, *should* be said, or how we felt as individuals *better explained* our journeys of being bullied. Writing this article has not been without anxiety. We all have scars from our experiences, and even today feel a shadow about getting punished. As insiders to being bullied, by naming and sharing our experiences in a safe environment, we seek to bring the mutual support we have received from one another to others going through such circumstances. By classifying certain actions as bullying, and discussing steps we used extricating ourselves from situations, we hope these can be recognised, handled, and bullying potentially reduced.

This article followed the conventions of group-autoethnography described in Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2010) and Vickers (2007) that have relevance for professional reflection and insight into things hidden from casual assessment. Non-parametric sampling by snowball contacts, in this case academic women colleagues, aimed to generate themes about bullying causes and effects not statistical generalisability about bullying. Given the general inaccessibility of learning about adverse impacts of bullying experiences on educators' lives and careers, and the taboo nature of publicly discussing it, this study's purpose was to highlight this dark corner of university teachers' lives. The lack of public discourse about the problem of bullying has both equity and affective dimensions. The advantages and limitations of this kind of research are acknowledged in making the multiple dimensions and negative impacts of the cultural problem of bullying clearer and better

recognised. Autoethnography uses a spectrum of personal reflection on experiences and input from collaborators to draw out this information (Burns et al., 2020).

Autoethnographic and group-autoethnographic analysis has become an important tool in qualitative research (Jones et al., 2013), especially for topics where self-reflection, is required to have a deeper understanding of a social problem (Philaretou & Allen, 2005). It is a transformative research approach that responds to vulnerability, encourages empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, dissolves boundaries, respects subjectivity, and is therapeutic (Adams, 2011; Ahmad, 2021; Anderson, 2006; Bochner & Ellis, 2002). As a method of research, it utilises data about self or selves and context to gain an understanding of an issue's connectivity between individuals and the wider society (Ngunjiri et al., 2010) permitting researchers to apply flexible modes of inquiry from their life experiences (Belbase, Luitel & Taylor, 2008). It may require researchers to confront personal discoveries that are not flattering (Bochner & Ellis, 2002).

Using group-autoethnography as a method of safe inclusion, Phillips et al. (2022) explore the importance of recognising the interests and needs of collaborators. Not all co-authors are positioned the same in their careers or the content of stories being recounted. Adjustment to those differing advantages and disadvantages of participation is part of the ethical and methodological process in creating any collaborative study. Collaborative data sharing is both a research and personal matter: negative bullying experiences shared may create difficulties in both individual and career terms. Part of the ethics of research is the joint commitment to support potentially vulnerable people. For us, reading and discussing one another's accounts created a sense of deep sorrow and affinity. As one collaborator said, "It brings to mind how bullies use similar modus operandi such as creating doubt about work performance or creating blame and lack of self-confidence in others."

Although there were no external participants in this study outside the group of collaborating authors, we carefully worked through how to narrate the experiences to avoid jeopardising the position of any co-author in this research. As part of this ethical responsibility authors are identified by self-chosen pseudonyms. Current affiliations of authors do not represent institutions in the narratives. Each vignette was drafted, discussed, cross-examined by the other co-authors and re-drafted. Each step drew out new reflections, feelings, and insights about the unwanted bullying and harassment each had received, taking comfort in the supportive friendship reflecting on what had happened.

The group-autoethnographic method used in this study has been personally cathartic for the authors, although it has also brought up feelings of guilt and insecurity. Despite this, the authors have found value in sharing their experiences and view it as helpful, regardless of any potential public benefit that may come from telling these stories. By framing their experiences within the context of both Pakistani literature and bullying studies from around the world, the authors have contributed to filling the knowledge gap in the literature on bullying in academic settings. These experiences, presented here as brief autobiographical narratives, connect emotional memories from the bullying events and aim to challenge the silence surrounding the issue of women being bullied. The contribution of this study comes not only from focusing on the adverse experiences of individuals but also from highlighting how bullying can instil fear, degradation, coercion, and ultimately silence those who are subjected to it (Nelson & Lambert, 2001). By naming these effects, the study provides a voice to those who have experienced workplace bullying and contributes to the broader conversation addressing and preventing bullying in academic and other settings.

Name (pseudonym)	Years since events	Length of time of bullying	Source of bullying	Career stage when bullied	Target of the bully
Sheila	3	1 year	Head of Department	Mid	Me and others
Saba	4	1 month	Senior Management	Early	Only me
Samina	6	8 years	Section Head	Early	Only me

\*Head of Department

Table 2. Characteristics of bullying situations participants experienced.

Prior to working together, the informed consent of co-authors formally minimised ethical concerns. In practice, actively sharing in the research process positively enabled the ethical intention of giving participants voice in presenting, comparing, analysing, and disseminating findings. This helps ensure individual perspectives and experiences are accurately represented and respected (Sandelowski et al., 2009).

## Findings: Autoethnographic Accounts of Being the Target of Bullying Conduct

### Account 1: “People Do Not Like to Report Cases of Bullying.” Sheila

Sheila is an experienced academic and has long association with the sector. She has worked in various capacities in public schools and universities in Pakistan.

*I remember being bullied around four years back at a university where I was working. This is one of the most reputable universities in the metropolitan city of Karachi, Pakistan. My oppression included misinformation conveyed to me regarding the HR [Human Resources] Department and other departments, leading to anxiety. It also included public criticism of my work. There was also open discrimination. One example was the return of written documents with passive-*

*aggressive comments. There was a continuous repetition of such actions by my HOD [Head of Department].*

*The hurtful behaviour included misinformation conveyed to me regarding the HR Department. This caused me to believe that I was being careless about my work timing. Later, I was moved from one department to another without my consent, it caused me to end up being extremely worried and stressed as I had no clue who I was supposed to report to. I am a social person and wanted to inculcate the same habit in my students. I organised a literary event for my students and for organising the event I was also asked to publicly justify the relevance of the event with regards to the course I was teaching (which was “Literature”). This public justification demand was made in a meeting, and it was embarrassing and stressful. I was repeatedly asked to write minutes of the meetings which were then sent back with passive aggressive comments.*

*My experience was that the department itself was not a bad place; rather there was only one person in the department that exuded toxicity in the department. I can bet there was no-one else in the entire university who was of such a mind-set. Everyone in the university were work-focused and professional in their demeanour except the HOD of [department name].*

*I wasn't the only one in the department who was a victim of bullying here. There were three of us who had to bear this attitude at the hands of our HOD.*

*I think that people bully others as a response to the dissatisfaction they feel in their own life. My bully person often commented about the unfairness in maintaining high*

*standards or the unfairness of having to continuously prove themselves. Therefore, perhaps their bullying is a response.*

*It may also be because they [bullies] feel a threat to their authority by the initiatives and creativity of others. Perhaps they feel incapable of understanding that the world consists of different people, and everyone has a different set of capabilities and strengths. Perhaps, when people don't feel secure in their own strengths, they feel stressed by the strengths of their team.*

*It may also be because of lack of leadership training or experience. It is through training, reading, and experience in leadership that we learn to appreciate our team and to build on their strengths. However, a person with lack of such [strengths] could be threatened and worried.*

*As it turned out in my situation, the person ended up making a team of people who were much junior to them instead of the previous team of peers.*

*Bullying at my workplace made me stressed out and anxious. Initially, I felt completely doubtful about myself. My feelings of anxiety have continued to the present date and despite success at the workplace, the feelings of anxiety continue to hamper my sanity. The practice of bullying can have detrimental impact on the self-esteem and confidence of a person. Despite being mentally strong and confident in my abilities, I have often felt extreme confusion, anxiety, and stress due to this experience. It has also resulted in my having trust issues with people.*

*I acted with caution and ultimately left the job. This resulted in creating a further complication in my life that included adjusting to a new place, understanding the*

*new procedures, and the whole new dynamic of a new workplace. It has also brought a sharp cut in my CV which is often questioned by subsequent employers. Unfortunately, I had to avoid this question by stating that it was due to 'personal reasons.'*

*I resorted to eliminating the toxicity from my life by changing my job.*

*The bully was in a powerful position, and I realised that this bully would easily manipulate data to show that the team was lacking in performance. I was, while working with this person, asked to work on a high-profile project with a senior dignitary at the university which proved that my work was not lacking in quality.*

*My colleague was also bullied by the same person. This colleague suffered from a health condition as a result.*

*People do not like to report cases of bullying because usually the perpetrator holds a position of authority. They are usually in higher positions, and this leads to complete disregard for the victims' side of the story. Also, due to confidentiality issues, people are reluctant to report or discuss.*

*When I think back on those stressful times, I don't think I could have done anything to improve my position or made myself more unsusceptible to my situation. However, now when I recognise similar patterns of behaviour, I do not waste my time or energy in trying to adapt myself to bullying behaviour. But I am careful and try to downplay my strengths so as not to trigger the bullying tendencies of the person in authority.*

## Account 2: “People Bully the Ones Who Give Them a Chance to Bully Them.” Saba

*As someone with over 13 years of experience teaching statistics and math to students of all ages, I have a unique perspective on bullying in the workplace. One incident stands out to me as a prime example of how people bully others who give them a chance to do so.*

*The incident I am referring to took place several years ago when I had just completed my master’s degree and was starting my first job in the teaching profession. I was assigned to be the class teacher, and I was fully dedicated to my work. My hard work and responsible behaviour did not go unnoticed, and I was soon promoted to principal assistant [PA].*

*However, my reporting head was not pleased with my promotion because she wanted one of her close friends to be hired. So, she started bullying me. One day, she called me into her office where other teachers were present and claimed that the students were complaining about my accent and tone when speaking English. She even went so far as to say that there was a touch of caste language in my dialect. It was hurtful because my accent was completely normal, and she had made up the story simply because she knew I belonged to a certain caste in Pakistan. She repeated this attack on my language skills in several staff and subject meetings until I finally resigned.*

*In retrospect, I realise that although my bullying was perpetrated by one person, the other staff members did nothing to help me and thus became part of the problem. I believe that some people enjoy bullying others to alleviate their own insecurities.*

*At the time, I was a young professional in my first job and felt terrible about the whole situation. When she first targeted me, I was shocked and did not know how to*

*respond. I felt devastated and even cried in front of my mother when I got home. But over time, I realised that work politics is a real thing, and people will bully others if they are given the chance to do so.*

*Since then, I have gained experience and polished my language and teaching skills. Now, I do not give anyone the chance to bully me. That incident gave me the courage to move out of that toxic environment and seek out better opportunities.*

*I have observed bullying in other workplaces, and people are often reluctant to speak out because they do not want to be seen as troublemakers or lose their jobs. But it is important to stand up against bullying and report it to higher management or HR departments. These departments should play an active role in protecting employees from bullying by implementing policies and procedures to address such issues.*

*Overall, I have learned that bullying is not acceptable, and it can have serious consequences. No one should tolerate bullying behaviour or be afraid to speak out about it. It is time for us to work together to create a safe and respectful workplace for everyone.*

### [Account 3. "...Talk About This Taboo Rather Than Silently Getting Victimised by It." Samina](#)

Samina started her career teaching as a secondary school teacher, as is standard in Pakistan. She retells her story of being bullied in these words.

*It all happened six years ago when I started to teach at one of the leading schools in my city. It was my first job, and I was about to complete my MPhil at that time. All*

*the teachers working around me were holding either Master or basic bachelor's degrees, including the head teacher. My immediate in-charge was a middle-aged woman who had worked there for over 14 years.*

*Initially she seemed discreet and cooperative, but things were the other way around. Recruitment of a young woman under her with a higher qualification was not acceptable to her. She could not tolerate having someone more qualified than her. As a result, she always tried to overburden me with extra work, with a simple excuse claiming that work is uniformly distributed. In addition to that, she ensured that I could not avail any of my free periods – with something assigned to me as a substitute teacher. Understanding the dynamics of a new workplace was already a challenge for me; in addition to that, her oppressive attitude made these circumstances worse. Moreover, I also noticed that she was always looking for an opportunity to find and highlight my mistakes as much as she could. Criticising my work was something that grew so often that it became normal for her and eventually for me as well.*

*Finally, when she realised that I remained silent to her insulting behaviour and did not respond to it outright, she resorted to other tactics to offend me. She then started criticising me about how I talk (my accent), how I teach, and even how I dress.*

*Eventually, I decided that I could not take this disrespectful behaviour anymore, and I resigned. In my case, bullying was explicitly done by one person who was also the head of the senior section. However, I later noticed that a few other senior colleagues also often tried to exploit me. They would ask me to stay back with young students during break or off-time while we were sharing the same duties, just by giving lame excuses like they were working on some additional tasks assigned by the principal.*

*Initially, it appeared to me that I was the only teacher who was the target of such oppressive behaviour, but later I got to know that one of my co-workers, who was appointed with me, was also confronting similar mistreatment by senior staff members.*

*I believe that people who like to pick on others have several reasons for doing so. They may have job insecurity in terms of their position or power or feel uncomfortable, threatened, and distressed with others having superior capabilities. There can be more severe problem like a family issue, or personality disorder, or simply because they themselves faced similar issue at the beginning of their career. And now they want to get even on their experience.*

*In terms of workload, initially I tried to cope with the additional burden placed on me but combined with the oppressive behaviour, my motivation and the urge to assume this additional workload subsided. This entire episode soaked up my energy level, and I started to feel distressed and unmotivated all the time.*

*As a result of this bullying, I eventually had to quit my job as there was no other option for me such as changing departments or campus.*

*I was reluctant to talk about this with higher authorities because the woman who was victimising me worked there for the last 14 years and hence was firmly grounded. In the absence of any formal structure to escalate this problem, I would be likely asking for more trouble.*

*As I was new at the institution, I only had a few friends who had recently joined and who were relatively new to the system themselves. Reaching out to them offered little or no relief.*

*Yes, I have witnessed several other situations where people are bullied for their caste, colour, social class, or physical attributes. One such incident happened with my cousin, who had a stammering problem. As a result, she always ended up becoming a laughingstock in all male-dominated organisations she worked at.*

*People are reluctant to talk about being bullied because they think it will expose their weak personality in handling pressure or a stressful situation wisely. This has the effect of compromising their chances of career growth to a position requiring a strong decision-making trait.*

*As I have spent a good six years in teaching, things are different for me now. I have learned a lot from the people around me and how they managed to fight and survive in a toxic environment. If I confront a similar situation, I will tackle it more aggressively by reporting this situation to my seniors and would not hesitate to go to the highest reporting level if need be.*

*I would advise everyone to talk about this taboo rather than silently getting victimised by it. Bearing the abusive treatment will bring no good to you; in fact, it will cause devastating effects on your mental and physical well-being. Suffering in silence can shatter your confidence and self-esteem.*

*Your voicing against exploitation will not only benefit you but will also encourage others sailing in the same boat. I would recommend that all institutions, especially*

*universities, to pay attention to this with a proper reporting mechanism in the place known to both the victim and the target to be aware of the consequences.*

## Discussion And Conclusion

All authors narrating these personal accounts are employed in academic settings. There might be a temptation to assert after reading these accounts of personal experiences of being bullied to say, “The problem was not so great, these women continue in their careers.” This fails to understand the damage that bullying directed against staff can do. A more realistic view corresponding to international studies about bullying is to see these accounts providing a window into a much bigger problem. Our collaboration as authors enabled us to generate sufficient personal capital to address our experiences of having been bullied (Bourdieu, 1990). Increased confidence to tell this much of our stories has a less sanguine corollary, that many others have experienced similar hurtful treatment and not been able to overcome the damaging effects on their confidence or careers. In Mills’ (1959) terms, their “personal troubles,” while linked to the “public issues” of bullying and harassment, have not engendered the freeing effect that working together exploring these shared stories has provided.

It has been challenging to write this piece, reliving our experiences of being bullied to build awareness of this problem. Workplace bullying can take many different forms, from overt to the more covert forms (Arnetz et al., 2019; Hutchinson et al., 2010). Perhaps nothing can ensure bullying will completely stop, but at least we can name this pattern of conduct for what it is—bullying, leg-pulling, cowardly abuse of hierarchy, and intimidation (Nelson & Lambert, 2001). Experiences described here highlight some of the negative mechanisms and consequences of bullying affecting adult educators. We hope sharing our experiences will encourage more studies

that document bullying conduct, encouraging others to speak out against this all-too-common practice in academia.

Education administrators who do not appreciate that bullying affects academics across all fields hold a limited perspective of the sector. Bullying can negatively impact academic careers and well-being (Dentith et al., 2015). To maintain a healthy, productive environment in academia, junior faculty members should be encouraged to seek guidance from outside sources who are aware of academic bullying like the cases we have described here. Bullying cultures appear high up the status hierarchy and may continue all the way down. As a result of being bullied staff become unable to see any future for them in the workplace and may lose even the ability to appreciate the help of others. College and university environments are special because of high expectations, subjective evaluations, and tenure and promotion procedures. These drivers create intense pressures. This justifies ongoing critical analysis and reflection on the effects on faculty careers and academic freedom. Otherwise, the malign potential for bullying and incivil organisational cultures and subcultures may prevail.

Individuals who have been targeted usually described feeling liberated when deciding to move out of the environment where bullying was practiced. In the cases presented here, a less common articulation of ways of coping and resilience-building was expressed. As we discussed these experiences, participants vividly described their underlying rage, defeat, and hostility towards the bullying perpetrated against them, in most cases by workplace superiors. Feelings such as worthlessness, depression, and powerlessness were also part-and-parcel of these reflections.

In all cases senior colleagues, either above or below the perpetrator, sheltered the bully instead of supporting the victims (Hollis, 2019). Another important theme in the narratives requires further research: What were the factors that helped them move out of the vicious cycle in which they

found themselves situated? Finding opportunities in new universities, and notably obtaining academic tenure were seen to help in recovering from the impact of the adverse behaviour to which they previously been exposed (Minibas-Poussard et al., 2018).

