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**Workplace Bullying: The Role of Perseverative Cognition and Coping  
in Its Impact on Frontline Employees' Health and Well-being**

**By:**

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**In loving memory of Siti Dalilah Ishak**  
2<sup>nd</sup> November 1951 – 19<sup>th</sup> September 2004

The person who taught me the meaning of resilience and  
the power of education

Thank you, Mama

## Abstract

This thesis investigates workplace bullying which refers to repeated negative acts between two parties where power imbalance exists, normally the victim being the one with less power. The aim of this thesis is to (1) investigate the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying on employees' health and well-being, (2) examine the cognitive reactions (PC) and behavioural reactions (coping strategies) as a mechanism of frontline employees in dealing with workplace bullying and (3) explore how employees perceive and make meaning of their bullying experiences in the workplace. This research uses a sequential explanatory mixed-method approach to identify and explore workplace bullying through frontline employees' perception. Study 1 examined 70 frontline employees from various organizations living in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This study focuses on the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying on employees' health and well-being and its reverse causation, mediating mechanism of perseverative cognition on the bullying-well-being relationship as well as the moderating role of coping in the mediating relationship through a survey approach. Meanwhile, Study 2 identified and explored actions that were perceived as bullying, experiences and reactions both cognitive and behavioural of the victims dealing with workplace bullying, and the impacts on their health and well-being through a narrative approach. This study involved 20 participants recruited from Study 1 who were identified as victims. Results revealed that bullying was prevalent within the workplace which gives negative impact to the employees' physical and psychological health. Repetitive negative thinking and worrying mediated the bullying-well-being relationship and this is moderated by certain acts of coping (e.g. problem solving and ignoring the problem). Silent retaliation and religious coping were one of the themes that emerged from the second study. Results of the two studies will be discussed further in the following chapters. The findings from this thesis reveals the need to improve the awareness of workplace bullying phenomena and organization's current practice that would fit the needs of front line employees. This includes providing greater organizational support, better reinforcements of current policies, improve communication and develop preventive interventions.

## Related work and presentations

*Poster Presentation* | Mokhtar, D.M., Sprigg, C. & Patterson, M. Workplace Bullying: The Role of Perseverative Cognition on Health & Well-being. 10th International Conference on Workplace Bullying and Harassment (IAWBH) Annual Conference 19–22 April 2016 in Auckland, New Zealand

*Paper Presentation* | Mokhtar, D.M., Sprigg, C. & Patterson, M. American A Three-Wave Study: The Role of Perseverative Cognition Between Workplace Bullying and Its Health & Well-Being Impact. American Psychological Association (APA) Work, Stress & Health Conference 6-9 June 2017 in Minneapolis, USA

*Paper Presentation* | Mokhtar, D.M., Sprigg, C. & Patterson, M. The Role of Perseverative Cognition between Workplace Bullying and its Impact on Health & Well-being: A sequential explanatory design. IAWBH Annual Conference 5-8 June 2018 in Bordeaux, France

*Symposium* | Sprigg, C., Coyne, I., Farley, S. Mokhtar, D.M., & Axtell C. Interventions in Workplace Aggression. Institute of Work Psychology International Conference 19-21 June 2018 in Sheffield, UK

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# Chapter 1

## Setting the scene

This thesis explores the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying on frontline employees' health and well-being and how employees deal with workplace bullying. This research uses a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach starting with a quantitative study (three wave survey) followed by a qualitative study (semi-structured interview). SPSS version 24 and PROCESS Macro version 3.20 (SPSS extension) was used to analyse the quantitative study whereas NVivo was used to carry out a thematic analysis on the semi-structured interviews.

### 1.0 Rationale

Workplace bullying is not something new and has been the focus of substantial research including organisational research into the dark side of working life. Perspectives on 'bullying' at work emerged in the 1980s among countries interested in improving and maintaining a healthy workplace environment (e.g. Finland, Norway, Sweden) (Leymann, 1996). Various countries have reported the prevalence of workplace bullying. For instance, studies in the US showed that 27% of Americans suffered abusive conduct at work, 21% have witnessed it and 72% are aware that workplace bullying happens (Namie, Christensen, and Phillips, 2014). Meanwhile, a national Crime Survey conducted in England and Wales in the period 2013/2014 reported 583,000 cases of violence at work including 269,000 assaults and 314,000 threats. Other countries like Australia and New Zealand have also reported cases of workplace bullying within their working population (McPhilbin, 2004 in Yahaya et al., 2012).

Bullying research has moved in circles from examining the prevalence rates, antecedents and consequences of bullying (Matthiesen, 2006; Neall and Tuckey, 2014; Samnani and Singh, 2012; Zapf and Einarsen, 2011) to developing interventions to manage the problem (Hodgins, MacCurtain and Mannix-McNamara, 2014; Hoel and Giga, 2009; Kemp, 2014). Although research on bullying has been going on for more than two decades, research examining mediators and moderators only commenced around the year 2001 (Rai & Agarwal, 2018). Most research on bullying is still limited to studying linear relationships on the antecedents and outcomes of bullying, where underlying mechanisms of bullying (moderators and mediators) either in antecedent -

bullying or bullying - consequences relationships, though increasing are still inadequate (Magee, Caputi, Gordon, Robinson, & Oades, 2017; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). Lack of sufficient research effort towards examining mediators and moderators in bullying phenomenon may potentially undermine the development of a knowledge base on the subject that needs attention (Branch, Ramsay and Barker, 2013; Samnani and Singh, 2012).

Following from the above, this thesis aims to address that gap by incorporating a mediator (perseverative cognition (PC)) and moderator (coping) variable into the study model. An important mechanism that is yet to be explored in the bullying research field is the mediating role of PC (Brosschot, Pieper and Thayer, 2005). PC (in this study operationalised separately as repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) prolongs the activation response to stress which have been found to enhance negative health outcomes (Brosschot et al., 2005). However, bullying studies are more focused on the past (e.g. recalling bullying experience in the past 6 months) and thus have not really paid attention to measuring anticipatory stress. Most research continues to measure workplace bullying as a discrete stressor and coping behaviour as a discrete strategy not fully recognising the importance of prolonged activation on the impact of health and well-being (Dehue et al., 2012; Karatuna, 2015; Olafsson and Johannsdottir, 2004; Zapf and Gross, 2001). The Perseverative Cognition Hypothesis (PCH) (Brosschot, Gerin and Thayer, 2006) may help in developing a rich, deep theoretical understanding of the bullying phenomenon in order to understand how employees react and appraise workplace bullying which could impact their health and well-being if stress was prolonged. Therefore, a moderated-mediation model is proposed here in-order to understand the underlying and intervening mechanisms of coping and PC in the bullying-health and well-being relationship.

This research was carried out among Malaysian employees working in the front line. To provide the necessary context, bullying research in Malaysia is in its infancy. To date, there is no exclusive legislation regarding workplace bullying in Malaysia; however, it is only indirectly mentioned under the guidelines for Hazard Identification, Risk Assessment and Risk Control (HIRARC) in the hazard classification of work environment that was framed by the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources, 2008). In addition, it can be indirectly related to the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 which states that one of the many general duties of employees at work is to “take care of the safety and health of himself and of

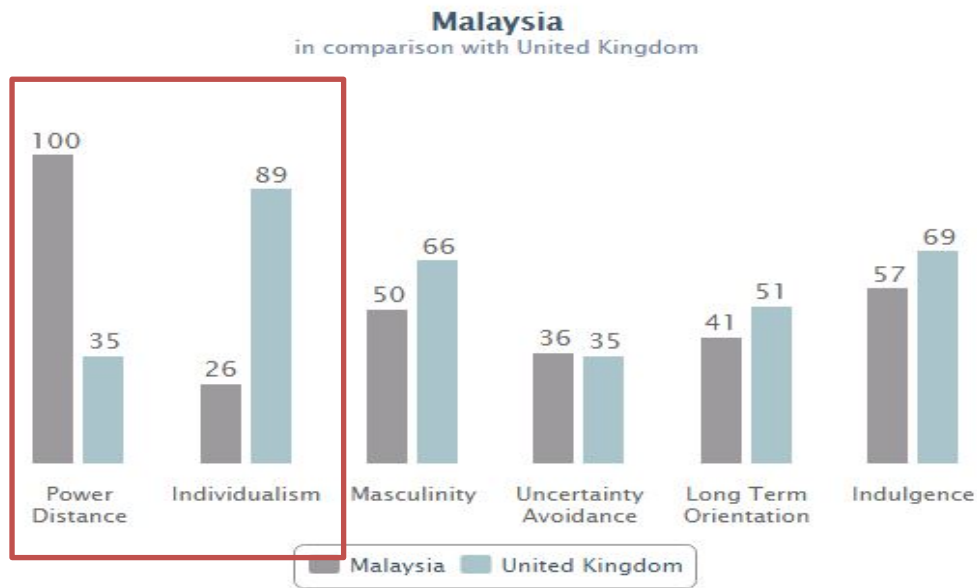
other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work” (p. 21: Part IV, 24 (1a)). This however, does not just specify to any material or machinery handling, it also refers to one’s behaviour. If one’s behaviour puts another person’s health (emotional, mental and physical) at stake or leads to the feeling of insecurity, it conveys an act of violation.

Malaysian researchers only began discussing workplace bullying in the 2000s, later when compared to western countries (Khalib & Ngan, 2006; Khoo, 2010; Omar, Mokhtar, & Hamzah, 2015; Patah & Abdullah, 2010; Talib, Al, & Hassan, 2014; Yahaya et al., 2012; Yusop, Dempster, & Stevenson, 2014), while most bullying research only focused on children in schools (Ismail et al., 2010; Salwina et al., 2009; Yaakuba, Haron and Leong, 2010). However, the issue of workplace bullying has started to attract people’s attention given the rising number of cases being reported in the news (Azizi Ahmad, 2016; Siti Baaqiah Mamat, 2016; Kevin Tan, 2013; Margaret Apau; Veena Babulal & Rizanizam, 2018). Bullying researchers began to shift their focus to bullying issues happening in the workplace, resulting in showing a high prevalence of workplace bullying (at least on a weekly or daily basis in the past six months) (Hidzir, Jaafar, Jalali, & Dahalan, 2017; Omar et al., 2015; Patah and Abdullah, 2010; Yusop et al., 2014). These studies were however mostly prevalence studies and were carried out via cross-sectional surveys. There have been a lot of discussions on the matter which is why more research should be carried out to acquire more knowledge and therefore gain understanding of this matter. Thus, this research intends to further explore the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying on employees’ health and well-being.

Bullying research has mostly taken place in Western countries as these nations are often considered more individualistic than non-Western countries, such as those in Asia. One could argue that workplace bullying is highlighted more as a problem in the West compared to non-Western countries as conformity to social norms is less of a concern in the latter (Hofstede, 1973). However, there have been calls in the bullying literature for more studies to be conducted in non-Western countries (Neall and Tuckey, 2014; Tepper et al., 2009). In a country with diverse cultures and values, the bullying dynamic might have a slight difference from Western countries especially on how one would perceive or define bullying (Casimir et al., 2013; Loh et al., 2010; Tsuno et al., 2010; Tsuno et al., 2015; Yahaya et al., 2012a). For instance, bullying might be viewed as an acceptable behaviour in order to achieve the desired performance especially among performance-oriented countries (e.g. Confucian Asia) (Power et al., 2013).

Even though workplace bullying in general across different cultures causes distress (Jacobson et al., 2014), culture itself may have an influence on the intensity (degree) of the bullying experienced as well as the type of bullying behaviour (Giorgi, Leon-Perez and Arenas, 2015). Cultures with conservation values that emphasise submissive self-restrictions and reservation of traditional practices (e.g. honouring elders) might view management techniques like scolding as acceptable and as part of ‘training’. A study on the role of culture in workplace bullying found that culture moderated the perceptions and reactions of bullying in the workplace in a way that employees in westernised countries were less likely to perceive bullying behaviours as standard behaviour or acceptable compared to non-westernised countries (Loh et al., 2010). Another study found contradicting evidence where Chinese employees reacted more negatively towards indirect conflict (subtle bullying) compared to American employees which resulted in more negative physical symptoms (Liu et al., 2008). A study on acceptance of workplace bullying across (work-related and physical intimidation) six continents reported that acceptance to workplace bullying differed based on cultural dimensions (humane orientation, performance orientation and future orientation). Countries which are high in humane orientation and future orientation reject bullying while countries that are high in performance orientation (result driven) could tolerate with workplace bullying (Power et al., 2013).

Drawing on the different perspectives of workplace bullying behaviours among different cultures is the cultural acceptance or approval of hierarchal power or *power distance*, which is a term introduced by Hofstede (1973). This refers to “the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organisations is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1973). Asian countries including Malaysia, Singapore, India and Hong Kong are reported to have higher power distance where employees agree that superiors have more power than subordinates and thus require more respect. In contrast, Western countries like the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America and Australia have lower power distance in which they agree that power is shared equally between superiors and subordinates (Hofstede, 1997). In the study of organisational culture by Hofstede (1973), Malaysia was ranked 36 (for power distance) in a comparative study of 53 countries (Robbins and Judge, 2013).



*Figure 1 Organisational Culture Comparison between Malaysia and United Kingdom*

Source: <http://geert-hofstede.com/malaysia.html> (2015).

For example, Figure 1 illustrates a comparison of cultural dimensions (e.g. power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance) between Malaysia and the UK. For an example, aiming on power distance and individualism, this statistic suggests that culture may influence individuals’ perception and experience of workplace bullying. Malaysia’s high score of power distance (100) in the figure above suggests that employees accept the hierarchical order, which reflects implicit inequalities (Bochner and Hesketh, 1994). This might also suggest that the employees in Malaysia practices a culture that expects to be given instructions and are coordinated by tight rules and norms (Triandis, 2004). For example, subordinates would probably accept being given a large workload or an impossible dateline as a task that has to be completed rather than perceiving it as being bullied. The individualism dimension addresses how employees see themselves in terms of ‘I’ or ‘We’ in an organisational context (Hofstede, 1973). Malaysia’s score of 26, three times lower than for the UK, portrays a collective group where loyalty plays an important role (Jetten, Postmes and McAuliffe, 2002). Collectivists are prone to preserve relationships within the group that they belong to more than their own personal rights or interest (Bazerman et al., 2000). They also give more priority to in-group goals than their own personal goals (Traindis, 2004). Such a society has strong cohesion and individuals have the tendency to take responsibility for other members of the group. However, due to

this strong bond, any offence would lead to the individual experiencing shame from the other fellow members. Since loyalty is the core of collectivism, this would perhaps influence the situation when a group member does not perform or does not conform to a group norm, then he/ she would have a high chance of being isolated.

A different example which compares Asia with a different continent is a research by Loh et al. (2010) which focuses on the moderation effects of national culture towards employees' responses to workplace bullying. This research involved 152 employees from Australia and 165 employees from Singapore. The study found that national culture was a significant moderator to the intensity of the variables where employees from Australia had stronger negative relationships between workplace bullying and job satisfaction ( $t = -3.30$ ) compared to Singaporean employees ( $t = -2.45$ ) as well as its relationship with workgroup identification. Based on the notion of power distance, employees from Singapore (greater power distance) are more accepting of bullying compared to employees from Australia. The General Secretary of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, Halim Mansur (The Star, 2012) commented that workplace bullying is mostly indirect. Reported cases included employees not being given proper protection, not being enrolled in the Employee Provident Fund (EPF), denied their opportunity to receive a bonus or promotion although they deserved it, violation of their basic rights (based on the Employment Act 1955) or not being enrolled in social security. However, this may also be encouraged by the lack of knowledge or awareness of their own rights.

Nevertheless, research in the Asian context is still limited. A meta-analysis by Neall and Tuckey (2014), reported workplace bullying studies carried out in Asian countries (e.g. China and Singapore), although the total number accounted for was less than 5% of the total number of studies ( $N = 234$ ). However, in this review one limitation clearly highlighted was that it only covered English speaking countries. One reason for this is that articles published in an Asian language may not be indexed in a central database, therefore making it difficult in terms of accessibility (Patah and Abdullah, 2010). Although a view on the commonality of workplace bullying in western countries exists (Björkqvist, Österman and Hjelt-Bäck, 1994), there needs to be an increase in research on workplace bullying in Asian countries.

Although there exist only limited studies on workplace bullying in Malaysia (Patah and Abdullah, 2010; Talib et al., 2014; Yahaya et al., 2012a), this thesis does not intend to compare Malaysian cultural acceptance towards workplace bullying.



Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning these findings do suggest that there might be some possible differences in how samples from Malaysia perceive and cope with workplace bullying. A very limited number of studies have been conducted in Malaysia examining its incidence and correlates. For example, Patah and Abdullah (2010) published a study on Malaysian trainees (N=232) at several different hotels in Malaysia. Their study found a significant impact of workplace bullying on the trainees' emotional dissonance ( $r=.302$ ,  $p<.01$ ) as well as their subsequent career intentions ( $r=-.155$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In other words, findings of this study revealed that victims of workplace bullying may not continue with their initial career intentions after having engaged in a bad experience which has negatively shaped their expected choices. In a different Malaysian study (Yahaya et al., 2012), a survey was conducted on 217 employees comprised of a mixture of local employees (70%) and foreign employees (30%). The revised Negative Act Questionnaire (NAQ-R) was used in the survey and both types of bullying which are person-related bullying ( $r=.514$ ) and work-related bullying ( $r=.469$ ), were significantly correlated with work performance. On top of that, this study found a significant difference between local and foreign employees ( $t(N=217) = -.2.705$ ,  $p<.05$ ) where foreign employees were found to be more exposed to bullying.

From this evidence, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the importance of further exploring on how employees within an Asian context (e.g. Malaysia) perceive and experience workplace bullying and how it affects their health and well-being while prioritising the main focus of this thesis, which is to understand the role of PC and coping as an underlying mechanism of the bullying-well-being relationship. Further, this thesis contributes to the ongoing debate on the health consequences of workplace bullying (e.g. physically, mentally and emotionally) and addresses the call by previous research on using a more complex method (e.g. the use of longitudinal study). Using a sequential explanatory mixed-method, the qualitative study (semi-structured interview) is carried out after the quantitative study (longitudinal survey) with the intention to seek further insights into the hypothesised relationships from the narrative responses. Therefore, this research was conducted to further (i) investigate the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying on employees' health and well-being (ii) examine the cognitive reactions (PC) and behavioural reactions (coping strategies) as a mechanism of frontline employees in dealing with workplace bullying, (iii) explore how employees perceive and make meaning of their bullying experiences in the workplace. The first and second aim had a closed structure which involved statistical analysis while the third aim had an open

structure and was more qualitative. Therefore, the third aim brought me to use a semi-structured interview rather than a self-report survey as the narrative responses of the study participants may offer insights that might extend beyond the range covered in a self-report survey.

### 1.1 Research objectives

The research has proceeded in two studies. Study 1 explored the role of PC on workplace bullying and its health and well-being outcomes. Phase Two of the study related to the bullying experiences (within the duration of Study 1) of the employees. Given that the samples are from Malaysia which belongs to a non-westernised country, I determined that it would be interesting to explore how frontline employees in Malaysia perceived workplace bullying and to explore more deeply their coping strategies and cognitive reactions (PC). Therefore, the current research examines:

- The prevalence of workplace bullying and impact on frontline employees' health and well-being over time.
- The reciprocal effect of frontline employees' health and well-being on subsequent bullying over time
- The mediating role of PC on the bullying-well-being relationship.
- The coping strategies used by frontline employees experiencing bullying at work.
- Victim's perceptions of workplace bullying and their cognitive (PC) and behavioural (coping) reactions to workplace bullying.

### 1.2 Research Questions

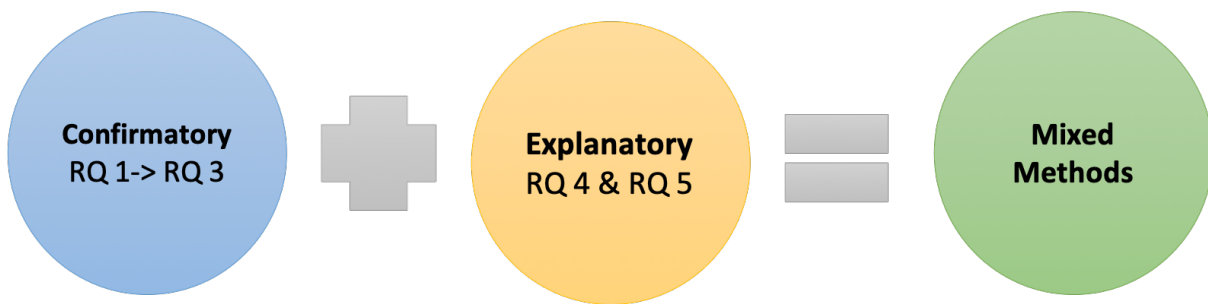
Five research questions were derived (see Table 1) based on the literature review and the theoretical background that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 respectively. The first two aims of this research focuses on frontline employees in general regardless of them being a victim or non-victim to workplace bullying. Three research questions were derived from these aims which will be answered using quantitative measures in Study 1. The third aim of this research focuses on victims of workplace bullying which were identified from the first study. From the third aim, two research questions were derived, and these questions were addressed via a narrative study which required interviewing the victims. The narrative approach is intended to expand the coverage of questions which might be useful to uncover insights from the subjective reality experienced by victims of workplace bullying. These insights might not be covered

by the self-report survey. The interviews are aimed at achieving a deeper understanding on the dynamics of workplace bullying experiences.

*Table 1 Research aims and research questions*

<p><b><i>Aim (Study One)</i></b></p> <p>(1) Investigate the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying on employees' health and well-being.</p> <p>(2) Examine the cognitive reactions (PC) and behavioural reactions (coping strategies) as a mechanism of frontline employees in dealing with workplace bullying</p>	<p><b><i>Research Questions</i></b></p> <p>(1) What are the effects of workplace bullying towards employees' health and well-being over time?</p> <p>(2) Do individuals' state of health and well-being predict subsequent bullying in the workplace?</p> <p>(3) How do coping and preservative cognition interplay in the relationship between workplace bullying and health and well-being impact?</p>
<p><b><i>Aim (Study Two)</i></b></p> <p>(3) Explore how employees perceive and make meaning of their bullying experiences in the workplace.</p>	<p><b><i>Research Questions</i></b></p> <p>(4) How do victims perceive and define workplace bullying?</p> <p>(5) What motivates victims to engage/ disengage with PC and cope with workplace bullying?</p>

Given that the range of research questions vary from confirmatory to explanatory, they need to be answered utilising a variety of methods. The first three research questions are close-ended type research questions which seek confirmation on the respective relationships. Whereas, research questions 4 and 5 are open-ended questions which seek to explore victims' experiences of workplace bullying. Therefore, a sequential explanatory mixed-method approach is used to address these research questions (Figure 2).

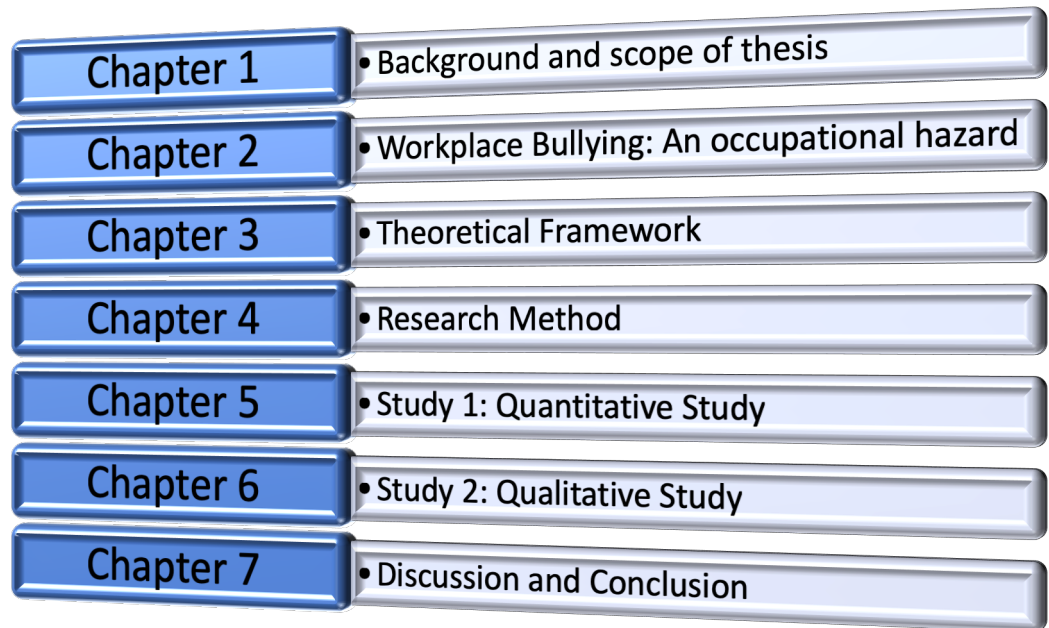


*Figure 2 Mixed Methods Design*

### 1.3 Positioning of the researcher

I became interested in this area due to my experience working part time as a retail assistant, cashier and a customer service officer. I made observations on the dynamics while working in the retail frontline, with the demand of maintaining a certain standard while having to deal with customers daily. I was always working during semester breaks, always in retail companies, at the frontline. I would describe the work environment as aggressive and we were trained to serve our customers with respect providing them the best service that we could offer. We went by the saying ‘customers are always right’ which was not unusual as most organisations especially in retail were trained the same way. This led to so many questions related to the long-term impact of workplace bullying especially when stress is being prolonged. Am I being bullied? Am I affected by this? How do I cope? I too became curious in wanting to explore how frontline employees especially make sense of workplace bullying and whether different coping strategies would help them less engage in sustaining their cognitive reactions towards bullying.

