

Response to Examiners Report

New Zealand Examiner

Candidate: Roshana Kamran Ali

Thesis title: Exploring Bullying Amongst Academics in Pakistan: A corrosive workplace issue.

Examiner: Dr Suzanne Phibbs

Overall comments:

The thesis provides a qualitative analysis of bullying of (mainly) female academics in Pakistani Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Intersections of identity explored including gender, socio-economic status and seniority. The conceptual framework for the thesis draws on social constructionism.

The thesis explores the following research questions:

Q 1. 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?

It is my view that the research questions are successfully addressed within the thesis

The research combines autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography and qualitative interviews. Excellent discussions of the methodology and methods are provided. Difficulties accessing participants, and gaining rapport/trust past initial contact, served to nicely illustrate the hidden/taboo nature of bullying within HEIs in Pakistan and the difficulties around giving voice to this topic.

Thank you for your feedback. I'm pleased to hear that you believe the research questions have been successfully addressed within the thesis.

Chapters five and six focus on ethnographic accounts of bullying within HEI settings in Pakistan. Chapter five provides an autoethnographic account of being bullied with a HEI in Pakistan documenting the personal and career impacts that followed. The protagonist's story is narrated, and their experience contextualised in relation to the international literature on workplace bullying. The insider account of bullying provided in this chapter establishes the subject position of the author in relation to the thesis topic. Given that, in this instance, the bully was a woman, I would like to have seen further discussion of the gender of the manager in relation to the literature on bullying/Pakistani content in this chapter.

Thank you for your feedback. Please note that the articles referenced in Chapters Five and Six have already been published, and there is limited scope for further revisions. However, I will take your suggestion into account for future research and discussions to enhance the analysis of gender dynamics in relation to bullying.

Chapter six, the second published chapter, provides a collaborative ethnographic account of bullying in higher education settings in Pakistan. Drawing on the accounts of three female academics, the collaborative autoethnography elaborated how interaction between a group of colleagues shaped their ability to speak about their adverse experiences. A strength of this chapter is the personal trouble/public issue shift in the narrator's understanding of her experience as she comes to identify patterns across the narratives and to see bullying through a sociological lens.

I'm pleased that you found the collaborative autoethnography and the shift from personal trouble to public issue to be a strength of the chapter.

Chapters 7 and 8 present findings from the semi-structured and email interviews conducted for this thesis. Chapter 7 centres on the exploration of themes of isolation and ostracism identified in the interview data. Within this chapter, findings on workplace bullying are presented in relation to the three sections of the NAQ-R framework (Einarsen, 2009) using extracts from interviews illustrate. Information from across the interviews identified that participants experienced 6 of 7 indicators of job-related bullying, 10 of 12 indicators of personal bullying and no indicators of personal intimidation (this section of the chapter could be extracted to form another publication). The chapter then goes on to consider gender, cultural issues, and silence associated with workplace bullying in Pakistan. Participant definitions of bullying, risk groups and sanctioned victims (difference, non-conformity, low status, gender discrimination) frame the last sections of the chapter. It is concluded that while there are similarities to the international literature on workplace bullying, there are also significant differences that can be traced back to unique aspects of Pakistani culture.

I'm pleased to hear that the exploration of themes like isolation, ostracism, and the use of the NAQ-R framework were effectively conveyed. Your suggestion about extracting the section on job-related and personal bullying indicators for a separate publication has already taken. I'm delighted to share that I have converted this chapter into an article titled "Exploring the Culture of Bullying in Academia: A Case Study in Pakistan." The article is currently under review in the *Administration & Society* journal.

Corrections are noted throughout the thesis copy returned to the examinations committee. In summary, the thesis needs a close read for grammatical errors. Remove the reference to grounded theory and consider swapping out the term phenomenon uses throughout for an alternative such as issue (this is because phenomenon is also a term that is associated with phenomenology).

Thank you for your feedback. I have read through the thesis and replaced the term "phenomenon" with more suitable alternatives. The edits are tracked in the document for your review.

Examiners Comments and Response

Oversea Examiner

Thank you for the opportunity to act as an examiner for your thesis, 'Exploring Bullying Against Academics in Pakistan: A Corrosive Workplace Issue.' Congratulations on completing this important extended study!