Presenting these summary accounts “ask[s] readers to re-live the experience through the writer’s or performer’s eyes” (Denzin, 2000, p. 905). In the present discussion the focus has been on supporting one another to articulate experiences in each writer’s personal history of working in a bullying culture. Autobiographical events and anecdotes illustrate deep taboo norms that maintain the silence and perpetuate the failure to deal with bullying in higher education. Among ourselves the value of using autoethnography is that this method of research makes each person feel included, important and valuable, being listened to. For Vives (2011) re-living of the experiences was a form of “catharsis” for her, not simply a “mechanism of discharge,” since the analytic process itself is what “unveils” the subject.

In this article three university teachers volunteered their experiences of bullying that reveal overlapping narrative themes. Sharing and discussing these authors’ accounts has braided these stories into wider analysis and discussion about this issue (Smith, 2019; Johnson, 2020; Lee, 2021). The group-autoethnographic process involved sharing personal experiences and reflections with other group members in ways that protected privacy and potential for harm (Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2013). Sensitivity to potential power dynamics and social hierarchies helped the group create a safe space where members feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

Moving together towards the goal of sharing these experiences left the authors feel lighter and happier. The collaborative process has made it easier to overcome social and cultural inhibitions and taboos, finding voice to express being dominated by a miasma of depression and sad feelings. Autoethnographic reflection thus has the potential to contribute to others’ lives by making ‘our’

words resonate with ‘their’ thoughts and narratives, better communicating the widespread social issue of bullying these stories represent. In this way, what is personal begins to trace structural and institutional dimensions of the problem.

Autoethnography elucidates insiders’ knowledge for people ‘outside’ such experiences unaware of these significant social and cultural realities. Silenced words can indeed be spoken, overcoming taboos many societies use to cover up the consequences of bullying in higher education. Spoken words generate ideas for handling bullying when it occurs. Insights from the accounts presented here have career implications for new academics, especially those dealing with the “twin crises of representation and legitimation” (Holt, 2003, p. 17) in qualitative research with silenced, underprivileged, or disempowered groups.

This study aligns with international studies on workplace bullying that have raised concerns and studied the issue from various perspectives (Nielsen et al., 2010; Zabrodzka et al., 2011; Escartín et al., 2011; Einarsen et al., 2011). Demographic factors such as gender, age differences, and position in the organisational hierarchy are common bases for workplace bullying (Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2008; Salin, 2003; Samnani & Singh, 2012 cited in Ahmed et al. (2019). The adverse effects of workplace bullying on the well-being of employees, irrespective of organisational type, has raised concerns in many countries and specific laws have been passed to curb this issue in universities and elsewhere.

In non-western settings such as Pakistan, research into workplace bullying is in its early stages. Pakistan attitudes and practices have changed little since the country’s inception. Challenges to traditional patriarchal cultural practices, current difficult economic conditions, and widespread poverty, leave little room to focus on the issue of bullying in organisations, much less establishing a regulatory environment to stop it. Intimidation, continuous criticism, false charges, exclusion or

ostracism, public humiliation, malicious gossip, setting someone up to fail, and job overload are all examples of bullying (Rayner, 1997). The Pakistani context, however, shows similar patterns of bullying, raising many practical implications (Ahmad, Kalim & Kaleem, 2017).

The literature shows that workplace bullying exists in both Western and non-Western cultures, highlighting its global presence. The discussion here highlights adverse experiences of academic bullying in educational institutions, something difficult for researchers to access. Victims are cautious talking about their experience, knowing that being bullied is often perceived as somehow an individual's own fault. Some victims even internalise a sense of self-blaming shame. The experiences shared here show gender has a pivotal role in studying bullying, women often seen as easy targets.

The present research shows bullying can have lasting effects for interpersonal trust, losing motivation to work, quitting, sub-optimising contribution to the organisation. Bullying may be directed against junior staff new to the organisation. It may be perpetrated by individuals in authority new to their role, or uncomfortable in their position, wanting to establish control over subordinates. Bullying can occur across any organisation, the accounts presented here giving insights into higher education. University administrators cannot claim to be 'above the fray' in higher education regarding bullying. Continuing quantitative investigations explores the prevalence and demographic patterns in bullying. The strength of qualitative modes of investigating the taboo topic of bullying is enabling researchers to delve deeper into the drivers and impacts of the bullying problem, explicating aspects of career and life experience not available in conventional survey reports.

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# Chapter 7

# Interview Participants' Experience of Isolation and Ostracism

## Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the third method, continuing the exploration of personal stories of harm caused by bullying by senior academics and administrators in Pakistan's higher education institutions. Each method used to investigate bullying provides insights that contribute to a fuller understanding of the thesis argument. In Chapter 5, the autoethnographic account traced an individual story of bullying, detailing the career and personal consequences that followed. In Chapter 6, the collaborative autoethnography illustrated how the interaction between colleagues shaped their ability to speak about their adverse experiences. In the current Chapter 7, interviews offer insights from women academics about their experiences with the corrosive effects of workplace bullying in higher education. Chapters 7 and 8 work as a pair, drawing on the third method—data from exploratory semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 7 focuses on exploring the themes of isolation and ostracism, drawn from a combination of semi-structured interviews and email exchanges with educators who shared their experiences of the pervasive issue of bullying within the academic environment. As described earlier in the methodology section in Chapter 4, the cumulative data collection from online interviews and supplementary email question-and-answer sessions extends the information gathered and offers a different kind of opportunity for people to share their stories—stories that might otherwise simply fade away.

The acquisition of this data enhances the triangulation of higher education bullying by adding a qualitative perspective, examining the evidence and insights from the collected data. This sheds light on the nature of workplace bullying and its impact on academic professional life. This chapter examines the viewpoints and accounts of participants who, despite their fears, have contributed to this scholarly discourse on academic women being targets of bullying. The goal is to explore avenues for addressing and rectifying uncivil conduct within the university environment. The analysis of responses from semi-structured interviews and email interviews delves into the subjective experiences of bullying and its consequential effects on academic performance and personal well-being.

The findings from the data collected through interviews are analysed through the NAQ-R framework developed by Einarsen (2009) to investigate workplace bullying practices. Its standardised format ensures consistent reliability and validity for data collection. NAQ-R allows assessment of various negative behaviours, contributing to the understanding of workplace bullying. The framework's widespread adoption facilitates comparative analysis across studies, promoting the integration of findings for understanding of bullying (Rai & Agarwal, 2017; Smith-Han, and colleagues, 2020). This fosters research continuity and facilitates communication within the academic community. Researchers benefit from a shared language and methodology, advancing collaboration and the collective knowledge base on workplace bullying (Tambur & Vadi, 2009; Serafin, Sak-Dankosky & Czarkowska-Pączek, 2020).

The purpose here has been to better understand the contextual factors that shape bullying, and to gain insight into aspects that contribute to workplace bullying in HEIs in Pakistan. Understanding these factors can legitimate policymakers' decisions to employ measures to curb workplace bullying in academia. The layout of the chapter runs as follows: section 7.1 explores the findings

of the interviews of workplace bullying utilising the interpretative lens of the NAQ-R bullying scale (Einarsen et al., 2009). It is used to measure negative acts like bullying and other unacceptable behaviours in the workplace. Section 7.2 examines the data using agender lens. Section 7.3 deliberates on the cultural context and explores the data through the theory of social dominance, which can act as a contributing factor to workplace bullying. Section 7.4 is a discussion of the risk factors that promotes bullying in academia.

## 7.1 Workplace Bullying

To examine the results of our interviews the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) model is used; it encompasses a broad range of negative acts that occur in the workplace, such as verbal abuse, humiliation, isolation, spreading rumours, and unfair treatment. It provides a standardised framework for interpreting data on workplace bullying, allowing for consistent measurement and comparison across different organisations and studies.

Table 1 NAQ-R Scale adapted from Einarsen et al. (2009) in Work and Stress

Work-related bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone withholding information that affects your performance.</li> <li>• Being ordered to do work below your level of competence.</li> <li>• Having your opinions ignored.</li> <li>• Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines.</li> <li>• Excessive monitoring of your work.</li> <li>• Pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses).</li> <li>• Being exposed to an unmanageable workload.</li> </ul>
Person-related bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work.</li> <li>• Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks.</li> <li>• Spreading of gossip and rumours about you.</li> <li>• Being ignored or excluded.</li> <li>• Having insulted or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes, or your private life.</li> <li>• Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job.</li> <li>• Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes.</li> <li>• Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach.</li> <li>• Persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes.</li> <li>• Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get along with.</li> <li>• Having allegations made against you.</li> <li>• Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm.</li> </ul>
Physically intimidating bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger.</li> <li>• Intimidating behaviours such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse.</li> </ul>
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The interview questions were designed to gather information related to the initially proposed research questions. The analysis of the collected data is assessed using the NAQ-R model to better understand the underlying factors influencing workplace bullying within the university context and to explore potential distinctions in bullying behaviours compared to those in the Western world. The goal remains to provide a holistic view of this issue in order to develop effective measures to prevent workplace bullying, particularly in academia. Based on the NAQ-R framework, workplace bullying can be divided into three categories: job-related bullying, personal bullying, and physical intimidation. The following discussion uses this structure to organise the experiences shared by the participants into these three categories.

### 7.1.1 Job-Related Bullying

Workplace bullying refers to adverse treatment aimed at undermining an individual's performance and responsibilities within a professional context. It can also involve harassment through the assignment of work that is either too much, too long, too easy, uninteresting, or by deliberately withholding necessary training. In the present study, it was found that out of the 7 listed items, 6 were experienced by the participants.

Table 8.2. Job- related Bullying (NAQ-R model)

	<b>Job related work-related bullying (NAQ-R)</b>	<b>Interview Results</b>
1	Someone withholding information that affects your performance.	✓
2	Being ordered to do work below your level of competence.	✓
3	Having your opinions ignored.	✓
4	Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines.	✓
5	Excessive monitoring of your work.	✓

6	Pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses).	✗
7	Being exposed to an unmanageable workload.	✓

The case of Participant# 02, and# 03 a senior faculty member with teaching experience of 6 and 8 years, provides evidence to this point.

**Participant# 02:** In meetings, she [bully boss] would either negate everything I used to say or shun me whenever I tried to take part in the talk.

**Participant# 03:** The committee started bombarding me with all sorts of questions beginning from my experience as a teacher to the way I was invigilating. I blushed at their acquisitions. I was speechless the way they were treating me as an incompetent teacher.

Another example can be seen in the case of Participant #05, an early-career lecturer, who described her experience with job-related bullying. She explained that her reporting head assigned her tasks beyond her level of experience and then targeted her when she voiced concerns about it to the authorities. She shared her experience in the following way.

**Participant# 05:** She could not tolerate having someone more qualified than her; therefore, she always tried to overburden me with extra workload - with a simple excuse that work is uniformly distributed.

As delineated in the NAQ-R framework, the manifestation of bullying experiences that was shared by the participants are like the ones recognised in Western studies. It is worth noting that while the participants in the present study did not explicitly articulate instances of bullying related to entitlements, as enumerated in the model, such a modus operandi frequently characterises the tactics employed by perpetrators of bullying. Conversely, beyond the defined components of the NAQ-R framework, this research brings to light two additional instances of job-related bullying encountered by the participants. These instances included bullying based on accent/dialect and

colleagues deliberately opting against cooperation. These forms of job-related bullying are influenced by personal factors, such as bias or personal dislike, as well as individual characteristics. This could be applied to the experience of participant# 09 an experienced faculty who was bullied for her regional dialect.

In this participant's view, bias is a type of personal hate that results in unfair treatment, as evidenced by the nasty remarks about her regional dialect. She also recalls another instance where she was subjected to prolonged waiting periods in the office, disregarding the value of her time as a faculty. The following setting, as reported by her, sheds some light on the issue.

**Participant# 09: Comment 1.** I've experienced discrimination concerning language... my regional dialect.

**Comment 2:** [She] made me sit in the office .... wait for her until she got free or would just make me do some stupid work that won't even make sense.

**Participant# 13:** [I found out] I was purposefully being isolated from the rest of the departments and other teachers.

Bias cannot be regarded purely as a personal dislike in the context of Participant #13; rather, it might be viewed as a contributing factor for job-related bullying. While the basis of bullying is entrenched in the professional arena, its instigation is frequently driven by personal issues such as bias or personal enmity. This specific example demonstrates the importance of contextualising workplace bullying, something not explicitly covered by the NAQ-R framework. Bias or personal dislike can serve as not only factors for job-related bullying but also interpersonal bullying, contingent upon the contextual circumstances. Outside of the workplace setting, these factors may give rise to personal bullying, whereas within the professional context, they contribute to the manifestation of job-related bullying behaviour.

Being a novice in a profession poses a significant risk factor contributing to job-related bullying. This aspect, described by two participants, increased the risk of being subjected to situations in which one is “ordered” or assigned tasks that are extremely basic but are judged on it. Participant # 01, a fresh graduate with no prior professional experience, presented her personal experience of being bullied for no apparent reason by her senior, resulting in a stressful situation for her. She shared the following sentiment:

**Participant# 01:** I’ve been ostracised several times by this senior faculty member, Ms. Y. She would not talk to me for days for no apparent reason and would ignore me and my presence even in social gatherings outside our office times. She would also show reluctance in working with me in any teamwork and would assume wrong things about me without any legit reason.

Another example can be seen in the case of Participant# 08

**Participant# 08...**person was so sarcastic and so upfront in their sarcasm that they would leave me astounded at their audacity...  
...This bully told me lies that the other departments in the university had problems with me such as the HR, the examination, and the other departments.  
...this person made me work on a document and when I sent it back the feedback or the comments were given in a very snide way; some things were written in a very passive-aggressive manner I don’t remember but I remember that it was passive-aggressive.

The participant shared that miscommunication regarding other departments was one way she was bullied by her reporting head. Apart from that, menial tasks were assigned to her with very close deadlines. Further, when completed these tasks were not approved and were returned multiple times for revision. The same participant revealed that she was an accomplished writer; had written two books and was working on a third one. She was well versed in her communication both oral and written, but despite this sound academic background she was made to revise meeting minutes multiple times before they were approved by the reporting head to be shared with the department.

Such instances vividly demonstrate that the presence of an insecure or unprofessional manager alone can cultivate a culture of bullying within an organisation or department. These shared perceptions conveyed by the participants serve as a crucial message for both novice and seasoned academics who may hold the misconception that workplace bullying is exclusively driven by factors such as age, gender, and experience. The reported incidents underscore the importance of addressing workplace bullying and fostering an environment that values and utilises employees’ talents appropriately. It is crucial for organisations to prioritise effective communication, recognise employees’ skills, and ensure fair treatment to create a conducive and harmonious workplace for all.

### 7.1.2 Personal Bullying

Personal bullying in this study refers to both direct and indirect forms of aggression that participants experienced in their workplace. The direct forms of aggression include facing a hostile reaction when approached, and indirect forms of aggression include spreading rumours/gossiping. Based on the NAQ-R framework, twelve items are included to measure personal bullying. In this study, participants experienced ten items from the list. The two items that were not experienced were: having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks and being hinted or signalled that you should quit your job.

Table 3. Personal Bullying (NAQ-R model)

	<b>Personal bullying (NAQ-R)</b>	<b>Interview results</b>
1	Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work.	✓
2	Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks.	✗
3	Spreading of gossip and rumours about you.	✓
4	Being ignored or excluded.	✓
5	Having insulted or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes, or your private life.	✓
6	Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job.	✗

7	Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes.	✓
8	Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach.	✓
9	Persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes.	✓
10	Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get along with.	✓
11	Having allegations made against you.	✓
12	Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm.	✓

I found that one of my participants was being teased based on her physical appearance. The NAQ-R does include teasing, but it does not contextualise it explicitly to appearance. It is worth noting, however, that physical appearance can be identified as another factor for personal bullying. Participant #12 demonstrated the emergent findings beyond the NAQ-R framework when he was questioned about the perpetrators of bullying. He states his opinion as follows:

(on the question of “*Who do you think are the perpetrators of bullying behaviour?*”)

**Participant# 10:** The senior bullies the junior and the upper class bullies the lower class. For example, if we are working together and you come to work wearing normal clothes then you'd be bullied for belonging to a poor background and not having the same level as us (person in position of authority), when this type of bullying takes place, it humiliates the other person to the point that he gets depression and anxiety and even suicidal thoughts.

Another participant faced a similar kind of bullying and felt miserable and demoralised. The attitude leads to low self-confidence according to Participant# 08:

**Participant# 08:** this person said you know apples need to be eaten in this way this is not the way [urban] people eat apples. You know, like degrading a person to every extent.

Attire and personal manner are significant aspects that contribute to instances of bullying—often dismissed as mere teasing but resulting in a decreased sense of self-assurance. It is important to note that while teasing is included in the NAQ-R framework, it does not specify whether physical appearance is the focus of such teasing. In other words, not adhering to certain appearance norms can also be considered a factor in personal bullying. Physical appearance is a highly sensitive issue,

and the impact of this kind of teasing can be extremely harmful. It is also worth noting that in Participant #12's case, the bully was a senior colleague.

This observation highlights the potential impact of the status quo on the occurrence of workplace bullying. Despite holding equal positions in the university, the experiences shared by Participant #08 and Participant #12 provide evidence supporting the applicability of the social dominance perspective. In other words, even within a setting where power differentials are not overtly pronounced, the underlying forces of social dominance based on the status quo can still be relevant in understanding and explaining instances of workplace bullying. By exploring the experiences of these participants, a more detailed understanding of the intricate interplay between power dynamics and bullying behaviour can be achieved.