## 1.4 Thesis outline



*Figure 3 Thesis Structure*

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters as listed in Figure 3. **Chapter 1** sets the scene of the research by providing the background of the study through describing the research problem. Further, this chapter sets out the research questions based on the aims and objectives of the research. Figure 4 illustrates an overview of the study mapping the research aims and objectives to the modes of inquiry and to the final output of the study. **Chapter 2** introduces workplace bullying beginning with conceptualising it based on various research. This chapter presents various terms which describe bullying and discussed the three important elements which defined workplace bullying (adverse treatment, duration and power imbalance). This chapter also reviewed some of the antecedents of workplace bullying covering individual and personal factors, work group and societal factors, leadership as well as organisational factors. Besides that, some of the most common consequences of workplace bullying reported by previous studies were also reviewed in this chapter including the negative impact on individuals, groups, organisations and society. This chapter presents a literature review of previous research in-order to identify gaps and opportunities for current research. The results of this review in general indicated that a weight of cross-sectional studies in this area have been conducted with the majority limited to employees in the health sector. It was also observed that most studies focused on the direct consequences of workplace bullying towards employees' health, neglecting the longitudinal process of the bullying

phenomena which encompasses prolonged reaction/ sustained stress which is responsible for the adverse effect on health and well-being.

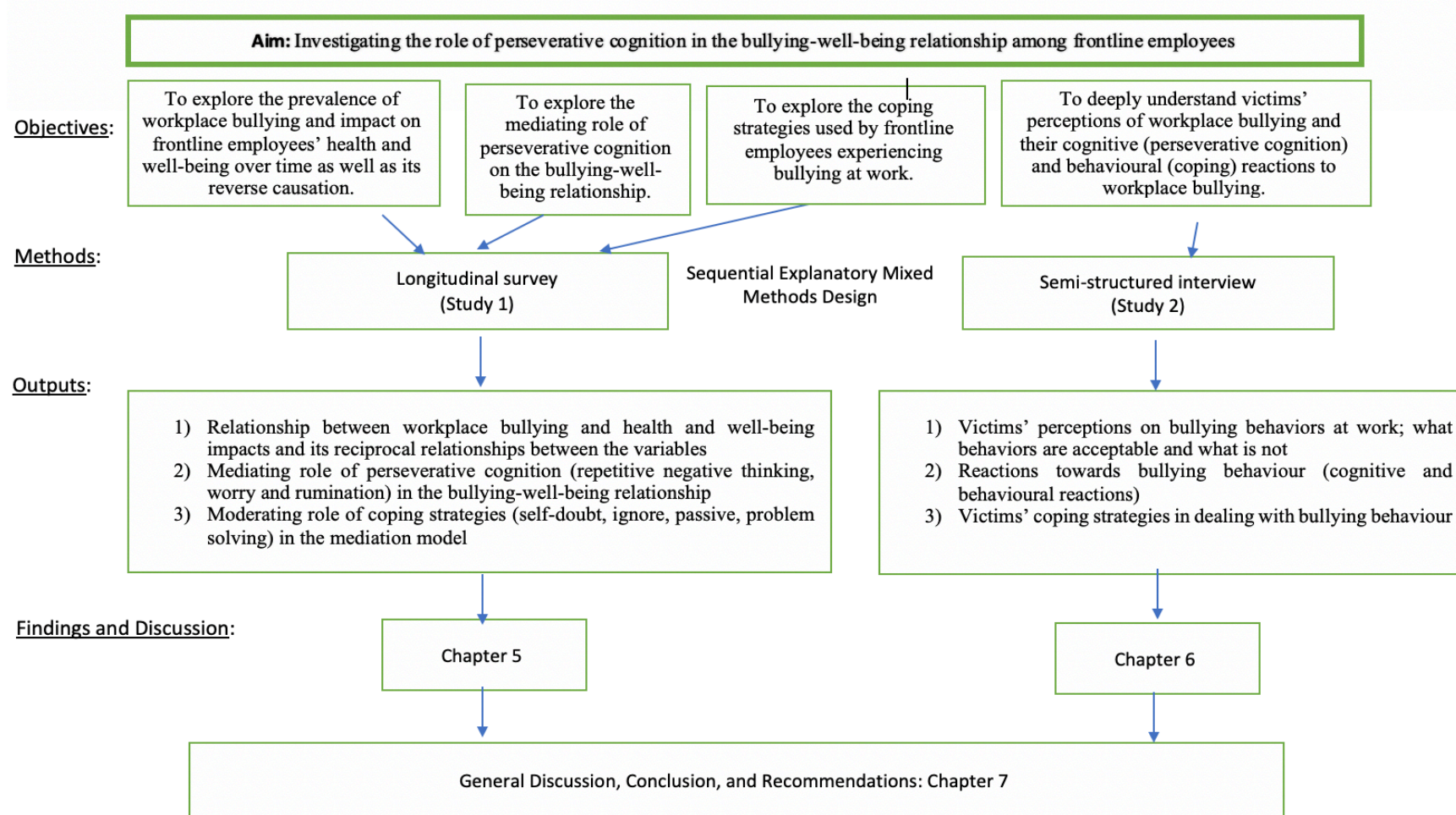
**Chapter 3** provides the theoretical background of the study to support the association of workplace bullying and employees' health and well-being. Firstly, the Cognitive – Motivation – Relational theory of coping (CMR) and Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress (CATS) are discussed in-order to describe the coping processes including cognitive appraisal and coping strategies, whereas CATS highlights the element of 'experience' within the relationship of a stressor and health outcomes. Explanations on how one's experience would motivate certain coping choices which then leads onto the main theory used in this thesis, the Perseverative Cognition Hypothesis (PCH). PCH refers to the prolonged cognitive representation of stressful past or future events which increases the likelihood of stress-related diseases. Drawing on the conceptual model and the adaptation of these theories, the research questions justifies the development of the hypothesis, providing the need to test the hypothesis based on the gaps discussed in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

**Chapter 4** describes the research methods and design including the validity of the survey and interview procedures. This chapter discusses the sequential explanatory mixed methods approach used to address the research questions developed in the previous chapters. The issue of research ethics was also highlighted in this chapter given that the nature of the study is a sensitive topic. **Chapter 5** addresses the three research questions of this thesis: *(1) What are the effects of workplace bullying towards employees' health and well-being over time? (2) Do individuals' state of health and well-being predict subsequent bullying in the workplace? and (3) How do coping and preservative cognition interplay in the relationship between workplace bullying and health and well-being impact?* Based on the CMR theory of coping and PCH (as will be depicted in Chapter 3), coping strategies and PC are proposed as moderators and mediators, respectively, which participate in the bullying process and result in negative impacts on the individual's health and well-being. Using longitudinal surveys and regression analyses (Study 1), a moderated mediation process was tested to observe the interaction between the variables. The results of the longitudinal survey (three time-points), with 70 participants at each time point, were discussed including the prevalence of bullying exposure, the longitudinal associations between workplace bullying and employees' health and well-being as well as a causal model predicting workplace bullying at T3 based on employees' health and well-being at T1.

**Chapter 6** addresses the other two research questions of this thesis: (4) *How do victims perceive and define workplace bullying?* and (5) *What motivates victims to engage/ disengage with PC and cope with workplace bullying?* The latter question was generated after the results of Study 1 were obtained (see Chapter 5). I became more interested in looking into what factors influence the victim's coping choices (cognitive appraisal) which I could ask through the interviews of 20 victims of bullying (Study 2). The themes generated via thematic analysis were presented following the process of preliminary coding, generating initial codes, and the collation of codes into themes before finalising them into five themes.

Finally, **Chapter 7** provides a general discussion and integration of the theories and empirical research discussed and developed in this thesis. This chapter then concludes with a summary, and the limitations and implications of the studies and followed by a number of recommendations and suggestions for future research. To sum up, the thesis contributes to the bullying literature through developing a strong theoretical model where PC is conceptually and empirically accepted as a mediator in describing bullying-well-being relationships. Previous research is integrated with recent advances in research on PC (Brosschot et al., 2006; Ruscio et al., 2011; Van Laethem et al., 2016) in order to understand the workplace bullying phenomena. As such, findings from this research have substantive meaning for researchers and practitioners in the field of bullying.

Figure 4 Overview of the Study





## Chapter 2

### Workplace Bullying: An Occupational Hazard

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces workplace bullying, how it is defined and the various terms that are used to describe the behaviour. This chapter also includes the different types of action that constitute workplace bullying and the many ways that workplace bullying has been conceptualised by different researchers. Antecedents and consequences at three levels (individual, group and organisational level) are also discussed based on scientific evidence from previous research. The chapter then describes workplace bullying within a specific context, which is among frontline employees involving their duty in communicating with customers as their core job role. Different perspectives on workplace bullying among different cultures is also briefly mentioned as an effort in build background on the thesis aim. Theories involved in this research will be discussed further in the next chapter.

#### 2.1 Conceptualisation

Throughout the decade, there had been an abundance of definitions of workplace bullying. For example, Rayner and Keashly (2005) listed five essential criteria when defining workplace bullying: (1) experiencing negative behaviour; (2) experiencing it persistently; (3) victims feeling that they are physically or psychologically threatened; (4) victims finding it hard to defend themselves normally due to the perception of having less power than the perpetrator; and (5) self-labelling themselves as victims. Einarsen, Raknes, and Matthiesen (1994) defined workplace bullying as a situation where a person has the perception of being negatively acted upon by one or more colleagues or supervisors and that the individual is in some sort of predicament to defend themselves against those unfavourable actions.

However, the appropriate use of the term bullying varies across countries and cultures. To some countries, the word mobbing (Leymann and Ph, 1990; Mulder et al., 2017) or psychological abuse (Rodríguez-Carballeira et al., 2010) is used instead of bullying to explain repeated negative acts in the workplace. Figure 5 presents the various terms or constructs used in bullying research. Bullying, workplace aggression, violence, conflict or harassment differs across writers and cultures (Thomas, 2005) and in some

countries, understanding and research of workplace bullying is still in the emerging phase (Yamada, 2008). Salin (2003a) suggests that in some cultures, bullying is viewed as an acceptable way of encouraging an employee to accomplish a task while some cultures may not hold this view.

Constructs used	Authors
Mobbing	Leymann, 1996
Bullying or Mobbing (terms used interchangeably)	Neidle, 1996 Rayner, 1997 Einarsen, 1999 Zapf & Goss, 2001 Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith & Pereina, 2002 Coyne, Chong, Seigne & Randle, 2003 Hoel, Einersen & Cooper, 2003 Einersen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003 Ferris, 2004 De Cuyper, Baillien & De Witt, 2009
Workplace Incivility	Lim, Cortina & Magley, 2008 Andersson & Pearson, 1999
Workplace Victimization	Aquino & Thau, 2009
Hostile Workplace Behaviour	Keashly & Jagatic, 2003
Occupational Violence	McCarthy, Mayhew Barker & Sheehan, 2003 Mayhew & McCarthy, 2005
Abusive Supervision	Tepper, 2000
Emotional Abuse	Keashly, 1998
Counterproductive Work Behaviour	Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001 Marcus & Schuler, 2004
Victimisation and Harassment	Einarsen & Rakens, 1997
Psychological Harassment	Salin, 2010
Workplace Violence	Hockley, 2002 Mayhew & McCarthy, 2005
Identity Threat	Aquino & Douglas, 2003
Social Undermining	Duffy, Ganster, Pagon, 2002 Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, Pagon, 2006

Figure 5 Terms used to describe bullying (Jenkins, 2011)

How people define workplace bullying can be subjective. As such, some sort of checklist or criteria is required in-order to distinguish workplace bullying from other types of mistreatment. Therefore, taking a more structured view, the elements that seems to be persistently used and widely included by various bullying researchers (Einarsen, 2000; Hoel, Faragher, & Cooper, 2004; Salin, 2003a) are as follows:

*Adverse treatment* constitutes behaviours that are unreasonable, inappropriate or negative. Workplace bullying which is often indirect could be in the form of repeated insults or humiliation and the victims are unable to get even or simply uphold their dignity (Einarsen, 2000). However, it does not necessarily involve belligerent acts that are hostile and aggressive, but it can occur via faint actions (through covert acts) that eventually

threatens and torture the victims indirectly. This includes personal-related acts (e.g. criticising and spreading untrue rumours at work), and work-related acts (e.g. purposely giving unimportant tasks, withholding or getting rid of necessary resources) or even isolation (Rayner, Hoel and Cooper, 2002 ; Tracy, Lutgen-sandvik, and Alberts, 2006). However, it should be noted that workplace bullying does not merge with the concept of work conflict or racial and sexual harassment. Figure 6 is a workplace bullying model in the context of antisocial behaviour (Branch, 2008) adapted from the original model of the incivility and other forms of anti-social behaviours in organisations (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). This model was based on a study which examined and compared workplace bullying to other counter-productive behaviours in the workplace. In this model, workplace bullying has been added to the model as a subset of antisocial and deviate behaviour that encompasses some low intensity behaviours termed incivility, to higher intensity aggressive behaviours that may result in physical violence. This is because bullying requires repetition, behaviours that are experienced repeatedly and not just one-off incidents like sexual harassment or conflict. Another element that could differentiate bullying from conflict is that conflict can happen between two parties with equal power whereas bullying involves perpetrators that are usually dominant and victims that have difficulties in defending themselves (Branch, 2008; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001). These two facets will be highlighted in the following paragraph.

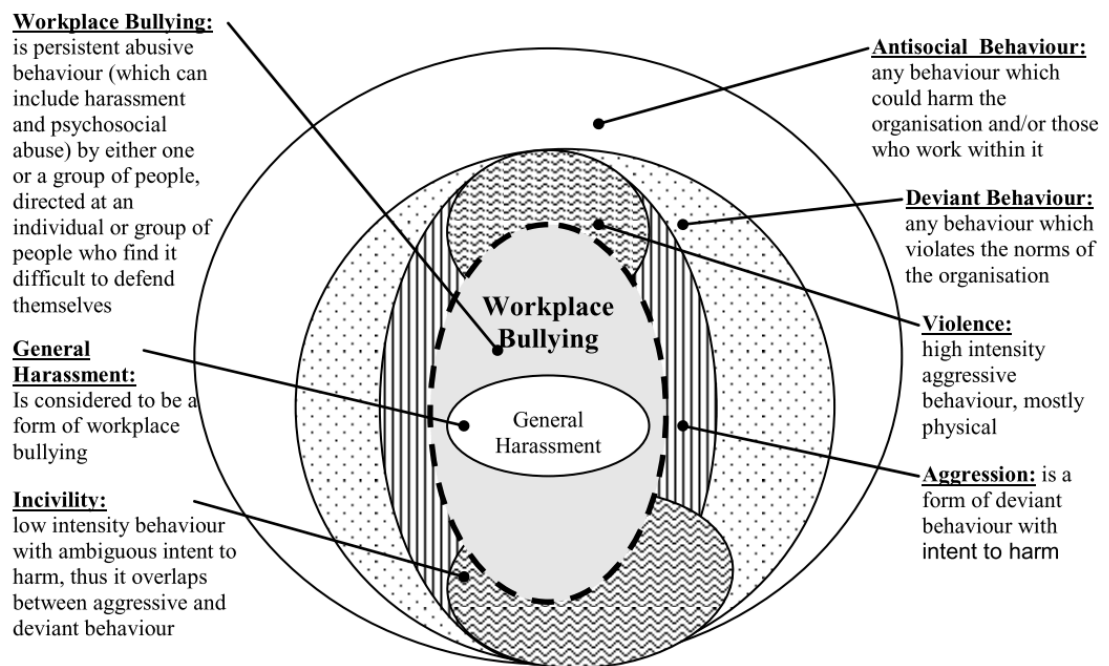
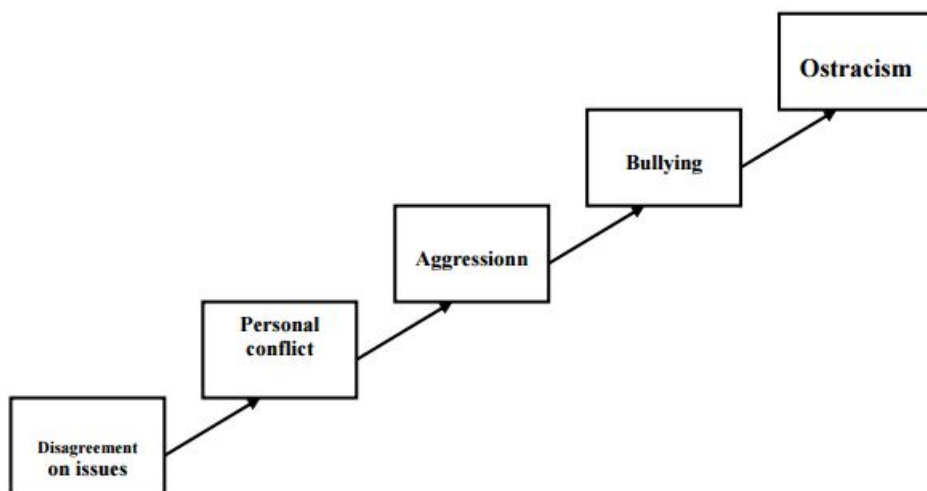


Figure 6 Model of workplace bullying in the context of antisocial behaviours (Branch, 2008)

*Duration* which involves repetition, persistence and patterning of a variety of behaviours involved (Einarsen, Mikkelsen and Matthiesen, 2003; Saunders, Huynh and Goodman-Delahunty, 2007) is a core characteristic that differentiates bullying and aggression, incivility or even harassment. It can be seen as a form of violence except that it seldom involves fighting and normally is non-physical (Namie, 2003). Some believe that it can only be considered or labelled bullying when the negative acts are repeated at least twice a week (Lachman, 2014) or at least once a week for a duration of six months (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Leymann and Ph, 1990). However, Tehrani (2012) disagrees and argue that the rate of escalation may vary across individuals. For an example, escalation may take as long as six months before reaching a frequency that constitutes bullying, but some may intensify at a faster rate. Drawing on this, Tehrani proposed that if the presence of power disparity between the target and the bully, and the behaviour persists for more than a week, then it can be considered bullying. It is the repeating nature that encourages us to treat workplace bullying as an escalating process rather than just a one-off incident or phenomenon (Einarsen, 2000; Zapf and Gross, 2001). Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) also revealed that victims encountered more frequent attacks when bullied for a longer period of time, with problems gradually intensifying over time. With regard to this, Figure 7 illustrates the escalation process of workplace bullying (Einarsen, Helge and Nielsen, 2005).



*Figure 7: The Escalation Process of Workplace Bullying (Einarsen, Helge and Nielsen, 2005)*

Based on the conflict escalation hypothesis, *bullying is a process triggered by a conflict that, when poorly managed or unsatisfactorily resolved, can lead to personal attacks to destroy the reputation of the other party, which, after a series of failed attempts to cope with bullying behaviours, may experience severe trauma* (Zapf and Gross, 2001). Figure 7 is a good illustration on how disagreement on issues gradually shifts to bullying and then ostracism which can also explain dispute related bullying that refers to being the target or bullying as a result of workplace conflicts (Einarsen, 1999). The process usually starts off following a disagreement on issues which then turns to something personal. In this stage, the question changes from what to who the problem is. For example, the conflict might be work-related at the beginning, but when left unresolved or prolonged, shifts to something person-related. It starts off by negative acts which are normally discreet in nature and as the conflict develops, it moves on to acts that are more aggressive where actions are often expressed in a direct form. Bullying then begins once the negative acts are constantly repeated towards one of the parties and they find it hard to defend themselves against it.

Finally, it escalates to ostracism which is also known as social exclusion (Baumeister et al., 2005), peer rejection (Prinstein and Aikins, 2004) or social isolation (Rook, 1984). The two characteristics of ostracism that makes it distinct from bullying is that it involves the (1) the absence of a desired behaviour and (2) total disconnection of the target allowing no involvement or interaction with the group (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson, Reilly and Wang, 2013). As opposed to bullying, ostracism implies the presence of an undesired behaviour and it still involves engaging the target, however, in a negative social dynamic. We could argue that this model was inspired by the model of escalation conflict by Glasl (1994) (as cited in Zapf and Gross, 2001) which has nine stages and begins with unresolved problems that causes irritation leading to personal threats and aggression. To sum up, workplace bullying is a form of adverse treatment which includes low levels of behaviours/ conflict that can escalate to higher levels of aggression/ violence. However, the model of escalation conflict lack acknowledgment of power imbalance which is core to the definition of workplace bullying (Salin, 2003a).

*Power imbalance* can either exist through formal or informal power structures between the two parties (Branch et al., 2013). It only constitutes bullying when the target is unable to defend themselves against mistreatments which are mostly due to this element

(Aquino, Douglas and Martinko, 2004; Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996). Most existing literature postulates that power imbalance reflects the formal power structure or positional power, which is reflected as being bullied by someone at the top of the organisational hierarchy (Liu and Wang, 2017; Scheuer et al., 2017). This is often represented as abusive supervision which is typically treated as another construct of workplace bullying (Tepper, Moss and Duffy, 2011). However, one must not equate this to workplace bullying as it is not only concerned with downward vertical mistreatment but also mistreatment from subordinate to supervisor (upwards), between co-workers (sideways) and from customers to employees (Kakarika, González-gómez and Dimitriades, 2017; Samnani and Singh, 2012; Tepper et al., 2007; Whitaker, 2012). Power disparity could also emerge from other factors which are more informal such as knowledge, psychological factors, personality, and the amount of support that they perceive they have (Salin, 2003; Tehrani, 2012; Zapf and Einarsen, 2011). For an example, conflicts between an experienced employee and a new employee (difference in knowledge or experience) and employees with more support on their side versus employees with less perceived support (social power).

### The Intention Dilemma

The issue concerning whether intention is a fundamental element of workplace bullying is still debatable. To some researchers, workplace bullying is defined as ‘status-blind’ interpersonal hostility that is deliberate and it is also driven by the perpetrator’s need to control another individual regardless of how it is manifested (Einarsen, 2000; Namie, 2003). If we adopt the aggression theory point of view, intention is key in defining bullying (Björkqvist, Österman and Hjelt-Bäck, 1994). However, some research has argued that workplace bullying does not have to be intentional in order for it to take place (Einarsen et al. in Tehrani, 2012). Tehrani (2012) discusses the issue of intent. For Tehrani, the ‘intent’ element only becomes relevant when trying to understand the impact of the behaviour on the victim and in cases where choosing the most effective intervention is questioned.

Tehrani identifies three levels of intent. First, *wilful intent* which causes direct occupational, physical or psychological harm. Second, *instrumental intent* which explains the side-effect of a behaviour when trying to achieve another goal. Third, *unintentional intent*, where the perpetrator lacks awareness on the impact that was caused from the

behaviour. However, it is often perceived as intentional from a victim's perspective, which in turn causes them to feel defenceless (Hoel, Faragher and Cooper, 2004; Lutgen-sandvik, Tracy and Alberts, 2007). In the end, however, thoughtlessness can also cause harm despite being unintentional. The presence of bullying may "exist independently of how these behaviours are being interpreted and construed" (Hoel and Beale, 2006). Many situations occur where victims tend to be reluctant when accusing bullying intention to the perpetrator over their uncertainty (Baillien et al., 2009). For example, victims might be uncertain that being given meaningless tasks or being the brunt of personal jokes were in fact intended to be harmful. Nevertheless, when defining workplace bullying, intent varies in the level of its importance depending on the contextual features of the environment and intention has not been made explicit when defining workplace bullying.

## 2.2 Describing Workplace Bullying

### 2.2.1 Types of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying can occur in various forms. As a whole, it can be grouped into two general categories: person-related and work-related (Beswick, Gore and Palferman, 2006). However, researchers have tended to categorise these forms based on its context and it might vary across different populations depending on its cultural background (Tehrani, 2012; Tsuno et al., 2010). For instance, Rayner and Hoel (1997) summarised the types of workplace bullying into five categories: (1) *threat to professional status* (e.g. belittling opinion, public professional humiliation, and accusation regarding lack of effort); (2) *threat to personal standing* (e.g. name-calling, insults, and intimidation); (3) *isolation* (e.g. preventing access to opportunities, physical or social isolation, and withholding information); (4) *overwork* (e.g. undue pressure, impossible deadlines, and unnecessary disruptions); and (5) *destabilisation* (e.g. failure to give credit when due, meaningless tasks, and removal of responsibility).

Another study conducted via Delphi survey found six categories of workplace bullying and attained a hierarchical order according to its severity (Rodríguez-Carballeira et al., 2010). Table 2 presents the categories that were determined from the study, with categories described based in its type and nature.