I will begin by first responding to the criteria outlined in the External Examiner's information sheet. There is a lot that is achieved. Through the thesis, the candidate shows familiarity with and understanding of the relevant literature. The research aims are clear, and the qualitative study of bullying in higher education in Pakistan is sufficiently comprehensive. The methods – autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography and semi-structured interviews – are appropriate to the topic, which has largely been studied using quantitative methods in existing scholarship. The methods also demonstrate an innovative approach to engaging with a research population that is often reluctant to talk about their experiences. The research findings are suitably presented and analysed. The expression is mostly satisfactory. As a whole, the thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge. And, given that some chapters have already been published, sections are worthy of publication.

Thank you for your positive feedback. I appreciate your recognition of my engagement with the relevant literature and the clarity of the research aims. I'm pleased that the use of autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, and semi-structured interviews has been seen as an innovative and appropriate approach to studying workplace bullying in higher education in Pakistan. It is encouraging to read that the research findings were presented and analyzed effectively, and that the thesis is considered to make an original contribution to the field. I'm also glad that the published chapters reflect the quality and impact of the work. Thank you again for your valuable feedback.

Apply the relevant literature – especially theory-informed sociological scholarship – to the presented analysis; this will help to extend the analysis and extend the contribution to sociology (the wider context of knowledge to which it belongs)

Most of the thesis has either been published or is under consideration for publication. We plan to adhere to the grounded theory approach, which is driven by the data itself rather than being shaped by pre-existing theoretical frameworks.

Exhibit and clarify the connection between analysis of the findings and the presented recommendations

As previously indicated, the analysis in Chapter 7 is derived from the findings of a single semi-structured interview (SSI). In contrast, the discussion and recommendations presented in Chapters 8 and 9 are informed by the analysis of both autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography, in addition to the semi-structured interview.

Edit the writing (I suggest employing a professional editor, given the number of editorial corrections) to ensure clarity is consistent, and adherence to writing conventions.

I have discussed this with my chief supervisor, and we will engage our second supervisor to assist with the proofreading.

Abstract

Your abstract makes the importance of the topic and your contribution clear. Editorial corrections/suggestions

Paragraph 1: Omit ‘the’ after ‘overall’ and before ‘learning environment’

Paragraph 3: replace ‘acts’ with ‘act’ before ‘as barriers’

The editorial corrections you suggested have been made.

Chapter 1

Your introduction has most of the required elements. In this chapter, you clearly indicate the gap in research that your thesis addresses: ‘There have been no known comprehensive studies of workplace bullying in academia in Pakistan’ (p 15-16). You underscore the complexity of the issue: ‘McKay (2008) assert[s] that this idealised façade does not hinder these institutions from bullying. Instead, it serves as a veneer behind which bullying can thrive’ (p. 14). And you articulate your research questions and thesis structure for the reader.

There is scope, however, to provide a little more background for the reader. The term ‘seth’ is introduced for the first time on page 55 (in chapter 2), but not defined until later. The many terms that underpin your research, from bullying to harassment to incivility and mobbing, could be defined here in chapter 1 as well, delving into the complexities of these terms for the reader.

The term "Seth culture" has now been introduced earlier in the thesis as suggested(pg.17)

This might also be a good place to defend your reasoning behind treating all of these concepts as synonymous within your scoping review. There is also room to be more explicit about your own experience of bullying. Upon first reading this chapter, I thought you had observed bullying, but not experienced it first-hand.

Add pg. 22

Chapter 2, Article 1

The article / scoping review clearly sets up the need for your research. It usefully establishes an appreciation of bullying as entangled within a ‘configuration’. Tables offer helpful visualisations of the research process. The article also underscores the need for research adopting the approach taken

by the candidate: ‘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’ (p. 47). The discussion is masterfully argued, explicating the many-fold complexities to the issue, from underreporting, to limited agency, to cultural considerations to gendered expectations.

There is scope, however, to provide a little more detail for the reader on the parameters of the scoping review – potentially in the preface. Why, for example, did you limit the search to 2000- 22? Did something significant happen in 2000?

The decision to limit the search to 2000-2022 was driven by the need to focus on the most recent and relevant research developments. Prior to 2000, the literature was less aligned with current methodologies and theoretical advancements that are central to the study. While specific details on the significance of the year 2000 were not included, this timeframe was chosen to ensure the review reflected contemporary issues and trends in the field.

Furthermore, there is scope to expand on the coping mechanisms revealed through the review, and critically consider this way of framing things. Coping - as a psychological construct – has been critiqued as individualistic. It might not allow you to sufficiently consider all the sociocultural complexities that are relevant to your study.