In Pakistan, social class plays a significant role in workplace bullying, as individuals are often evaluated and treated based on the social class to which they belong. The hierarchical nature of society in Pakistan fosters power dynamics or "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 1991), where individuals from higher social classes exert their influence and engage in bullying behaviours toward those from lower social classes. This manifests in various forms, including verbal abuse, exclusion, belittlement, and unfair treatment. The perceived social class of colleagues becomes a lens through which people are judged, creating fertile ground for workplace bullying to occur. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle in which individuals from lower social classes may face discrimination, limited opportunities, and a hostile work environment, while those from higher social classes may feel entitled to exert dominance and control. Addressing workplace bullying in Pakistan requires an understanding of the connections between social class, power dynamics, and cultural norms in order to implement effective interventions and promote a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

### 7.1.3 Physical Intimidation

Physical intimidation refers to the occurrence of verbal or non-verbal aggressive, intense, and explicit behaviours experienced in the work environment. This form of bullying can manifest through actions such as threats, physical aggression, invasion of personal space, or the use of intimidating gestures or expressions. Within the NAQ-R framework, three specific items are included to gauge instances of physical intimidation as a foundation for identifying bullying. These items are designed to capture the wide range of behaviours that fall under the category of physical intimidation, ensuring comprehensive coverage.

Table 4. Physical Intimidation (NAQ-R model)

	Physical Intimidation (NAQ-R)	Interview Results
1	Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger.	✗
2	Intimidating behaviours such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way.	✗
3	Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse.	✗

During the interviews participants were asked to respond to questions regarding the physical form of bullying they experienced. None of the participants experienced physical intimidation from their perpetrator. This absence of experience establishes – at least in this group of academics - the possibility that physical intimidation may not be a primary bullying factor within university settings in Pakistan. Bourdieu’s theories of *habitus* and *capital* offer valuable insights into how physical intimidation is sustained and reproduced within social structures. They highlight how individuals' responses to bullying are shaped by their social conditioning and the resources they possess, thus elucidating the broader power dynamics and inequalities that underpin such behaviours. Bourdieu (2018) argues that these forms of capital, shaped by one's *habitus*, help maintain social hierarchies, as those with more capital have greater opportunities for social mobility and power, while those with less are constrained by structural barriers. This finding contributes to the understanding of the nature of bullying within academic

environments, highlighting a potential divergence from prevailing assumptions about the prevalence of physical forms of intimidation among university staff.

It is important to note that although the participants in this study did not report experiencing physical intimidation, it does not negate the existence or prevalence of such behaviours in other workplace contexts. The absence of physical intimidation in a university setting highlights the fact that in higher educational environment, bullying behaviours may be practiced in a more subtle way than in other organisations (Kakumba, Wamala & Wanyama, 2014).

Overall, the use of the NAQ-R framework was instrumental in analyzing participants' experiences described in the interviews. This standardized framework facilitated the identification of negative behaviours and provided a consistent level of analysis. In addition to serving as a practical tool for measurement, the NAQ-R framework allowed for comparability with existing research, promoting a broader understanding of workplace bullying in academia. Its effectiveness in this study lay in its ability to navigate the complexities of workplace dynamics, simplifying the intricate landscape of bullying within educational institutions in Pakistan.

## 7.2 Gender Issues and Workplace Bullying

After analyzing participant data using the NAQ-R framework, this section of Chapter 7 explores participant views and responses through a gender lens. This perspective is crucial in the context of Pakistani society, which follows a traditional patriarchal social structure. Despite efforts to create a more equitable society, resistance to change persists, and covert mechanisms within organizations, regardless of profession, continue to sustain gender inequalities (Blackmore & Sachs, 2012). Unfortunately, higher educational institutions are no exception to these forces, making them vital focal points for investigating and addressing such pervasive issues. These

mechanisms include both symbolic factors, such as cultural norms, and structural elements, like organizational policies and practices that perpetuate bullying.

In this study the participants, mostly women, did not perceive bullying as being based on their gender. However, one participant said she faced discrimination by her male colleagues when she was promoted to a position of authority in the university, against the common cultural practice, since women are not considered suitable to occupy position of authority. But when she reported the antagonistic act to higher management the matter was dealt with zero tolerance and this participant was fully supported by the management.

**Participant# 11:** I was bullied by my male colleagues, especially the colleagues who thought that a woman shouldn't be given the position of authority, ...so they (male colleagues) created problems for me. They communicated negative things about the work that I was doing and highlighted it in front of others that I shouldn't be given this work.

It is evident from these remarks that Participant#11 experienced bullying when she broke the gender stereotype that compels women to serve in less authoritative positions. Hence when she was given a position of authority, she faced uncivil behaviours from some of her male counterparts but when she reported the issue to the management the issue was resolved.

**Participant# 11:** ... then they (management) called out the meeting and they openly ... highlighting(ed)... they don't have a culture where anyone will underestimate the strength of women, as they are given equal opportunity to talk, to say and to work.

This thing made me more encouraged and more confident that at least I have good people around me who are supporting me.

Male dominance in our culture makes it hard for women to have leading roles.

Drawing upon my understanding of gender roles in the context of Pakistan, the participant in question encountered underestimation, and perhaps a feeling of incipient threat to their male privilege, based on her gender by her male colleagues. As an insider, I find this to be unsurprising.

The roles assigned to women in Pakistan emerge as significant contributing factors that foster instances of bullying, as delineated by Tabassum (2016). In this case, the participant experienced bullying due to the socio-cultural role assigned to her as a woman. This supports the argument that socially and culturally constructed gender roles have negative impacts on individuals. My interpretation of these participants' accounts is that if such oppressive relations are socially constructed, then they can be challenged and eventually changed.

Out of 14 participants, 13 were women. This observation leads to another proposition regarding gender-related issues, suggesting that roles and responsibilities that are gender-specific may experience vertical forms of bullying rather than horizontal ones. A noteworthy example is shared by Participant #11, who faced gender-specific discrimination from her male colleagues when she was assigned a strategic role in the university. Her experience of bullying can be attributed to her transgression of preconceived boundaries that traditionally assign positions of authority to males, thereby challenging the established norms of male dominance in such roles.

These observations emphasize the impact of gender norms in the professional environment and the potential repercussions individuals may face when they stray from the culturally prescribed gender roles within that institutional setting. Exploring such dimensions can be beneficial for increasing our understanding of the complexities surrounding gender-based discrimination and its manifestations within different occupational contexts. The experience of Participant #11 illustrates the operational dynamics of gender-specific roles within the university setting. Women are often assigned responsibilities that are comparatively less complex and primarily centered around mundane tasks. The existence of gender-specific roles is intertwined with the power disparity between men and women. The prevailing inequitable power distance is conspicuously apparent within the university milieu, where men disproportionately occupy managerial positions compared

to women—a fact that is common in Asian countries (Zulfiqar & Prasad, 2021; Velaskar, 2021; Zafarullah, 2016). Such normative expectations manifest in workplace harassment when the invisible social rules are breached by a woman. This kind of gendered bullying not only reinforces the idea of unbalanced cultural norms but also makes management sceptical about assigning challenging roles to women. Typically, this type of gender discrimination is observed when bullying is horizontal and is perpetrated by colleagues rather than supervisors or reporting heads.

A plausible interpretation of this form of bullying is predicated on the belief that the male colleague in question holds—that women are better suited for less complex roles, such as that of a secretary or an assistant. It is worth noting that within this context, the prevalence of job-related bullying is connected to gender imbalance, with a higher proportion of men perpetrating such behaviors compared to women in various occupational settings. In the present study, for example, the faculty member in question was barred from undertaking tasks that were apparently designated for men, despite those tasks being included in her job description. Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that job-related bullying does not invariably reflect the gender imbalance within an organization, as extant literature and this study document, but can occur even within women-dominated establishments.

While the expectation of traditional gender roles and gender-specific occupations can contribute to workplace bullying for women, it is important to understand that sexual orientation can itself be a factor that influences workplace bullying. For example, in the case of Participant# 09, a veteran in her field and a passionate lecturer revealed her experience of workplace bullying in these words:

**Participant# 09:** The new dean appeared eager to familiarise himself with the new faces in the institution. However, it became evident that he sought interactions only with individuals who were willing to offer certain favours, particularly of a sexual nature. Recognising my youth, he assumed I might be interested in advancing my career by providing such favours. He invited me to go out with him, implying an expectation of more. Upon my refusal, my

professional trajectory within the university took an abrupt turn. The dean explicitly conveyed that unless I acquiesced to his inappropriate requests and consented to engage with him intimately, I would no longer teach at the university.

Gender discrimination, particularly in the context of soliciting sexual favours from young employees, is prevalent in patriarchal societies, where women are commonly objectified and primarily regarded as sexual objects (Varman et al., 2018; McDonald, 2012). In such social systems, traditional gender norms and displays of power reinforce a hierarchical structure that grants men positions of authority and control. This creates an environment conducive to the exploitation and objectification of women, overshadowing their professional competence and contributions with a focus on their perceived sexual attractiveness. The practice of using sexual favours as a determinant for employment-related decisions perpetuates a culture of discrimination and inequity by undermining the principles of meritocracy and fair treatment based on qualifications and skills. As the same survivor further revealed:

**Participants# 09:** Despite having a commendable reputation among students, teachers, and colleagues, my standing did not protect me from the ramifications of rejecting his advances, marking the unfortunate end of my career within that institution.

This unethical behaviour not only poses moral objections but also undermines the overall well-being and progress of individuals and organisations. It fosters a toxic work environment where employees, particularly young women, feel compelled to comply with such requests to secure career opportunities, promotions, or even job security, thereby perpetuating a cycle of exploitation. This experience underscores the pressing need to address issues of abuse of power and harassment within academic settings, highlighting the importance of fostering a culture that prioritises merit, professionalism, and respect.

In addition to the challenge of objectification, another issue facing professional women arises when they take on the role of providing financial support to their partners. This can make them more vulnerable to bullying and undue pressure. Participants in the study suggested that when women share financial responsibilities with their husbands, they may become easy targets for bullying due to this perceived vulnerability. Participant# 03 confided her dilemma as:

**Participant# 03:** I wanted to quit but at that time my husband had no stable income. We live in a joint family... I knew my salary contributed a big chunk to keep our daily expenses going. I knew we would fall on a hard time if I quit the job. So, I kept on going to university but kept a low profile. Did not contribute or participate in the weekly departmental meetings and did not participate in any extracurricular activities.

In male-dominated societies, women often face social obstacles, limited independence, and low socioeconomic status. Even when they achieve financial autonomy, many feel pressured to weigh the potential impact on their marital life before standing up for themselves. Participant #03, for instance, initially ignored frequent instances of bullying, as the consequences of speaking out seemed more severe than tolerating the behaviour. The primary concern was the financial strain her family might face if she reported the incidents, compelling her to endure the ongoing mistreatment. Empowering women and ensuring equal opportunities for their career growth and development can significantly contribute to creating a more equitable work environment. Dismantling the systemic foundations of gender discrimination requires not only individual efforts but also collective action from society, organizations, and policymakers to achieve true gender equality.

### 7. 3. Cultural Issues and Workplace Bullying

Organizational culture refers to the specific blend of values and norms collectively embraced by employees and groups within an organization. This shared ethos shapes how they interact with

one another and with external stakeholders (Agu, 2020; Eddah & Ng'eno, 2017; Qureshi & Cheema, 2007). Examining workplace bullying from a cultural perspective is crucial, as culture significantly influences how bullying is perceived, identified, and addressed (D'Cruz et al., 2018; Giorgi et al., 2015; Arnetz et al., 2019). Different cultures may offer varying definitions and conceptualizations of workplace bullying, as well as different criteria for determining which behaviours qualify as bullying. Cultural factors, such as power distance, performance orientation, and legislation, shape how bullying is understood and experienced. Moreover, these cultural differences can affect the prevalence and nature of workplace bullying, influencing which behaviours are most common in different contexts.

Cultures that practice conservative values, submissive self-restrictions, and traditional customs, such as respecting elders, may have different perspectives on what constitutes bullying (Bhandari, 2019; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2016; Salin, 2021). Similarly, cultural norms around what is considered acceptable behaviour can influence how bullying is defined and how it is responded to. Cultural perspectives on bullying vary widely, with some cultures viewing it as a normal part of adolescence (Hofstede, 1980), while others acknowledge it as a significant issue (Agu, 2020). In certain cultural contexts, victims of bullying may hesitate to report incidents due to fears of retaliation or the belief that bullying is an unavoidable aspect of life. This divergence highlights the influence of cultural norms on how bullying is perceived and addressed across different societies. All these situations mean that incorporating cultural perspectives are crucial for developing effective interventions for promoting safe and healthy work environment for individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Fisher, & Stockbridge, 2016; Chmura-Rutkowska, 2014; Lamb, 2012). In the context of HEIs, I examine the interview data by exploring the “culture of silence,” a term coined by Freire (1972) to describe the problem in

which marginalised or oppressed groups are conditioned to remain silent about their experiences and grievances, perpetuating their own subjugation. Paulo Freire's concept of the "culture of silence" provides a profound lens through which to understand the dynamics of power and oppression, particularly in marginalized communities. This notion is not just about the inability to speak or be heard, but rather a structural condition where the voices of the oppressed are systematically suppressed by dominant social, economic, and political forces. These dominant groups create and control the narratives that shape society, leaving the marginalized unable to challenge or even articulate the structures of their oppression.

Freire argues that this silence is maintained through institutional systems such as education, where the oppressed are often taught to accept their position within the existing social order. Rather than encouraging critical thinking and dialogue, traditional education methods can reinforce passivity, limiting individuals' ability to question authority or societal norms. The culture of silence, therefore, perpetuates a cycle of oppression, as those without power are conditioned to believe they have little to contribute to the broader societal discourse.

In a leadership or institutional context, the culture of silence can manifest in a lack of representation for marginalized voices and in decision-making processes that exclude their participation. This exclusion becomes self-reinforcing, as the more individuals are silenced, the less they are able to influence change, thus maintaining the dominance of those in power.

Freire's solution to this is rooted in what he terms "dialogical education," which seeks to break the cycle of silence by fostering spaces where marginalized voices are not only heard but also engaged critically. This process involves not just speaking out but developing a critical awareness—or what Freire calls *conscientização* (critical consciousness)—where individuals come to understand the broader structures of their oppression and learn to challenge them.

In this way, the “culture of silence” is not simply a condition of voicelessness but a manifestation of deeper power imbalances, requiring intentional efforts in education, leadership, and social structures to dismantle.

### 7.3.1 Culture of Silence

In Pakistan, a culture of silence exists around the issue of bullying (Javed et al., 2023; Najam & Kashif, 2018; Anjum & Shoukat, 2013). As an educator, it is essential to recognize that individuals who become targets of bullying often feel reluctant to speak up about their experiences. They may isolate themselves and withdraw from social interactions to avoid further harassment or confrontation (Zapf et al., 2020). This reluctance is largely fuelled by their fear of retaliation or the belief that their complaints will be ignored.

For example, Participant #03 shared an incident in which she sought help from management regarding her experience of bullying. However, rather than receiving support, she faced an escalation of bullying from the managerial staff. This underscores the challenges individuals face when attempting to address bullying, particularly when authority figures are involved.

**Participant #03:** I realised that I was bullied for reporting an incident to the disciplinary committee.

Participant #04 shared a similar experience to Participant #03. When she approached management, the situation caused her significant mental stress.

**Participant# 04:** I took a firm decision to take the matter to the top management. Although they addressed it, it caused a lot of distress, and I was unwilling to work and go to the same place to work.

The statements from participants make it clear that the culture of silence surrounding bullying in Pakistan presents significant challenges for those attempting to address and resolve such issues.

The act of “voicing” concerns, which is often perceived as negative conduct, can itself trigger job-related bullying in Pakistani culture. As a result, the understandable reluctance to speak up, driven by the fear of retaliation and a lack of faith in effective interventions, further compounds the difficulties faced by victims. Participant #03’s experience serves as a poignant example, where seeking assistance from management not only failed to resolve the issue but also led to an escalation of bullying by managerial staff. These findings highlight the urgent need for constructive efforts to break the culture of silence, raise awareness, and establish supportive mechanisms to safeguard the rights and well-being of bullying victims, particularly in university settings, so that a safe and inclusive environment can be fostered where individuals feel empowered to speak out without fear of retaliation and can seek redress for bullying without facing further harm.

### 7.3.2 Definitions of Bullying

The definition of workplace bullying varies significantly across cultures and contexts (Smith, Shu, & Madsen, 2001; Guneri-Cangarli, 2016), making it challenging to consistently identify and address such behaviour in diverse settings. During the analysis, it became clear that each participant offered a unique interpretation of workplace bullying, highlighting the subjective nature of the concept. This diversity in perspectives reflects how personal, cultural, and organizational factors shape individuals’ understanding of bullying, complicating efforts to create universal policies and interventions. As a result, context-specific approaches that consider these nuances are crucial to effectively addressing workplace bullying in different cultural environments.

Table 4 Definition of Bullying

	<b>Participants' Responses</b>
P01	<i>Harassment; Toxic work culture; Leg pulling; not given the opportunity to work Insult; gossip; defamation; Giving the cold shoulder</i>
P02	<i>Primarily verbal or attitudinal; when an individual exercising some power targets someone frequently; insults them or excludes them unnecessarily.</i>
P03	<i>Making fun of people; having a condescending attitude toward others; blaming you for everything that goes wrong around; finding faults in a person; highlighting faults in front of other people to make you look incompetent.</i>
P04	<i>Anything that makes you feel uncomfortable and humiliated is bullying in my opinion.</i>
P05	<i>When a colleague feels threatened by your competent attitude, they start bullying you; you would be penalised if you're not working but if you're competent then you get bullied by your bosses.</i>
P06	<i>Bullying is not a one-time act.</i>
P07	<i>Somebody has targeted someone and then continuously keeps torturing them mentally, through abusive, direct verbal abuse; it could be talking bad about them; ruining their reputation; meddling in their work directly or indirectly; finding faults; continuously saying bad or targeting one person; making fun of them.</i>
P08	<i>Somebody who misuses their position; anyone who harasses another person to the extent of impacting their mental health. It is a mental rape.</i>
P09	<i>... Discrimination concerning gender... not approving your ideas or any kind of administrative task; making you work, or make you sit in the office; ask you to give some sexual favours.</i>
P10	<i>Being made uncomfortable through comments or having to hear degrading comments; and insults from your coworkers; from the people working under you or above you.</i>
P11	<i>Workplace bullying involves trying to make life difficult at work; to make them uncomfortable whether it is physically or emotionally strategically in terms of trying to sabotage them.</i>
P12	<i>Neglecting someone; making them feel left out; ostracising.</i>
P13	<i>the senior bullying the junior; and the upper class bullying the lower class; you'd be bullied for belonging to a poor background and not having the same level as us.</i>
P14	<i>It is organised politics.</i>

The variation in definitions and elements of what constitutes bullying poses a significant challenge when attempting to identify and address bullying behaviour, especially when considering the cultural diversity present in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan. By analyzing the data obtained, I discovered a fascinating pattern emerging. Each participant, in their unique way, presented a new definition when asked to define workplace bullying. This finding highlights the interplay between cultural factors, individual experiences, and societal expectations that shape one's understanding of bullying in the workplace. Some participants provided definitions of bullying that shared common elements, such as “unrealistic deadlines,” leg-pulling, spreading rumors, ridiculing, and isolating the target individual. However, others articulated unique

definitions, describing bullying as “organized politics.” This personal “theorizing” of bullying underscores how perpetrators often have the support of others in positions of authority, which enables their behaviour. One participant referred to bullying as “mental rape,” a phrase that, despite its intense connotation, effectively captures the severity and psychological impact of the experience. This evocative description highlights the profound and distressing nature of bullying, emphasizing the significant emotional toll endured by the participant.