Table 2 Taxonomy of psychological abuse in the workplace/ mobbing (Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2010)

+	Type	Nature	Categories
			<p>1. <b>ISOLATION:</b> Restricting the worker's interaction with his or her co-worker and/or physically separating him or her from them, seeking his or her marginalization or exclusion.</p> <p><b>1.1 Physical isolation</b></p> <p><b>1.2 Social isolation</b></p>
	Indirect	Work Context	<p>2. <b>CONTROL AND MANIPULATION OF INFORMATION:</b> Selecting and manipulating the information received by the worker, lying to him or her, and stemming or interfering with the information that the worker transmits.</p> <p>3. <b>CONTROL – ABUSE OF WORKING CONDITIONS:</b> Intervening or acting negligently in the work environment and working conditions in order to upset the worker as he or she attempts to performs his or her tasks, or to put his or her health at risk.</p> <p><b>3.1 Obstructionism</b></p> <p><b>3.2 Dangerous work</b></p>
		Emotion	<p>4. <b>EMOTIONAL ABUSE:</b> Offensive actions and expression aimed at especially attacking, injuring and sneering at the worker's feelings and emotion.</p> <p><b>4.1 Intimidation and threats</b></p> <p><b>4.2 Disrespect, humiliation and rejection of the person</b></p>
	Direct	Cognition	<p>5. <b>PROFESSIONAL DISCREDIT AND DENIGRATION:</b> Discrediting and denigrating the worker's professional reputation and standing, belittling his or her knowledge, experience, efforts, performance, etc</p>
		Behaviour	<p>6. <b>DEVALUATION OF THE ROLE IN WORKPLACE:</b> Undervaluing the importance of the role of the worker, unjustifiably relieving the worker of his or her responsibilities or assigning the worker tasks that are useless, impossible or clearly inferior to his category in the organisation.</p>



Indirect bullying was mostly exercised in the work context and were broken down into three categories: (1) isolation – victims can either be physically isolated or socially isolated. A person is physically isolated when he/she is being physically separated from their co-workers as a means of isolation whereas socially isolated refers to hindering or impeding communications and interactions between the victim and his/ her co-workers or restricting participation in communal activities. Other categories of indirect bullying include: (2) control and manipulation of information; and (3) control – abuse of working conditions. The third category is further broken down into two other subcategories: (a) obstructionism – removing or damaging the possession of work tools of the victim and limiting his or her access to other useful elements, interfering with them or hiding them; and (b) dangerous work - assigning to the worker tasks that are prejudicial to put at risk his or her health.

The following categories were grouped as direct types of bullying but were different in nature: (4) emotional abuse – which is obviously emotional in nature and further broken down into two sub-categories: (a) intimidation and threats – intimidating the victim by warning him or her of the physical or psychological harm, or other injuries that will befall them or their environment if they do not do as they are told or as expected to; and (b) disrespect, humiliation and rejection of the person – which takes the form of insults, slanderous comments, taunts, mockery, false accusation, rumours and other disparaging remarks. The other two types of indirect bullying in this taxonomy is professional discredit and denigration (cognitive in nature) and devaluation of the role in the workplace (behaviour in nature).

Between the two types of bullying, direct and indirect, the latter was more common especially in top-down bullying. This might be the case that indirect bullying is not easily identifiable (Björkqvist, Österman and Hjelt-Bäck, 1994; Razzaghian, 2011; Van Dijk and Kirk, 2007). Emotional abuse was ranked the highest in terms of severity among the six categories followed by professional discrediting and denigration and devaluation of the role in the workplace. Meanwhile, control and manipulation of information, isolation, and control-abuse of working conditions were determined the least severe from the study by Rodríguez-Carballeira et al. (2010).

Tehrani (2012) identified four main types of bullying which are:- (1) personal derogation such as humiliation or remarks that purposely hurt targets of workplace bullying; (2) intimidation which relates to threats, either physical and/or psychological,

by misusing self-power or position in an organisational setting; (3) work-related bullying which includes withholding information and resources, irrelevant workload and due dates, or even ignoring one's performance; and (4) social exclusion which applies to isolation or scapegoating of the victim. Social exclusion, similar to ostracism, threatens four basic social needs which are belonging to a significant social group, maintaining high self-esteem, the need to feel in control of one's interactions with others and to be able to control the outcome of the interaction, and lastly, maintaining a belief in a meaningful existence (Twenge, Catanese and Baumeister, 2003; Zadro, Boland and Richardson, 2006). Victims may be perceived it as a form of 'social death' especially if an individual is the only target. In contrast, results from a Japanese study carried out on 1,626 civil workers found three categories of workplace bullying: (1) person and work-related bullying; (2) physical or psychological intimidation; and (3) occupational devaluation (Tsuno et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, from the different categories laid out by various researchers, the categories that seem appealing was the categories used by Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers (2009) which they integrated into a scale (Negative Acts Questionnaire) to measure exposure to bullying in the workplace. Those categories included: (1) work-related bullying; (2) personal bullying; and (3) physically intimidating forms of bullying. The distinction between these categories is a result from previous studies reporting behaviours that constituted workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann and Ph, 1990; Vartia, 1996). Examples of work-related bullying include giving too many or too few tasks, persistently criticising a worker's work, whereas personal bullying includes humiliating a person in public and slander. Physical intimidations include threats and physical violence. The full list of behaviours within these three categories can be found in APPENDIX C.

## 2.2.2 Workplace bullying antecedents

### *a. Individual or Personal Factors*

Bullying may come from a vast number of sources, for example employers, employees or other third parties (Grandey, Kern and Frone, 2007; Sliter et al., 2010). Personal factors of the perpetrator that account for workplace bullying include intrapersonal frustrations due to ineffective coping (Baillien et al., 2009) and interpersonal conflicts due to unsuccessful solutions (Zapf and Gross, 2001). Intrapersonal frustration may result from low job satisfaction usually about changes made in the organisation, high workload, job

insecurity or prolonged work stress (Baillien, Neyens and De Witte, 2011). This includes psychosocial conditions such as role ambiguity and role conflict which may trigger further conflicts which leads to bullying (Bowling and Beehr, 2006; Leymann and Ph, 1990). Individuals that are unable to cope effectively are most likely to engage in workplace bullying behaviours depending on their disposition (De Cuyper, Baillien and De Witte, 2009). This means that individuals that operate active-effective coping style (e.g. lashing out at other colleagues) may eventually become a perpetrator whereas those who are more passive are more likely to end up becoming targets of workplace bullying.

Difference in personality might be an important factor when choosing how to cope with workplace bullying (Balducci, Fraccaroli and Schaufeli, 2011). Individuals may be dominant in nature or privately vindictive and crave power, but there is evidence where individuals have low self-confidence and resort to bullying as a defence mechanism (Hannabuss, 1998). Certain personal attributes (either positive or negative), have been shown to expose individuals to bullying. For an example, negative attributes such as low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, unassertiveness and submissiveness exposes an individual's reduced capability to endure any belligerent confrontation and this supports acts of bullying (Aquino, 2000). Meanwhile, positive attributes such as high self-confidence have been reported as attributes that provoke aggressive behaviours (Luzio-lockett and Luzio-lockett, 1999). Individuals emotionally affected by frustration that are not coped properly might have a tendency to blame others or misread others' intentions (Khalib and Ngan, 2006). Failure to de-escalate a conflict will increase the risks of bullying to occur which can also be explained by the conflict escalation model discussed earlier. Example of different types of interpersonal conflicts include conflict in ideas and values, management approaches, perceptions and or personal interest (Hoel and Giga, 2009). Conflicts that remain unresolved may lead to revenge and heated anger. Thus, repeated negative acts that result from unresolved conflicts would then encourage bullying to occur at work.

### *b. Work Group and Societal Factors*

Teamwork and group cohesion is key in a successful work group. However, employees within a group may feel obligated to conform to group norms due to fear of being a target of bullying (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2011). In relation to social learning theory (Bandura, 1973 as cited in Salin, 2003a), on the one hand, followers in a group would be prone to

being influenced by negative behaviour set by the role model in the group or other members especially when they are rewarded for engaging in those maladaptive behaviours. On the other hand, diversity within the organisation might also influence workplace bullying (Harvey, Treadway and Duke, 2009). Employees belonging to a different background (e.g. cultural, religion, race) may not be able to conform to the norms or cultures practiced within the organizations and with less social contact with other co-workers, might put the employee in a position of becoming a target of workplace bullying (Agervold and Mikkelsen, 2004). Foreign employees who are normally subjected to having 'different' characteristics (e.g. features, race, nationality) can facilitate the formation of in-groups and out-groups (Calhoun, 2002).

Status inconsistencies due to group incompatibility may encourage employees to either become a perpetrator or a victim of bullying (Heames, Harvey and Treadway, 2006). Status inconsistencies or status incongruence can be defined as occurring in a given environment when an individual is different (inconsistent) from others in the group on one or more status dimensions (i.e. age, race, religion, education level) (Lenski, 1954 in Heames et al., 2006). Studies have suggested that these inconsistencies encourage aggressive behaviours (Bacharach, Bamberger and Mundell, 1993), hence triggering them to engage in bullying activities as perpetrators. It could also be the opposite, where they feel victimised by being or feeling different in terms of background or power disparity (Samnani and Singh, 2012; Vartia, 1996). In terms of societal factors, non-work life stressors such as relationship problems, existing physical illness and family dysfunction play a big role in determining one's behaviour at work (Johnson and Gardner, 1999).

### *c. Leadership*

Workplace bullying may result from different types of power abuse (Einarsen, Helge and Nielsen, 2005) including *positional power* where managers may abuse their powers by setting unfair rules and restrictions that could affect one or more employees; *resource power* which inhibits or slows down the targets progress due to the removal of, or withholding access to, resources; *knowledge power* which relates to facts or important information needed by the targets; *psychological power* by exploiting the target's vulnerabilities; and *delegated power* by using a third party to bully the target (Tehrani, 2012). For instance, job insecurity has been recognised as one of the causes of an increase

in bullying mainly due to organisational change or restructuring (Hearn and Parkin, 2001). This has led to indirectly diminished power within employees creating abuse of power by managers and supervisors that are caused by the mutual fear of losing their jobs (e.g. manager blames or threatens employees). In addition, a less employee-oriented management style or a laissez faire leadership style (Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen, 2007) might also prompt workplace bullying. This type of leadership might relate to organisations that have remote activities (e.g. sales, on-sites). This can result in difficulty in the direct supervision of employees' activities, resulting in less control over bullying activities.

#### *d. Organisational Factors*

Organisational factors are one of the common antecedents of workplace bullying (Appelbaum et al., 2007; Leymann and Ph, 1990). Some researchers believe that bullying is a form of organisational politics in order to achieve a certain goal or influence an organisational decision (Katrinli, Atabay, Cangarli, & Gunay, 2010). Organisational factors include: *organisational cultures* (Yamada, 2008), especially in organisations that are hierarchical or rank structured and power based; *workplace changes* involving downsizing, social changes, pay-cuts, employment contracts and job sharing that could impact on employee behaviours and job insecurity (Harvey et al., 2009); *lack of organisational support* (Vartia, 1996) either directly (e.g. maintaining a reward system purely for performance or encouraging a 'bottom-line mentality' in the organisation) or indirectly (e.g. not taking action regarding bullying complaints); *work environment* involving a competitive climate (Balducci et al., 2011) and *leadership issues* along with poor management skills (Journal, Erkutlu and Chafra, 2014; Razzaghian, 2011).

Salin (2003) proposed a three-process interactive model which conceptualised the organisational antecedents of workplace bullying:

- i. Enabling processes which makes workplace bullying possible. These aspects include perceived power imbalances and power structures, low perceived risk where the perpetrator finds it easy to get away with bullying or that he/ she will not be losing much if they get caught, and feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration with their working environment or the organisational climate.

- ii. Motivating processes are ‘incentives’ which, in certain circumstances makes it rewarding to perpetrators. Research have argued that bullying is not necessarily due to irrational behaviour among perpetrators, but it can be due to striving behaviours that gives profit to the perpetrator. This includes high internal competition which might motivate individuals to sabotage another colleague in order for the individual to improve his/ her ranking (Vartia, 1996), performance evaluations which are most of time based on production amount (reward systems), or the need to maintain group performance might motivate an individual to ‘discipline’ low performing or non-desirable team members. For example, under-performing employees might be susceptible to bullying from his/ her team members (or supervisors) as team members might have the idea of punishment or expelling under-performing members. Thus, such policies that promote performance-related pay might just indirectly institutionalise bullying behaviours in the workplace.
- iii. Precipitating processes which reflects a change within the status quo such as restructuring, change in the composition of the work group and downsizing. This crisis may result in feelings of uncertainty which creates increases in competition, increasing workloads and reduced job insecurity. For example, restructuring and downsizing eliminates positions and therefore limits promotion opportunities, increased workloads and competition and reduced job security.

### 2.2.3 Consequences of workplace bullying

Conflict-related bullying is a result of highly escalated levels of conflict (Einarsen, 2000). There are two major types of conflict. Interpersonal conflict and task-related conflict are very similar to the two major types of bullying (person-related and work-related) except that it differs mainly in respect to frequency. As discussed earlier, the duration (or frequency) serves as an important element in defining bullying. Nevertheless, the impact it causes on groups or teams at work are equally damaging. A protracted conflict which then escalates into bullying, hinders team members’ potentials which slows down performance and efficiency as well as reducing cohesion (Gersick, 1989 as cited in Ayoko, Callan and Hartel, 2003; De Dreu, 2008). Workplace bullying can affect other employees and not just the victims. It has been shown that the impact it has on its targets

can also impact those who witnessed it (Olender-Russo, 2009). It may also bring harm to witnesses as perpetrators would often threaten other employees who might report the incidents which in turn encourages more bullying (Lewis and Orford, 2005; Ramsey, Troth and Branch, 2011). This is closely related to the point mentioned above where group members would take sides and normally they would take the perpetrator's side in fear of becoming the next target (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2011). This may lead to the deterioration of the working culture and organisational performance including absenteeism and presenteeism, (Einarsen et al., 1994), turnover and productivity (Hoel and Cooper, 2000), morale practice (Gardner, Catley and Driscoll, 2013) and the disruption of the organisational climate, company reputation, medical concerns including rehabilitations costs and legal costs if settlements are involved (Cascio, 2006; Gardner et al., 2013; Georgakopoulos, Wilkin and Kent, 2011). In the case of performance, for instance presenteeism, it negatively impacts the organisation through either individual impact or/and collective impact (Demerouti et al., 2009). When a person becomes the target of bullying, they become insecure about losing their job (Cascio, 2006). They might fear that with their absence, they would not be able to defend themselves (e.g. spread rumours, unmanageable workload) and this would put their job at stake (Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie and Namie, 2009). Employees feel obligated to be present at work although feeling ill, due to the increased pressure of having to complete a task (even if it was unreasonable). This would lead to the decrease in work quality which indirectly affects organisational performance as a whole (Hemp, 2004).

Besides presenteeism, organisations are also exposed to financial burden. A previous study has established that workplace bullying impacts negatively on company profitability and financially (Yahaya et al., 2012). For instance, a study from Australia reported that the average cost of serious bullying is \$20,000 per employee (McPhilbin, 2004 in Yahaya et al., 2012). This includes an increased premium for worker's compensation, medical insurance, legal fees and operation expenses (Rayner et al., 2002 as cited in Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2009). Organisations would face a decrease in their reputation, losing their positive image from the public which would make it harder for them to recruit new employees due to the aftermath of workplace especially legal actions are being taken and bad rumours are spread about the negative environment at work (employee-abusive organisation) (Lutgen-sandvik and Mcdermott, 2008). Besides that, a long-term impact of workplace bullying would eventually cause the loss of good employees. Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) derived the exodus (worker-exit) waves as one of the

five resistance strategies that victims or witnesses go through with workplace bullying. The first ones to leave are normally those with high occupational capital. The second wave is when the employee perceives that the hope for change is lost, and the third wave includes new employees who leaves as soon as he/ she realises the negative dynamics.

The consequences that workplace bullying produce are not limited to the organisation or the workplace. It might impact beyond the organisation. It has been found that workplace bullying may influence unemployment levels and premature retirement which would then increase the need for social services and welfare (Helge Hoel, Sparks, & Cooper, 2002; Vega & Comer, 2005). Vega & Comer (2005) also suggested that workplace bullying affected interpersonal relationships beyond the workplace. On that note, a 2001 national survey by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) on workplace bullying in Ireland determined that 28% of the population has negatively affected family relationships while 43% of the victims had experienced low quality of life beyond their workplace due to workplace bullying (O'Moore, 2000). Moreover, medical expenses that occurred as a result of workplace bullying may be a considerable amount and cost to society (Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper, 2003).

### *Focusing on the individual*

Most importantly is the negative impact on the individual itself, which is the focus of this thesis. Exposure to workplace bullying have resulted in adverse psychological effects (Björkqvist, Österman and Hjelt-Bäck, 1994; Einarsen et al., 2003) including mental distress and depression (Ciby and Raya, 2015; Lahelma et al., 2011; Salin, 2003a). Everyone involved in the process of bullying (directly or indirectly) in the workplace can be negatively affected. Both victims and observers experience more stress reactions than those who had not witnessed any bullying (Vartia, 2001). An interview study by Hallberg and Strandmark (2006) found that victims eventually developed psychological and psychosomatic symptoms a few months after the onset of bullying (N=20). Victims initially showed minor symptoms at work but over time the symptoms worsened at the same time when psychological symptoms were being reported. This included psychological symptoms such as the inability to focus, mood swings, feeling anxious, sleep disturbances, fear and depressive symptoms. Whereas, psychosomatic symptoms included headaches, respiratory and cardiac problems, hypertension. Victims perceived adult bullying as a psychological trauma or a traumatic life event that



marked them for life. Hallberg and Strandmark (2006) explored how one could feel marked for life through the categories set out below:

- i. Feeling guilt, shame and diminishing self-esteem;
- ii. Developing symptoms and reactions;
- iii. Getting limited space for action;
- iv. Working through the course of events; and
- v. Trying to obtain redress.

When a victim is blamed for problems or conflicts at the workplace, the victim tends to accept this along with feelings of guilt and shame. This advances the deterioration of one's self-esteem and the feeling of unworthiness which could also lead to suicide tendencies, loss of self-respect, and self-image (Djukorvik et al., 2004; Quine, 2001). Besides psychological effects, workplace bullying has also been associated with psychosomatic complaints (Agervold and Mikkelsen, 2004; Casimir et al., 2013; Meseguer de Pedro et al., 2008) including sleep problems (Hansen et al., 2016; Niedhammer et al., 2009; Rodriguez-muñoz, Notelaers and Moreno-jimenez, 2011), gastrointestinal disorders and headaches (Takaki, Taniguchi and Hirokawa, 2013) as well as chronic fatigue (Thomas, 2005). Further, workplace bullying has been shown to cause emotional reactions like unhappiness, anxiety, withdrawal, mood changes (Ciby and Raya, 2015; Hoel et al., 2003 in Einarsen et al. 2003) in addition to emotional exhaustion (Chi and Liang, 2013; Lam and Walter, 2017; Wheeler, Halbesleben and Whitman, 2013). Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have also reported negative impacts on employees' behaviour as a result of experiencing workplace bullying including lowered commitment and intention to leave (Berthelsen et al., 2011), reduced job satisfaction and engagement (Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2009), increased absenteeism (Magee et al., 2017) and presenteeism (Conway et al., 2016).

As bullying continues, the victim's choices become limited and they would experience the lack of energy/ strength to handle or change the situation (Hallberg and Strandmark, 2006b). Flashbacks would normally appear even when trying to work through the course of events either by meeting the perpetrator or experiencing a similar event causing the victim to be reminded of the traumatic event (Perseverative Cognition) (Hallberg and Strandmark, 2006b; Razzaghian, 2011). This might cause anxiety symptoms like palpitations or panic attacks. Victims find it hard to move on without trying to obtain redress (e.g. monetary compensation, professional confirmation) and

some might even want revenge or the need to reconcile. Often, victims and even witnesses would only feel that the situation improved by leaving the company (Berthelsen et al., 2011; Sims, Sun, & Sims, 2013).

Other consequences of workplace bullying include moral decline (Fisher-blando, 2008) and a decline in job performance and commitment (Ciby and Raya, 2015; Gemz and Einarsen, 2015; Ngutor and Corresponding, 2013; Oghojafor et al., 2012). Based on the evidence discussed above, this thesis sets out to measure the negative impact of workplace bullying on the study participants' health and well-being. Since previous studies have also called for more longitudinal studies to be carried out on bullying, a longitudinal design was chosen to measure the relationships. Workplace bullying will be measured at (T1) while the negative impact on health and well-being consequences will be measured at T3 instead of T2 to leave a bigger time gap for longitudinal observations on the bullying-well-being relationship. Therefore, the first hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Workplace bullying at T1 is positively associated with mental ill-health (1a), somatic complaints (1b) and emotional exhaustions (1c) at T3.

*Hypothesis 1a:* Workplace bullying at T1 is positively associated with depression, anxiety and stress at T3.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Workplace bullying at T1 is positively associated with sleep disturbances, headaches, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections at T3.

*Hypothesis 1c:* Workplace bullying at T1 is positively associated with emotional exhaustion at T3.

Furthermore, evidence exists that found employees with worse psychological health such as anxiety were likely to experience increased levels of bullying (Rodríguez-Muñoz, Moreno-Jiménez and Sanz-Vergel, 2015a). Bullying and depression was also found to mutually influence each other over time (Kivimäki et al., 2003). Besides that, research has also found a reciprocal relationship between bullying and psychological distress (Nielsen et al., 2012). Individuals with poor health may be bullied over a few reasons such as perceived vulnerability. By adopting a longitudinal study and the advantages therein, I am able to measure causal effects between the variables. Consequently, I am

able to look at whether a decline in health and well-being (T1) is able to predict subsequent bullying (T3). Based on previous research associating bullying with a decline in individual health and well-being, the second hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 2:** Mental ill-health (2a), higher somatic complaints (2b) and high levels of emotional exhaustion (2c) are positively associated with future exposure to workplace bullying.

*Hypothesis 2a:* Depression, anxiety and stress T1 is positively associated with future exposure to workplace bullying T3.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Sleep disturbances, headaches, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections at T1 is positively associated with future exposure to workplace bullying T3.

*Hypothesis 2c:* High levels of emotional exhaustion T1 is positively associated with future exposure to workplace bullying T3.

### 2.3 Workplace bullying in Customer Service Context

Research into workplace bullying has been carried out on various different working populations. For example, it was noted that among 1,733 samples from New Zealand, the four main sectors that reported high numbers of cases of bullying was health, education, hospitality and travel (O'Driscoll et al., 2011). All four sectors involved a similar element, namely communication with a customer, either patients, students or clients. The significance of this is that it is possible that jobs involving customer services might report higher workplace bullying incidents. It was also indicated that workplace bullying was an internal problem reporting the prime individuals (source of bullying) who provoke bullying to others are among the supervisors, managers, and co-workers (Ortega, Høgh, Pejtersen, & Olsen, 2009).

However, there exists research showing workplace bullying present among customers, patients and clients in certain work environments (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2014; Greenbaum, Mawritz and Mayer, 2013; Prof and Yagil, 2017). Therefore, the population of interest for this study are employees working in the front line including those in sales, call centres, retail and the service sector. This decision was motivated by a few reasons. First, it has been suggested that workplace bullying is quite common among those

working in the service sectors compared to other sectors (Omari, 2007). It was also highlighted in previous research that employees dealing with customers experienced frequent encounters of aggression and bullying (Bishop and Hoel, 2008; Korczynski and Evans, 2013; Talib et al., 2014; Yeh, 2015).

A study in Malaysia (Talib et al., 2014) found that 81.4% experienced bullying through someone withholding information that affected their performance, 82.2% experienced gossiping and 82.3% experienced bullying through having to finish their tasks with unreasonable datelines (n = 231). The sample included a majority of employees who had work experience of between 6 to 10 years (43.3%). Interestingly, the study findings reported that employees working in the customer services sector were prone to be exposed to bullying. In terms of age group, younger employees were more often targeted compared to older employees and in terms of work experiences, newcomers were the ones who were often targeted.

In a customer service context, the relationship between the service provider (front liners) and a customer could be looked at as customer-employee-management triangle. Service sectors have the pressure to maintain a customer-focused service and the message of continuously improving performance is always being conveyed. It is necessary that good customer service is maintained even when there are limitations in terms of resources and costs. Therefore, frontline employees play an important role in responding to customers through their formal roles (Cenatiempo, George and Casey, 1997). Besides maintaining a good reputation for the organisation, frontline employees also seek information from customers as well as the internal organisational knowledge repositories, such as websites or databases, and make use of this information to meet the demands of the customers. This is one of the critical parts of the knowledge creation process. In other words, frontline employees bring in information through their roles and the information is then being leveraged for the organisation (Heinrichs and Lim, 2005).