The initial framing of coping mechanisms was intended to provide a focused analysis of individual psychological responses. This approach was based on prevalent frameworks in the existing literature that emphasize individual coping strategies. Although this framing may appear individualistic, it was chosen to align with the dominant perspectives and methodologies within the field at the time of the review.

Thank you again for your feedback, which helps to clarify the rationale behind these decisions.

Chapter 3.

Page 72: ‘While Seth culture...my positivistic perspective led me to anticipate its absence within my study domain’ – did you mean optimistic instead of positivistic? My reading of your methodology chapter is that you are working within an interpretivist research paradigm (epistemology & ontology), not a positivistic one.

Thank you for pointing that out. You are correct; the term “positivistic” was used incorrectly. My intention was to convey an “optimistic” perspective regarding the anticipated findings. As you observed, my methodology is indeed grounded in an interpretivist research paradigm, which aligns with the epistemological and ontological approaches detailed in the chapter. I appreciate your careful reading and have corrected this terminology to reflect the interpretivist nature of the study.

Chapter 4 Methodology

In this chapter you thoroughly outline and defend the methods you have adopted within your thesis. You indicate on page 101 that you are appropriately taking an interpretative approach to your research. You also talk about ‘truth’ using quotations (p. 113), indicating a critical engagement with this terminology. This poses an opportunity to more thoroughly explicate your project’s epistemological and ontological positioning, informed by an interpretative approach.

This would provide a useful backdrop to your decision-making regarding your analysis. There has been much discussion in recent decades critiquing the naïve positioning of the researcher within grounded theory approaches to qualitative analysis that emphasise emergence and presume the researcher can be objective. There have also been critiques of the ‘methodological fetishism’ of these more formulaic approaches to data analysis (e.g., ‘constant comparison’ [p.125] from grounded theory). Given that you have drawn on your ‘reading of the academic literature’ to inform your analysis, I suggest that your analysis was probably inductive, deductive and **abductive**. Engaging with work from Charmaz and Braun and Clarke may be useful to further refining this section.

The thesis demonstrates a natural progression toward grounded theory. The methods employed, the rationale behind their selection, and the evolution of the research questions are all key components of grounded theory. While the theory is not explicitly stated, the methodology effectively articulates the underlying concepts. This subtle integration of grounded theory is a distinctive feature of the thesis.

There is also scope to refine your communication in this chapter by adopting more consistent terminology. In other chapters you use the terms academics. Here you employ the term teacher. This could be confusing to some readers who often define teacher as someone working outside of a university context. Also, watch out for repetition. You use the phrasing 'swept under the carpet' more than once in your thesis

I have reviewed the terminology used in the chapter to ensure consistency, using the terms "academics" rather than "teacher" to avoid any potential confusion. I have also addressed the repetitive use of the phrase "swept under the carpet" to improve clarity and avoid redundancy. Thank you for this insightful suggestion.

Chapter 5, Article 3

This article 'militates' against the under acknowledgement and inaction in addressing bullying within higher education institutions, especially in Pakistan. Through an autoethnography, it responds to the research questions: What transpired to categorise certain behaviours as workplace bullying and mobbing? How do I interpret, comprehend, or derive meaning from the events that transpired within my workplace? Overall, it does well in setting up the candidate's experiential positionality regarding bullying.

Thank you for your feedback on the article. Your comments are valuable and affirm the impact and direction of the research.

Chapter 6, article 4

This article does a good job of situating the CAE research within existing scholarship. For example, the candidate notes that 'Research has consistently shown that workplace bullying affects women more than men, with women also more likely to bully other women than men (Anjum and Mauzzam, 2018)' (p. 177). There is scope, however, to further unpack concepts and histories that relevant to the CAE. On page 179, you say 'Despite Pakistan's independence for more than seven decades, the situation of women has changed little.' But, what is the between colonisation, independence and patriarchy.

The discussion has been developed to draw connections between colonization, independence, and patriarchy, focusing on how these elements have shaped the current societal and gender dynamics in Pakistan. (Detail response on pg.182 PhD. THESIS)

This could be further explicated. On page 178, the concept of 'coping' is mentioned, but not defined. The Research Questions could be introduced more explicitly, just following the background / literature review and before the methods. The ethics approval number, while included in the thesis as an appendix, could also be inserted on page 184 – confirming for readers of the article that the study has been through an HREC review process.