Another notable aspect of the definitional emotion work related to experiences of bullying, as described by Hochschild (1983), is the frequency of incivility, which is crucial for distinguishing bullying from other adverse behaviours, such as harassment. The concept of time, particularly the emphasis on repetition as a fundamental element of workplace bullying, was conspicuously absent from the participants’ definitions. When asked about their understanding of bullying, participants focused primarily on individual incidents without acknowledging the repeated negative behaviours that contribute to escalation and worsening over time. This absence underscores the misconception that bullying can be characterized by a single incident. Moreover, it highlights the need for developing tailored interventions that acknowledge cultural diversity and individual perspectives, effectively addressing and preventing workplace bullying in academic settings.

## 7.4 Risk Factors and Discussion

### 7.4.1 Risk Group and Sanctioned Victims

The discussion of interview participants' commentary on their experiences highlights distinctive aspects of this study, particularly the identification of individuals singled out as targets of bullying. Through an examination of the data, I have identified four categories of individuals at risk of experiencing bullying: those perceived as different in terms of their work performance—either

high-performing or underperforming; those who deviate from social norms and do not conform to group membership; individuals unable to assimilate due to low social status; and, in a patriarchal culture, women, who are often more susceptible to offensive behaviour. Any one of these circumstances can render an individual vulnerable to bullying.

#### 7.4.1.2 Risk Factor 1: The “Individual” in a Collective Culture

Individuals who express their uniqueness—whether through their performance (high or low), attitude toward work, communication style, etc.—are at a higher risk of being bullied. This expression of individualism was evident in the experiences of this type of bullied person. For example, participants could be victimised on the ground that they were more qualified than their reporting head.

**Participant# 02.** Although the coordinator had more experience in teaching..., she was quite less qualified.

**Participant# 05.** It was my first job, and I was about to complete my MPhil at that time. All the teachers working around me were holding either master’s or rudimentary bachelor’s degree, including my immediate head.

This situation caused the reporting head to feel insecure, resulting in a challenging experience for the participant. Similarly, another respondent shared that her proactive approach to work, which was highly appreciated by management, became a disadvantage. As a result of her efforts, she was assigned difficult tasks with the intention of undermining her performance. Interestingly, another participant confided that it was when she started coming into the spotlight that she was bullied. This situation reflects a clear preference for hierarchy and control over individuals defined as belonging to lower-status groups or categories. Thus, victims of bullying can be high-performing subordinates if they are perceived as potential threats to their supervisor’s status, which may lead to being bullied by their supervisors.

**Participant# 05:** Recruitment of a young girl under her with a superior qualification was not acceptable for her [Principal]. She could not tolerate having someone more qualified than her; therefore, she always tried to overburden me with extra workload – with a simple excuse that work is uniformly distributed.

**Participant# 06:** Workplaces are full of bullying, if you are working hard and if any senior or any colleague feels threatened with your competent attitude, they start bullying you.

**Participant# 13:** My job description was only a lecturer but soon after two semesters I somehow found myself managing 50 courses and ten different teachers besides teaching 5 of my own.

This top-down bullying is also described by Rayner (1997), who notes that the pervasive issue of workplace bullying is evident in various scenarios, such as middle managers vying against each other and administrative assistants competing with their counterparts. Addressing these influences necessitates a comprehensive approach to understanding what fosters or undermines a culture of respect and collaboration within the organizational framework. This situation highlights the need for further qualitative research on the subject, exploring how individuality influences the phenomenon and its various expressions within organizations. The significance of how it is perceived, experienced, interpreted, researched, and addressed should not be underestimated.

Individuals in collectivistic cultures are expected to be less inclined to believe in their uniqueness, maintain modest self-views, possess lower self-certainty, and demonstrate skill in adapting themselves to the requirements and demands of their work situations. Individuals who try to break away from the norm are prone to being subjected to bullying (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Those in positions of authority, notably in senior roles, are more engaged in bullying behaviour towards their subordinates to force junior employees to follow the established norms and to discipline those who deviate from them. In societies like Pakistan with a collectivistic orientation there may be a

tendency to view bullying of non-conforming individuals as both acceptable and instrumental - simply the way things are, or how things work (Hofstede, 1980).

In Pakistan, the prevalent understanding that supervisors tend to engage in bullying behaviour towards subordinates is supported by the present research (Naseer, 2018; Muhsin, 2021). The findings reflect systemic nature of workplace bullying and underscore how employees seek to exert influence over others according to their hierarchical position. Consequently, transforming the culture that allows workplace bullying to proliferate. In larger organizations, the size of in-groups amplifies the misuse of authority, as individuals strengthen their positions through the deployment of power and behaviours that contribute to bullying. For instance, middle managers competing among themselves, or administrative assistants vying with their counterparts, highlight how this dynamic manifests. Addressing this issue needs a comprehensive approach aimed at reshaping organizational culture and dismantling the structures that perpetuate such behaviour.

#### 7.4.1.2 Risk Factor 2: The Non-Conformist

To understand how a non-conformist could be vulnerable to workplace bullying, we need to consider social interactions within an organization. Non-conformists who challenge the established norms and question the existing authority are prone to becoming targets of bullying conduct (South & Wood, 2006). Conversely, in low power distance cultures, there may be greater receptivity to non-conformist behaviour, fostering an environment that encourages questioning and challenges to authority, albeit within certain limits. The interaction between non-conformists and power distance thus unveils a crucial tension, illustrating how individuals who resist the status quo may find themselves assailed by the embedded power dynamics within their respective spheres or organizational units.

In Participant# 04 scenario, a non-conformist who took the risk of reporting her experience to management, regretted it afterwards. It caused her distress, and loss of drive to work in the same department.

**Participant# 04:** I have learned a lot about how it is okay to pass negative comments on one another.... I took a firm decision to take the matter to the top management and they addressed it., but it caused a lot of distress, and I did not want to work in that institute.

A significant number of the participants in this study reported experiencing instances of bullying and ostracism perpetrated by their superiors or reporting heads. However, it is noteworthy that two participants (Participant# 07 and Participant# 11), faced instances of bullying from their co-workers after being promoted to positions of authority. These cases underscore the complex nature of workplace interaction. The finding also exemplifies the idea that non-conformists in positions of authority can also be at risk of becoming targets of bullying behaviour. Other individuals in positions of authority may resort to bullying as a manifestation of their insecurities, while those who aspire to challenge established stereotypes can become targets of bullying from their co-workers. This corresponds with international research on the adverse effects of hierarchical structures within institutions.

**Participant# 07:** Upon attaining the position of faculty head in the management department, I encountered some resistance from colleagues due to the prevailing concept of seniority in Pakistan. Being considerably younger than some of my senior colleagues, it was challenging for them to accept my authoritative role.

**Participant# 11:** I was bullied by my male colleagues specially the colleagues who thought that a female shouldn't be given that position and that I shouldn't has the empowerment to make decisions.

The interviewees consistently highlighted the exploitation of positions within the hierarchical structure in their workplace that granted certain individuals' legitimate power to engage in

detrimental behaviours against their subordinates. Drawing from these findings, I posit that the dynamics of workplace bullying, and the hierarchical distribution of power are inseparable. Moreover, it is plausible that individuals in authoritative positions misuse their power to intimidate their subordinates, which can escalate into full-fledged bullying, as indicated by the findings of Sharma (2017) and Wright (2020).

Being a non-conformist within the social setup of a given workplace makes an employee vulnerable to workplace bullying (Rai & Agarwal, 2020). The higher the degree of acceptance of unequal distribution of power, the lower the incidents of workplace bullying. This resonates with my understanding of Pakistani culture, known for its pronounced bureaucratic tendencies and high-power distance, thus setting the stage for potential occurrences of job-related bullying. This finding also aligns with Plimmer (2022) that managerial privileges can lead to workplace bullying and adverse consequences for employees who must accept unfair treatment due to minimal agency.

Hofstede's (2011) power distance Index scores highlight higher scores observed in Asian countries to have high power distance, especially likely to result in downward bullying. Staff in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, etc. may find it very difficult to challenge or defend themselves against bullying because of societal norms that affect the victim's ability to resist (see for example, D'Cruz, & Noronha, 2016). Hence low power distance countries may have comparatively lower incidence of bullying, for example Scandinavia, as compared to Asian countries where bullying is high due to high power distance.

The connection of power imbalance, whether stemming from formal authority or some class of social power, is typically considered a fundamental characteristic of workplace bullying. In countries with a high-power distance those in positions of authority are automatically linked with power and the norm is commanding unilateral respect; subordinates are expected to yield to their

authority. Consequently, downward bullying may be viewed to some extent as standard behaviour in cultures that embrace hierarchical power disparities and expect top-down forms of leadership (Loh, Restubog & Zagenczyk, 2010; Hofstede's (2011).

Pakistan has a deep-rooted power distance culture in organizations that requires employees to exhibit profound deference towards authority figures. The notion that a non-conformist can sometimes be a catalyst for workplace bullying is supported by other research as well (Hussain & Sia, 2017; Rai & Agarwal, 2020; Dai et al., 2022). In countries characterized by high power distance, bullying is often conceptualized primarily as an abuse of power. Consequently, a significant proportion of negative social behaviours is perpetuated by colleagues and supervisors (Einarsen, 2015; Zapf et al., 2011).

#### 7.4.1.3 Risk Factor 3: Low Social Standing

Individuals with low social standing often find themselves particularly vulnerable to bullying, with perpetrators exploiting perceived weaknesses or differences. This victimization can take various forms, including social exclusion, discriminatory behaviour based on factors such as race or socioeconomic status, and intentional isolation of those with diminished social influence. Jealousy and envy can also drive bullying against individuals with low social standing, especially if the victim possesses qualities others may lack. This is evident in the account provided by Participant #03, who revealed that her precarious financial position made her a target of bullying. Similarly, Participant #12 experienced bullying due to the widely recognized awareness of his modest socioeconomic background.

The target person often fails to notice the conduct in the early stages, as it may be masked by joking and witty remarks. As Einarsen and Raknes (1997) and Salin and Hoel (2013) explain, there is a subtle boundary between humour and bullying. In some cases, bullying emerges when humour

turns unpleasant, especially when the target either resists the implicit message of the jokes or refrains from reacting, even when the remarks become offensive. This practice is often tied to a culture of respect for seniors and authority figures. Remaining silent and not reacting to mistreatment complicates the issue for those on the receiving end of such interactions. Omari and Colleagues (2016) note that in Confucian Asia, silence is often regarded as part of the conversation, providing time for reflection and meaning. In contrast, silence in some Western cultures, such as Anglo societies, is seen as deeply awkward and uncomfortable. A discussion of these cultural influences is provided in the following section.

Scholarship on this issue also highlights that individual new to an organization, often lacking support from an established in-group, may become targets of bullying based on ethnicity, gender, or other perceived characteristics (Guner-Cangarli, 2016; Salin et al., 2021). This pattern was evident in the present research, as summarized in Table 1. Participants unanimously agreed that they encountered difficulties and bullying in their new roles within university settings, particularly when they were inexperienced.

Table 6 Participants perception regarding the source and victim of bullying

Participants	Source of Bullying	Victim of workplace bullying
P#01	Manager	Young professionals/ People who are freshly recruited /Amateurs.
P#02	Co-Ordinator& Principal	The junior teachers.
P#03	Management people	Inexperience or new to a place.
P#04	fellow faculty members	Novice, inexperienced, introverts, and young professionals.
P#05	Principal and Co-ordinator	Emotionally weak, timid, and submissive.
P#06	older colleagues	Competent, hard-working, and sincere.
P#07	Senior colleagues	No answered.
P#08	Reporting head	Subordinates.
P#09	Dean of the department	Younger people.
P#10	Administrative people	Introverts.
P#11	Senior colleagues	Not answered.
P#12	Colleagues	Hardworking people.
P#13	Reporting head	People who have more potential but not powerful positions.
P#14	Reporting head	Sensitive and good at their work they are the kind of people who you would often come across bullying at the workplace.

Coexisting with this factor is the gendered dimension, which is unfortunately, often ignored or inadequately addressed in studies related to the Pakistani context. Scholars argue that women's advancement in the workplace poses a threat to the established male dominance and female subordination. This argument is supported by research indicating that women face a higher risk of bullying in male-dominated environments, especially when they enter managerial positions traditionally held by men (Neuman et al., 2011). The combined influence of societal norms, family responsibilities, and institutional policies significantly hinders the career progression of women aspiring to leadership roles (Farooq et al., 2020). Further discussion on social dominance and its implications is presented in the following section.

#### 7.4.1.4 Risk Factor 4: Gender Inegalitarianism

The educational sector in Pakistan is hierarchically gendered, women occupying the bulk of lower-level teaching roles. But it manifests a further discernible gender disparity at the administrative level, characterised by a notable underrepresentation of women in positions of authority' (Khokhar, 2018). This dynamic is obvious in the experiences shared by Participant #07 and Participant #11. Both individuals were promoted to authoritative positions due to their high achievements; however, their promotions were not well received by their male colleagues and senior staff. These colleagues actively created obstacles, ensuring that the participants faced difficulties in adjusting to their new roles.

**Participant# 07:** When I got a role in the management department as the faculty head, ... so the people working there before me and the ones older than me, at that time I faced a little bit from my colleagues, the ones who were my seniors by years in age so for them it was very hard to accept that I was at an authoritative position being very young, I had to ... faced with attitude I remember a few of them used to comment knowing I'm listening.

**Participant# 11:** I was bullied by my male colleagues specially the colleagues who thought that a female shouldn't be given that position and that I shouldn't have the empowerment to

make decisions for example if the task was defining or being decided that you have to do this particular task so in that they created some problems for me and they started communicating negative things about the work which I was doing and specifically they highlighted it in front of others that I shouldn't be given this work.

In Pakistan gender inequality is socially constructed as part of the nation's socio-cultural fabric due to its deep cultural and historical origins. This falsely initialises gender inequality, making it appear natural and certainly justified as natural. These sociocultural influences impact every sphere of society, encompassing the organisational workforce, as well as social and political contexts. This unquestioned influence is a prevailing norm within societal and familial spheres in South Asia countries not just Pakistan (Preece & Bullingham, 2022; Gorbacheva & Colleagues, 2016; Batra & Reio, 2016). Women workers are assigned roles accordingly to criteria of more menial and less laborious activities (Acker, 1990). Women are susceptible to be bullied if they "fail" to adhere to the predetermined gender roles that are not naturally inherent but rather meticulously shaped by the social milieu created by gender practice in society. The delegation of domestic chores and household tasks to women was not seen by any participant in this study. None of the participants said they were assigned roles based on their biological capability and capacity.

In identifying participants in this study who became targets of bullying early in their careers, the cruelty lies in their lack of available self-defence mechanisms and their inability to extricate themselves from the situation due to various dependencies (Shakir & Noorani, 2014). This powerlessness can manifest through social constraints, such as hierarchical position, power distance, or group membership, as well as through physical factors, like strength, or economic factors, including self-esteem, personality, and a trained incapacity to assert themselves effectively against adverse conduct. Considering individual factors certain individuals may be more susceptible to bullying based on social, demographic, or personal circumstances, heightening their

vulnerability in specific situations discussed in the previous section. Maintaining a balance between family and work duties is regarded as one of the primary challenges for women in academics to function optimally in their professions. However, personal style and conduct can lead to colleagues motivated by patriarchal ideology to react aggressively and inappropriately.

This study revealed that individuals characterized by courage and outspokenness often became targets of bullying by their supervisors. While these findings do not suggest that the victims belong to a specific gender, given that the majority of participants in this study are women, these observations primarily apply to the female cohort. Similar to those initiating the bullying, there appear to be various groups and mechanisms where the personal characteristics of the targeted individuals play a significant role in the origins of bullying: bullies perceive these traits as opportunities to unfairly undermine and diminish their targets.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the exploratory interview results has provided valuable insights. Two key findings emerge from this exploration. First, a comparison with established frameworks reveals a significant alignment between the elements of workplace bullying identified in Pakistan and those found globally, underscoring the universal nature of this issue. Secondly, the interviews have uncovered subtle contextual factors unique to the Pakistani workplace environment, emphasizing the importance of considering local practices and dynamics. While the NAQ-R (Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised) is widely used to measure workplace bullying, it has limitations when it comes to capturing the complexity of bullying in specific social and cultural contexts. The standardized nature of the NAQ-R often overlooks the nuanced ways in which

power dynamics, cultural norms, and socio-political factors shape bullying behaviour, particularly in non-Western settings. For instance, linguistic discrimination based on accent or dialect, which may be dismissed as a personal issue, is deeply tied to larger structures of inequality and exclusion. As Mills (2023) argues, personal troubles often reflect broader public issues, and in this case, bullying based on linguistic identity is a manifestation of societal hierarchies and power relations. Therefore, contextualizing workplace bullying to account for cultural specificity is critical, and this thesis offers a critique of the NAQ-R's inability to fully address these complexities, advocating for a more culturally responsive framework for understanding and measuring workplace bullying.