A nationwide study of workplace bullying in Great Britain by Hoel and Cooper (2000) found that 8% (n = 5, 288) identified customers or clients as perpetrators in their bullying experience, with substantially higher numbers within customer service industries. Frontline-customer interaction paints a picture of a difficult relationship characterised by a power imbalance (Bishop, Korczynski and Cohen, 2005; Korczynski and Ott, 2004) with frequently abusive and sometimes even violent customers (Bishop, Korczynski and Cohen, 2005). Employees having frequent face-to-face or voice-to-voice

interactions with customers played a critical role in emotional dissonance (Karatepe and Aleshinloye, 2009). Since the continued success of an organisation depends on providing a quality services to customers, the question arises over the extent to which service organisations use customer orientation in service work to force front liners to accept negative work conditions in general. Customer satisfaction is a critical measure of the success or failure of service industries and frontline employees play a crucial role in maintaining a long term relationship with customers (Kusluvan, 2003).

These employees serve as ambassadors that represent the face of an organisation, but it has also been pointed out that frontline employees are exposed to the risk of being bullied by customers. Frontline employees become especially subservient to angry or abusive customer (Korczynski and Evans, 2013). There exists a notion which acknowledges ‘customer sovereignty’ (the idea that the customer is king) which is often understood as a façade created by the organisation and that this idea of the ‘customer is always right’ is commonly used by organisations to manage their performance and provide an efficient provision of service (Korczynski and Ott, 2004). “When people interact more, it is more likely that personalities will clash and that individuals who possess bullying tendencies (e.g. with more power) will have opportunities to act upon them” (Yamada, 2000 in Hodson, Roscigno and Lopez, 2006). Previous studies showed evidence that suggests employees working in the frontline are more inclined to experience emotional dissonance (Phillips et al., 2007). This might be caused by the nature of their job which requires frequent interaction with customers and they are expected to behave in a certain sway which maintains an ‘organisationally-desired emotion’ during interpersonal transactions (Morris and Feldman, 1996). The discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions are conditioned among the victims where faking actual emotions will cause them to experience emotional exhaustion (Bozionelos & Kiamou, 2008; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009). This requirement of having to suppress their feelings and to keep up the emotional displace even under pressure of an offensive customer can be termed as emotional labour which was earlier discovered by Hochschild (1983).

The existence of bullying in a customer-employee relationship can be rather delicate to decipher especially when most employees would have the perception that customer’s hostility or unwanted behaviour are caused by the frontliner’s inability to deliver the desired service (Yagil, 2008). Nevertheless, similar elements used to define workplace bullying can be used to identify bullying in this relationship. Frontliners are expected to serve their customers on a regular basis, and it is this that exposes them to

experience negative behaviour repeatedly. Repeated customer contact is also a unique feature of working in customer service that may aggravate the negative experience. Although the encounters are most of the time perceived as one-offs, in practice, most frontline employees would require contact with customers who return on a regular basis.

Uniquely, customer bullying may be frequently re-experienced when dealing with other customers due to the similarity of the interaction. In other words, even when they serve a new customer, the potential threat of further negative behaviour can cause them to re-experience similar encounters which is very similar to victims of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002). On the issue of the experience becoming a one-off incident, cases of severe aggression may generate significant long-term effects that involves flashbacks, or re-encounters with the customer or even prompted by things or situations that are similar. The recollection of the act may affect behaviour and memories as strong as the original incident or act (Bishop and Hoel, 2008).

In a similar way to the example provided earlier between an employee-employer relationship, an imbalance of power is partly established and maintained through the customer sovereignty ideology. This power imbalance can be manifested in a number of ways including the regular occurrence where management supports customers involved in conflicts with frontliners (in some cases it could involve the management breaking certain organisational rules to facilitate the customer's request) (Korczynski and Evans, 2013). The nature of service work itself may create an imbalance of power because the customer has a certain amount of leverage in customer service interactions (Prottas, 1979 as cited in Bishop and Hoel, 2008). On the one hand, Prottas (1979) argued that the customer is able to stand a fair amount of tension during the transaction because it is an infrequent occurrence. On the other hand, the frontline employee does it day after day and so they cannot stand such tension all the time, causing them to compromise their own resources to fulfil the demands of clients in order to reduce conflict and get through the day. This situation can be related to the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). COR theory suggests that "*people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that what is threatening to them is the potential or actual loss of these values resources*" (pp. 516). Individuals are motivated to protect their resources including resources that have both intrinsic and extrinsic values including object resources (e.g. house, car), condition resources (e.g. seniority, tenure), personal resources (e.g. self-esteem, self-efficacy) and energy resources (e.g. knowledge, credit, time) (Hobfoll, 2011).

The concept of good customer service and the skills that this is claimed to entail can sometimes give rise to stigmatising the victim. Employees are trained to have good customer service skills to maintain good relations with the customer. In other words, it is often implied that they are required to go through all types of customer behaviours including acts that we have labelled as bullying. This notion is often constructed through policies and procedures and it is stated that it is every employee's duty to maintain a skilful handling of the customer in-order to be classified as a good frontline employee. Therefore, negative customer behaviour was particularly seen as the employee's fault for not being able to handle the customer. In fact, in a Western study involving 49 interviews with employees in customer service roles, none actually referred to themselves as bullied by customers either by encounters with customer hostility or customer aggression.

The employees somehow accepted that it was part of their job and that the organisational context that surrounded it as well as the social representation of the customers crystallised this belief (Bishop and Hoel, 2008). Nevertheless, it is the frontliners who are required to sustain a front which most of the time involves accepting negative behaviours and remarks from customers as part of their job requirement. There are circumstances where even if victims are aware that they are being bullied they will not admit that they are being bullied (Einarsen, 2000). This could also be subjected to their working nature such as working in the frontline where it is possible that victims choose to decline the role of becoming a victim as it implies weakness or imperfection. In this case, if prevalence of bullying was only assessed based on the victim's awareness, it could lead to an underreporting of bullying cases (Einarsen, 2000). The following chapter will discuss the theories embedded in the research prior to further development of the research hypotheses.

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Framework: Integrating Theories into the Research Model

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the theories underpinning the development of the research model. The role that PC and coping in the bullying-well-being relationship will be discussed in detail following the theories that inspired the research model. In the previous chapter, the consequences of workplace bullying were discussed involving mental health, somatic complaints and emotional exhaustion. In this chapter, theories that build up mediators and moderators of the relationship between workplace bullying and health and well-being outcomes will be discussed. I will start by describing the three types of PC tested in the study which are operationalised separately as repetitive negative thinking (RNT), worry, and rumination. In this section, the core characteristics of PC will be discussed as well as how to distinguish them from each other. Then, I will proceed to discuss CATS which explains expectancies and relates to how the individual reacts to stressors in the context of workplace bullying. This theory also describes how a short stress response is activated on perceiving stress based on their expectancies of their response outcomes (perceived control). CATS will also serve as the basis of the PCH which is a hypothesis expanded from CATS. PCH will explain the mediating role of PC between workplace bullying and the well-being relationship. Subsequently, I will continue with the discussions on CMR theory which explains how individuals undergo the cognitive appraisal and coping processes and how this can influence their coping behaviours. All these theories are then integrated to develop the research model providing a more comprehensive explanation on prolonged responses or reactions of individuals experiencing bullying at work.

#### 3.1 The role of continuing stressful thought: Perseverative Cognition

##### Repetitive thinking

Repetitive thinking refers to the “ process of frequent thoughts that acquires a high deal of attentiveness about an individual’s self or world ” (Segerstrom et al., 2000). Various types of repetitive thoughts include *worry* (Borkovec and Ray, 1998; Tallis and Eysenck, 1994) *rumination* (Treyner, Gonzalez and Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003), *depressive*



*rumination* (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991), *positive rumination* (Feldman, Joorman and Johnson, 2008) and *post-event rumination* (Kashdan and Roberts, 2007).

Studies have provided evidence showing the cross-sectional and longitudinal impacts of repetitive thinking on psychological and physical health. Different forms of repetitive thinking have always been associated with the onset and development of depressive symptoms and anxiety among both clinical and non-clinical samples (Ehring et al., 2011; Rood et al., 2010; Ruscio et al., 2011; Treynor et al., 2003). It has been shown that repetitive thinking predicts poor sleep quality, pre-sleep intrusive thoughts and individuals often take longer to fall sleep (Takano, Sakamoto and Tanno, 2014; Thomsen et al., 2003; Van Laethem et al., 2015, 2016). Besides having an association with sleep quality, repetitive thinking is also often associated with mental and physical health, slower recovery, fatigue, subsequent somatic complaints, increased blood pressure and heart disease (Brosschot and Van Der Doef, 2006; Calmes and Roberts, 2007; Watkins, 2008). Repetitive thinking has also been seen as a core process in the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Callander et al., 2007).

On a positive note, repetitive thinking has also been associated with recovery and acceptance as a form of cognitive process. When compared, individuals who engage in active thinking about a stressful event are exposed to finding meaning in a form of reflection and experience growth as compared to those who do not think about it at all. A comprehensive study on repetitive thinking following a traumatic event found a positive association with posttraumatic growth in terms of discovery on personal strength, new hopes or possibilities and appreciated life more (Calhoun, Cann and Tedeschi, 2000). Depending on how one utilises repetitive thinking, it is possible that repetitive thinking is able to help individuals make sense of a stressful event. When used in a constructive manner, repetitive thinking helps in solving problems, achieving clarity or to achieve closure.

A few properties should be taken into consideration when determining whether repetitive thinking produces constructive or unconstructive consequences. This system of classification has been broadened to include: (1) thought content (valence and temporal orientation); (2) controllability; (3) purpose; (4) intrapersonal and situational context; and (5) level of construal (Seegerstrom et al., 2003; Watkins, 2008). In terms of its content valence, thoughts that are negative leads to distress including declining mental health and physical symptoms, whereas positive thoughts are essential to positive consequences such

as better recovery and improved self-esteem. However, PC encompasses just repetitive negative thoughts (Verkuil et al., 2010). Meanwhile, temporal orientation has been associated with affective consequences like anxiety and depression. Thoughts of future threat (worry) is more significantly correlated to anxiety whereas thoughts of past failure (rumination) is more significantly correlated to depression. The second characteristic refers to the controllability of the thought. Having control over thoughts may benefit individuals by having metacognitive effects in defiance of less control over thoughts. This would encourage them to engage in positive thoughts by reframing and refocusing in a way that would limit negative thoughts. It has been suggested that strongly valenced thoughts (either positive or negative) are difficult to control. However, Segerstrom et al. (2003) pointed out that negative valenced repetitive thinking turned out to be less controllable compared to positive valenced repetitive thinking. The inability to control thoughts might drive unpleasant perceptions as uncontrollable thoughts are often intrusive or disruptive.

The third property, purpose, reflects the goals motivating repetitive thinking which is formed on a continuum of searching for new ideas and experiences versus solving problems. Segerstrom et al. (2003, pp. 916) used the term searching for new ideas to define “exploring, considering possibilities or expressing confusion”. These includes examples like seeing things in a different perspective, generating options or new ways as well as expressing uncertainties. Meanwhile, the term solving was used by Segerstrom et al. (2003) to refer to “narrowing down, to make sure or make plans” such as causal or consequences statements, planning and even summary statements.

A significant analysis and discussion on the subject was presented by (Segerstrom et al., 2003). Their results suggested that repetitive negative thinking was associated with constructive outcomes when a searching purpose was used rather than a solving purpose. This means that individuals tend to benefit more when exploring a stressful event rather than trying to solve it. On that note, I would like to relate it to previous studies that found active coping such as problem solving was unsuccessful when dealing with bullying in the workplace (Lee and Brotheridge, 2006; Zapf and Gross, 2001). Victims tended to opt for passive coping strategies as opposed to active coping strategies (e.g. confrontation, problem-solving) to search and explore options and possibilities or reframe thoughts and undergo re-appraisal to cope with bullying.

Studies among clinical and non-clinical samples have shown that repetitive thinking is moderated by intrapersonal and situational contexts. Examples of intrapersonal context include dysphoric (distressed) states, dysfunctional attitudes and low self-esteem (Ciesla and Roberts, 2007; Rimes and Watkins, 2005). When individuals are under these conditions (e.g. low self-esteem), repetitive thinking amplifies the adverse consequences including negative thinking about a memory or the future and increased negative mood. Research has also shown that the situational context has a relationship with intrapersonal context (Kashdan and Roberts, 2007). Under certain conditions, level of self-esteem (intrapersonal context) would determine whether individuals within a rewarding or threatening situation would experience more negative consequences of repetitive thinking. However, when individuals are embedded within a stressful environment, negative thoughts are easily activated.

Even though thought content is a prominent feature of repetitive thinking, it does not have the ability to explain certain findings. There are research findings that suggest contradicting results where negative valenced repetitive thinking has been found to have adaptive outcomes (Rimes and Watkins, 2005; Watkins and Moulds, 2005). Another important feature that influences the impact of repetitive thinking is the level of construal during repetitive thinking. The two levels of construal are abstract, which is the higher level of construal, and concrete, the lower level of construal. Abstract construal levels often focus on the importance of the outcomes (why) whereas concrete levels of construal focus on the feasibility of the outcomes (how) (Trope and Liberman, 2003). The abstract level of construal was seen to be more unconstructive compared to the concrete level of construal after exposure to a stressful event (Ehring, Frank and Ehlers, 2008). A systematic review found similar results on the basis of abstract construal having more unconstructive consequences with the majority of studies focusing on repetitive negative thinking (Watkins, 2008).

### Worry and Rumination

The differences between worry and rumination can be categorised into four domains based on a consensus reached by researchers in this field. Those domains include temporal orientation, either past-oriented or future-oriented; positive perceived function, either it is used to understand or to prepare; the thought content, either problem-focused or emotion-focused; and thought focus, either internal or external (Borkovec and Ray,

1998; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; Tallis and Eysenck, 1994). Due to these differences, they have been commonly investigated in different contexts where worry is often associated with anxiety and rumination with the context of depression. On that note, there are also a few debates on the mental health outcomes (i.e. anxiety and depression) involving the overlapping features of anxiety and depression. These emotional states are commonly found to highly correlate with each other (Clark & Watson, 1991). They share a common biological predisposition and are often associated with negative affect and impaired cognitive processes. However, researchers have also discussed the unique features that discriminate them from each other. According to Watson and Clark (1991), low levels of positive affect are unique to depression while physiological arousal is unique to anxiety. A few ways to discriminate depression and anxiety is through its association with cognitive processes, temporal orientation, its functions and adaptive values (Eysenck & Fajkowska, 2017). Meanwhile, stress may seem similar but it is also different. Stress refers to a response or a defense mechanism to pressures or a threatening situation whereas anxiety and depression tends to last longer thus, often associated with perseverative cognition due to prolonged activation of stress (Brosschot et al., 2005; Ursin & Eriksen, 2010). This will be discussed further in the next subchapter.

Individuals suffering depression tends to focus on loss or failure in the past and usually experience low motivation to participate in other activities (Nieuwenhuijsen, Boer, Verbeek, Blonk, & Dijk, 2003). This sustained thoughts on loss or failure is what explains the association between depression and rumination (Ciesla & Roberts, 2007). Meanwhile, anxiety focuses on threats of future events which causes individuals with this symptom to experience hyperarousal or rapid threat detection of threats (Eysenck, 1992; Grupe and Nitschke, 2013). Therefore, the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales would seem appropriate for this study given that this instrument corresponds with the tripartite model of anxiety and depression (Clark & Watson, 1991). This DASS instrument will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Worry is a repetitive thought that focuses on the negative consequences of an event that is yet to take place (Borkovec and Ray, 1998). Worrying thoughts are often uncontrollable and are usually focused on mentally solving a problem with an uncertain outcome but is already perceived as a negative outcome. However, a study indicated that worriers only show reduced cognitive control when they have high anxiety scores, and that they have enhanced cognitive control when anxiety is controlled for (Verkuil et al., 2009) causing some researchers to argue on its possible constructive functions (Tallis and

Eysenck, 1994). These constructive functions include giving priority to an issue, being promptly aware of any potential threats and having the motivation to make preparation for any difficulties. Borkovec's (1994) avoidance theory of worry suggests that worry may allow individuals to disengage from emotional pain. By doing this, it helps them to regain a sense of control (Fresco et al., 2002). As it relates closely to fear process, worry can act as an avoidance response that could help them to avoid potential catastrophes. But how much worry is good? Worried individuals tend to avoid processing adequately any relevant information which leads to underutilising adaptive coping resources. Chronic worrying would eventually cause failure to resolve stressors and could lead to more serious problems including psychosomatic problems (Eriksen and Ursin, 2004; Verkuil, Brosschot and Thayer, 2007).

Rumination refers to uncontrollable repetitive thoughts which are focused on the past. Besides that, rumination has been found to often associate with depressive symptoms especially when ruminating on negative experience (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Without an active coping response, it prolongs depression. Rumination typically focuses on the type of thought content that worry serves to avoid (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2008). In terms of its thought content, rumination often involves negative thoughts that focuses on one's feelings and problems rather than a specific content of thought. Nolen-Hoeksema et al. (2008, pp. 400) described rumination as "thinking perseveratively about one's feelings and problems" regardless of thought content (positive or negative).

Like worry, rumination has both constructive and unconstructive functions which depends on the way it is utilized. Rumination may either help or hinder achieving something that was not achievable before. Constructive rumination refers to mindful self-awareness (Watkins and Teasdale, 2004). In contrast to depressive rumination, mindful self-awareness involves non-evaluative experiential awareness. A few studies discovered that their participants classified rumination as a coping strategy (Papageorgiou and Wells, 2001; Watkins and Baracaia, 2001). According to these studies, the participants viewed that rumination helped to increase understanding and empathy, facilitated problem-solving and allowed them to learn from their mistakes. In relation to that, rumination is best conceptualised as having two components which are brooding (unconstructive) and reflection (constructive) (Treyner et al., 2003).

Brooding is characterised as a passive and judgemental form of rumination, whereas reflection is more contemplative with a focus on problem-solving. In Treyner

and colleagues (2003) research, they contributed evidence that brooding is the more unconstructive or maladaptive component of rumination as brooding predicted symptoms of depression one year later, whereas, although reflection predicted current depression, it predicted lower levels of depression over time. Reflection is thus considered to be a somewhat adaptive component of rumination. In other words, brooding can be described as a passive form of rumination while reflection is more active with more focus on problem-solving. Although rumination can be positive, rumination and worry within PCH only encompasses negative thought contents.

Despite worry and rumination being distinguishable, worry and rumination share a few similarities. Rather than focusing on its content, researchers argue that worry and rumination share the same underlying process and therefore can be considered as one concept. These similarities have led to suggestions that they represent the same core process which are not just repetitive but also unconstructive (Ehring and Watkins, 2008; Watkins, 2008). These similarities are what defines PC which exposes individuals to engage in uncontrollable and repetitive negative thinking irrespective of its thought content, temporal orientation and focus of the thoughts (Gebhardt and Brosschot, 2002; Ruscio and Borkovec, 2004). Lack of cognitive control is related to persistent negative thinking (shared characteristics), even after controlling for anxiety or depression. (Beckwé et al., 2014).

Both worry and rumination hold a similar cognitive nature often described as verbal-linguistic activities involving the predominance of thought instead of imagery (Fresco et al., 2002). Besides that, they both reflect a passive tone and fixation on problems which restrict effective coping from taking place (Borkovec and Ray, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2008). When a stressor is perceived as uncontrollable, individuals tend to prolong the experience leading to sustained physiological activation. Hence, both often result in a negative impact on interpersonal function, mood, physical and psychological health (Watkins, 2008). Despite ongoing debate about whether rumination and worry ought to be considered separately or collapsed into a single phenomenal category (e.g. Ottaviani et al., 2015), but given the research looking at its similarities and differences, I still think that it is important that we note that “worrying is a process that overlaps with but differs from rumination” (Papageorgiou and Wells, 2001, pp.15). Therefore, repetitive negative thinking is used as an overlapping term for both worry as rumination (Ehring and Watkins, 2008; Hoyer, Gloster and Herzberg, 2009). Nevertheless, the core feature of worry, rumination and other forms or repetitive thinking is known as PC. PC

can be defined as ‘*the repeated or chronic activation of the cognitive representation of one or more psychological stressor*’ (Brosschot et al., 2005; Pieper and Brosschot, 2005).

### 3.1.1 Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress

Before I proceed with explaining PCH, I will first discuss the cognitive activation theory of stress (CATS). There is a diverse perspective in the term stress mainly from the (i) epidemiological point of view which focuses on defining which circumstances and experiences are deemed stressful on the basis of consensual agreement that they constitute threats to social or physical well-being, (ii) psychological point of view which focuses on individuals’ perceptions of the stress, appraisals of the threats and the availability of effective coping resources and (iii) biological point of view which focuses on maintaining homeostasis within the physiological systems (Cohen, Gianaros, & Manuck, 2016) Thus, CATS gives “a psychobiological explanation of the relationship between stressful events and health consequences” (Eriksen and Ursin, 2004; Reme, Eriksen and Ursin, 2008). Expectancy is an important element when explaining CATS. The brain will develop expectancy when the brain signals and establishes an event preceding another, but only with the same stimuli. The brain stores relationships between stimuli (*classical conditioning*) and the relationship between responses (*instrumental conditioning*), respectively.

Therefore, expectancy of an outcome and specific response gives influence on the level of stress. The brain prioritises expectancies to form a rank which requires quantification via acquisition strength, perceived probability and affective values (Eriksen and Ursin, 2004). Acquisition strength depends on the salience (properties of events), continuity in the presentation, number of presentations and the occurrence of events in terms of its frequency. In terms of its perceived probability, high expectancies create predictability whereas high probability in response outcome creates control. Meanwhile, affective value refers to the reward value of the expected event: either negative, positive or no affect at all.

Response outcomes which can be either positive, negative or no response at all are formed based on an individual’s experience (Eriksen and Ursin, 2004). On the one hand, previous success would form a positive response outcome normally known as coping, whereas experiencing no relationship between one’s acts and results would cause helplessness. On the other hand, having experience of an act that leads to a disastrous

event results in hopelessness (Ursin and Eriksen, 2010). This experience and evaluation of the situation (expectancies of outcomes) determines whether the situation would cause a stress response or the opposite. When an individual is able to cope, stress levels are reduced generally maintaining good health. However, when individuals feel helpless or hopeless, it increases their stress level to where they would experience sustained arousal. This sustained arousal will then interfere with the individuals' pain pathways leading to the contribution of sensitisation in neural loops for somatic sensation (Eriksen and Ursin, 2004).

In other words, CATS define coping as a positive response outcome expectancy which means that the individual anticipates control over the situation. Coping strategies are usually selected based on previous learning experiences where successful responses are generalised across time and situations. Meanwhile, for individuals having a negative response, outcome expectancy will anticipate the opposite and therefore prolonging the stressor causing sustained activation. Studies have shown the positive outcomes for stress in terms of it producing training effects (McEwen, 2007; Sapolsky, 2000). However, most research has found that deterioration in health was the main impact of stress when sustained for too long (Eriksen and Ursin, 2004). Prolonged elevation may be due to anxiety, constant exposure to an adverse environment involving interpersonal conflicts or changes in lifestyle and health-related behaviours that result from being under chronic stress as well as cognitive styles (Eriksen and Ursin, 2004; McEwen, 2007). However, CATS does not explain the mechanism of prolonged cognitive evaluation and how it actually contributes to sustained activation. CATS cover a limited scope by explaining reactivity (during stressors) instead of prolonged activity. This brings us to the PCH which is explained in the following section.

### 3.1.2 The Perseverative Cognition Hypothesis (PCH)

The PCH (Brosschot et al., 2006) explains a cognitive mechanism that prolongs activation due to stressors (Figure 8). It expands CATS theory by incorporating the cognitive nature of the psychological mediator which perseveres cognition transforming a short stress response into a prolonged stress response. It is believed that stressors or perception itself (without being prolonged) does not lead to sustained activation (Brosschot et al., 2005). Stress factors such as low social support, deficient coping style or perceived uncontrollability do not produce prolonged activation on its own without PC (Brosschot,



2010; Brosschot et al., 2006, 2005). This hypothesis incorporates repeated activation of the cognitive representations of a problem which then prolongs the immediate response (physiological or psychological), converting those responses into a sustained physiological activation (Brosschot et al., 2005).

In stress studies, coping is commonly regarded as a moderator of the stressor effect on individual health. PC, on the other hand, can be thought of as a mediator by which it prolongs the stressor itself in a representational form that continues to activate the individual. In other words, an individual would have to maintain an active cognitive representation (PC) of a negative outcome in order to produce a prolonged activation. In other words, stressors without prolonged negative thinking (prolonged worrying or ruminating) are unlikely to influence an individual's health. Therefore, it can be said that stress-related physiological consequences are not due to the event itself, but most probably due to frequent thoughts about it (Brosschot, Verkuil and Thayer, 2010).