The ethics approval number has been added to page 184, in addition to its inclusion in the appendix, to confirm that the study has undergone an HREC review process.

The Research Questions could be introduced more explicitly, just following the background / literature review and before the methods. The ethics approval number, while included in the thesis as an appendix, could also be inserted on page 184 – confirming for readers of the article that the study has been through an HREC review process. The Findings present the three participants' autoethnographic account with little to no interpretation. When this structure is used, this means that the discussion should be relied on to explicate the analysis and connection to theory and existing scholarship. Although the discussion makes a start in this regard (e.g., in mentioning Bourdieu and Mills in the first paragraph of the discussion on page 193), more work is needed to explain the

experiences presented in the findings. The theme of caste and accent (p. 194), for example, could be theorised more – perhaps using Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and capital. The theorisation of power, hierarchy and experiences could be theorised further with, say, Williams’ work on emotions and social status (see reference provided below). The gendered nature of the bullying, articulated in the background / literature review, could also be theorised more, drawing on the work of specific Feminist scholars (p. 196). The implications mentioned on page 197, could also be articulated.

Overall, chapter 6 offers findings from a collaborate autoethnography. But, there is scope to do more with the findings. The following questions might help in thinking about what more could be

done:

- What structural forces are at play (e.g., gender, caste)?
- How does culture intersect with the experiences found in the CAEs?
- How can theory help in elevating your findings beyond the experiential, towards the explanatory?

Thank you for your feedback on the article. I would like to clarify that the article you are referring to has already been published. As a result, we were limited in how much additional interpretation and theorization could be incorporated after publication. However, your suggestions for expanding the analysis—such as further theorizing the themes of caste and accent using Bourdieu’s concepts, exploring power dynamics through Williams’ work, and deepening the discussion on the gendered nature of bullying—are valuable. While these aspects were not fully explored in the published article, they offer important directions for future research or revisions.

Chapter 7. Interview participants’ experience of isolation and ostracism

This chapter illustrates a better attempt at elevating findings and linking to existing scholarship.

Your discussion of collectivist societies, and how bullying ensues when individuals break from norms on page 227 is a good example of this. However, there is scope to go even further in engaging with theory, as is the tradition in sociological and social science scholarship. Friere and feminist theory are mentioned; these could be good avenues for furthering your theorisation. Below, I highlight specific opportunities for improving clarity and expanding the potential of your findings.

Incorporated

I suggest providing a table with participants’ demographic characteristics from the start of the chapter. While these become evident as the chapter progresses through the useful tables that are presented, it would be best to help the reader to situate the findings within a broader understanding of the sample from the beginning of the chapter.

The demographic of the participants is shared in the Chapter 4. Methodology pg.122

2) On page 209, you describe bullying based on accent/dialect as linked to ‘personal factors’ and ‘individual characteristics’ – but the personal is political here. Mills, who you reference in the previous chapter, famously argued that personal troubles are public issues, and this is a good example. You go on to explain at the bottom of the page ‘the importance of contextualising workplace bullying’ as a critique of the NAQ-R. This is a very important and relevant critique that you could extend as part of your contribution.

This has been deliberated on pg. 240.

3) On page 211, you talk about ‘seasoned academics.’ Perhaps further clarification is needed here, in the thesis more broadly. In chapter 6, the CAEs are in reference to one university academic and two secondary school teachers. Is this chapter only about university academics?

In the collaborative autoethnography, the authors discreetly share their experiences of being bullied within an academic setting. While they are currently university teachers, their accounts include instances of bullying encountered during the early stages of their careers as secondary school teachers. However, in Chapter 7, when selecting participants for the study, I was explicit about the eligibility criteria, ensuring that all participants met the specified requirements for inclusion.

4) The finding related to physical appearance on page 213 may be an opportunity to bring in Bourdieu's theories related to habitus and capital.

Added pg.219

5) On page 214, you write 'Addressing workplace bullying in Pakistan requires an understanding of the connection between social class, power dynamics, and cultural norms to implement effective interventions and promote a more inclusive and equitable work environment.' This is such an important point, and an opportunity for elaboration.

Explicating these structural forces, and further linking your findings to these sociocultural and political forces will help in explaining the social forces behind the individual experiences of bullying in Pakistan AND the social interventions that are appropriate / inappropriate in this setting.

This point is examined from the perspectives of leadership, culture, and social dynamics. And likewise, the recommendations are proposed on its bases.