This synthesis of universal patterns and exclusive insights enriches our understanding of workplace bullying, underscoring the significance of contextual interpretation in research and intervention efforts. Analysing the interviews through a cultural lens sheds light on bullying within Pakistani society and clarifies the pivotal role culture plays in shaping workplace bullying. Fundamental values, beliefs, and societal contexts exert profound influence on individual behaviours and the organisational milieu. Specifically, cultural norms prevalent in Pakistani social and professional spheres emphasise the preservation of group honour as paramount, with individuals deviating from established norms viewed as potential sources of shame and dishonour. This emphasis on conformity is encapsulated in cultural adages such as “Innovation is the root of all evil,” which underscore the societal preference for maintaining traditional and existing practices and norms. An understanding of workplace bullying within Pakistani contexts necessitates an examination of the cultural forces operating to grasp the motivations and manifestations of such behaviour.

To deepen our understanding of workplace dynamics and contribute to informed interventions aimed at fostering a more inclusive and respectful work environment, a cultural perspective is necessary but not sufficient. It is essential to investigate the impact of bullying on the targeted individual and to discern the strategies they attempt in addressing the entrapment by bullies, particularly in instances where organizational support is lacking. The discussion now shifts to the final substantive chapter to consider the ambivalence between concepts of survival and resistance on one hand and the hope or optimism associated with ideas such as resilience on the other.

# Chapter

# 8

# Trauma, Adaptive Responses and Possibility of Resilience

## Introduction

In the ongoing discourse surrounding participants' experiences of bullying within academic settings, the preceding chapters have meticulously traced the events, actions, motivations, and experiences of those targeted by bullying behaviours. This analysis has involved a continual interplay between the data provided by participants and inferences regarding the positioning and motivations of perpetrators, as well as the socio-cultural and organizational structures that enable such misconduct. Chapter 8 shifts the focus to the consequences of bullying in academia as described by the interview participants, representing the second of two chapters based on these interviews. This chapter examines the effects of bullying perpetrated by colleagues and seniors, while also exploring the coping mechanisms employed by participants to navigate these hostile environments, particularly in the absence of effective university policies and conduct management guidelines to address bullying and related behaviours.

Experiencing workplace bullying is recognized as a significant contributor to social stress within professional environments. Zapf (1999) and Vartia (2013) highlight the profound impact of such bullying on employees. The findings from AE and CAE reinforce that workplace bullying can lead to health issues if not addressed in a timely manner. My own experience of adverse behaviour serves as an illustration of this. Similarly, in the CAE chapter, authors revealed the emotional trauma they endured as victims of bullying within academia. Research indicates that the

detrimental effects of workplace bullying are considered more severe and distressing than those of other work-related stressors combined (Plimmer, 2022; Dehue et al., 2012). Clinical observations by Leymann (1996), Weinstein et al. (2009), and Ghamrawi (2013) emphasize a range of adverse consequences related to work bullying, including social isolation, maladjustment, psychosomatic illnesses, depression, compulsions, feelings of helplessness, anger, anxiety, and despair. It is clear that addressing workplace bullying is essential for maintaining a healthy and supportive work environment.

The findings from these three methods underscore the imperative need for developing proactive measures and targeted interventions to address workplace bullying within academia. Such measures should aim not only to enhance the overall well-being of individual academic professionals but also to cultivate a healthier and more conducive work environment. Research indicates that understanding the cumulative impact of workplace bullying in quantitative terms alone is insufficient for informing effective intervention strategies and fostering healthier organizational environments. Taking a broader approach, scholars have explored the role of healthy coping mechanisms in mitigating the detrimental behaviours associated with bullying (Carlson, 2005; Ghamrawi, 2013; Rajaei et al., 2016; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013; Seltzer & Long, 2013; Weinstein et al., 2009).

The research literature indicates that while isolated incidents of aggression and harassment are prevalent in daily workplace interactions, patterns of such occurrences can lead to significant health issues for the targeted individuals (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015; Vartia, 2013; Mikkelsen, 2002). Individuals subjected to deliberate and systematic psychological harm by another person, whether real or perceived, tend to experience intense emotional responses. This implies that workplace bullying can reshape employees' perceptions of their work environment and life in

general, compelling them to view situations as fraught with threats, dangers, insecurity, and self-doubt—a sentiment detrimental to the targeted person’s well-being (Arvatea et al., 2018).

Further, the repercussions of workplace bullying extend beyond the individual and can impact the overall work environment at either departmental or organisational scales. This complex interplay of emotions was observed among participants in this study. The research also underscores that, despite its adverse effects, targets of bullying conduct have the potential to develop resilience when supported by family and colleagues. This less-explored aspect has been suggested to positively correlate with mitigating the detrimental impact of bullying (Ortega et al., 2012). The ensuing sections aim to strike a balance between these two facets associated with workplace bullying.

A limitation of the interview method not previously discussed means that the trajectory of this chapter needs to frame the findings and analysis of what participants reported in a particular way. This will alert readers to the background issue of accessing bullying data about the experience of being bullied. This remains the case even in this thesis firmly focussed on this topic. The issue in this chapter was implicit in the recruitment process that placed high priority on enabling potential participants to decline to be involved, to question what consent and participation mean, or to change their minds and withdraw even after agreeing to participate. As was described earlier, this means that those who were willing to participate emerged in what was a self-filtering process of people who felt strong enough to be involved and those exercising caution against participating for various reasons.

My concern in this chapter is that this study of academics being bullied should not finish on a “happy-happy” note suggesting overcoming adversity and becoming resilient, being strong, and getting on with life is the outcome. The interview participants represent only one end of a continuum between people who survive being bullied and at least partly thrive, to the other end of

the scale compromising those who do not survive and or survive but don't thrive. Those who declined to participate are somewhere in the middle—known/contactable to some extent, but protective of their vulnerability given their circumstances. This tension is the narrative framing running through this chapter. We are not hearing the voices at the completely invisible end this spectrum of the experience of being bullied, nor the in-between who were approached but chose not to participate. The implication of this is that the narrative and commentary of these missing persons would be even sadder and likely reflect greater trauma than what is discussed. Avoiding over-assertion of positive themes of successful resilience is as important as reporting the negative and unfair treatment that is described here.

### 8.1 The Far-Reaching Effects of Bullying

The far-reaching effect of bullying become an issue of grave concern when examining this aspect in the light of educational institutions which are supposed to be producers of future leaders, thinkers, and educators, where the role of an educator is to guide their cohort towards prospective prosperity (e.g., Lester, 2013). Workplace bullying, research study offers a distressing commentary about the methods employed by perpetrators to inflict bullying on their victims. The tactics laid bare in the literature encompass a range of insidious behaviours, including false accusations, dismissing contributions, establishing arbitrary rules, discrediting work, subjecting individuals to criticism, spreading derogatory rumours, and manipulating others to support fraudulent gossip—all aimed at attaining social dominance to perpetuate oppression and humiliate colleagues (Wanasika, 2011; Mhaka-Mutefa, 2021; Lester, 2013).

Interestingly, the modus operandi of bullies uncovered in autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography aligns with these well-documented tactics in the literature revealing the pervasive

nature of such behaviours. This orientation is particularly noteworthy when examining the patriarchal strands embedded in organisational arrangements in Pakistan, where spreading rumours, increasing workloads, and disregarding opinions in decision-making become instruments of power.

As the discussion evolves, it becomes clear that the detrimental effects of deference have a widespread impact on the bullied person's productivity, emerging as a recurring theme observed throughout this investigation. Participants reported encountering a subtle form of bullying that sometimes blurred the line between bullying and a conscientious supervisor aiming to elicit optimal performance. This feature resonates with my own experience and is evident in similar patterns in the participants' narratives.

Findings from the exploratory interviews reveal that the initial response to instances of being bullied was expressed as self-doubt, diminished confidence, and an unescapable absence of self-assurance. This prompted people to exert themselves excessively to substantiate their qualifications or suitability for their respective roles. In validating their professional worth, target individuals often neglect considerations of family and work-life balance, leading to a disruption of equilibrium between work and private life. The imperative to endure personal attacks on one's professional role emerges as a discernible response to bullying. For the target, awareness of being bullied typically crystallizes once they recognize the significant influence of the perpetrator and the imposition of their domineering behaviour. This phenomenon has been documented frequently (Dai et al., 2022; Einarsen et al., 2015; Wu, Imran, & Fu, 2020).

Participants in my study experienced a broad spectrum of health-related repercussions, consistent with findings reported by other researchers. These consequences included insomnia, fluctuations in weight, headaches, skin conditions, shingles, digestive issues, memory lapses, decreased

concentration, anxiety, and depression. While only one participant self-diagnosed with hypertension due to excessive stress, several others recounted experiencing obsessive ruminations about their bullying encounters, an inclination toward retaliation, and tendencies to avoid triggers or exhibit hypervigilance—manifestations that are partially consistent with a post-traumatic presentation (Baldry, Sorrentino, & Farrington, 2019). They frequently reported elevated stress levels, attributing this to the widespread adverse effects on their health.

Looking at my own experience that is presented in the first phase of this study as autoethnography, I recount facing dire health problems due to constant bullying pressure which I still bear the scars of the experience. Participant# 08 revealed she developed trust issues after her experience of adverse behaviours.

**Participant# 08:** This has made me very particular in choosing my company of friends in the institute I work. I find it challenging to adjust in a new setting. I am always on edge in my new workplace, and I have become overanalytical about everything.

Similarly, participant# 09 conveyed a lingering apprehension rooted in past encounters with gender-based bullying, specifically expressing reservations about having a male manager.

**Participant# 09:** ...because of my experience with sexual harassment I am apprehensive about having a male boss.

Some participants in the study revealed that their experiences of being bullied have made them more sensitive to their workplace dynamics. As a result, they tend to jump to conclusions and make hasty decisions regarding their jobs out of fear of escalating the situation. This hyper-vigilance has led to their reluctance to remain in any institution for more than a year, despite having a long history of tenure in organizations prior to these incidents.

Table 7: Effects of Bullying (n=14)

	<b>Participants' Responses</b>
P#01	My entire self-esteem was shattered.
P#02	I became more conscious of my work.
P#03	It has shaken my self-confidence; I was not motivated, no passion to teach.
P#04	But it causes a lot of distress, and unwillingness to work and go to the same office.
P#05	I couldn't tolerate that disrespectful and toxic environment.
P#06	Choose not to comment.
P#07	Choose not to comment.
P#08	I felt ostracised, demotivated, depressed, I had reoccurring UTI, emotionally drained.
P#09	It would be incorrect to say that I overcome bullying I couldn't, it's just you must, it's just I probably got the trick to handle the bullying.
P#10	I was very angry, upset.
P#11	I felt ostracised, left out.
P#12	It was humiliating, under constant pressure.
P#13	Anyways, long story short after countless breakdowns because of a ton of mental stress, feeling of being not enough and just simply feeling like a failure one day I found out that I was purposefully being isolated from the rest of the departments and other teachers.
P#14	I felt depressed, distressed.

The narratives shared by participants illuminate a pervasive pattern, highlighting the issue of trauma as bullied individuals grapple with anxiety and compromised emotional health. Their accounts vividly portray a spectrum of emotions, including worry, pressure, anger, sadness, dishonesty, hurt, and uncertainty. Furthermore, participants reported experiencing diminished self-esteem, sleep disturbances, and heightened levels of excessive worry. These observations align with established Western research on workplace bullying, which underscores its significant psychological repercussions, manifesting as stress and anxiety.

Additionally, the discernible imbalance between work and personal life emerged as a prominent consequence of workplace bullying, mirroring findings from studies of Tolentino (2016) and Fahie & Devine (2014). The participants in the study reported experiencing feelings of stress, sadness, persistent worry, and sleep disturbances. It is significant to recognise that the identified symptoms hold importance as prolonged exposure to workplace bullying may potentially escalate into severe

health-related issues over time. The stress response varied among individuals, often leading to distinct stress management approaches. Some participants resorted to coping mechanisms, such as increased consumption of high-calorie foods, which can lead to weight gain—an established risk factor for conditions like diabetes (Pinquart, 2017). Conversely, individuals who are adept at managing and alleviating the effects of workplace bullying may not experience such severe health issues. Unfortunately, this study cannot ascertain the long-term health implications stemming from workplace bullying. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that participants endured workplace bullying, with some employing coping mechanisms to mitigate its effects.

## 8.2 Coping Strategies

### 8.2.1 Explanation of the Coping Strategies

The exploration of coping strategies employed by individuals in response to bullying is crucial, as the effectiveness of these strategies can significantly mitigate the incidence of bullying and provide insights into the severity of the experiences faced by victims and their overall well-being. Research indicates that factors such as gender and age play pivotal roles in this dynamic, influencing both the behavior of bullies and the responses of their victims (Bijttebier & Vertommen, 1998; Cowie, 2000; Kristensen & Smith, 2003; Olafsen & Viemero, 2000; Smith, Shu & Madsen, 2001).

Despite commonalities in the experiences of participants, there were also variations in their responses to bullying. The diverse cognitive and behavioural responses to bullying lend unique significance to each individual's experience as some participants engaged in deep reflection on their encounters, expressing feelings of distress when recounting the challenging times. Conversely, other participants took a more casual approach in sharing their experiences, openly disclosing the identity and position of the perpetrator. This range of reactions underscores the

heterogeneous responses among participants, highlighting their divergent coping mechanisms in relation to the experiences discussed in the previous section.

Table 5: Coping Strategies and Response

	<b>Coping Strategies/ Evidence</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
P#01	<i>My only source of catharsis was my friend at work who would understand all my issues and would give me the best advice to tackle such problems.</i>	Sharing her predicament
P#02	<i>I tried to communicate with her whenever I got a chance, for instance by greeting her and asking about how she was feeling. After working in that institute for another one and a half year, I resigned.</i>	Resigned
P#03	<i>I wanted to quit but at that time my husband had no stable income. kept a low profile. Did not contribute or participated in the weekly departmental meetings and did not participate in any extracurricular activities.</i>	Kept low profile
P#04	<i>I took a firm decision to take the matter to the top management and they have addressed it.</i>	Reported the case
P#05	<i>I couldn't tolerate that disrespectful and toxic environment and eventually resigned from that job.</i>	Resigned
P#06	<i>I tried to overcome the professional bullying behaviour, but it didn't end which is why i had to leave the job.</i>	Resigned
P#07	<i>I never went beyond my work to make their lives hard I did what was in my JD. I tried to engage with them and that worked.</i>	Handled professionally
P#08	<i>I was not able to avoid the workplace bullying and it led the end for me resigning and moving on to another place, however I did wait until I got another job.</i>	Resigned
P#09	<i>saying I must defend myself and probably you can get rid of this bullying if you are self-sufficient, and you can criticise the person criticising you so that's the only way how you could overcome the bullying otherwise it's impossible to get rid of bullies.</i>	Resilience
P#10	<i>I spoke to the administration, and it never happened.</i>	Reported the case
P#11	<i>I communicated with them[management] and told them the problem, and then they called out the meeting and they openly discussed without highlighting the name of the individuals they indirectly talked it out saying they don't have the culture where anyone will underestimate the strength of the females as they have also been given the equal opportunity to talk, to say and to work and this thing made me more encouraged and more confident that at least I have good people around me who were supporting</i>	Reported the case
P#12	<i>I made myself busy, worked on my weakness.</i>	Tolerated till subsided
P#13	<i>I tried to go head-to-head in response to bullying but failed because I was not in the same position.</i>	Resigned
P#14	<i>I resigned from that institute when it got too much for me to handle, so that is how I dealt with it.</i>	Resigned

Examining the diverse coping strategies employed by participants in addressing bullying reveals two overarching categories: problem-oriented (active) strategies and emotion-oriented (passive)

strategies. Problem-oriented strategies, which involve taking direct action to confront the bullying—such as resisting, fighting, or arguing with the bully—are generally successful when the victim is confident that the bullying will stop and working conditions will improve. However, they can also be risky, as they may escalate the conflict. The second approach, emotion-oriented strategies, focuses on managing the emotional impact of bullying, such as sharing the problem with others, avoiding thinking about it, or ignoring the bully. These strategies might help cope with the emotional stress of bullying, but they may not be effective in stopping the bullying (Wu & Imran, 2020; Dehue, Bolman, Völlink, & Pouwelse, 2012; Grennan, & Woodhams, 2007). Another aspect worth considering is that the choice of coping strategies also depends on the gender of the victim. Male victims often adopt problem-solving or active strategies, while female targets of bullying tend to lean toward emotion-oriented or passive strategies to mitigate the issue (Olafsson, 2003; Cowie, 2000; Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2004). The most effective coping strategies vary depending on the individual and the type of bullying they experience. However, by understanding the different types of coping strategies and how they help in mitigating the adverse behaviour, we can better support those who are experiencing workplace bullying.

### 8.2.2 Problem-Oriented Active Strategy

Problem-oriented or active strategies encompass direct actions taken to counteract bullying, such as resistance, confrontation, or argumentation with the perpetrator (Goldstein, 1990). Goldstein propose these strategies are effective in scenarios where the victim believes that the situation will improve or as a reaction to personal bullying. The harmful effects of personal bullying extend beyond the workplace, significantly impacting the victim's social and emotional well-being. These effects may endure throughout the individual's lifetime, leaving lasting scars.

Participants in this study resorted to problem-oriented strategies to deal with personal bullying with varied outcomes. Participant #02, a newcomer to the teaching field, specifically mentioned engaging in debates as a proactive approach to addressing instances of personal bullying. In her specific case, the chosen active coping strategy involved responding assertively, when questioned in the presence of colleagues concerning her professional duties which lead to an escalation of the issue.