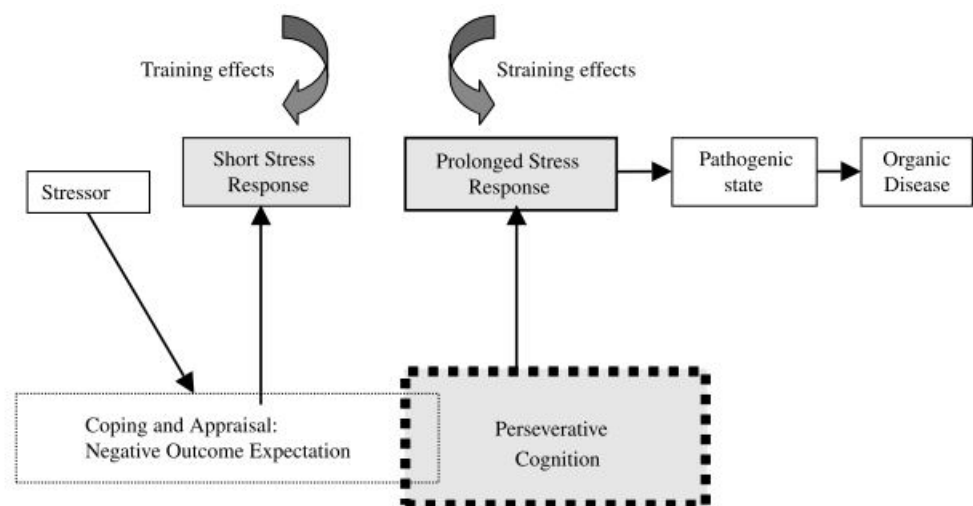


Figure 8 The Model of Perseverative Cognition (Brosschot, Pieper and Thayer, 2005)

The PCH was developed based on two foundations which are the comparison of recovery and anticipatory responses between physiological and psychological stressors and the mental representations individuals create regardless of the stressors' actual occurrence (Brosschot et al., 2006). It has been suggested that the rate of recovery from a physical stressor is faster than recovery from a psychological stressor. This is because psychological stressors create opportunities for individuals to linger on events mentally. Meanwhile, explaining the second foundation of this theoretical development is that

individuals tend to create mental representations of stressors way before or after stressful events occur or are believed to occur regardless of their actual occurrence.

PCH serves as a more comprehensive theory explaining the stress response by explaining prolonged or sustained activation of stress, not just from real occurrences but also stressors that never actually occurred. It acknowledges more stress sources by considering what is in the mind as cognitive representations of stress. It is important that we note that PC can also occur unconsciously (Brosschot et al., 2010). In fact, the vast majority of cognitive activities are able to operate automatically without awareness. It has been known that it is possible to carry out complex tasks unconsciously and there are studies that suggested unconscious thinking can actually solve complex problems better than conscious thinking (Dijksterhuis, 2006).

Emotion researchers have debated whether most cognitive and emotional processing such as unconscious stress are likely to cause an enhanced processing of negative information leading to a continuous mental load (Mathews and MacLeod, 2005). In relation to that, this could explain why thoughts about stressful events may disrupt unconsciously and uncontrollably, including during sleep which is the largest natural restorative period crucial for recovery. For instance, it is possible that the negative impacts of workplace bullying are not particularly due to the actual confrontation with the perpetrator. Experiences like this can be interfering in the sense of where experiences are recreated in the mind (cognitive representation) over and over again, hence prolonging their stress response (Brosschot, van Dijk and Thayer, 2002) which can be explained by the PCH.

In short, the PCH proposes that repetitive negative thinking, worry, rumination and other related thought process can not only impact psychologically, it could also impact physical health by prolonging stress-related activation by amplifying short-term responses, delaying recovery or reactivating responses after a stressor has been experienced. This hypothesis also states that even when the physical stressor is absent, the cognitive representation alone (e.g. bullying experience in the workplace) can induce a stress response, which then, when prolonged, increases the likelihood of stress-related illness.

In relation to this research, the direct relationship between workplace bullying and reduction in health and well-being is intensified when a stressor is subject to thought. By adapting the PCH (Brosschot et al., 2005), this research seeks to find out if PC (repetitive

negative thinking, worry and rumination) at T2 has a mediating role in the relationship described in Hypothesis 1.

**Hypothesis 3:** Perseverative cognition (repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and mental health (3a), somatic complaints (3b) and emotional exhaustion (3c).

*Hypothesis 3a:* Perseverative cognition (repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and depression, anxiety and stress.

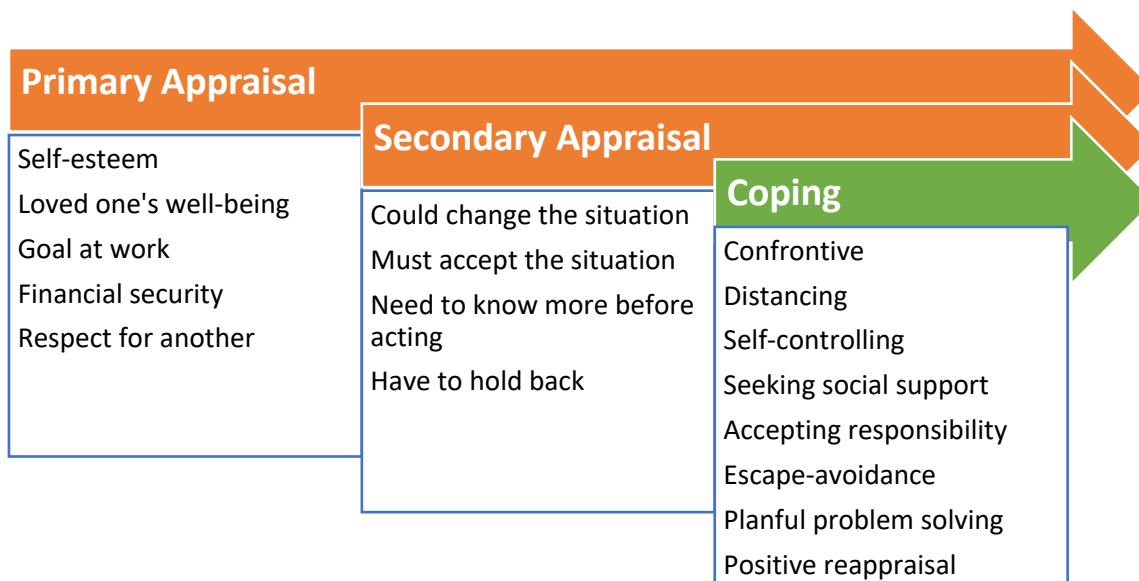
*Hypothesis 3b:* Perseverative cognition (repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and sleep disturbances, headache, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections.

*Hypothesis 3c:* Perseverative cognition (repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion.

## 3.2 Coping

### 3.2.1 Cognitive- Motivation – Relational Theory of Coping (CMR)

Coping can be defined as “*constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific internal and/or external demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person*”(Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) which involves two processes. These are cognitive appraisal (cognitive) and the coping itself (behavioural). Cognitive appraisal includes primary appraisal, a process in which the person assess whether a specific experience or encounter with a situation is relevant to his or her well-being (stakes) and, if so, in what way (secondary appraisal). Figure 9 illustrates an example of the appraisal and coping process which can be measured across stressful encounters (Folkman et al., 1986).



*Figure 9 Appraisal and Coping process (Folkman and Lazarus, 1986)*

The CMR theory of coping (Lazarus, 1991) incorporates three major elements which are cognitive appraisal, motivation to achieve goals and the relational theme involving the person and their environment. In general, coping requires effort and it is a process which involves constant evaluation of the success of one's strategies which is often learned during stressful encounters. Cognitive appraisal occurs almost instantly after an event (e.g. a threatening event in this research is bullying) has occurred. It comprises two stages of appraisal which are primary and secondary appraisal. (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984)

During primary appraisal, individual tends to focus on the source of stress, also known as a stressor. This means an individual will evaluate to what extent the event is a threat to their well-being allowing motivational congruence and motivational relevance to take place (Smith and Lazarus, 1990). More specifically, the individual would decide if the event helps (congruence) or hurts (incongruence) attaining one's goal, leading the person to experience emotions that could be either positive or negative. However, motivational relevance focuses on one's personal goals, that is, how relevant is the event in influencing whether the person can achieve his goals.

Among the different types of primary appraisal are harm or loss, threat, challenge and benign. An example of a situation where loss is perceived is when a person is being diagnosed with a serious illness, whereas threat appraisals are more focused on the potential for being harmful or bringing loss such as waiting for health screening results to come back. Both of these types of primary appraisals are often associated with negative

emotions. Meanwhile, challenge appraisals are often more associated with positive emotions. This type of appraisal often takes place in situations where personal growth has an opportunity to happen like sitting for an entrance exam, for example. In other words, we could say that primary appraisal exerts influence on the valence (positive or negative) and the magnitude of emotions.

There are circumstances where individuals perceive a stressor as benign. In this case, no further action is taken. This means that the change in magnitude would influence the choice of coping strategies. It is also important to note that these types of appraisal can occur simultaneously during a stressful event (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). If a stressor is perceived as relevant, the individual would then start to focus on ways and options to cope with the stressor. This is what Folkman and Lazarus (1988) called secondary appraisal. In this stage of appraisal, situational appraisals of control are mainly involved.

Several cognitive control processes have been proposed as underlying factors in both reappraisal and rumination which includes inhibition, working memory updating, and set shifting (McRae et al., 2012; Whitmer and Gotlib, 2013). Inhibition refers to suppressing and ignoring interference from task-irrelevant information (Friedman and Miyake, 2004) and has been shown to have a causal role in rumination and reappraisal (Cohen et al., 2014). This study also found that low ability to inhibit negative content would leave ruminators stuck in a cycle of negative thinking, whereas good ability to inhibit emotional content allows reappraisers to look at a negative situation from another perspective (N. Cohen et al., 2014).

Different types of appraisals influence the choice of coping responses. Failure to control the motivational and perceptual bases of the appraisal process may bring failure to control the emotions that are produced. Inappropriate appraisals can explain many occasions of emotions that are irrational in a form of maladaptive reactions to the stressful event (Roseman and Smith, 2001). As mentioned in the earlier definition, coping involves both cognitive and behavioural efforts to deal with the demand created by the person-environment relationship. Two common coping strategies are problem-focused which are aimed at solving the problem/ conflict and emotion-focused coping strategies which are often used to regulate unpleasant emotions that arise during the stressful encounter (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988).

### 3.2.2 Coping with workplace bullying

A type of coping strategy might be effective for one individual, but it might be ineffective for another person for the same type of stressor. Coping has to be seen as a dynamic process which varies within and between individuals and it also depends on the type of problematic situation the individual is in. Given that bullying is a longitudinal process, victims might have to adopt different coping strategies at different stages (Smith and Lazarus, 1990). The integration of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage stress can be conveyed into two types of coping strategies: problem-oriented strategies (active coping) and emotion-focused (passive coping). Active coping involves analysing the situation, taking steps to reduce a stressor and then actively carrying out a relevant solution (Richman et al., 2001).

Meanwhile, passive strategies are aimed at re-adjusting and re-appraising the stressor. Passive or emotion-focused strategies are aimed to modify individuals' emotional responses to the stressor, rather than addressing the stressor (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004). This, in turn, will motivate the individual to use a different approach by using positive reassessments or making positive comparisons which are basically emotional reinterpretations (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). Some of the examples of passive coping include ignoring the problem (selective coping), managing one's affective state (resigned coping) or even distancing oneself from the stressor (avoidance). Nevertheless, how one uses a strategy would also influence the valence of the strategy. Dehue, Bolman and Völlink (2012) highlight that seeking for social support could be either of the two strategies depending on how it is being carried out. For instance, asking someone for help to solve a problem is seen as active coping while seeking social support in the form of emotional support is seen as passive (Hogh and Dofradottir, 2001). Social support was seen to have a neutralising effect on stressors and contributed to faster recovery (Stroebe et al., 2005). This is on the basis that active coping strategies attempt to discard or control the stressor.

There exists mixed evidence on the use of different types of coping in a workplace bullying context. Coping strategies varied across individuals which are usually associated with the level of control over the situation. Control is an important factor when it comes to coping as mentioned a lot in coping studies (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004; Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen, 2009) However, in relation to one of the definitional characteristics of workplace bullying which is 'feeling defenceless', it basically implies

that victims perceive that they have no control over the situation. Victims of workplace bullying may also experience a range of feelings such as shame, self-blame, self-doubt, shock, fear, denial and disbelief (Lutgen-sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007a). This in turn would motivate the victims to opt for a more passive style of coping, for example, maintaining distance from the perpetrator or leaving the organisation.

This is why it has been commonly found that bullying victims often use passive coping strategies such as avoidance and ignoring the behaviour (Hogh and Dofradottir, 2001; Olafsson and Johannsdottir, 2004). Victims tend to 'put up' with the problem rather than doing anything about it for fear of making a fuss about the whole thing as victims might feel uncomfortable sharing information that could be threatening to their perpetrators (especially if the perpetrators are superiors in their organisational hierarchy) (Salin, 2003a). Victims may also experience fear of being labelled negatively which could also damage valued relationships within the organisation (Miliken, Morrison and Hewlin, 2003). Whereas some victims who feel loyal tend to remain silent in order to avoid causing any disruption or further conflict if complaints were made. Besides that, victims might also think that no one would want to believe them and fear that it will cause retribution or any other negative personal and professional outcomes (e.g. getting blamed, reputation).

Furthermore, studies that looked at coping with workplace bullying found that personal dispositions tended to moderate the relationship between bullying and health rather than just focusing on a specific coping style. Personal dispositions like self-efficacy and sense of coherence are examples of significant moderators between workplace bullying and health (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002; Nielsen, Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2008). Sense of coherence (SOC) refers to how people view life in stressful situations and are able to use general resistance resources to maintain healthy well-being (Eriksson and Lindstrom, 2007). This concept includes three main components; comprehensibility (the ability to understand what happens), manageability (to what extent the person was able to manage the situation) and meaningfulness (the ability to find meaning in the situation). In a Norwegian study, it was found that the sense of coherence was beneficial in terms of it being a protective moderator but only when the rate of bullying was mild (Nielsen et al., 2008). The study also found that as bullying grew more severe, its protective benefits became weaker.

It is also common to find ineffective results of active coping when dealing with workplace bullying which previous evidence showed resulted in heightened feelings of stress (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Richman et al., 2001), aggressive reactions from the target which can have adverse effects on wellbeing (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Zapf & Gross, 2001) and even health-declining related behaviours (Richman et al., 2001). This assumption was also supported by a longitudinal study that tested workplace bullying and subsequent levels of anxiety (Reknes, Einarsen, Pallesen, & Bjorvatn, 2016). Another interesting study also found that the negative relationship between bullying and mental health was weaker among employees that attained low scores on active coping compared to those who attained high scores in active coping (Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2012). In other words, those who utilised active coping contributed even more to the negative bullying-well-being relationship.

However, findings were different for those who utilised active coping under low levels of conflict (usually at the beginning stage of workplace bullying). It has been found that active coping has been successful in stimulating health and negatively related to depressive symptoms, whereas passive coping was seen to elevate health complaints and depressive symptoms (Dehue, Bolman, Völlink, and Pouwelse, 2012; Folkman and Lazarus, 1988; Lechner, Bolman, and van Dalen, 2007; Stanton, Revenson, and Tennen, 2007). As an example, avoidance would impact health negatively as it does not help the individual to change or solve the problematic situation. In short, active strategies are often used when a person believes that the stressor or problem can be reduced or solved (which is usually at the initial phase of bullying) while passive strategies are often used when the person thinks that they do not have control over the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In relation to PC, I would predict that participants who utilised active coping would engage less in PC on the basis of having a positive outcome expectancy of solving the conflict; thus, the relationship with health and well-being through PC would be weaker.

Therefore, the types of coping strategies are dependent on the bullying intensity as part of the cognitive appraisal process. Research on coping with workplace bullying often find that the targets or victims would initially employ problem focused coping (active coping) strategies such as confrontation or negotiation (Zapf & Gross, 2001). However, when their attempts are deemed unsuccessful or if the bullying escalates and worsen, victims would then shift to strategies that are destructive such as leaving their jobs or avoiding and/or ignoring the bullying behaviour (especially if leaving is not an



option). For an example, a study by Zapf and Gross (2001) used two types of coping models which were known as the ELVN Model (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988) and the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (Rahim & Magner, 1995).

The ELVN model in Figure 10 is short for ‘Exit’, ‘Loyalty’, ‘Voice’ and ‘Neglect’ which refers to the final reactions when employees are unhappy at work. This model is an integrative model of responses to job dissatisfaction which is an extension of the ELV model (Hirschman, 1970) which discusses employees’ responses to organizational decline. Taking it into the bullying context, victims of workplace bullying may leave their organisation (exit), improve their situation through problem solving (voice), maintain in the organisation with hopes that the organisation will support them (loyalty) or not focusing at work but focusing on non-work interest (neglect).

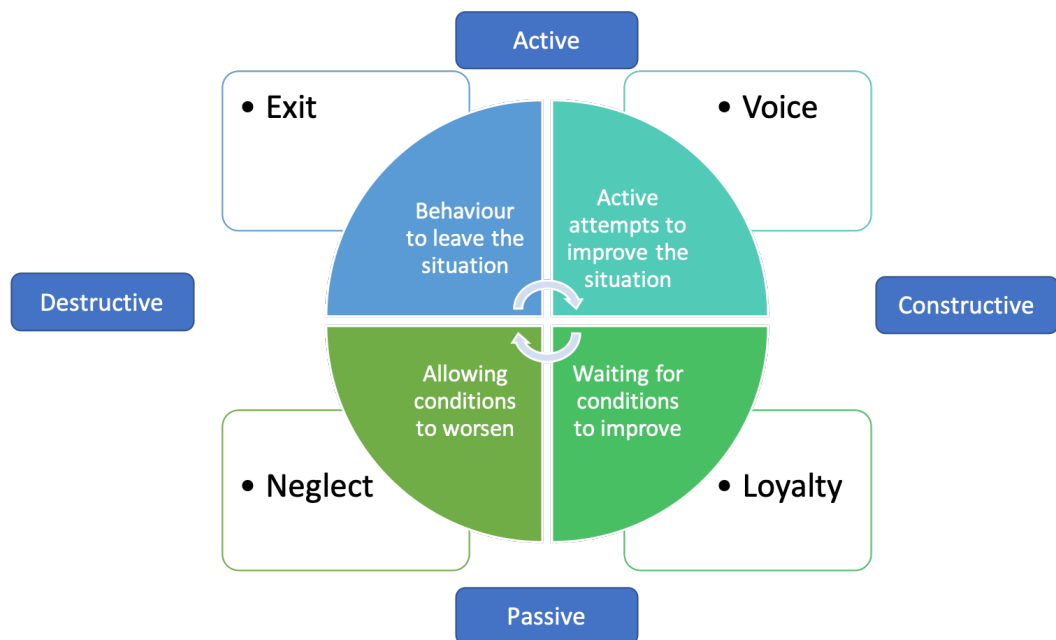


Figure 10 ELVN Model (Rusbult et al., 1988)

Meanwhile, the other model consisted of five styles of conflict handling with regard to interactions with supervisors which were termed: dominating, avoiding, obliging, compromising and integrating (Rahim & Magner, 1995). The results of that study found that victims were prone to use more passive strategies such as avoidance more than non-victims and that leaving their organisation (exit) was the ultimate reaction of the victim to workplace bullying (Zapf and Gross, 2001). On that note, most workplace bullying-well-being research has focused significantly on the role of coping behaviour as discrete events (Dehue et al., 2012; Reknes et al., 2016; Zapf and Gross, 2015), and not putting importance on why the events have prolonged effects on the individual’s health and well-

being. Drawing on the CATS theory and PCH theory, it is suggested here that individuals having positive response outcome expectancy would engage in problem-focused coping (active coping) and hence would engage less in PC. In contrast, individuals having a negative response outcome expectancy would perceive it as uncontrollable and therefore are motivated to engage in passive coping (e.g. self-doubt, ignoring, avoidance). This type of coping would then lead them to a prolonged activation of stress and most likely to increase the strength of the bullying-PC relationship. On that basis, it is assumed that individuals engaging in active coping would weaken the mediation role of PC within the bullying-health and well-being relationship. Therefore, this research predicts a moderated-mediation relationship as listed below:

**Hypothesis 4:** The indirect association between workplace bullying and mental health (4a), psychosomatic complaints (4b) and emotional exhaustion (4c) through perseverative cognition is conditional upon types of coping, such that the relationship between workplace bullying and health and well-being outcomes is weaker when active coping is utilised.

*Hypothesis 4a:* The indirect association between workplace bullying and depression, anxiety and stress through perseverative cognition is conditional upon types of coping, such that the negative relationship between workplace bullying and mental health outcomes is weaker when active coping is utilised.

*Hypothesis 4b:* The indirect association between workplace bullying and sleep disturbances, headaches, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections through perseverative cognition is conditional upon types of coping, such that the relationship between workplace bullying and psychosomatic complaints is weaker when active coping is utilised.

*Hypothesis 4c:* The indirect association between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion through perseverative cognition is conditional upon types of coping, such that the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion is weaker when active coping is utilised.

By integrating all four of the hypotheses above, this study aims to investigate the role of coping and PC on the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying on employees' health and well-being. Figure 11 illustrates the research model which will be tested using two studies carried out in sequence. Study 1 will quantitatively measure the hypothesised

relationships via self-report survey. Study 2 will try to explore victims' perceptions on bullying and coping strategies that they adopted and their engagement with PC that might lead to the deterioration of their well-being.

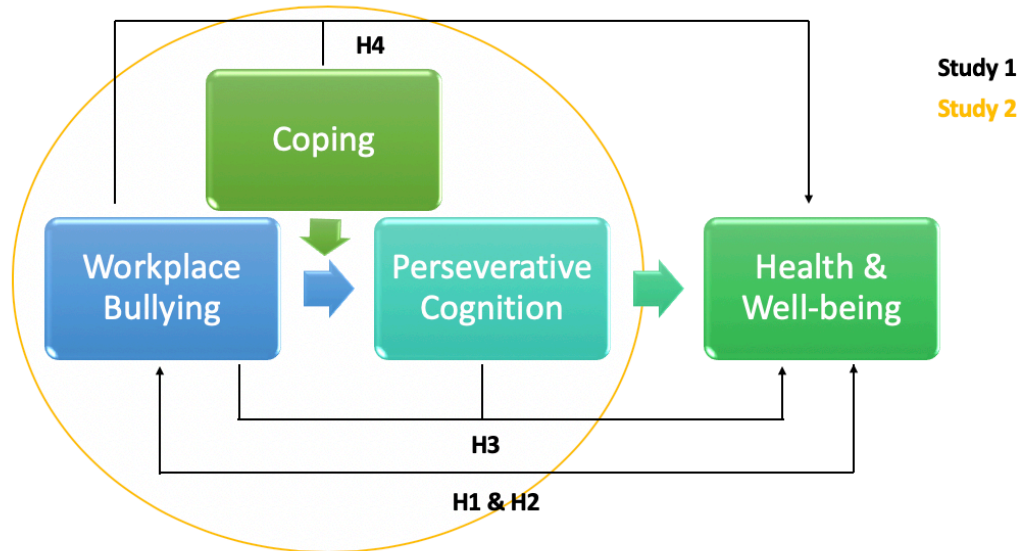


Figure 11 Research Model: A moderated mediation model

### 3.3 Summary

This chapter has discussed the theories that were used to inspire the development of the research model which is a moderated mediation model. Stress theories (CATS and PCH) and coping theory (CMR) were elaborated upon consecutively to explain the predicted role of PC as mediator and coping as moderator to the relationship. PC was introduced as an expansion of CATS and the three types of PC were discussed in detail: repetitive thinking (negative valence), worry and rumination. In addition, different types of coping with workplace bullying were discussed comparing various evidence that found similar and contradicting results of different coping strategies (passive and active coping). Hence, integrating the literature review on workplace bullying and health and well-being outcomes (Chapter 2) together with stress and coping theories (Chapter 3), four hypotheses were developed to answer three research questions derived from the first aim. These hypotheses will be addressed quantitatively using a longitudinal approach. The second aim focused on the victims' experiences and perceptions on workplace bullying will be addressed using a narrative approach. A narrative approach is chosen with the intent of collecting a wider range of data that is not limited to the survey questions in hopes that issues on cultural differences could be observed or identified from this niche population (Malaysian frontline employees). The following chapter will present the methods and approach used in attempting to answer all the research questions.

## Chapter 4

### Research Methods

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter will start by briefly addressing a few considerations on using a sequential mixed-methods approach. Sequential mixed-methods involve multiple phases of data collection in which the research purpose and research questions motivate the particular sequence; either explanatory or exploratory (Andrew and Halcomb, 2009). Sequential explanatory design refers to a mixed method study which executes its quantitative study followed by the qualitative study, whereas a sequential exploratory design involves the reverse sequence, in which the qualitative study is executed first followed by the quantitative study (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2007). Another important consideration in the two sequential designs is the priority or weight given to a specific study within the mixed-methods design. This also depends on the theoretical drive of the overall study (Morse, 2003).

#### 4.1 Methodological Considerations

Any research design has its own methodological concerns. There are several issues that I need to consider when using mixed-methods (i.e. using both qualitative and quantitative methods). Following recommendations suggested by previous researchers, in addressing these issues I am guided by the purpose of the study and my research questions (Creswell et al., 2003; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Ivankova, Creswell and Stick (2006) highlighted three issues in their paper on mixed-methods sequential explanatory design.