6) Page 217 and 220 offer ideal opportunities for further engagement with specific feminist theories / theorists. Page 223, where you discuss the 'pressing need for comprehensive efforts to break the culture of silence' is an ideal opportunity to engage further with Paolo Friere's work. How might Friere's work help to support and extend these implications?

Added pg.227

7) You write, 'It suggests that occupations that are gender specific may experience vertical forms of bullying rather than horizontal ones' (p. 217). But I am not clear on what you are communicating here. Are you saying jobs like nursing that are dominated by one gender are more likely to have bullying perpetuated by senior colleagues over lower ranking colleagues? If so, the example does not illustrate this.

Corrected the ambiguity (pg.221).

Page 218&219: When introducing the participant in-text you refer to them as participant #09, but the indented quote indicated Participant #10.

Thank you for spotting that inconsistency. The participant is referred to as Participant #09 both in the in-text introduction and the indented quote.

Page 224&225: on page 225, you write 'When asked about their definition of bullying, none explicitly mentioned the behaviour's recurrence...' However, on page 224, in Table 5, participant 6 is quoted as saying 'Bullying is not a one-time act.' I suggest revising the phrasing on page 225 accordingly, to acknowledge participant 6's contribution.

Corrected

Page 226: Before section 7.4.1.2, the reader is left wondering how your findings compare with what is in the existing scholarship. You do go on to link your findings to the existing scholarship in the sections that follow. I suggest inserting some signposting to let the reader know that that is what follows

Thank you for your feedback. I have added the information for clarify.

Chapter 8 Trauma Adaptive Responses and Possibility of Resilience

On page 255, you discuss the psychological concept of emotion-focused coping and Sociologist Hochschild's concept of emotion work. These two concepts, however, are distinct (see Olson 2011). How are you relating these in your analysis?

In my analysis, these concepts are related but used in different contexts. Emotion-focused coping is discussed in terms of how individuals personally navigate the emotional toll of bullying, seeking ways to alleviate their stress internally. Meanwhile, Hochschild's emotion work is relevant to understanding how participants manage their emotions in professional settings, often masking their true feelings to conform to workplace norms or avoid further conflict. These concepts intersect when considering how individuals might cope with bullying by engaging in emotion work—managing their emotions to maintain a professional demeanour even in the face of distress. This happens when there are no defined policies to address an issue.

Considering inserted Table 9 (p. 260) into your methods.

The feedback regarding the inclusion of Table 9 on page 260 into the methods section has been noted and has been moved to Methodology Chapter p.122.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

In this chapter you write that through your research you 'reveal layers of denial and suppression' relate to bullying (p. 269). Perhaps some rephrasing is warranted here. From my reading, your research revealed reluctance from victims of bullying to talk about it, and at times a reluctance from management to respond to it – but not denial and suppression exactly.

Thank you for your careful reading and feedback. I agree that the phrasing could be more precise. Based on your suggestion, I have revised the statement to reflect that my research revealed a reluctance from victims to discuss their experiences and, at times, hesitancy from management to respond, rather than outright denial and suppression.

2) You write, 'the findings were analysed through interpretivist lens, utilising the theories of gendered organisation and social dominance to encapsulate the dynamics inherent in workplace bullying phenomenon' (p. 269). I see this as an overstatement. Yes, a feminist lens is mentioned, but an extended and deliberate analysis of the data drawing on one or more feminist theories is not yet offered. Consider rephrasing? Or, better yet, consider expanding on your engagement with feminist theory in your analysis so that this statement holds.

Thank you for this important feedback. I understand the concern and agree that the statement could be seen as an overstatement given the current level of engagement with feminist theory in the analysis. I have rephrase ensuring that the statement is fully supported by the content of the chapter.

You write, 'Job security, particularly for tenured faculty, creates an environment conducive to bullying tactics. The exploitation of tenure by management...' (p. 273). Rather than an analysis of the data driven by examination of the perpetrators' positions / tenure, my reading of your analysis is that it was about women victims being less able to quit because of entangled financial and family commitments.

Edited

On page 283, you suggest written warnings, coaching and short-term leave could be effective penalties for employees/managers who engage in bullying. But, what evidence (from your research or existing scholarship) supports your assertion that these penalties will be effect in higher education in Pakistan?

I acknowledge that the unique cultural and organizational dynamics of Pakistani higher education may require further investigation to confirm the applicability of these penalties. I plan to explore this area more deeply in future research to ensure that the recommended interventions are both culturally and contextually appropriate.