**Participant# 02:** I mentioned my concern about the excessive workload at the institute, specifically the amount of checking work required. The principal acknowledged that this was a common challenge in other institutes, ... However, I pointed out that other institute offers higher salary packages. Surprisingly, she [principal] informed me of the management's intention to issue a warning letter. I was taken aback and reminded her that I had been assigned to teach another class ... since our conversation, she started requesting my work more frequently, deviating from the usual practice, and raising issues that were not typically discussed.

As a result, the argument technique did not work well for her because after the confrontation approach, her reporting head always blamed her when she made mistakes, and she was tasked with extra work that was beyond her experience and she was questioned on it. The above statement shows a type of personal bullying that causes distress and anxiety. It is apparent that the victim even when they have the courage to react to instances of bullying receive negative reactions and sometime leads to escalation of the issue impacting the social emotional well-being of the bullied person further leading to greater distress and anxiety. A common impact of this coping strategy could be the reluctance to work in the same office as the victim may feel unsafe, uncomfortable, and stressed, in some cases, the victim may even be afraid to return to work altogether. A fact also found in the study of global setting see for example Minton & Birks (2018) and Einarsen and Colleagues (2015). The ongoing stress and anxiety can affect productivity and job satisfaction, and it may become increasingly difficult for an individual to perform their duties effectively (Demir, & Küçük, 2022).

It is important to recognize that in Pakistan, individuals should be cautious about displaying excessive confidence, as it is often perceived negatively, especially by those in positions of authority when their subordinates demonstrate superior knowledge, skill, or confidence to speak up. This cultural context underscores the importance of understanding workplace dynamics, where power imbalances and the misuse of hierarchical positions can generate hostility or resentment from those in authority.

Contrary to this notion, an active problem-oriented strategy can sometimes be an effective coping mechanism, as demonstrated by Participant #09. She mentioned that she found a strategy that works for her, which involves adopting a tougher and more assertive demeanour, especially when dealing with seniors. By establishing firm boundaries and clearly communicating that certain behaviours are unacceptable, she created a space that discouraged bullying. Over time, she noticed the gradual development of a more resilient disposition, which helped her cope with and manage the emotional toll of bullying.

**Participant# 09:** Rather than just understanding and accepting whatever is being said, I have come to realise the importance of engaging in criticism, questioning, and defending myself when confronted with bullying. Politeness and passivity are not effective; instead, it is crucial to assertively criticise the individual engaging in bullying behaviours. I've found that being self-sufficient and capable of countering criticism are essential for overcoming bullying, as merely accepting the situation is unlikely to discourage bullies.

Another participant# 07 when showed resistance was successful in coping with bullying.

**Participant# 07:** I had to adopt a resistant stance, and on certain occasions, I encountered individuals with unfavourable attitudes. I distinctly recall instances where some individuals made comments with the awareness that I was within earshot, and I ignored them.

The strategy to be assertive in the face of adversity is a recurring theme in the narrative of these participants. Another participant disclosed:

**Participant# 11:** In my perspective, maintaining one's dignity, self-respect, and confidence is pivotal when confronted with challenging situations. I believe in thoroughly assessing the circumstances before asserting my position, providing the other party an opportunity to recognise any misunderstanding. However, when such efforts prove futile, I have taken the initiative to communicate the issue to superiors. In my experience, these concerns were addressed in meetings where the bosses, without singling out individuals, emphasised the organisational culture that values the equal participation of all, regardless of gender.

The coping strategies mentioned above were related to personal bullying where the victim confronted the perpetrators and was successful in improving the working environment. Another Participant# 04 used a resistive approach to deal with the issue; by reporting the bullying to management. She confided when she felt she was being singled out as her lessons were observed, she was banned from taking lunch breaks without permission, and her lunch break time were monitored. She had the courage to report her bullying experience with the management but regretted for being courageous as it caused distress. She commented:

**Participant# 04:** I took a firm decision to take the matter to the top management and they addressed it. But it caused a lot of distress, and unwillingness to work and go to the same office.

Although this strategy worked for the participant, the mental distress and the loss of drive to work in the same environment with the perpetrators made her regret her move to report the case of bullying to the management. The strategy appears to be most appropriate for individuals who are self-assured and confident that reporting the bullying will lead to positive outcomes. This is confirmed by Participant #10, who reported their bullying incident to management and found this worked effectively:

**Participant# 10:** I spoke to the administration, and it never happened again.

From my perspective, the strategy of resistance or confrontation can be construed not merely as a problem-solving tactic but also as an approach to navigating power dynamics. This inference is

drawn from Participant# 03's endeavour to address instances of bullying by reporting the matter to higher management rather than directly engaging with the immediate supervisor. The diverse responses exhibited by individuals in navigating stressful circumstances were distinctive and noteworthy. Participants expressed eagerness in revealing the strategies they employed to find solace amidst adversity. The variance in coping mechanisms suggests that, while problem-oriented, active strategies may evoke a profound sense of trepidation and anxiety regarding confronting perpetrators or enduring continued mistreatment, they also have the potential to foster strength and resilience in individuals facing such circumstances. Overall, these accounts reveal distinct approaches used by individuals targeted in addressing instances of workplace bullying.

### 8.2.3 Discussion: Problem-Oriented Strategies

As previously mentioned, Pakistan lacks the required support systems for employees dealing with workplace bullying. My research findings also reveal that victim frequently had to tackle instances of bullying on their own, resorting to a limited range of coping strategies, including both problem-oriented/active approaches and emotion-oriented/passive responses. A discussion of these strategies, contextualised within the experiences of the participants, follows below.

According to Dehue et al. (2012), problem-oriented strategies involve actions such as seeking assistance from others to address bullying incidents, typically by reporting the misconduct to higher authorities like supervisors or bosses. These strategies are employed when the bullied individual believes that the stressful situation can be altered. In the case of Participants #14, #10, #11, who experienced bullying by their direct superiors, the participants disclosed that they reported the misconduct directly to the management. This proactive step led to the acknowledgment of the bullying behaviour, resulting in a mitigation of the issue. This indicates

that problem-oriented strategy can work if employees have confidence in the management and in cases where the supervisor or boss is answerable to the management or organisational intervention (D' Cruz & Noronha,2010). However, in most cases, victims refrained from utilising either formal or informal complaint mechanisms, mainly due to their lack of trust in the organisation as generally bullying incidents are enacted by immediate supervisors. This lack of trust may be attributed to the perceived absence or ineffectiveness of anti-bullying policies and procedures within organisations.

If a confrontation strategy is unsuccessful it may lead to a form of workplace-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), where the individual experiences persistent anxiety, flashbacks, and nightmares associated with bullying incidents. Moreover, the victim may also struggle with feelings of isolation and low self-esteem because of bullying (Wu & Imran, 2020) if no change or cessation happens. They may lose confidence in their abilities, question their self-worth, and withdraw from social interactions. The emotional scars left by personal bullying can have long-lasting effects on an individual's mental health and overall quality of life (Arseneault, 2018).

Another interesting finding about the coping tactics used by the participant was the lack of support and trust in the organisational structure which inhibits employees from taking collective action in this regard, resulting in handling the situation on an individual basis with the most common option being resignation when the bullying gets intolerable (e.g., P# 02, P# 04, P# 05, P# 06, P# 08, P# 09, P# 12, P# 13, P# 14). Significantly, this trend was predominantly observed among those who were beginning their career in this profession. On the other hand, respondents who had a long tenure in an organisation opted not to resign but instead resorted to exhibiting a covert attitude to the problem. We can say that people's intention of leaving an organisation depends on the opportunity cost. If moving out of an organisation is beneficial in comparison to speaking out

against the mistreatment then people choose the first option (Withey & Cooper, 1989). As was the case of AE and CAE, the interviews confirmed that survivors opted to disengage from the deleterious organisational culture only if they found more favourable professional prospects.

The study suggests that the effectiveness of problem-oriented strategies, including reporting the bully's behaviour, may depend on the hierarchical relationship between the victim, the bully, and the management. This complex influence can significantly impact the outcomes of such interventions. Regarding the utilisation of the arguing technique, it is noteworthy that Participant# 02 employed this approach, although without achieving success in curbing the ongoing bullying behaviour directed at her. Nevertheless, I contend that this technique can be considered effective to some extent, as it makes the aggressor aware of their misuse of power and, in some instances, may temporarily lessen their hostile behaviour (Goldstein, 1990).

Grounded in the findings of my study, problem-oriented strategies, such as seeking support from others and resisting, not only serve to mitigate bullying incidents but also signify an alternative approach to addressing power dynamics. For example, Participant# 10, facing bullying from her superior, resorted to reporting the issue to higher management, while Participant# 02 and Participant# 08, who encountered bullying from their respective supervisors, directly confronted the aggressor through logical argument. Unfortunately, notwithstanding these endeavours, both strategies proved ineffective in resolving the matter, as instances of bullying continued unabated. Another empirical observation supported by research literature pertains to the tendency of male employees subjected to bullying to employ active problem-solving strategies, as illustrated in the studies by Olafsson (2003) and Smith et al. (2001). The present study found that the application of these strategies proved effective for participants. A distinction can be made between the benefits

of making the effort for a sense of personal self-worth or efficacy, even if the bullying itself is not curbed, and the effectiveness of responses that may have stopped the bullying.

Addressing bullying requires a holistic approach that encompasses the establishment of a supportive work environment, the implementation of anti-bullying policies, the provision of counselling and mental health support for targets of bullying, and the promotion of awareness and education regarding the repercussions of bullying. Cultivating a workplace culture that prioritizes respect, empathy, and inclusivity is pivotal in preventing personal bullying and safeguarding the overall well-being of all employees.

#### 8.2.4 Emotion-Oriented Strategies

Coping strategies, whether adaptive or maladaptive, involve a cognitive or behavioural response from the bullied person to mitigate or endure incivil and oppressive behaviours in the workplace (Folkman et al., 1986). Individuals who confided in colleagues, friends, and family members often perceived a potential for positive change in sharing their experiences. The findings from my research reveal that certain participants adopted this avoidance and confiding, as a coping tactic to mitigate the emotional distress stemming from their encounters with workplace bullying.

During the interviews one participant (Participant# 03) explained how she employed a combination of strategies to contend with the issue at hand. Within the professional sphere, she adopted avoidance behaviours, refraining from participating in meetings and social interactions with colleagues, even abstaining from engagement in formal gatherings. Concurrently, she shared her predicament with her mother, who offered constant support and empathetically attended to her concerns. This practice empowered her to confront and address the challenges she encountered. Another participant (# 01) reported that she regularly shared her difficulties with a colleague who

also happened to be a close friend, finding solace in having someone thoughtful about her concerns.

Although it is recognised that emotion-focused coping strategies are generally considered less effective in dealing with bullying situations (Dehue et al., 2012), I propose that individuals facing such adversity may consider employing these strategies for temporary respite to cope up with bullying. Even being able to label this as bullying often requires a significant amount of emotional work (Hochschild, 1983), but it may provide individuals with the personal space needed to process the elements of their experience. This is predicated on the notion that sharing problems with others can offer stress relief, even if the respite is transient. Colleagues can only offer emotional or cognitive support, involving aiding the victim in contemplation of the issue and potentially proposing solutions, but not necessarily addressing the problem, a role typically assumed by superiors or HR directors. It is suggested that the selection of diverse support sources delineates a spectrum in the escalation of conflict, transitioning from less authoritative (colleagues) to more authoritative (superiors or HR directors) to improve the working environment.

My research indicates that passive coping strategies, which include avoidance measures, are largely ineffective in addressing workplace bullying. A significant number of participants resorted to job resignation as a coping mechanism in response to workplace bullying. This finding substantiates the idea that workplace bullying significantly contributes to heightened intentions of moving out of the organisation (Einarsen et al., 2015). All participants in this study expressed intentions to separate themselves from their current workplaces when the opportunity arose, with eleven of them ultimately doing so and securing new positions in other institutions. This trend was also consistent with the experiences recounted in the earlier autoethnography (AE) and the responses to bullying described by the authors in the context of the collaborative autoethnography

(CAE). However, it is worth emphasising that transitioning to a new organisation may not necessarily shield individuals from further bullying experiences, as those who secured new employment subsequently found themselves entangled in fresh instances of workplace bullying.

Regarding coping strategies, it is noteworthy that participants (P# 03, P# 08, P# 12,) felt a sense of helplessness in not having their grievances addressed due to the absence of a formal channel for reporting bullying. This observation emphasises the ubiquitous disposition of workplace bullying across various organisations. It is reasonable to advocate for proactive measures aimed at preventing bullying at the organisational level. These measures could include heightened awareness campaigns, the implementation of anti-bullying policies, and the establishment of accessible and supportive reporting mechanisms within organizations. It is also important to acknowledge that age plays a pivotal role in the decision to resign from a job. Based on my findings, younger individuals are more inclined to adopt this coping strategy, driven by the belief that they have greater opportunities to secure alternative and better employment. This inclination may stem from a combination of factors, including a perceived lower level of commitment to a specific job, a greater willingness to take risks, and the belief that they have time to recover from potential setbacks in their careers. Additionally, younger individuals often possess a more adaptable skill set and a stronger network of connections through social media and educational platforms, which can facilitate their search for new opportunities.

As organizations strive to retain talent, they should consider implementing mentorship programs and career development initiatives that address the unique needs of employees. By fostering a supportive environment that values their contributions and aspirations, organizations can mitigate the factors that lead to turnover and promote a more engaged and committed workforce.

A holistic understanding of the issue is required to address this issue nationwide while referencing practice and policies implemented in other developed countries. A comprehensive guideline is needed to address these issues. In this regard WorkSafe New Zealand (2014) can provide a good example, the underlying principle emphasised by this guideline is that employees possess the fundamental right to a secure and supportive work environment, a principle that is currently lacking in Pakistan. In contrast, New Zealand's Employment Relations Act mandates the provision of a safe workplace in all employment agreements. Failure on the part of employers to fulfil this obligation, particularly by neglecting to address bullying and fostering an unsafe work environment, may lead to employees lodging personal complaints (Employment New Zealand, 2018). Research findings suggest Pakistan does not have an equivalent legislation in place. Therefore, New Zealand can serve as a model for Pakistan, illustrating how the issue of workplace bullying can be addressed in its early stages within the confines of professional setting.

### 8.3.1 Mitigating Workplace Bullying: A Strategic Approach to Resilience and Well-being

As mentioned earlier, workplace bullying causes health problems through stress. Considering this and recognising the relevance of the demand-control-support theory of workplace stress to bullying situations proposed by van Heugten, (2011) the negative health may boost resilience.

While constantly thinking about a problem can increase stress, my research participants found that gaining information about bullying helped them externalise its causes. This allowed them to distance themselves mentally and emotionally from the bully's actions. Instead of either avoiding or obsessing over the issue, thinking about the problem improved their sense of control and self-confidence. It also empowered them to take a more active approach to solving the problem. They considered options like confronting the bully, reporting the incident, taking sick leave, or planning

a break. Even so, when these measures proved ineffective, individuals ultimately chose to resign from their positions.

Social support from colleagues, family, and supervisors served as a protective barrier against heightened levels of anxiety and loneliness. Collegial support frequently intensified when participants disclosed their intentions to leave the organisation, initiating a reversal in the process of social exclusion. Ultimately, the decision to separate oneself from unreasonable demands, facilitated in the recovery of a sense of control—particularly as many successfully secured alternative employment in social work—and activated or enhanced available support networks. It is imperative, however, to explore alternative avenues for achieving these positive outcomes. Given that 12 out of the 14 participants had experienced serial bullying, it becomes evident that this “solution,” resulted in an increased turnover of experienced staff, exerting a substantial loss to organisation and all stakeholders including the students.

### 8.3.2 Building Resilience: A Shield Against Bullying

The concept of resilience as an outcome of workplace bullying has received limited attention in the literature (Rylance, 2001; Sloan, Matyók, & Schmitz, 2010; van Heugten, 2011). Much emphasis has been placed on identifying the adverse effects of bullying, given the substantial distress it causes. Demonstrating the detrimental impact of bullying on an individual’s health has been of interest to professionals such as psychologists, human resource specialists, and legal experts, as it allows them to advocate for support for the affected individuals and changes in organisational practices. However, a sole focus on problems can limit our understanding of how individuals can overcome negative consequences and achieve more positive outcomes. It is important to note that resilience can follow negative health outcomes, and indeed, the adverse

health effects resulting from bullying can prompt actions that promote resilience, such as seeking support.

The capacity of individuals to navigate in challenging situations contributes positively to their psychological well-being, elevates their quality of life, and fosters optimism (Carlson, 2005; Ghamrawi, 2013; Rajaei, Khoyneshad, Javanmard, & Abdollahpour, 2016; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013; Seltzer & Long, 2013; Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009). Irrespective of an individual's age, the psychological and psychosocial impacts of bullying depend on the victim's coping abilities, which can lead to positive outcomes over time (Dehue, Bolman, Völlink, & Pouwelse, 2012; Grennan & Woodhams, 2007; Zapf, 1999; Plimmer, 2022).

The emergence of the resilience theme surfaced organically during the analysis, a development that, given the prominence of resilience in social work, is not entirely unexpected. However, as the analysis progressed, I became increasingly aware of the literature's relative oversight of resilience as a potential outcome for individuals navigating workplace bullying. Recognising this gap, I deemed it essential to explore this theme. Upon closer examination, I observed a congruence between the theme and participants' narratives and existing theories, albeit situated outside the realm of workplace bullying. Consequently, I opted to draw attention to pre-existing perspectives rather than strictly adhering to the notion that grounded research must inevitably lead to the development of entirely new grand theories (Clarke, 2007). As Clarke highlighted, researchers are seldom newcomers to the existing literature in their field, often having seen a wealth of scholarship conducted in extensive literature reviews.