The first issue is priority, referring to the weight or attention given to a particular approach, quantitative or qualitative. Deciding on which approach has more weight was difficult as both approaches have their own strengths and weaknesses. Given that the main goal of the two studies is to look at the role of PC between workplace bullying and individuals' health and well-being, therefore the quantitative study is prioritised. Study 2 will be used to uncover more insights (only from victims of workplace bullying) using interviews to develop a deeper understanding of how the victims perceive and make sense of bullying. Their experiences and reactions (cognitive and behavioural) can be captured straight from the participants' perspectives which might not be covered by the survey. Although Study 1 is able to provide statistical evidence in accepting or rejecting the

research hypotheses, a richer data could be obtained via Study 2 which will serve as a better tool in uncovering victims' experiences and perceptions as well as what motivated them to engage or disengage with PC and cope with workplace bullying. Study 2 can also serve as a follow-up to the victim's bullying experience together with their subjective assessment on their coping strategies.

The second issue is that of the implementation of the design – whether it should be carried out consecutively or concurrently (Creswell et al., 2003; Green et al., 1989; Ivankova et al., 2006). In-order to meet the main aim of study which is to look at the role of PC, the quantitative study should be commenced first. With collecting longitudinal data, hypothesised relationships can be tested in addition to identifying participants who have experienced bullying in the workplace. The process of selecting the interviewees' is then carried out at the intermediate stage. From the results of the quantitative study, victims of workplace bullying can be identified using the operational definition of experiencing at least one behaviour (listed in the Negative Act Questionnaire) at least weekly. During this stage, preparation for the next phase is carried out where questions relating to the first study are developed. This gives a sense of continuity between the two phases which addresses the third and final issue of the mixed method design which is the integration process of both methods (Creswell et al., 2003; Green et al., 1989; Ivankova et al., 2006).

This research has taken a pragmatic approach which believes that there is not 'a better methodological tool' (Brewer and Hunter, 2006; Maxwell and Loomis, 2003). As long as it answers the research questions with a valid methodological approach, this is what is most important. A pragmatist rejects the 'choice' between paradigms and focuses on what works (Kitchin and Tate, 2000; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Respecting other perspectives such as positivist and constructivist, pragmatism believes that no method dictates the other. I have put myself forward in adapting the pragmatic method as it helped me choose the right methods to address issues in workplace bullying. Before truly understanding the pragmatic approach, I was myself torn between the traditional philosophical dualisms. I believe that behaviours can be measured using validated and reliable scales. However, there is still knowledge that cannot be unfolded via quantitative measures. There are theories and assumptions that differ across context, some difficult to quantify and needing further explanation. Therefore, each result from both methods is necessary for the confirmation or verification of theories which integrates inductive and deductive logic.

## 4.2 Methods Utilised in Bullying Research

As Keashly (2001) pointed out, certain behaviours are difficult to accurately describe due to their subtle nature and which may undermine the victim's own ability to understand incidents that have occurred. It has been argued that in efforts to explore the extent of bullying phenomena, surveys can be used as the initial step (Cowie et al., 2002). However, it needs to be supplemented by other types of methods to further explain this subjective phenomena (Cowie et al., 2002). Figure 12 below illustrates the types of data collection methods used previously in workplace bullying research.

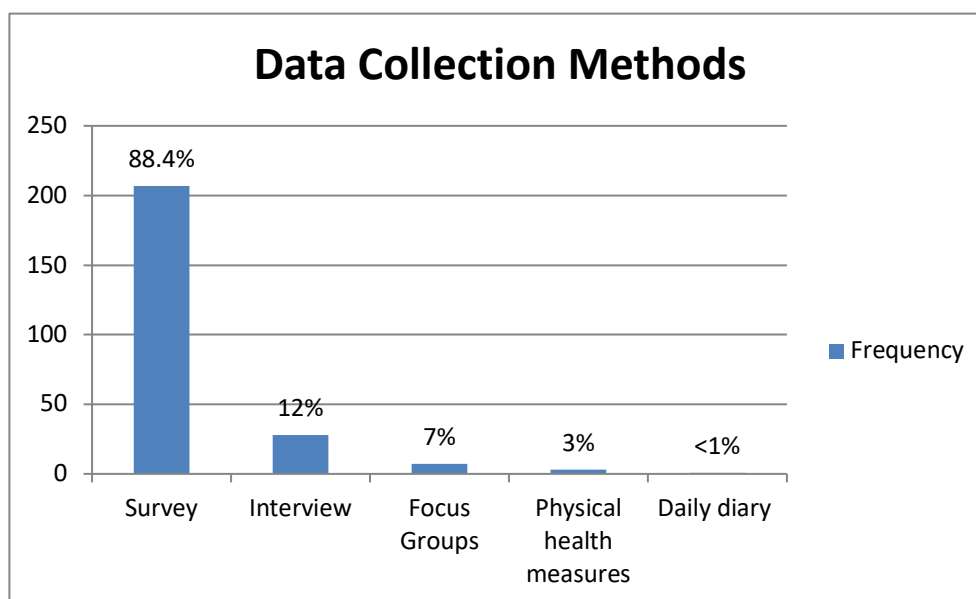


Figure 12 Use of data collection methods in previous workplace bullying studies N=234 (Neall and Tuckey, 2014).

The statistics shown in Figure 12 were from a total of 234 samples taken over a 26-year period, from 1987 to 2012 (Neall and Tuckey, 2014). Surveys dominated the choice of most researchers (88.4%) whereas interviews were much less utilised in investigating workplace bullying (12%). Other methods including focus groups, physical health measures and daily diaries accounted for the rest. Workplace bullying using qualitative studies often focus on targets' perception and experiences as well as coping with workplace bullying (Elfi Baillien et al., 2009; Gonzalez, 2012; Karatuna, 2015; Kwan, Tuckey, & Dollard, 2016). Given that bullying is a sensitive topic, methods like focus groups and interviews are rarely chosen as participants might feel uncomfortable discussing delicate issues face-to-face. Participants might not feel encouraged to discuss the matter openly due to factors like issues on anonymity or trying to avoid having overwhelming feelings or feelings of embarrassment. Another reason why the physical

health measure was not often used is that they sometimes require sophisticated equipment which are costly to measure heart rate, sleeping patterns and cortisol levels. Further, daily diaries would require the frequent involvement of participants to record their reactions, mood or behaviours at a certain time which can be intrusive. Researchers would also face a higher risk of participants forgetting to record according to the time given which would then result in more missing data.

In the same study, Neall and Tuckey (2014) discovered that the majority of studies were in cross-sectional design (84.4%) leaving only (15.6%) representing longitudinal studies. Out of the longitudinal studies, two waves measuring pre and post event were the most common design. Most of them adopted a correlational level of control (84.6%) whereas a combination of correlational and qualitative level of control accounted for only 9.2% of the total sample population. Even though current longitudinal studies in the bullying research is increasing, most of them employed a two-wave study with a minimum of a 6-month gap in between (Baillien et al., 2013; Holten et al., 2017; Nielsen et al., 2012; Rodríguez-Muñoz, Moreno-Jiménez and Sanz-Vergel, 2015). This advocated a methodological gap which motivated me in using a combination of longitudinal questionnaires (quantitative) as well as semi-structured interviews (qualitative).

### 4.3 Research Design

The mixed methods approach varies in its design depending on its features including timing, integration, purpose and priority (Creswell et al., 2003). This research utilises a sequential explanatory mixed method which adopts both quantitative and qualitative studies in sequence to answer the research questions. This design starts with the quantitative phase followed by the qualitative phase. The two phases in this design are connected in which the participants are samples from both phases. The two phases complement each other while giving priority to the quantitative phase. Data from the qualitative phase can be used to further explain, interpret or offer insights into the findings from their results in the quantitative phase.

There are a few reasons in which combining both methods would help in carrying out a more robust study. Firstly, each method would complement the other in terms of seeking elaboration for a clearer understanding of their experience of workplace bullying (Bryman, 2009). The quantitative data obtained in Study 1 would provide an understanding and to confirm the acceptance or rejection of the research hypotheses.

Study 2 would then permit the deeper exploration of the victim's experience of workplace bullying in terms of PC and coping strategies via in-depth questions within the interview. The interview could help to illustrate the events experienced by the participants which could have more coverage than just using a quantitative study. It also allows the exposition of their reflections (Philip, 1998). This is to ensure a deeper understanding of the interpretation of the participants' experiences.

Qualitative approaches like interviews or focus groups allow participants to speak for themselves instead of inflicting the researcher's own values and judgements (Cowie et al., 2002). A narrative approach could help expand the coverage of questions which might be useful, such as to uncover ways of coping with workplace bullying which are not included in the survey questions. For example, a previous study uncovered new insights from their narrative study when they found their participants adopting ways of coping with their sickness other than what were asked in their survey questions (e.g. mentally preparing for what is coming, crying as part of venting their emotions) (Moskowitz and Wrubel, 2000 in Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004). The use of the interviews would facilitate in the in-depth exploration of the victims' experiences regarding their cognitive reactions (PC) and the different ways of coping with workplace bullying. The range of research questions needed to be answered would need a variety of methods. It provides a sense of completeness when different approaches are exerted in order to address such questions comprehensively (Bryman, 2009).

Study 1 addresses the first aim of the thesis which is to 'investigate the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying on employees' health and well-being' via a three-wave survey. The survey is used to test the hypotheses regarding the relationship of workplace bullying and employees' health and well-being, together with the mediating role of PC moderated by different types of coping strategies. Workplace bullying was measured using a multi-item list of behaviours. To address the aim for Study 2, which is 'to explore victims' perceptions and experiences of workplace bullying', a qualitative approach comprising face-to-face interviewing was used to address issues concerning the individuals' thoughts and reaction to their workplace bullying experience. By adopting a qualitative approach, experiences or perceptions that are hard to capture or measure by other means can be addressed, and participants selected to be interviewed can offer insights on their experiences of engaging or disengaging with PC and their ways of coping with workplace bullying.



This poses a problem for researchers who attempt to understand certain effects of the variable under examination, as this will lead to spurious data and possibly fewer significant results that may be obtained through a larger sample size and additional data collection techniques (Miles et al., 2001). Participants would also have the advantage to ask questions or clarify words that they are not familiar with and these dynamics would have a reciprocal benefit between the researcher and the participant. The interviewer and the interviewee relationship would be more evenly balanced compared to simply using a survey. Another reason for conducting interviews is that by depending on the survey questions alone (even in longitudinal surveys) researcher may overlook the actual times of when a certain behaviour takes place in which the data collected at certain points of time may occur after the moderating effect has taken place which in turn results in the observation of only the main effects (Bernstein, 1992). It is the intention that, by having two different approaches which do not have the same methodological weakness, a more accurate account from respondents can be collected while achieving a more robust study (Pietersen, 2007). Figure 13 illustrates the research design consisting of the sequence of methods, kinds of data and sources of data. Revisiting the purpose of this study, it is to determine the role of PC in the bullying-well-being relationship and coping behaviours among front line employees. Secondly, the study will focus on exploring how victims make sense of, and cope with bullying in the workplace.

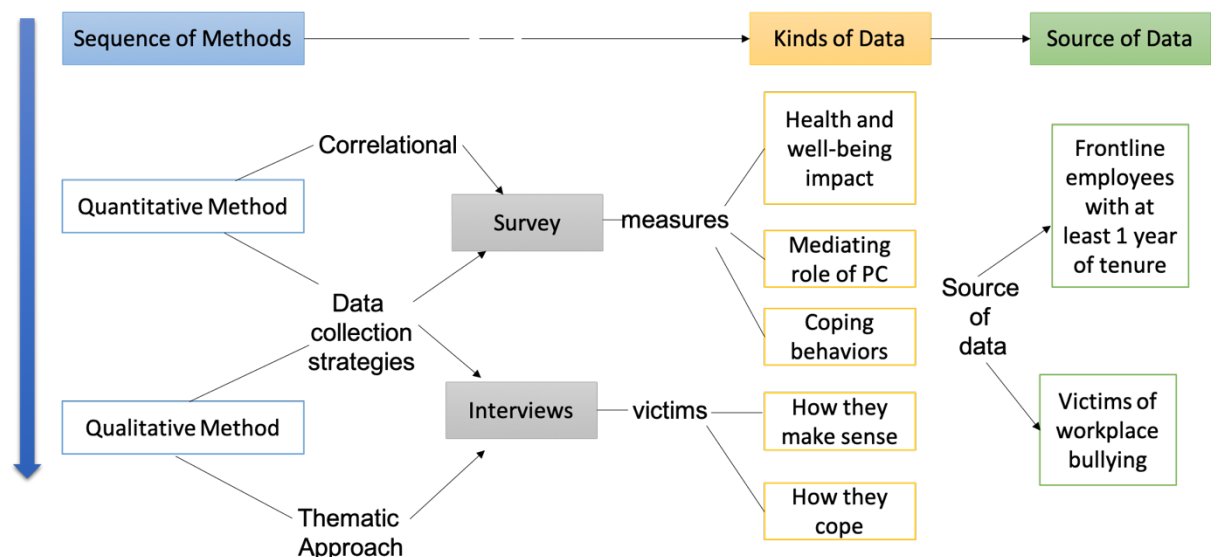


Figure 13 Sequential explanatory mixed method

The following section will briefly discuss the two studies adopted in this study. Descriptions of Study 1 and Study 2 will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6,

respectively. Starting with the survey (quantitative phase), carried out at the beginning of the study followed by the interviews (qualitative phase) which were carried out in sequence after the interview participants were identified based on the results of the survey.

#### 4.3.1 Study 1: Survey

The quantitative phase consisted of a longitudinal survey. Data was collected at three time-points with a two-month gap in between using validated scales (Ehring et al., 2011; Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers, 2009; Lee and Brotheridge, 2006; Schat, Kelloway and Desmarais, 2005). Analysis of the quantitative data was carried out using SPSS version 22 for Windows, AMOS version 24 and PROCESS MACRO (an extension in SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data regarding the demographic characteristics, prevalence of workplace bullying and its outcomes. A list of bullying behaviours ranging from most prevalent to least prevalent was generated to show the ranking of the behaviours at all three time-points (see Chapter 5). Prior to conducting further statistical analyses, it was essential to determine the reliability and validity of the scales within the instrument. All items were adapted from previous validated scales and validity was therefore measured using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Results of the CFA will be presented in this chapter whereas a more detailed illustration of Study 1 and the study findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### *Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

Although previous literature has reported high validity of the revised version of the negative acts questionnaire (NAQ-R) (Charilaos et al., 2015a, 2015b; Seo, 2010; Verdasca, 2008), some have raised issues on the compatibility of bullying items with participants in different cultural settings and work environments (Tsuno et al., 2010; Verdasca, 2008; Yahaya et al., 2012). I performed a CFA on the original model (Einarsen et al., 2009a) to examine the model fit. Specifically, I examined the chi-square, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the goodness of fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI) and normed fit index (NFI) and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The initial assessment of the three-factor model, which are Factor 1: work-related bullying, Factor 2: person-related bullying and Factor 3: physical intimidation (see APPENDIX E1) revealed a moderate fit  $\chi^2(206, N=270) = 549.88$   $P < .001$ , RMSEA = .08, GFI = .83, CFI = .85, NFI = .78, SRMR = .06.

However, referring to a previous bullying research I decided to repeat the CFA on a different model that was based on a Malaysian sample (Yahaya et al., 2012). In his model, workplace bullying was tested using a two-factor model (person-related and work-related) instead of the original three (see APPENDIX E2). The three items of physical intimidation were combined with person-related items making it 15 items for person-related bullying and 7 items for work-related bullying. Another difference was that ‘*being ordered to do work below your level of competence*’ (Item 3) was grouped under person-related factors instead of work-related bullying. ‘*Practical jokes carried out by people you don’t get on with*’ (Item 15) was grouped under work-related bullying instead of person-related bullying. The assessment of the two-factor model, however, revealed a worse fit  $\chi^2$  (208, N= 270 = 623.920P <.001, RMSEA = .068, GFI = .81, CFI = .81, NFI = .75, SRMR =.07).

Therefore, I decided to continue with the original structure which had a better fit. However, some minor adjustments were carried out in-order to achieve the best fit of the measurement model. Poor fit may occur due to several reasons including a number of items that could measure multiple factors or a number of items that are more related to one another than to others. One item (see Table 3) had a low factor loading which did not meet the minimum value of .40 as suggested by Ford, MacCallum and Tait (1986) which was ‘*Someone withholding information which affect your performance with*’. However, I decided to maintain all original items in the scales as it did not differ significantly in its model fit indices. Reliability scores for both models (NAQ-R 22, r=0.922; NAQ-R 21, r = -0.919) also did not exhibit significant difference between each other. Therefore, all 22 items were maintained in the NAQ-R scale in the analysis. Table 4 presents the factor loading for all items within its constructs (Factor 1: work-related bullying, Factor 2: person-related bullying and Factor 3: Physically intimidating bullying).

*Table 3 Items that had low factor loading*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>
<i>Items with low factor loadings (&lt;.40)</i>		
Work-Related	(1) Someone withholding information which affects your performance	.33

Table 4 CFA using AMOS: Items and factor loadings of workplace bullying factors

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>
Work-related	(3) Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	.49
	(14) Having your opinions and views ignored	.59
	(16) Being given tasks with reasonable or impossible targets or deadlines	.65
	(18) Excessive monitoring of your work	.66
	(19) Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)	.71
	(21) Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	.73
Person-related	(2) Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	.49
	(4) Spreading of gossip and rumours about you	.51
	(5) Being ignored, excluded or being “sent to Coventry”	.53
	(6) Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person (i.e. habits and background), your attitudes or your private life	.68
	(7) Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job	.73
	(10) Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes	.48
	(11) Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach	.68
	(12) Persistent criticism of your work and effort	.66
	(13) Practical jokes carried out by people you don’t get on with	.73
	(15) Having allegations made against you	.66
	(17) Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm	.54
(20) Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	.70	
Physical Intimidation	(8) Intimidating behaviour such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/ barring the way	.77
	(9) Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse	.63
	(22) Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger (or rage)	.40

### *Validity of measurement model*

CFA was then carried out to measure the validity of the measurement model using samples from Time 1 (N=270). The measurement model characterises relationships between observed indicators (items) to their constructs (latent). Due to the large number of variables, the model was separated into 3 parts. Part 1 included Workplace Bullying as the Independent Variable and the four types of coping strategies (self-doubt, ignore, passive and problem solving); Part 2 included the mediating variables (Perseverative Thinking Questionnaire, Worry and Rumination scales); and Part 3 consisted of the outcome variables which are the three dimensions of mental health (stress, anxiety and depression) and the four dimensions of somatic complaints (sleep disturbance, headache, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infection). The final model of the three parts (Table 5) achieved a moderate fit with a majority of the indices achieving the minimum recommendation (Schreiber et al., 2006).

*Table 5 Model Fit Indices*

Part	Model Fit Indices					
	X2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
1	1336.16	616	.80	.79	.06	.07
2	1993.01	483	.79	.77	.10	.06
3	1070.50	74	.85	.80	.06	.06

Results from the quantitative phase were analysed before proceeding to Study 2 which is the qualitative phase of the study. Participants for the interview were selected based on their responses in Study 1 (for more detail please see Chapter 5). The potential participants were approached once again to seek consent before executing Study 2. The following section will provide a brief illustration of Study 2.

#### *4.3.2 Study 2: Interview*

There are several methods of qualitative data collection including participant observation (experiencing); interviewing (enquiring); and studying materials prepared by others (examining) (Wolcott, 1998). Specifically, some of the most commonly used approaches in workplace bullying qualitative studies include focus groups, structured or unstructured interviews, case studies and peer nomination technique (Cowie et al., 2002). This study

adopted semi-structured interviews instead of the other three types of techniques. Due to limited number of organisations that were approached, the tendency of employees to know each other was rather higher. Besides that, given that workplace bullying is a sensitive topic, using focus groups and peer nomination technique might inhibit participants from volunteering to be interviewed over anonymity and confidentiality issues, whereas case studies would require more time and would probably have representative issues due to the selection of cases. Even though interviews might have similar issues on being representative, it was deemed here to be a better choice as it involved a larger number of participants instead of just having one or two case studies.

Over these reasons, a semi-structured interview was designed to collect qualitative data for this study. The interviews were not limited to face-to-face sessions. Due to issues of time constraints, several interviews were carried out online via video chat and telephone calls. Interviews allowed narrative responses which provided a more detailed picture of the bullying experience that surveys might not be capable of capturing. Interviews, then, would help me obtain a richer data set that could be further analysed in order to obtain a better understanding of the issues. Interviews may also help unearth unexpected and insightful information by facilitating rich descriptions and detailed accounts of victim's experiences and perspectives (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

Interviews are also known to be more suitable when trying to obtain temporal or spontaneous information on events, in this case negative acts in the workplace. For example, participants will be able to explain further why the outcomes predicted from the survey were significant or not significant with workplace bullying. A semi-structured interview was chosen as the best way to explore the samples' perception on workplace bullying. Given that the samples were from Malaysia, and the instruments used were originally developed by researchers in a westernised country, the interviews might also be able to collect a more accurate account on the employees' perceptions on workplace bullying. Study 2 will be discussed further in Chapter 6 together with the results from the interviews and discussions on the output.

#### 4.4 Ethical Considerations

Undertaking research requires awareness of ethical considerations. However, when doing sensitive research like workplace bullying, additional issues must be considered. Issues such as unintentional psychological harm (when recalling traumatic events), maintaining boundaries as well as degree of self-disclosure are among the dilemmas or challenges faced by both researchers and participants (Dixon-Smith et al., 1996). Ethics approval for both studies was given by the ethics committee at the University of Sheffield (APPENDIX B).

##### *a) Safe from any psychological and physical type of harm*

Participants were made aware that throughout the study they would not be mistreated or be involved in any situation that would cause them any harm. Although there is no intention of implying any harm, but due to the nature of the study that requires them to recall and record experiences of bullying events at their workplace, it may indirectly cause psychological harm (i.e. negative emotion, stress). In other words, researching bullying may have the potential of causing participants to feel re-traumatised by recalling the distressing incidents. Therefore, it was my responsibility to make explicit any possible negative effects at the very beginning of the research process. If in any circumstances I sensed an emergency from the data collected, I would advise the participant to seek help from a professional.

##### *b) Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality*

Participants' privacy was guaranteed by clarifying that any information provided by the participant would not be mentioned either in writing or in any other communication medium. Codes were given to them for the interview and they did not have to write their names during the interview. I ensured that I used pseudonyms when writing the results. Identifying features such as the geographical location and professional details were removed from any quotations in-order to protect participant anonymity.

##### *c) Informed Consent and Non-Intrusive*

The participants were briefed on the nature and purpose of the study. They were also made aware that they would not be coerced into participation and may withdraw at any time during the study. I made it clear that as the researcher, I

would also not intrude in their time, space or personal lives. I informed them at the beginning of the study that I would send them friendly reminders from time to time (due to the long period of study) but not in any intrusive manner. A copy of an information sheet on the study was provided for each of the participants.

*d) Rapport, Friendship and Inappropriate Behaviour*

A trustworthy environment was set but at the same time putting in mind to avoid a situation where the participants think that they are friends with the researcher. I was also cautious about any possibilities of inappropriate behaviour. As the researcher, I kept in mind the responsibility and role as a researcher and that I am bound by the research code of conduct to treat participants with respect.

*e) Data Interpretation*

As a researcher I held the responsibility of analysing the data collected without misinterpreting it or executing a fraudulent analysis. To avoid this situation, I presented evidence on how the data interpretation of both phases was carried out. In-order to achieve a reliable interpretation of the transcripts, I scheduled meetings with other colleagues from a similar background to go through the themes developed to confirm that no misinterpretations occurred.

#### 4.5 Summary

This chapter described the use of a sequential mixed methods design in addressing the research questions. A brief discussion was made about the methods commonly used in bullying research especially regarding cross-sectional surveys. Realising the gap in the methods used in previous bullying research, this study seeks to fill the gap by utilising a mixed methods design combining two approaches which are a longitudinal survey quantitative approach followed by a semi-structured interview (qualitative approach). Further, the importance of ethics was also highlighted in this chapter given that the nature of this topic is a sensitive research. The foregoing discussions focused on the development of the instruments that were utilised in Study 1 (survey) to gain information about the role of PC in the bullying-well-being relationship as well as their coping behaviour among frontline employees. The preparations and procedures taken in Study 2 (interview) will be discussed in Chapter 6 with the aim to explore the subjective nature of people's thoughts and feelings (cognitive process) about bullying at work and how they reacted or handled the situation (strategies).



## Chapter 5

### Study 1: Quantitative Study

This chapter addresses the four research questions of this thesis: *(RQ1) What are the effects of workplace bullying towards employees' health and well-being over time? (RQ2) Does individuals' health and well-being levels predict subsequent bullying in the workplace; (RQ3) Does perseverative cognition mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and health and wellbeing impact? and (RQ4) Does different type of coping strategies influence the mediation relationship?* Based on the theoretical discussions in Chapter 3, the research framework examines the possible mediating mechanism of PC for explaining the effect of workplace bullying on employee health and well-being moderated by different types of coping strategies. This chapter describes in detail the methods used in the quantitative study including the procedures, sampling, measures used and analytic approach. This section also presents the findings of the preliminary data screening, research demographics, findings of the mediation and conditional indirect effects (moderated-mediation) for all the proposed hypotheses (H1 – H4).