Thus, engaging in a reflexive analysis that acknowledges prior knowledge, including awareness of potentially relevant theories, proves more appropriate than adopting a tabula rasa approach. Reflexive integrity is about maintaining honesty and consistency in presenting information to the

readers. It is crucial to ensure the reliability of information by making sure it aligns with the data and makes logical sense. As researchers, we enhance the reliability of information through diverse analysis methods and engaging in thorough discussions with participants or fellow researchers. This commitment to reflexive integrity contributes to the trustworthiness of our research findings. In this case, I could not verify the information through a formal joint analysis. Since all participants had given this study enough time and on the commitment of anonymity the participants trusted me with their experience, so they did not want others to see their transcripts or have any further exploration of their experience with others. They had already spent a lot of time and effort dealing with their experiences, and they did not want to spend more energy on it now that they were ready to move on.

The notable absence of robust evidence indicated resilience among the victims, coupled with a discernible willingness to candidly share their experiences of adverse behaviours with others for the explicit purpose of education, serves as compelling evidence of the participants' efficacy in surmounting the lingering aftereffects of adverse behaviours. This proclivity to impart experiential knowledge not only underscores their personal triumph over adversity but also signifies a constructive and transformative response, contributing to the broader dissemination of awareness and understanding surrounding the impact of adverse behaviours.

Reflecting on the data collect and looking at the demographic details of each participant as shared in table 6 it will not be wrong to note that the average affiliation of the participants to academia was 9.5 years and despite the challenges and adverse situation they continued in their career in academia. While a subset of participants opted not to disclose the temporal duration *since* their experiences, their composed demeanour and willingness to share their experiences for the

collective benefit, coupled with the observation that all participants were still associated with academia, serves as a clear indication of their resilience in overcoming these experiences.

The journey to resilience for at least these participants commenced as they physically distanced themselves from the bullying environment. With this transition, various themes surfaced, predominantly intertwined with psychological healing. These encompassed the deliberate purging of reminders of trauma, navigating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), experiencing newfound creative freedom to construct a positive environment, personal growth through introspection, the cultivation of resilience through overcoming challenges, and, notably, the frequent mention of resilience strategies. As I examined the interview data in the initial post-bullying phase, a few participants expressed symptoms resembling PTSD, exhibiting heightened vigilance at their new worksite and occasionally feeling apologetic for minor issues. Some participants disclosed lingering anger, questioning why perpetrators of bullying seemed to thrive. For most participants, overcoming the trauma of bullying served as a catalyst for the development of resilience. This process involved creating a positive work environment, providing positive role models, emphasising faculty governance, and providing supportive environment. Reflecting on the bullying experience contributed to a perspective of ‘lessons learned’, where resilience to adversity emerged as a positive outcome from a distressing encounter.

Specific resilience strategies were consistently highlighted. Participants continued to seek support from family and colleagues, engaging in personal self-care activities. Some chose avoidance, opting to work off-campus until they felt safer and more psychologically healed. A crucial strategy involved rebuilding the professional persona, with many seeking renewed joy in teaching, increased interaction with students, dedicating time to scholarly research agendas, and participating in professional activities to rebuild self-confidence. Intention to switch job was a

major strategy, with almost all participants describing altered personal behaviours or work environments, while a few actively chose to remain in the challenging environment, gaining a sense of control by positioning themselves for future opportunities.

Participants demonstrated resilience by openly sharing their experiences and expressing an enhanced sense of control over their work environment over time, highlighting the importance of personal initiative and conducive circumstances. This finding is consistent with the research of Farooq and colleagues (2020) and Fazal and colleagues (2019), who acknowledge that despite facing challenges in balancing their responsibilities at home and in the workplace, individuals in Pakistan display notable resilience. Instead of succumbing to these challenges, they confront obstacles with determination, optimism, and effectiveness, both in their professional endeavours and personal lives.

#### 8.4 Conclusion

Addressing personal bullying necessitates an approach encompassing the formation of a supportive work environment, the implementation of anti-bullying policies, the provision of counselling and mental health support for victims, and the promotion of awareness and education on the repercussions of bullying. The cultivation of a workplace culture that prioritises respect, empathy, and inclusivity surface as pivotal in preventing personal bullying and safeguarding the overall well-being of all employees. The literature review and participant insights on coping mechanisms offer valuable guidance for practitioners to steer individuals affected by bullying towards more effective coping strategies. This contributes to a more constructive approach in addressing such challenging circumstances.

In qualitative research, the primary objective is to gain new insights and perspectives. One notable revelation is that individuals subjected to bullying can cultivate resilience as a result of their experiences. However, the limited participant pool prevents us from determining the prevalence of such development and whether the factors fostering resilience among bullied academics extend to other professional groups. Despite these constraints, the pivotal moments recounted by participants on their path to resilience align closely with established theoretical frameworks, including prominent models such as the demand-control-support theory in workplace stress. This alignment opens promising avenues for further exploration and theoretical development, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics that distinguish supportive workplaces from those that perpetuate bullying dynamics.

# Chapter 9

# Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I aim to synthesize the overall findings from my research, highlighting how these insights contribute to understanding workplace bullying in Pakistani higher education institutions (HEIs). The chapter also outlines recommendations for future research and interventions aimed at addressing and preventing bullying in this context.

## **9.1 Brief Review of the Process and Findings**

In the empirical literature on bullying in academia, key questions arise that are crucial for understanding prevention, management, and the impact on individuals. First, it is essential to examine how exposure to specific behaviours correlates with the experience of being targeted by bullying. In academic settings, for instance, critiques of ideas and contributions may be perceived differently than in corporate environments, which can influence how targets experience bullying. Understanding these nuances is particularly important for junior faculty navigating the tenure process.

Second, understanding the motives and intentions of those who engage in bullying is critical. This understanding can guide more effective management strategies, whether through interpersonal skills training, emotional management support, or direct intervention by organizational authorities when bullying is driven by rivalry or power struggles.

The third focus is on the role and effectiveness of formal mechanisms—such as HR, unions, and department chairs—in responding to and managing bullying. Insights into when and how these

mechanisms are effective can inform the development of policies and procedures that foster a more supportive and productive academic environment.

My research focused on exploring these issues within the context of Pakistani HEIs, particularly from the perspectives of female academics who had experienced bullying. The initial step in my inquiry involved a scoping review of existing literature, which revealed a significant gap in research on bullying in Pakistani academia, particularly with respect to gender-specific experiences.

The scoping review highlighted two areas in need of further exploration: first, a deeper understanding of bullying in Pakistani HEIs, and second, a focus on how gender-specific tactics impact the well-being and career trajectories of women. Given that 91.5% of women in Pakistan are involved in the field of education, with many serving in HEIs, this research is crucial not only for academic women but also for the broader educational sector.

Despite some existing research on bullying in academia, much of it fails to capture the depth of women's experiences, particularly in Pakistan, where cultural norms often silence discussions about workplace bullying. By incorporating autoethnography (AE), collaborative autoethnography (CAE), and exploratory semi-structured interviews (SSI), my research aimed to fill this gap by providing a nuanced understanding of bullying in a way that statistical analysis alone cannot achieve.

The autoethnographic approach allowed for a personal and culturally contextualized exploration of bullying, while CAE amplified the voices of other survivors, creating a collective narrative that resonates with a wider audience. The SSI added further depth, capturing the complexities of bullying from multiple perspectives. Together, these methods revealed not only the prevalence of

bullying but also the intricate ways in which it is embedded in the cultural and organizational fabric of Pakistani academia.

One significant finding was the persistent reluctance to address and the normalization of bullying within academic institutions, particularly where it intersects with gender. Women, especially in mid-level academic roles, were disproportionately affected by bullying, often facing stereotypes that undermine their competence and hinder their career progression. This aligns with theories of gendered organizations and social dominance, which highlight the power imbalances that sustain such behaviours.

The chapter emphasizes the importance of understanding these dynamics not just in statistical terms but through the lived experiences of those affected. My findings also highlight the emergence of resilience among women who resist mistreatment, a topic rarely explored in the bullying discourse.

## 9.2 Key Findings

The research suggests that in societies with lower levels of gender egalitarianism, women may be particularly vulnerable to bullying in the workplace, especially within academic institutions. This finding aligns with studies by Neuman et al. (2011) and Salin (2013), which note that in such environments, women are often socialized to be less assertive and more accommodating compared to men (Björkqvist, 1994). The power disparities that exist within these cultural contexts can hinder women's ability to resist negative behaviours and confront perpetrators, highlighting the potential link between cultural power dynamics and responses to bullying. These insights underscore the importance of promoting gender egalitarian values to mitigate vulnerability to bullying.

While the educational sector in Pakistan is often seen as a favourable profession for women, this study reveals underlying male-centric hierarchies and gender inequalities within organizational contexts. The findings indicate that bullying is a significant issue, particularly for women, although this is an underexplored area in Pakistani research literature.

Kanter (1975) asserts that gender differences in organizational behaviour stem more from structural factors than individual characteristics. Women's challenges in large organizations often arise from their structural placement, such as being confined to lower-level positions or token roles (Agu, 2020). The structural inequality can contribute to the risk of bullying, making it difficult to disentangle the influence of various factors. Even among women academics with relatively urbanized and well-educated backgrounds, workplace bullying persists, highlighting its prevalence even in more privileged settings (Mubarak, & Nazeer, 2019). Research in Pakistan reflects this pattern, revealing a gendered structure within the education sector.

The study also identifies tenure status as a significant factor influencing the prevalence of bullying in higher education. Job security, particularly for tenured faculty, can foster an environment where bullying tactics are more likely to occur. The exploitation of tenure by management, coupled with the lack of robust legal protections, complicates efforts to address bullying. Faculty responses to bullying vary; some choose to resign in search of better opportunities, while others endure the situation in hopes of improvement. Participants noted that negative leadership often led to resignations, as individuals sought to distance themselves from toxic work environments and restart their careers.

One of the study's findings is that both men and women in leadership roles can contribute to a culture of bullying. However, it is important to clarify that not all women in leadership engage in such behaviours. Some participants reported that women in authority positions sometimes adopted

behaviours perceived as undermining or bullying, which may include gaslighting, shunning, or spreading gossip. These behaviours, when present, were seen as contributing to a negative work environment and affecting the professional trajectories of their colleagues. However, it is crucial to avoid generalizing these findings to suggest that all women leaders exhibit these behaviours. Instead, the study highlights the complexity of power dynamics in leadership roles and the potential for both men and women to engage in negative behaviours.

Additionally, the study reveals the emergence of resilience among participants. Despite facing significant challenges, participants exhibited resilience by openly sharing their experiences and expressing a growing sense of control over their work environments. This resilience was fostered by personal initiative and supportive circumstances, aligning with the findings of Farooq et al. (2020) and Fazal et al. (2019), who observed that women in Pakistan demonstrate remarkable resilience in balancing their professional and personal lives.

These findings provide valuable insights into the dynamics of workplace bullying in academia, considering tenure status, the intersection of gender and culture, and the resilience exhibited by individuals. The study suggests that certain resilience strategies are particularly relevant during and after the experience of bullying, including the preparation for exiting toxic environments and the healing process that follows. Reflection on these experiences played a pivotal role in diminishing self-blame and shame, especially when individuals found themselves in more positive environments.

While leaving a toxic workplace can be beneficial for the individual, it may not necessarily resolve the underlying issues within the institution. Administrators, if they are not part of the problem, have a responsibility to address bullying. This responsibility is not only important for addressing faculty shortages but also for promoting program quality and maintaining the institution's fiscal

health. Regular assessments, including exit interviews and 360-degree evaluations, can provide valuable feedback and help administrators foster a more positive work environment. Addressing bullying by senior faculty is also essential to ensuring a healthy and productive academic community.

These key findings offer valuable insights into the complex dynamics of workplace bullying in academia, considering tenure status, the intersection of gender and culture, and the resilience exhibited by individuals. The results offer a more extended outlook for faculty, indicating that certain resilience strategies are particularly relevant during the experience of bullying, the preparation for exit, and the subsequent mental and physical healing post-bullying. This study identified that most of the enduring, harmful bullying originated from horizontally, with senior faculty being the secondary perpetrators. An unexpected discovery was faculty actively opting to remain in a bullying environment, driven by factors such as limited geographical alternatives or a deliberate delay until they could exert control over their next job choice. While described as an act of defiance, this choice was associated with sustained negative physical and psychological responses. The process of resilience was powered by reflection on the experience. Reflection played a pivotal role in the healing process for faculty members. The tendencies to self-blame and experience shame significantly diminished when individuals had the opportunity to be in a positive environment and reflect on the toxicity of their previous workplace. Workplace bullies often enjoy protection from those in positions of power, leading to the normalisation and tolerance of abuse. This norm has far-reaching implications for faculty recruitment, retention, and overall well-being. While a faculty member's withdrawal from a toxic environment may be a positive step for the individual, it does not necessarily benefit the educational institution. Administrators, if they are not perpetrators themselves, bear the responsibility of addressing bullying within the institution.

This is not only essential due to the ongoing faculty shortage but also crucial for promoting a safe and healthy environment. Conducting system assessments regarding faculty absence and worksite avoidance is pertinent. Information gathering can include exit interviews and 360-degree evaluation processes. Like administrators evaluating faculty performance, obtaining faculty perspectives on their leaders and the work environment should be a routine practice and not an exception. Such feedback can prove educative, especially for administrators perceived as bullies by their faculty. Administrators are, and should be, accountable for fostering a positive work environment. Additionally, addressing and managing bullying by senior faculty is imperative.

### 9.3 Contribution to the Field of Research

The study analyzed and interpreted workplace bullying both in general and with a specific focus on gender. While certain aspects of workplace bullying, such as its effects and coping mechanisms, aligned with findings from some Western countries, distinct differences emerged, particularly in how bullying is framed within cultural contexts.

Regarding gender and workplace bullying, the findings from this study echo Acker's (1990) concept of the inequality regime, where bullying manifests as a form of gendered oppression. This contributes to gender disparities concerning compensation and acknowledgment of their work and effort. Some results align with Western findings regarding perpetrators, recognising that bullies can be both men and women, holding positions of significant power in hierarchical structures where such bullying conduct occurs. Additionally, this research identifies gender as a risk factor for bullying, as demonstrated by the experiences of women in this study, highlighting the impact of social constructions of gender roles and norms on bullying dynamics. Broadly, the study constitutes a novel addition to the exploration of gender and workplace bullying within an Asian

environment rather than a western setting. By concentrating on contextual factors, the findings deepen our understanding of individuals' perceptions and experiences related to gendered workplace bullying in Pakistan, as well as in the broader Asian context.

The incorporation of risk factors provides substantial evidence that enhances our understanding of workplace bullying as perceived by academics in Pakistan. Notably, both gender and culture emerge as crucial, inseparable risk factors in interpreting workplace bullying in this context. Women are more susceptible to bullying from co-workers due to the social construction of gender roles that define their roles as wives and mothers, intertwined with gender norms and cultural expectations. The understanding derived from this study emphasises that workplace bullying against educators in HEIs in Pakistan exhibits diverse manifestations, influenced by a range of risk factors. Educational institutions in Pakistan demonstrate pronounced gender-related characteristics, including the delineation of gender roles, gender-specific job roles, and instances of gender discrimination, all of which contribute to instances of job-related bullying. Moreover, Pakistan presents unique cultural risk factors, power imbalances, social dominance and gender orientation which have a significant impact on the occurrence of workplace bullying. These elements are integral in understanding workplace bullying in Pakistan. Consequently, this study contributes to the existing body of research on workplace bullying, particularly through a gendered and cultural lens.

Another important aspect of this study is the autoethnographical method used in this research, which explore researchers experience to understand the phenomena. Autoethnographies are individualised narratives that are prompted by the researcher's own experiences to deepen understanding of sociological phenomena (Sparkes, 1996). When we explore the use of personal narratives within the realm of sociology, Laslett (1999) contends that it is the convergence of

personal experiences and societal influences that provides a fresh perspective, enabling a distinctive contribution to the field of social science.

I envision that my research findings can serve as a valuable reference for shaping regulations or guidelines concerning workplace bullying in Pakistan HEIs. New Zealand stands as an effective model for this purpose in its approach to addressing and preventing workplace bullying. In the Islamic Republic, gender and culture are intertwined aspects that are challenging to disentangle when striving to comprehend workplace bullying in Pakistani context.

#### 9.4 Limitations

While the study offers valuable insights into the dynamics of workplace bullying within academia, it is imperative to acknowledge certain limitations. The research is confined to the perspectives of educators in Karachi, Pakistan. Given that Pakistan is characterized by an agrarian society, with 38% of its population living in urban areas, it is evident that perspectives from educators in various cities across the country are essential for a comprehensive understanding of workplace bullying in academia. Examining the viewpoints of educators in different regions would contribute significantly to elucidating the extent to which regional cultural influences impact the perceptions of educators on this issue.

One limitation of the study was the lack of volunteers from diverse backgrounds among faculty members. This lack of representation constrains the study's ability to provide a comprehensive and balanced analysis of workplace bullying in academia. Consequently, the findings may not fully encompass the breadth of perspectives and experiences prevalent within the broader faculty community, potentially impacting the generalisability and applicability of the study's outcomes. Thus, the predominance of women participants in the study provides a focused exploration into

the experiences of women academics restricting the representation of diverse faculty experiences within the broader academic community. By primarily featuring women, the study captured the underlying forces that could vary across different gender groups in academia. The absence of male faculty members and other gender identities limits the scope of the findings, limiting a fully rounded understanding of workplace dynamics and potential differences in the experiences of faculty members based on gender.

The research primarily focuses on the experiences and perspectives of direct participants, such as bullied individuals and perpetrators of workplace bullying, overlooking the potential insights provided by bystanders. Bystanders, play a crucial role in understanding the broader contextual dynamics and the overall impact of workplace bullying within the academic setting.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the resilience strategies discussed in the study are specific to academia and may not be universally applicable in other service providing sectors. The distinct nature of these environments, characterised by varying professional demands, organisational structures, and interpersonal dynamics, suggests that strategies effective in an academic setting may not seamlessly translate to the other service sectors. This limitation draws attention to the need for focused research and tailored approaches when considering the implementation of resilience strategies in different professional contexts, recognising the unique challenges and subtleties present in each setting.

To address the limitation related to the exclusive focus on women participants and the lack of diversity in the study, a potential way forward is to actively encourage and seek participation from a more diverse pool of faculty members. Researchers could employ targeted outreach strategies, collaborate with miscellaneous academic departments, and engage in inclusive recruitment practices to ensure a broader representation. Additionally, conducting follow-up studies

specifically designed to explore the experiences of underrepresented groups within the faculty could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of workplace dynamics. Emphasising the importance of diverse perspectives and experiences in future research endeavours will enhance the study's applicability and relevance to a broader range of faculty members. Overall, however, women have been the excluded voices in the bullying conversation, and generic gender inclusion of men and women without adequate reference to the cultural gender hierarchies, misses the point of women's distinctive experience of bullying. Here, then, leading with the voices and experiences is a positive gain.

### 9.5 Recommendations

Based on my exploration of this issue from various methodological stance I find Lester's (2013) recommendations to be most suitable to cope with bullying issue in academia in Pakistan. To address workplace bullying in higher education, a combination of formal and informal strategies is recommended. Informal approaches involve faculty peers working together to create a positive culture within their department or institution. This can be achieved through collective action and promoting respectful behaviour. On the other hand, formal processes provide a structured framework for addressing and preventing bullying incidents. Lester suggests and I agree if these formal procedures are enforced properly, they have the potential to shape the overall organisational culture. It is important to target specific stakeholder groups with tailored recommendations to effectively combat workplace bullying in higher education settings. Targeting specific stakeholder groups with tailored recommendations is crucial for effectively addressing and mitigating bullying within higher education settings. This approach ensures that the unique needs and challenges of different groups are considered, leading to more impactful and sustainable outcomes

Faculty members would benefit from educating themselves about workplace bullying to effectively respond to such situations. It is crucial for faculty to distinguish between congenial debate, conflict, and bullying. While debate can involve passionate differences of opinion, it should remain civil. Recognising and properly labelling the behaviour is the first step towards resolving it. Faculty can refer to resources on collegiality and other definitions of workplace bullying to identify and potentially modify behaviours in the workplace.

Where there is no established formal system for reporting such misconduct, victim should consider employing coping strategies based on the specific circumstances they find themselves in. When it comes to a problem-oriented approach, for instance, reporting the bullying incidents to a manager or the organisation's leader is an option. However, this option is advised only if the bully is not a superior or if the boss is not subordinate to the bully. On the other hand, techniques like resistance should only be applied if individuals possess the courage to do so, as it may entail risks related to job security and potentially result in increased stress and anxiety. Regarding emotion-oriented strategies, since they may not effectively halt or reduce bullying behaviour, my recommendation is to consider using them primarily to manage stress.

Significant to the coping strategies employed by the participants in this study to address bullying emphasises the need for distinct strategies in Pakistan compared to a Western country like New Zealand. In Pakistan, individuals who are bullied often deal with the situation independently due to the absence of a legal and human resource framework. In contrast, in New Zealand, bullied employees have the option to report incidents of bullying to their manager, directly to a Human Resources department or representative, or even to the WorkSafe New Zealand office. Moreover, under the legal framework in New Zealand, employers are obligated to provide a safe work

environment and must take action to address and prevent workplace bullying (Employment New Zealand, 2018) a proposition this study makes for HEIs in Pakistan.

### 9.5 Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

This section outlines suggestions for managers and supervisors regarding the prevention and handling of relational and social aggression within the workplace. During the recruitment process, it is recommended to inquire about an applicant's approach to handling workplace-related problems. A conclusion I have drawn from my experience with workplace bullying, which was reinforced by the participants of the study, is that proactive communication and early intervention are key to preventing the escalation of conflicts and fostering a healthier work environment.

Managers involved in the hiring process should incorporate case vignettes of relational and social bullying to assess the applicant's responses. Applicants may be prompted to delineate the situation from both the perpetrators and victim's viewpoints, as well as to offer recommendations on how management could intervene. Candidates may be queried about the behaviours they intend to demonstrate as employees to foster a positive and productive work environment.

#### **Workplace Policy and Procedures**

Higher education institutions should develop a clear anti-bullying policy that defines relational and social aggression and their associated conducts. Existing policies should be periodically reviewed to ensure they cover a wide range of bullying behaviours, including physical and verbal bullying, as well as actions related to relational and social aggression, which may include cyberbullying. The institution should establish straightforward procedures for reporting workplace bullying, including options for anonymous reporting. Additionally, clear protocols should be defined for investigating bullying incidents, involving separate interviews with staff who have

been targeted, perpetrators, and witnesses. To effectively address workplace bullying, the institution should establish procedures for applying penalties to employees found engaging in such behaviour. This may include a written warning for the first offence, a behavioural coaching session with an administrator for the second offence, and short-term leave for a third offence. Penalties should be sufficiently strict to deter relational and social aggression. While my research could not measure the effectiveness of these penalties, based on the findings from the three methodological processes, I posit that these recommendations are grounded in broader literature on workplace bullying and management strategies. Research from similar organizational settings suggests that written warnings, coaching, and short-term leave can serve as effective deterrents by signalling that bullying behaviours will not be tolerated and by providing opportunities for behavioural correction. However, these strategies for intervention and prevention were notably absent from the findings.

### **Training**

Institutions of higher education should implement mandatory training programs for individuals upon joining or during their employment tenure. These programs should cover topics such as sexual harassment awareness and relational/social aggression in the workplace. Both new hires and experienced staff should have access to training sessions that provide detailed statistics and outline the repercussions of such behaviours for bullied individuals, perpetrators, and the overall work environment. Facilitating open dialogue is crucial, allowing employees to delve into the underlying causes of relational and social aggression within the institution. Further, employees should actively participate in brainstorming sessions to propose strategies that can either mitigate negative workplace climates or foster a healthy and productive environment. As part of the

workplace expectations, all employees should be required to sign a behavioural contract outlining the expected standards of treatment toward one another within the organisation.

Supervisors and managers must exhibit ego strength, assertiveness, and maintain clear professional boundaries, especially considering that perpetrators may possess charm and social prowess that they might attempt to leverage for manipulation.

Furthermore, supervisors and managers should consistently assess their own approaches to conflict resolution and work dynamics, ensuring they do not inadvertently reinforce a culture that tolerates relational and social aggression among colleagues.

#### 9.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Further empirical and normative research is essential to assess the extent to which cultural norms can undergo a transformation towards fostering an equitable society for individuals without the discrimination of gender. This shift from a culture of mere compliance to one characterised by an attitude of integrity may lead to an overall enhancement in workforce productivity and creativity. The primary focus should be on investigating the potential of integrity-based perspectives, extending beyond organisational conformity, to instigate social justice that acknowledges the ethical value or moral mindfulness of individuals within organisations. Researchers could delve into the examination of specific organisational cultural features that might either facilitate or hinder this transformation process. Specifically, there is a need to explore whether certain characteristics embedded in the organisations can support or impede the evolution towards an elevated level of moral mindfulness.

Additionally, researchers could check if certain aspects of an institutions way of doing things can support or block this positive change. Moreover, researchers could also study how being fair to

people relates to taking care of the environment in organisations. To put it simply, researchers could explore how being fair and doing good for the environment are connected in organisations. A cross-sectional study can benefit employees by providing a snapshot of current conditions, allowing for a quick assessment of various factors influencing the well-being, job satisfaction, and overall work environment. This approach can be useful for identifying immediate trends and patterns, offering valuable insights that can inform timely interventions and improvements. While a longitudinal study offers the advantage of tracking changes over an extended period, a cross-sectional study's efficiency in capturing a comprehensive view of the workforce at a specific point in time makes it a valuable tool for targeted and swift decision-making to enhance employee experiences and organisational outcomes.

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## Appendix 1. Ethics Approval

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The University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
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Hamilton, New Zealand

Human Research Ethics Committee  
Roger Moltzen  
Telephone: +64021658119  
Email: [humanethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@waikato.ac.nz)



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

1 February 2022

Roshana Kamran  
School of Social Sciences  
DALPS  
By email: [roshana.kamran@gmail.com](mailto:roshana.kamran@gmail.com)

Dear Roshana

**HREC(Health)2021# 88 : Exploring bullying against university teachers in Pakistan: A corrosive workplace issue**

Thank you for your responses to the Committee feedback.

We are now pleased to provide formal approval for your project.

Please contact the Committee by email ([humanethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@waikato.ac.nz)) if you wish to make changes to your project as it unfolds, quoting your application number with your future correspondence. Any minor changes or additions to the approved research activities can be handled outside the monthly application cycle.

We wish you all the best with your research.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RM', written over a horizontal line.

---

**Emeritus Professor Roger Moltzen MNZM**  
**Chairperson**  
**University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee**

## Appendix 2. Participant Information Sheets (PIS)



### Participant Information sheet

The following information sheet is for those who volunteer to be part of the study mentioned above

#### 1. Invitation

You are invited to be part of a research study investigating the types of bullying behaviors university teachers experience while teaching. In this study you to share your experience of being bullied in your professional life as a university teacher in Pakistan. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment Ph.D. in Sociology for student Roshana Kamran, under the supervision of Edgar Burns and Bruce Curtis of Waikato University, New Zealand.

Roshana Kamran has been associated with different Pakistani educational institutions for over a decade.

Edgar Burns is a Chair of Integrated Management Hawke's Bay at Division of Law, Psychology, & Social Sciences at the University of Waikato.

#### 2. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to narrate and display the contextual stressor, "bullying" experienced by Pakistani tertiary level teachers and how this impacts their well-being.

#### 3. Why Have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate after an informal discussion about the project and your willingness to share your experience with us (on the condition that your identity and your organization will be kept anonymous). You have volunteered to be part of this research study

#### 4. What will I be asked to do?

If you choose to participate in this study, you would be asked to email us [address]. At this time an interview/ interview questions you will be shared with you . The duration of the interview will be 40-60 minutes. In the interview, you would be asked 15-20 questions. Your response will be recorded. The interview can have intermittent breaks to give you time to gather your thoughts and compose yourself.

**5. Are there any possible benefits for the participant in this study?**

By identifying the factors that perpetrate bullying in universities, your experience would create awareness about this neglected topic. This could ultimately lead to serious consideration of this phenomenon and, in the future, can lead to enforcement of laws for it.

**6. Are there any possible risks from participation in the study?**

The risk could be in the form of an emotional setback while retelling the experience. The participant might be overwhelmed with emotions and would not like to continue. In such cases, we will stop the interview until the composure is restored, but in extreme cases, we would reschedule the interview.

**7. What if I change my mind during or after the interview?**

It is essential that you understand that your participation in the study is entirely voluntary; while we hope you participate; we respect your right to refuse. You will have the opportunity to withdraw from the study should you wish to without any explanation or consequences.

**8. What will happen to the information when the study is over?**

[ answered] After the PhD is completed the anonymize interviews will be stored in a secured place in the university

**9. How will the result of the study be published?**

The result of the study will be included in my dissertation. The results may also be included in the research articles written for publication purposes.

**This information sheet is your copy Proceeding with the interview will indicate your consent to participate in this research.**

*I agree to our interview being audio-recorded, and may choose to ask for an electronic copy.*

### Appendix 3. Participant Consent Form



#### *Consent Form for Participants*

*I have read the Information Sheet for Participants for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.*

*I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out on the Information Sheet.*

*I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet form.*

*Signed:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Name:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4. Research Team



### □ *Researcher's Name and contact information:*

*Roshana Kamran (roshana.kamran@gmail.com)*

*Std\_1576308*

*University of Waikato*

*New Zealand*

### □ *Supervisor's Name and contact information:*



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
Te Wānanga o Waikato

Edgar Burns | Chair of Integrated Catchment Management Hawke's Bay  
Te Kura Aronui School of Social Sciences | Te Wānanga o Ngā Kete Division of  
Arts Law, Psychology, & Social Sciences | University of Waikato |  
PO Box 12023 | Napier 4114 | New Zealand | +642 2588 5900

### □ *Counsellor in Pakistan*

*Salima Ahsan Tejani (salima.ahsan@iqra.edu.pk)*

*Ph.D.(Psychology)*

*Assistant Professor*

*Iqra university Karachi*

*Pakistan*

## **Interview Questions**



### **Major Questions**

1. How long have you been in the teaching line?
2. How do you define yourself as a teacher? (Compassionate, Sensitive, Strict, empathetic, emotional, patient, resilient, vocal, composed) give example of your choices.
3. How does your institution support wellbeing of the teachers? Give example
4. What approaches are taken to promote wellbeing in your institution
5. How can u define work place bullying?
6. Have you ever faced bullying in your professional life?
7. Share your experience. (duration, kind of bullying behaviour, the perpetrator) a detailed response required.
8. How did you overcome work place bullying in your institution?
9. What in your opinion is the cause of workplace bullying?
10. Who do you think are the perpetrator of bullying behaviour?
11. Who do you think are the victims of workplace bullying?
12. Does workplace bullying effect your ability to teach.?
13. What can be done to preserve the wellbeing of everyone in the institution and reduce bullying?

### **Minor**

1. How do you rate yourself as a teacher?
2. What motivates you the most about this profession?
3. Do you prefer to work alone or in groups?
4. How have you contributed to the cause of wellbeing in your institution?
5. What are the most severe form of work place bullying have you witnessed?



### **Consent Letter from Counsellor**

This is in regards to the Research Study Topic: "Exploring workplace bullying against university teachers in Pakistan: A corrosive workplace issue" by researcher Roshana Kamran under the supervision of Professor Edgar Burns of Waikato University, New Zealand.

In this regard I wish to inform you that I am willing to accept Ms. Roshana Kamran's request to act as a counsellor to her participant. My role in this study will be passive and participant can only approach me with the consent of Ms. Roshana and her supervisor.

I will provide paid brief solution focused therapy if contacted by participants for personal or work related stress. If participant will have needs for other kind of therapy I will help them to connect with expert of that area.

My area of expertise include self – esteem issues, personal, academic or work related stress using Positive psychology techniques.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

SALIMA

Name of Counsellor: Dr. Salima Ahsan Tejani

Designation: Assistant professor

Name of Institution: IQRA University

Contact Number: 03343796889

Email: salimabtejani@gmail.com

Appendix 7. Co-Authorship Form 1



## Co-Authorship Form

School of Graduate Research  
 The University of Waikato  
 Private Bag 3105  
 Hamilton 3240, New Zealand  
 Phone +64 7 838 5096  
 Email: SGR@waikato.ac.nz  
 Website:  
<http://www.waikato.ac.nz/students/research-degrees/>

This form is to accompany the submission of any PhD that contains research reported in published or unpublished co-authored work. **Please include one copy of this form for each co-authored work.** Completed forms should be included in your appendices for all the copies of your thesis submitted for examination and library deposit (including digital deposit).

Please indicate the chapter/section/pages of this thesis that are extracted from a co-authored work and give the title and publication details or details of submission of the co-authored work.

Article Title: Bullying Research Progress Review: Women Academics in Pakistan's University Sector

Chapter 2. Literature review

Nature of contribution by PhD candidate	Collected data, analysed data, wrote drafts and final
Extent of contribution by PhD candidate (%)	80%

### CO-AUTHORS

Name	Nature of Contribution
Edgar Burns	Suggested the outlet, discussed theoretical framework, edited drafts

### Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- ❖ the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and
- ❖ that the candidate wrote all or the majority of the text.

Name	Signature	Date
Edgar Burns		30 Jan 2024

## Appendix 8. Co-Authorship Form 2



# Co-Authorship Form

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Hamilton 3240, New Zealand  
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Please indicate the chapter/section/pages of this thesis that are extracted from a co-authored work and give the title and publication details or details of submission of the co-authored work.

Article: 2 Gender disparities: Antecedents to bullying in Academia in Pakistan

Chapter 2. Literature review (Thematic analysis of literature)

Nature of contribution  
by PhD candidate  
Extent of contribution  
by PhD candidate (%)

Collected data, analysed data, wrote drafts and final

80%

### CO-AUTHORS

Name	Nature of Contribution
Edgar Burns	Suggested the outlet, discussed theoretical framework, edited drafts

### Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- ❖ the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and
- ❖ that the candidate wrote all or the majority of the text.

Name	Signature	Date
Edgar Burns		30 January 2024

## Appendix 9. Co-Authorship Form 3



# Co-Authorship Form

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Hamilton 3240, New Zealand  
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Website:  
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Please indicate the chapter/section/pages of this thesis that are extracted from a co-authored work and give the title and publication details or details of submission of the co-authored work.

Article 3: Bullying and Autoethnography: A Personal Narrative of Harassment in Higher Education  
Chapter 5: Findings and analysis

Nature of contribution by PhD candidate	Collected data, analysed data, wrote drafts and final
Extent of contribution by PhD candidate (%)	80%

### CO-AUTHORS

Name	Nature of Contribution
Edgar Burns	Suggested the outlet, discussion, edited drafts

### Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- ❖ the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and
- ❖ that the candidate wrote all or the majority of the text.

Name	Signature	Date
Edgar Burns		30 January 2024

Appendix 10. Co-Author Form 4



## Co-Authorship Form

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Please indicate the chapter/section/pages of this thesis that are extracted from a co-authored work and give the title and publication details or details of submission of the co-authored work.

Article Title: Kamran, R., Burns, E. A., Sultan, S., Tahir, S., & Ashraf, S. (2023). Breaking the silence: three Pakistani women academics' accounts of being bullied. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1-17.

Chapter 6: Collaborative autoethnographic narration

Nature of contribution by PhD candidate	
Extent of contribution by PhD candidate (%)	


### CO-AUTHORS

Name	Nature of Contribution
Edgar Burns	

### Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- ❖ the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and
- ❖ that the candidate wrote all or the majority of the text.

Name	Signature	Date
Edgar Burns (Second Author)		