#### 5.1 Method

The survey aimed to capture substantive data on employees bullying experiences, engagement in perseverative cognitive (RNT, worry and rumination), coping styles, and health and well-being complaints (physical and psychological outcomes). The instrument (see APPENDIX C) was devised based on a review of literature and validated measures. Collecting longitudinal data may help in establishing a sequence of events while also following the change in exposure to bullying over time (Caruana et al., 2015). This helped me to identify and relate specific events to particular exposures to bullying in the workplace.

##### 5.1.1 Participants

This study recruited participants via non-probability sampling. In non-probability sampling, randomisation is not crucial as subjective methods are used to decide the sample as opposed to probability sampling which emphasises on every participant having an equal probability of being selected (Battaglia, 2008). The rationale for using non-probability sampling instead of probability sampling is that it is cost effective and time

efficient. Participants were recruited via purposive sampling through organisations and existing networks within the Klang Valley region in Malaysia. There are a few types of sampling techniques within purposive sampling. This study adopts homogenous sampling which focuses on potential participants that share similar characteristics, in this case, organisational size, tenure and job role. This technique recruited participants based on three criteria which are: -

- (1) belonging to an organisation with more than 50 employees;
- (2) have worked for at least one year in the same organisation; and
- (3) are front liners in their organisation.

Participation was entirely voluntary, and they were asked to create a code that served as their identification code so that they could use the same code in the next two phases. Organisations were identified based on the number of employees ( $n > 50$ ). Large-sized organisations were chosen on the basis of having reported more bullying occurrences due to reasons such as having low transparency causing the potential for anonymity (perpetrator) (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Hearn and Parkin, 2001). Meanwhile, participants had to have at least one year of working experience in the same organisation so that they would be able to respond to retrospective questions that requires them to recall experiences from 6 months ago. I made sure that ethical measures were highlighted to increase participation of the organisations.

### *Completion Rates*

It was difficult to identify the accurate number of participants who received the link to the survey. However, it was possible to record the actual number of people that started to complete the survey. Table 6 below shows the number of partial and complete responses to the survey in Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3.

*Table 6 Online survey completion rate*

Frontline Employees	Started	Completed	Completion rate (%)
Time 1	431	284	65.9
Time 2	130	121	93.1
Time 3	107	98	91.6

Time 1 had more participants who started answering the survey, but completion rate was higher in Time 2 and Time 3. Once all the data were collected, the responses were scanned

for missing data. A few participants were excluded due to missing data (Table 7). It should be noted that there were new participants that participated in Time 2 and Time 3. In Time 2, 23 new participants answered the survey for the first time. Due to the focus of this study on longitudinal data, the new participants were separated from the returning participants in Time 2. After excluding them, the final number of participants who answered at both time points were N=93. Meanwhile, in Time 3, there were returning participants from Time 1 that did not respond in Time 2. The final number for those who answered in the three time-points were N=70. This represented the final number of the sample used in the longitudinal analysis that will be discussed in the this chapter.

*Table 7 Missing Data*

Frontline Employees	Completed	Missing Data	Final Number
Time 1	284	14	270
Time 2	121	4	117
Time 3	98	6	92

A total of 213 participants responded via their organisational emails which made 78.9% of the total sample in Time 1 (N = 270). 31.2% (N = 84) were made up of participants belonging to Organisation A, 27.0% (N = 73) from Organisation B and 20.7% (N = 56) were from Organisation C. The remaining 21.1% (N = 57) were participants who were recruited via the snowballing method. Meanwhile, in Time 2, 54.7% (N=64) were returning participants from Organisation A, N = 21 (17.9%), Organisation B, N = 22 (20.5%) and Organisation C, N = 22 (18.8%) whereas 22.2% (N = 26) were returning participants recruited from the snowballing method. An additional 20.5% (N = 24) were new participants who did not participate at Time 1. These participants were also recruited via the snowballing method. As for participants in Time 3, 74.3% (N = 52) were returning participants from Time 2 who were recruited via organisational sampling [Organisation A, N = 17 (18.5%); Organisation B, N = 18 (19.6%); Organisation C, N = 17 (18.5%)] whereas 19.6% (N = 18) were recruited from the snowballing method. An additional 22 new employees participated at Time 3 but not in Time 1 and Time 2 making up 23.9% (N = 22) of the total number or complete responses in Time 3.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out on participants in Time 1 (N = 270) to measure systematic differences between participants recruited from the three organisations and also from those recruited via snowballing in their responses on key variables (workplace bullying, perseverative cognition, coping and health and well-being variables). Results of the ANOVA (Table 8) showed no significant mean differences among all the variables tested ( $p > .05$ ). This means that there were no systematic differences between the participants that were recruited via organisational sampling (Organisations A, B, and C) and those via snowball sampling. Besides that, the Levene's homogeneity tests were used to examine the equality of variances between the groups. No significant variances were found among the key variables except for mental health and emotional exhaustion ( $p < .05$ ). Further analyses were carried out using Welch and Brown-Forsythe tests on the equality of means. Results found no significant values on mental health and emotional exhaustion. Thus, these findings suggest that equal variances are assumed.

*Table 8 Result of ANOVA*

	df	Mean Square	F	p
NAQ	3	129.85	1.37	.25
PTQ	3	224.90	1.31	.27
Worry	3	189.44	2.59	.06
Rumination	3	245.83	2.08	.10
Coping	3	76.31	1.28	.28
Mental Health	3	289.61	.92	.43
Psychosomatic	3	80.35	1.50	.22
Emotional Exhaustion	3	301.71	2.40	.07

#### *Non-response and attrition bias*

It has been said that low response rate could undermine the actual generalizability if a collected data due to non-response bias (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Considering potential attrition bias and non-response bias, T-test analyses was carried out to compare the mean differences in demographic variables (age, gender, education, tenure and job sector) between those who responded to all waves of the study (N = 70) with those who dropped out after the first wave (N=200) (Miller & Wright, 2006). Results showed no significant differences between the groups on their demographic background except for age group

[ $t(268) = -2.158, p < .05$ ] which revealed that the respondents who retained were somewhat younger than dropout respondents. Similar tests were carried out on the key variables of the study (workplace bullying, perseverative cognition, coping and health and well-being variables) and results showed no significant difference between the key variables except for rumination [ $t(268) = -2.126, p < .05$ ] revealing that respondents who retained were somewhat engaging less in rumination ( $M = 36.91, S.D = 9.51$ ) than dropout respondents ( $M = 40.13, S.D = 11.31$ ).

### 5.1.2 Procedure

Invitation emails were sent to the human resources (HR) department of several organisations to recruit their employees to participate in this study. An information sheet was attached to the emails to explain the design of the study and what they could expect if they agreed to participate (see APPENDIX C ). From the seven organisations, one declined the invitation; three did not reply to the emails, leaving only three organisations who confirmed their participation. Upon confirmation, a link to the online survey was generated and forwarded to the HR department. They would then transmit the link via an email list which is only accessible within the organisation. I chose this method as a way to generate potential participants regardless of whether they had been bullied or not within a short period. This helped save time and increased the probability to achieve representativeness. Besides recruiting samples via organisations, I approached individuals that fit the criteria via email. The criteria of recruiting individuals were the same which included them: (1) belonging to an organisation with more than 50 employees; (2) have worked for at least one year in the same organisation; and (3) being frontliners in their organisation.

The questionnaires were made available in two forms: electronic and hard copy. Those who preferred to do it electronically were sent a link that directed them to the questionnaire whereas those who preferred the manual option (paper and pencil) were given a hard copy. However, all surveys were responded to via the online link as everyone preferred answering the survey online. An information page was provided at the beginning of the survey for them to read and understand. Upon agreement, the participants were required to tick a box giving their consent before they could start answering the questions. Instructions on how to respond were also provided at the beginning of every section. Links to the online questionnaire were emailed to the relevant HR department in the three companies that agreed to participate and also to employees (individually) which

carried a job role involving dealing with customers or clients. The surveys were developed in QUALTRICS which was both desktop and mobile friendly and would take them approximately 40-45 minutes to complete in one go. This information was automatically generated by QUALTRICS upon completion of the online survey design. Reminders were sent twice to the participants over a period of 10 days.

At Time 1 (early August 2016), participants were briefed about the design of the study involving the three phases of surveys and a semi-structured interview at the end. They were asked if they would be interested in participating in the upcoming phases as well as an interview (Study 2). So, those who were interested in participating provided their email address and telephone number. Therefore, help from the organisations were only required at Time 1, for them to distribute the links.

In Time 2 (mid - October 2016) and Time 3 (end - December) of the survey, the links were distributed directly to their email addresses. Figure 14 illustrates the research procedure for Study 1 beginning from when the organisations were approached (June 2016) until all data were collected at all three time-points (January 2017).

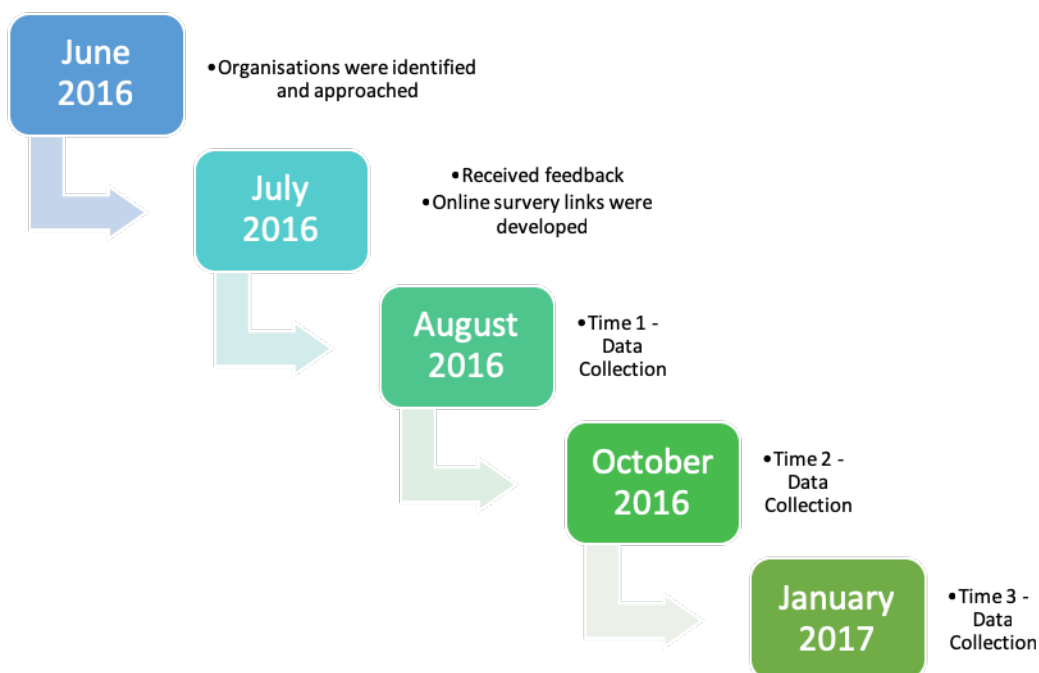


Figure 14 Research Procedure

### 5.1.3 Measures

As this study included Malaysian participants the language used as a medium in the data collection process was the Malay Language. All items were translated into the Malay Language and went through a back-translation process to provide a consistency check. This was so that any deviation of the items from its original meaning could be avoided. Back translation was carried out by a native speaker of the Malay Language who is a Doctoral Researcher from the University of Sheffield majoring in the English Language. The translated version was compared again to the original version and went through thorough checking for any differences in meaning. However, certain scales were already available in Malay such as the NAQ-R which was translated by Yahaya and his colleagues (2012) and DASS which was also translated by Malaysian researchers (Ramli, Rosnani and Fasrul, 2012). Translations were carried out in a paper version before transferring it to the online platform (QUALTRICS). The survey consisted of 5 sections: *Section A*: Introduction; *Section B*: Negative Behaviours at Work; *Section C*: Perseverative Cognition; *Section D*: Coping Strategies; *Section E*: Health Outcomes and *Section F*: Control items and other related questions (see Appendix A for full scales).

#### *Introduction: Section A*

This survey commenced with an introduction to the study. The introduction contained a summary of the research purpose, information about the study, reminders and a consent page highlighting the main information about the study. The participants were required to tick all the boxes as a sign of giving consent before they could proceed with the study. It was made explicit to the participants that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they could opt out at any point of the study. The confidentiality of their identity was also highlighted, and participants were asked to create an ID Code that could be used as a reference for only those involved in the study (the main researcher and the supervisors). The ID Code was made up of the combination of their initials and birth date and participants were asked to remember their own ID Code as they would be using the same ID Code in the next survey in Time 2 and Time 3. Participants were made aware that the data collected would be used only for research purposes. The researcher's contact information (number and email) was also provided in this section in case participants had more questions to ask.

## *Predictor: Section B*

*Workplace bullying* was measured using the revised version of the NAQ-R. Previous studies have shown rates of bullying tend to be higher when bullying are explicitly asked in the questions compared to questions that indirectly sets the participants as targets or victims of bullying (Gardner et al., 2013; Lutgen-sandvik and Mcdermott, 2008). Behavioural inventories are usually the most suitable method to collect data as it has the tendency to determine those who are being bullied (Way et al., 2013). Besides that, some may not be aware or are unable to distinguish specific acts that could amount to bullying ( Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001). The 22 items in the revised version of the NAQ-R by Einarsen et al. (2009a) had no reference to the terms bullying or harassment. In previous bullying studies, participants are normally given a brief definition of bullying and they would then have to indicate if they would label themselves as being bullied based on the definition given. However, in this research, the participants were not given any prior definition in Study 1; they are only asked if they were bullied at work in the face-to-face interviews (see next section on Study 2). The justification is that it would help eliminate bias without any implication of the individuals as victims of bullying in the workplace.

The questions on workplace bullying were retrospective in nature which required the participants to recall their experiences based on the behaviours listed. For example, the timeframe for Time 1 was 6 months – meaning participants were required to recall if they had experienced any of the behaviours listed within the 6 months and to state the frequency (daily, weekly, monthly, etc). This time frame of 6 months was most commonly used by bullying researchers in previous studies (Einarsen et al., 2003; Leymann, 1996). Drawing on the argument about the rate of escalation (Tehrani, 2012), the timeframe for Time 2 and Time 3 were only 2 months which were between the two time-points (e.g. between Time 1 and Time 2). This was also decided over other reasons including time constraint (limited time to return to Malaysia) and to have some control over time-related threats to internal validity where longer rest periods between observations may allow bias to be reflected in the results. By shortening the gap between the time points, the risk of time-related threats can be reduced including recall biasness (Gravetter et al., 2006).

There are three dimensions of bullying measured in the NAQ-R including person-related (e.g. ‘Having insulted or offensive remarks you as a person’), work-related (e.g. ‘being given with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines’) and physical intimidation (e.g. ‘being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger or rage’).



They had to indicate the frequencies of the behaviours on a five-point Likert scale from 1= 'Never', two = 'Now and then', three = 'Monthly', four = 'Weekly', or 5 = 'Daily'. Responses were grouped into three categories which were those who had not been bullied (answered 1), had experienced at least one form of bullying at least once a month (answered 2 or 3), and had experienced at least one form of bullying at least once a week (answered 4 or 5) as commonly done by previous studies (Dehue et al., 2012; Hansen, Høgh and Persson, 2011; Leymann, 1990). However, I labelled the three groups as *no exposure* (those who had not been bullied), *mistreated* (had experienced at least one form of bullying at least once a month) and *bullying victims* (those who experienced at least one form of bullying at least once a week). The internal consistency of the scale was determined using Cronbach's Alpha at Time 1 ( $r = .91$ ). In addition, participants were asked to indicate the perpetrator or the sources of bullying which were among their 'Superior', 'Colleague' and 'Client/ Customer'.

### *Mediator: Section C*

As PC only focuses on negative thoughts, the PTQ developed by (Ehring et al., 2011) was used to measure repetitive negative thinking. It measures repetitive negative thinking as a process without focusing on a disorder (content-independent). The questionnaire is utilised in order to measure repetitive negative thinking independently of a specific content or disorder in order to allow transdiagnostic comparisons. The items in PTQ measures PC using the five important characteristics of repetitive negative thinking which are repetitive (e.g. 'My thoughts repeat themselves'), intrusive (e.g. 'Thoughts intrude into my mind'), difficult to disengage from (e.g. 'I feel driven to continue dwelling on the same issue'), unproductiveness (e.g. 'I think about many problems without solving any of them') and capturing mental capacity (e.g. 'My thoughts take up all my attention'). Participants were required to indicate how each characteristic represents them (1= 'not at all like me'; 6= 'very much like me'). The internal consistency of the scale was determined using Cronbach's Alpha at Time 1 ( $r = .95$ ).

However, the PTQ scale only measures the characteristics of repetitive negative thinking but does not specifically differentiate the two main types of PC (rumination and worry). Thus, two separate scales were added in this section to measure them which are the short version of the Ruminative Response Scale (RRS) (Treyner et al., 2003) and Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ) (Meyer et al., 1990). The short version of the RRS

consists of 10 items which are scored using a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from (1 = 'almost never' to 4 = 'almost always'). It measures two subscales which include Brooding ('Think why do I always react this way?') and Reflective ('Go someplace alone to think about your feelings'). The Brooding subscale had a negative connotation and can be described as moody pondering while the Reflection subscale was more neutral and often described the process of considering lessening or mitigate moodiness. Meanwhile, the PSWQ consists of 16 items which are scored using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1 = 'Not at all typical of me' to 5 = 'Very typical of me'). Example of items include 'Many situations make me worry' and 'When I am under pressure I worry a lot'. The internal consistency for both scales RSS and PSWQ were determined using Cronbach Alpha at Time 1 ( $r = .95$  and  $r = .88$  respectively) (Einarsen, Helge and Nielsen, 2005).

#### *Moderator: Section D*

*Coping* was measured using the coping with bullying scale developed by Lee and Brotheridge (2006). They formed 18 items based on existing scales that measured how victims dealt with bullying (Keashly, Trott and MacLean, 1994; Salmivalli, Karhunen and Lagerspetz, 1996). Four different types of coping strategies were measured: self-doubt (e.g. 'Felt bad about me'), ignored bully (e.g. 'Acted as if you didn't care'), indirect or passive ('avoided the bully') and problem-solving ('asked the person to stop'). Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they used each behaviour with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1 = never to 5 = always). In determining which coping strategy was mostly utilised by participants, the coping score with the highest mean suggested that the participant frequently used this strategy to cope with bullying. The internal consistency was determined via Cronbach's Alpha at Time 1 ( $r = .78$ ).

#### *Dependent Variables: Section E*

*Stress, anxiety and depression* were measured using the short version of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). This scale was chosen over Beck Depression Inventory-II due to its ability in distinguishing depressive, anxiety and stress symptomatology. The depression subscale assesses symptoms of dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest or involvement, anhedonia and inertia and the anxiety subscale assesses symptoms of autonomic arousal, skeletal musculature effects, situational anxiety and subjective experience of anxious affect. Meanwhile, the stress subscale assesses symptoms of difficulty in relaxing, nervous arousal, easily upset or agitated, irritable or

over reactive and impatient. Examples of the items include: 'getting upset by quite trivial things' (*stress*), 'aware of dryness of mouth' (*anxiety*) and 'couldn't experience any positive feeling at all' (*depression*). Items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from (0 = did not apply to me at all' to 3 = 'applied to me very much'). Scoring was carried out based on the recommended cut-off scores and was labelled as either 'normal', 'mild', 'moderate', 'severe' or 'extremely severe'. Since the scale that was used was the short version, the scores obtained on the DASS-21 were multiplied by two before labelling them accordingly. The internal consistency for this scale was  $r = .96$ .

*Psychosomatic Complaints* was measured using the Physical Health Questionnaire (PHQ-14) by Schat, Kelloway and Desmarais (2005a) that measures physical complaints including sleep disturbances, headaches, respiratory illness and gastrointestinal problems. The questions were answered in a retrospective manner using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from a score of (1= 'not at all' to 7= 'All of the time'). Participants who answered '1' for a particular symptom were categorised as not having that symptom. Meanwhile, participants who answered '2', '3', '4' were categorised as having infrequent symptoms whereas participants who answered '5', '6' and '7' were categorised as having frequent symptoms. The internal reliability consistency for this scale was  $r = .85$ .

*Emotional Exhaustion* was measured using one from three of the subscales from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The original MBI scale examined three areas contributing to burnout which are emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and depersonalisation. This study, however, is interested in looking at participants' levels of emotional exhaustion as consequences of workplace bullying. Thus, 9 items from the MBI was used to measure the intensity and frequency of feelings of emotional exhaustion such as '*I feel emotionally drained from my work*' and '*I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job*'. The questions were asked in a retrospective manner using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from a score of (1 = never to 7 = everyday). The internal consistency of the scale was determined using Cronbach's Alpha at Time 1 ( $r = .92$ ).

### *Controls: Section F*

This section collected information on the demographic and current employment background of the participants including age, gender, the highest level of education, marital status, working hours, job role and length of tenure. These control items were

tested based on previous research that suggested its influence on experiencing bullying behaviours (Balducci, Fraccaroli and Schaufeli, 2011; Olafsson and Johannsdottir, 2004; Salin, 2003). To emphasise anonymity, participants were given the option to decide whether they wanted or skip the specific questions such as job role and length of tenure. This section also included affect items measured by the positive and negative trait affect schedule (Watson, Clark and Tellegen, 1988). These items were added to measure affect bias to see whether the state of mood at that time would influence the scores.

## 5.2 Data Management and Preliminary Screening

### 5.2.1 Managing Raw Data

Since all responses were given online, there was no need to enter data manually. This is because QUALTRICS is able to export raw data to other formats like Excel or SPSS. By using an online platform to collect quantitative data, the process of organising and managing the data was much more straightforward compared to manual data collection. After every deadline, at each time points all data collected were exported and converted to the format of the analysis tool which is SPSS. Upon downloading, the raw data went through a process of editing and clean up. Following the data management procedures recommended in Pallant (2010), a few steps that had to be completed before analysis could begin. Once all the data had been exported to SPSS, items were coded accordingly to ease the process of computing items into its associated variables. Next, non-numerical data were coded numerically in SPSS to allow further statistical analysis (e.g. 1= male; 2 = female). Further, negatively worded items were recoded via the Compute option in SPSS.

### 5.2.2 Test for Normality, Missing Data and Outliers

The normality test was carried out on the data collected at each time point. Each time point revealed a positively skewed distribution. This was anticipated as similar results were achieved by various bullying researchers (see Balducci et al., 2011; Hauge et al., 2011; Notelaers and Einarsen, 2013) suggesting that most employees are not victims of workplace bullying. Regarding missing data, by using the features offered in QUALTRICS, I was able to configure the setting so that every question was made compulsory before the participants could move to next question. This reduced the risk of participants skipping questions in the survey. However, the only question that was not

made compulsory was their contact details since it depended on the participant's consent. Nevertheless, there were surveys that were incomplete suggesting that participants were not able to finish responding to the questions either by forgetting to continue to answer after they paused or if it was too long for them to answer.

### 5.3 Descriptive Analysis

The results of the descriptive analysis will be displayed in this section including participants' demographic backgrounds (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity) and the frequencies of the variables at each time point. The frequency levels were grouped in a different type of categories depending on the variable (e.g. Workplace Bullying = Non-Exposed, Mistreated or Victims of Bullying).

#### 5.3.1 Demographic Background of Samples

Table 9 presents the frequency of respondents across the three time-points. A total of seven demographic characteristics were captured including age group, gender, ethnicity, highest education level, job status, tenure and organisational sector. The majority of the participants were between the age of 18 to 28 (84.3%), female (71.4%) and holding at least a degree (78.6%). Participants were all frontline employees from various organisations including retail (37.1%), consulting (32.9%), education (15.7%), health (7.1%) and hospitality (7.1%). All of them shared a similar role which involved dealing with customers, clients or patients. The majority of them worked full time (80.0%) and have at least a year of experience with the company (70.0%).

*Table 9 Demographics of participants involved in the study at three-time points (N =70)*

	Demographics	Frequency (%)
Age (years)	18-28	59 (84.3)
	29-40	9 (12.9)
	41-55	2 (2.9)
Gender:	Male	20 (28.6)
	Female	50 (71.4)
Ethnicity	Bumiputera	70 (100.0)
Highest Education	High School Leavers	5 (7.1)
	Diploma/ Pre-University	10 (14.3)
	Undergraduate	44 (62.9)
	Postgraduate	11 (15.7)
Job Status	Full Time	56 (80.0)
	Part Time	14 (20.0)
Tenure	6 months to 1 year	21 (30.0)
	One to 5 years	35 (50.0)

	5 to 10 years	9 (12.9)
	> 10 years	5 (7.1)
Sector	Retail	26 (37.1)
	Services	44 (62.9)

### 5.3.2 Frequency of Variables at 3 time-points (N=70)

The following section presents the frequency levels for each variable including experience of being bullied at work, perseverative thinking including worry and rumination, coping strategies, mental health, psychosomatic complaints as well as emotional exhaustion. Each variable had a different approach of categorising its frequency which will be mentioned further in their respective sections.

#### a) Workplace Bullying Frequency

While the notion of duration is still debatable it seems to linger on a continuum from short term to at least six months or beyond (Einarsen et al., 2011; Leymann, 1995; Zapf et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the recurrence of at least one adverse act on a weekly basis is commonly agreed upon (Einarsen et al., 2005; Leymann 1996; Lutgan-Sandvik et al., 2007). Moreover, it was unfair to entirely disregard those who still had rare or occasional experience as non-bullied as these participants were still considered as being mistreated. This method of categorising was inspired based on Salin's (2001) criteria where she classified her participants into *victims* or *non-victims*. Therefore, participants who experienced at least one negative act on a weekly or daily basis were categorised as *victims of bullying* (Leymann, 1990). For those who experienced any negative acts on rare occasions or a monthly basis were categorised as mistreated whereas those who did not experience any of the negative acts at all were categorised as non-exposed. The table below presents the frequency levels of bullying exposure among the 70 participants that participated at all time points. In Time 1, 17 participants (24.3%) were identified as victims of bullying, 50 (71.4%) were *mistreated*, and only 3 (4.3%) were *not exposed* to negative acts at the workplace. In Time 2, the number of participants who were bullied reduced to 12 (17.1%), while 49 (70%) were mistreated and 9 (12.9%) did not experience any negative acts. For Time 3, the number of victims increased to 14 (20%), whereas those who were mistreated reduced to 46 (65.7%) and 10 participants (14.3%) who were not exposed to any negative acts.

Table 10 Descriptive Statistics for Exposure to Bullying at three waves (N= 70)

Variables	Mean (SD)				Frequency (%)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Bullying experience (NAQ)	33.10	31.41	30.27	Non-exposed	3 (4.3)	9 (12.9)	10 (14.3)
	(9.76)	(10.40)	(9.37)	Mistreated	50 (71.4)	49 (70.0)	46 (65.7)
				Victims of bullying*	17 (24.3)	12 (17.1)	14 (20.0)

*b) Change in Bullying Experience over Time*

A one-way repeated measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate whether there was a change in participants bullying experience at Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3 (N=70) (see Figure 15). The results of the ANOVA indicated a significant time effect, Wilks' Lambda = .88,  $F(2, 68) = 4.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ . Follow up comparisons indicated that only Time 1 and Time 3 were significantly different,  $p < .05$  hence, suggesting that bullying experience decreased over time across participants.

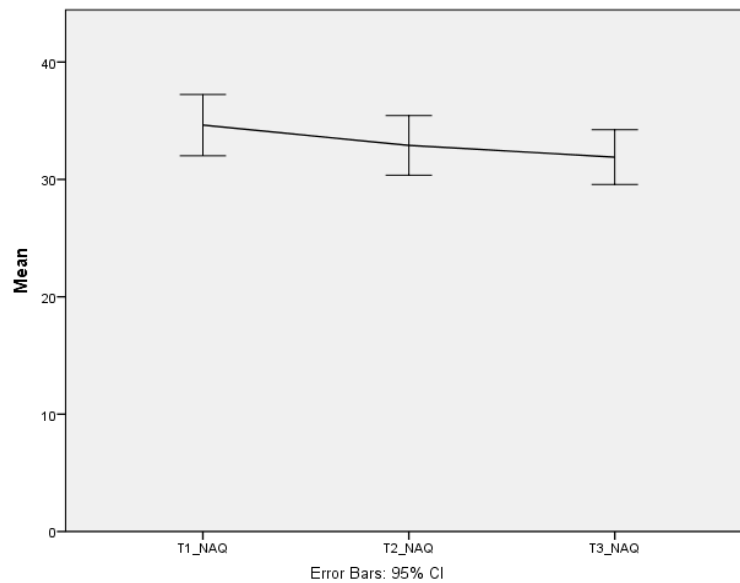


Figure 15 Change in bullying experience over time

### *c) Ranking and Sources of Negative Acts*

In Time 1, participants mostly reported to have experienced the following acts on a daily basis: ‘Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks’, ‘Being exposed to an unmanageable workload’ and ‘Being ignored, excluded’ or being ‘sent to Coventry’. Whereas in Time 2, these were the most reported acts, ‘Being ordered to do work below your level of competence’ and ‘Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes’. Meanwhile in Time 3 ‘Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work’ was the most reported act by participants. Besides that, participants were asked to identify where were the negative acts mainly were coming from. However, this question was only asked in Time 2 and Time 3 but not in Time 1. Table 11 below includes three types of sources that were identified by the participants and a ‘non-identified’ source for those who did not prefer to identify its sources. The three sources include their superior (manager, supervisor, higher management), a colleague (same level or level below) and their clients or customers. The results show that in Time 2, the majority of the participants identified their superiors as the perpetrator (N=26, 37.1%) whereas in Time 3 most of them identified their colleagues as the perpetrator (N=20, 28.6%).

*Table 11 Sources of negative acts*

Source	Frequency (%)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Superior	-	26 (37.1)	18 (25.7)
Colleague	-	14 (20.0)	20 (28.6)
Client/ Customers	-	17 (24.3)	15 (21.4)
Non-identified	-	13 (18.6)	17 (24.3)

### *Perseverative Cognition Prevalence*

Table 12 below presents the frequency of the three measures of PC: repetitive negative thinking (RNT), worry, and rumination. All three measures were categorised using a similar approach which labelled the lower 33% as low frequency and higher 33% as high frequency. In Time 1, 4 participants (5.75%) reported having engaged in a high frequency of RNT, 14 participants (20%) in a high frequency of worrying and 4 participants (5.7%) in ruminating. Meanwhile, in Time 2, 7 participants (10%) reported having engaged in a high frequency of RNT, 13 participants (18.6%) in worrying and 7 participants (10%) in



ruminating. Lastly, in Time 3, the number of participants engaging in a high frequency of RNT reduced to 2 participants (2.9%), 11 participants worried highly and 3 participants (4.3%) highly ruminated. For perseverative thinking across time, a higher percentage of participants tended to engage in high repetitive negative thinking and rumination at Time 2 whereas worrying slightly decreased over time.

*Table 12 Descriptive Statistics for PTQ Worry and Rumination at three waves (N= 70)*

Variables	Mean (SD)				Frequency (%)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
RNT	43.27	43.81	39.26	High	4 (5.7)	7 (10.0)	2 (2.9)
	(14.02)	(13.99)	(13.63)	Moderate	36 (51.4)	37 (52.9)	34 (48.6)
				Low	30 (42.9)	26 (37.1)	34 (48.6)
Worry	16.27	21.99	14.19	High	14 (20.0)	13 (18.6)	11 (15.7)
	(3.78)	(7.21)	(4.85)	Moderate	50 (71.4)	35 (50.0)	42 (60.0)
				Low	6 (8.6)	22 (31.4)	17 (24.3)
Rumination	21.50	13.24	18.59	High	4 (5.7)	7 (10.0)	3 (4.3)
	(5.24)	(4.23)	(5.57)	Moderate	55 (78.6)	24 (34.3)	44 (62.9)
				Low	11 (15.7)	39 (55.7)	23 (32.9)

#### *d) Frequency of Coping Strategies*

Table 13 displays the mean and frequency level of coping strategies across time. The coping scale consisted of four types of coping strategies: self-doubt, ignore, passive and problem-solving. Based on the mean value shown in the results below, ignoring the behaviour and passive coping seems to be the favourite choice when coping with bullying. This result parallels Keashly, Trott and Mac Lean's (1994) findings where individuals tended to not deal directly with the perpetrator or the problem. Regarding its frequency, more than half of participants reported using ignoring the behaviour as the most prevalent coping strategy across the three time-points while problem-solving was the least prevalent at all three time points. At Time 1, 39 participants (55.6%) reported using ignoring behaviour the most and 42 participants (60%) using problem-solving the least. At Time 2, 35 participants (50%) used ignoring, and 40 participants (57.1%) reported using

problem-solving the least. Lastly, at Time 3, the numbers increased to 42 participants (60%) using ignoring the most and 44 participants (62.8%) used problem-solving the least.

*Table 13 Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Exhaustion and Coping Styles at three waves (N=70)*

Variables	Mean (SD)			Frequency (%)	
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Prevalent	Least Prevalent
Self-Doubt	2.10 (.83)	2.10 (.83)	1.91 (.83)	Time 1 Ignore Behaviour 39 (55.6%)	Problem Solving 42 (60%)
Ignore	2.98 (.64)	2.90 (.69)	2.87 (.74)	Time 2 Ignore Behaviour 35 (50%)	Problem Solving 40 (57.1%)
Passive Coping	2.76 (.84)	2.71 (.92)	2.59 (.86)	Time 3 Ignore Behaviour 42 (60%)	Problem Solving 44 (62.8%)
Problem Solving	1.79 (.60)	1.88 (.66)	1.74 (.63)		

#### *e) Frequency of Health and Well-being Complaints*

In this section, descriptive values of HWB complaints will be presented. Results of mental health, psychosomatic complaints and emotional exhaustion will be described in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 14 below shows the descriptive analysis of mental health variables. The variables include: depression, anxiety and stress. Depression, anxiety and stress were categorised into five categories of severity: normal, mild, moderate, severe and extremely severe. Scoring was carried out based on the recommendation provided by the Manual for DASS (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995). The severity of mental illness increased in Time 2 for depression, anxiety and stress. At Time 1, only 1 (1.4%) participant was identified as having extremely severe depression while 3 (4.3%) participants were classified as having severe depression. As for anxiety severity at Time 1, 2 (2.9%) participants were identified as having severe and extremely severe anxiety. Meanwhile, at Time 1, 2 (2.9%) participants were severely stressed, but none were classified as having extremely severe stress.

However, in Time 2, the number of participants experiencing extremely severe depression increased to 3 (4.3%) participants, and 2 (2.9%) participants reported having severe depression. As for anxiety, the number rose for both severe and extremely severe anxiety to 3 (4.3%) participants and 5 (7.1%) participants, respectively. Similar results were found for stress having an increased number of 3 (4.3%) participants with severe stress and 2 (2.9%) participants with extremely severe stress. As for Time 3, the number of participants reporting severe depression increased to 4 (5.7%) participants but those with extremely severe depression decreased to 2 participants (2.9%). For anxiety, the number continued to increase for those having severe and extremely severe anxiety to 5 (7.1%) participants and 6 (8.6%) participants, respectively. Lastly, those experiencing severe stress increased to 5 (7.1%) participants, and none reported having extremely severe stress symptoms at Time 3.

*Table 14 Descriptive Statistics for Mental Health at three waves (N=70)*

Variables	Mean (SD)				Frequency (%)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Depression	3.00	3.70	3.50	Normal	53	51	48 (68.6)
	(3.41)	(4.04)	(3.76)		(75.7)	(72.9)	
				Mild	6 (8.6)	7 (10.0)	6 (8.6)
				Moderate	7 (10.0)	7 (10.0)	10 (14.3)
				Severe	3 (4.3)	2 (2.9)	4 (5.7)
			Extremely Severe	1 (1.4)	3 (4.3)	2 (2.9)	
Anxiety	3.14	3.84	3.94	Normal	42	39	41 (58.6)
	(2.80)	(3.52)	(4.16)		(60.0)	(55.7)	
				Mild	10	13	4 (5.7)
				Moderate	14	10	14 (20.0)
				Severe	2 (2.9)	3 (4.3)	5 (7.1)
			Extremely Severe	2 (2.9)	5 (7.1)	6 (8.6)	
Stress	4.21	5.31	4.96	Normal	58	56	57 (81.4)
	(3.28)	(4.08)	(3.93)		(82.9)	(80.0)	
				Mild	7 (10.0)	5 (7.1)	6 (8.6)
				Moderate	3 (4.3)	4 (5.7)	2 (2.9)
				Severe	2 (2.9)	3 (4.3)	5 (7.1)
			Extremely Severe	-	2 (2.9)	-	

Table 15 below exhibits descriptive and frequency levels of participants' psychosomatic complaints and emotional exhaustion. Psychosomatic complaints include: sleep disturbance, headaches, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infection. Psychosomatic complaints were categorised into three categories (1 = not having symptoms, 2/ 3/ 4 = infrequent symptoms, 5/ 6/ 7 = frequent symptoms). In Time 1, 9 (12.9%) of participants reported having frequent sleep disturbances, 11 (15.7%) reported having frequent headaches, 9 (12.9%) reported having frequent gastrointestinal problems and 4 (5.7%) of participants reported having frequent respiratory infections. In Time 2, 10 (14.35%) of participants reported having frequent sleep disturbance, 11 (15.7%) reported having frequent headaches, 15 (21.45%) of participants reported having frequent gastrointestinal problems and 6 (8.6%) reported having frequent respiratory infections.

In Time 3, the number of participants experiencing frequent symptoms of sleep disturbance, headaches and gastrointestinal problems reduced to 7 (10%) participants, 10 (14.3%) of participants and 12 (17.1%), respectively, while it remained the same for respiratory infections at 6 (8.6%). As for emotional exhaustion, an overall score of 0-16 was categorised as low, 17 -26 was categorised as moderate and those who scored 27 and above was categorised as experiencing high emotional exhaustion (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). At Time 1, 14 (20%) reported having high levels of emotional exhaustion, whereas at Time 2, the number increased to 24 (34.3%) before reducing to 15 (21.4%) at Time 3.

*Table 15 Descriptive Statistics for Psychosomatic Complaints and Emotional Exhaustion (N=70)*

Variables	Mean (SD)			Symptoms	Frequency (%)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3		Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Sleep Disturbance	7.79 (2.88)	7.40 (2.81)	7.09 (3.25)	Frequent	9 (12.9)	10 (14.3)	7 (10.0)
				Infrequent	55 (78.6)	55 (78.6)	50 (71.4)
				None	6 (8.6)	5 (7.1)	13 (18.6)
Headaches	7.49 (2.99)	7.47 (3.74)	7.71 (3.62)	Frequent	11 (15.7)	11 (15.7)	10 (14.3)
				Infrequent	52 (74.3)	49 (70.0)	51 (72.9)
				None	7 (10.0)	10 (14.3)	9 (12.9)
Gastrointestinal Problems	9.67 (4.10)	9.25 (3.74)	9.39 (4.15)	Frequent	9 (12.9)	15 (21.4)	12 (17.1)
				Infrequent	55 (78.6)	46 (65.7)	48 (68.6)
				None	6 (8.6)	9 (12.9)	10 (14.3)

Respiratory Infection	3.33	3.26	3.52	Frequent	4 (5.7)	6 (8.6)	6 (8.6)
	(2.08)	(1.86)	(1.90)	Infrequent	38 (54.3)	37 (52.9)	44 (62.9)
				None	28 (40.0)	27 (38.6)	20 (28.6)
Emotional Exhaustion	21.01	22.91	21.90	High	14 (20.0)	24 (34.3)	15 (21.4)
	(9.61)	(11.05)	(10.64)	Moderate	33 (47.1)	21 (30.0)	31 (44.3)
				Low	23 (32.9)	25 (35.7)	24 (34.4)

To sum up for mental health severity, participants reported higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress in Time 2. This was the same for psychosomatic complaints. More than 10% of participants complained of having these symptoms especially sleep disturbances, headaches and gastrointestinal problems. More than 20% of participants reported high levels of emotional exhaustion with Time 2 having the highest report. This section, however, provides just descriptive results showing frequencies of bullying experience, cognitive and behavioural reactions as well as physical and psychological symptoms experienced at each time points. This chapter will subsequently move further into inferential analysis to look at the correlational and regression tests to test this study's hypotheses.

#### 5.4 Inferential Analysis

In this section of the analysis, results from inferential tests are reported including correlational analysis, hierarchical regression (Hypothesis 1 and 2), mediation analysis (Hypothesis 3) and finally to test the moderated-mediation model (Hypothesis 4). Results of each test would determine if each of these hypotheses are accepted or have been rejected. To test Hypothesis 1, a hierarchical regression was used to measure the influence of T1 workplace bullying as the predictors to the outcomes in T3. Before that, a correlational analysis was carried out on the study variables to measure its associations.

However, given that certain socio-demographic variables were found correlated with the variables, the hierarchical regression was then carried out in order to control the potential covariates, encouraging a more robust study. Hypothesis 2 was carried out in the same manner using a hierarchical regression, but with different variables in such a way that the variables were reversed. Instead of measuring workplace bullying as the predictor, health and well-being at T1 was used to measure as potential predictors to workplace bullying at T3. Socio-demographic variables were also controlled in the analysis to eliminate potential bias. PROCESS Macro was used to measure Hypothesis 4

(mediation model) and Hypothesis 5 (moderated-mediation model) which is a plugin to SPSS which basically uses regression to test the two hypotheses. Results are discussed in detail in the following sections with the help of tables in presenting the results of Study 1.

#### 5.4.1 Correlational Analysis

Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between bullying experience T1, coping T1, perseverative cognition. T2 and health and well-being complaints at T3. From the results shown in Table 16 below, T1 workplace bullying was significantly associated with T1 self-doubt ( $r = .39, p < .05$ ) and T1 problem solving ( $r = .30, p < .05$ ) but not with T1 ignoring ( $r = -.11, p > .05$ ) and T1 passive coping ( $r = .22, p > .05$ ). Meanwhile, T1 workplace bullying was found to significantly correlate with all measures of perseverative cognition which are T2 repetitive negative thinking (RNT) ( $r = .41, p < .05$ ), T2 worry ( $r = .28, p < .05$ ) and T2 rumination ( $r = .38, p < .05$ ).

Besides that, workplace bullying at T1 was found to be significantly correlated with all three mental health complaints at T3 which are: depression ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ), anxiety ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ) and stress ( $r = .26, p < .05$ ). In terms of its relationship with psychosomatic complaints, bullying experience at Time 1 was only positively correlated with sleep disturbances ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ) and T3 headache complaints ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ) but not with gastrointestinal complaints ( $r = .19, p > .05$ ) and T3 respiratory infections ( $r = .11, p > .05$ ). As for the final health and well-being variable tested, T1 workplace bullying was positively correlated with emotional exhaustion ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ). With regards to the socio-demographic variables of the participant, level of education was significantly associated with T1 bullying experience ( $r = -.28, p < .05$ ) and T1 ignoring ( $r = .26, p < .05$ ). This result could suggest that participants with higher levels of education reported less bullying experience tend to engage higher in ignoring. Besides that, age had a negative correlation with respiratory infection ( $r = -.25, p < .05$ ) whereas gender was correlated with T1 ignoring ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ), stress ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ) and headaches ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ). Meanwhile, results found that negative affect T3 was positively correlated self-doubt and with all T3 health and well-being outcomes. Hence, these significant control variables will be included in the following analyses.

Table 16 Overall correlation between study variables

#		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
1	Workplace Bullying T1	34.63	10.94	1																						
2	Self-Doubt T1	10.51	4.13	.39**	1																					
3	Ignore T1	14.91	3.20	-.11	.10	1																				
4	Passive T1	5.53	1.68	.22	.34**	.32**	1																			
5	Problem-Solving T1	7.16	2.42	.30*	.17	-.16	.25*	1																		
6	RNT T2	43.50	15.04	.41**	.34**	.03	.27*	.22	1																	
7	Worry T2	16.27	3.78	.28*	.30*	.23	.40**	.19	.25*	1																
8	Rumination T2	21.50	5.25	.38**	.38**	.16	.35**	.12	.31**	.50**	1															
9	Depression T3	3.51	3.75	.34**	.41**	.08	.29*	.21	.49**	.36**	.47**	1														
10	Anxiety T3	3.96	4.15	.25*	.16	-.01	.27*	.31*	.34*	.39**	.35**	.75**	1													
11	Stress T3	4.96	3.93	.26*	.33**	.16	.41**	.23	.45**	.54**	.44**	.80**	.80**	1												
12	Sleep T3	7.09	3.25	.44**	.22	.11	.20	.20	.58**	.35**	.26*	.60**	.58**	.54**	1											
13	Headache T3	7.71	3.62	.42**	.35**	.12	.26*	.30*	.50**	.34**	.35**	.60**	.58**	.61**	.73**	1										
14	Gastrointestinal T3	9.39	4.15	.19	.09	.14	.12	.04	.39**	.32**	.29**	.33**	.58**	.49**	.56**	.58**	1									
15	Respiratory T3	3.53	1.90	.11	.09	.06	.07	-.08	.33**	.10	.15	.46**	.45**	.33**	.34**	.34**	.44**	1								
16	Emotional Exhaustion T3	21.90	10.64	.33**	.41**	.11	.31**	.16	.23	.33**	.35**	.61**	.47**	.62**	.46**	.60**	.25*	.29*	1							
17	Age	1.19	.46	.12	-.01	.03	-.04	.20	.01	-.08	-.11	-.06	-.09	-.06	.01	.07	-.23	-.25*	.12	1						
18	Gender	1.71	.46	.07	.13	.24*	.16	.03	.02	.23	.11	.12	.17	.24*	.13	.25*	.14	.14	.19	-.02	1					
19	Tenure	1.96	.86	.03	-.00	-.02	-.02	.12	-.10	.03	-.06	.05	.04	.09	.07	.14	-.12	-.17	.11	.68**	-	1				
20	Education	2.89	.77	-.28*	-.13	.26*	.14	-.10	-.03	-.11	-.05	-.14	-.15	-.12	-.21	-.06	.03	-.01	-.10	.10	.11	-	.03	1		
21	Industry	1.37	.49	.09	.14	-.04	.06	-.05	.15	.10	.09	.09	.07	.16	-.01	.01	.10	.13	-.05	-.12	.16	-	.08	.14	1	
22	Negative Affect T3	21.46	9.21	.14	.29*	.26*	.11	.02	.17	.07	.22	.41**	.38**	.31**	.29*	.36**	.32**	.42**	.30*	-.13	.23	-	.18	.16	.16	1

Note: N: 70, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.05, Age: 1 = 18-28; 2 = 29-40; 3 = 41-55, Gender: 1 = Male; 2 = Female, Tenure: 1 = <1 year; 2 = 1-5 years; 3 = 5-10 years ; 4 = > 10 years, Education: 1 = High School Leaver; 2 = Diploma/ Pre-university; 3 = Undergraduate; 4 = Postgraduate, Industry : 1 = Retail, 2 = Services

One of the benefits of carrying out a longitudinal study is that causal relationships can be tested. In other words, the relationship between HWB complaints at Time 1 and bullying experience at Time 3 can be measured. Mental health complaints at Time 1 were positively correlated with bullying experience at Time 3: depression ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ), anxiety ( $r = .61, p < .01$ ) and stress ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ). Similar results were found with psychosomatic conditions at T1. Sleep disturbances ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ) were significantly associated with T3 bullying experience specifically with difficulties in falling asleep ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ), waking up at night ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ) and having nightmares ( $r = .27, p < .05$ ).

Meanwhile, headache complaints at T1 ( $r = .51, p < .01$ ) was also found to be associated with subsequent bullying at T3, specifically with frequency of getting headaches ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ), headaches due to experiencing pressure of getting things done ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ) and headaches due to feeling frustrated or annoyed at the workplace ( $r = .30, p < .05$ ). However, for gastrointestinal conditions, only feelings of nausea at T1 ( $r = .27, p < .05$ ) were correlated with subsequent bullying at T3 whereas none of the respiratory conditions at T1 were significantly correlated to subsequent bullying at T3. With regards to emotional exhaustion at Time 1, results showed a positive correlation with subsequent bullying experience at Time 3 ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ) (see Table 17).

*Table 17 Correlation values of HWB complaints T1 and bullying experience T3*

#		M	SD	Workplace Bullying T3
1	Workplace Bullying T3	31.90	9.77	1
2	Depression T1	3.00	3.41	.41**
3	Anxiety T1	3.14	2.79	.61**
4	Stress T1	4.21	3.28	.38**
5	Sleep T1	7.79	2.88	.41**
6	Headache T1	7.49	2.99	.51**
7	Gastro T1	9.67	4.10	.25*
8	Respiratory T1	3.33	2.08	.15
9	Emotional Exhaustion T1	21.01	9.61	.35**

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

The correlational analysis has shown interesting findings, but it is not quite substantial given that there are other potential covariates which may affect the result of the analysis. This refers to the significant relationship between the study variables and participants'



socio-demographic background such as gender, age and level of education as well vulnerable variables like negative affect and well-being at Time 1. For a more robust study, these variables should be controlled prior to testing the study hypotheses. Hence, the next section will present the findings of the hierarchical regression analysis carried out to test Hypothesis 1 and 2.

#### 5.4.2 Regression Analysis

To further explore the contributions of each variables in Hypothesis 1, a hierarchical regression analysis was carried out to rule out alternative explanations. Socio-demographic variables (gender, age and level of education) as well as negative trait affect were controlled for in Step 1, T1 health and well-being was entered in Step 2 and bullying experience at Time 1 was entered in Step 3 in each model. Health and well-being outcomes were measured at Time 3 instead of Time 2 to allow a gap of time in between which was approximately at least 5 months to measure the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying. In addition, I wanted to measure PC at Time 2 and to observe its effect on the bullying-well-being relationship.

**Hypothesis 1:** Workplace bullying at Time 1 is positively associated with mental ill-health (1a), somatic complaints (1b) and emotional exhaustion (1c) at Time 3.

*Hypothesis 1a:* Workplace bullying at Time 1 is positively associated with depression, anxiety and stress at T3.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Workplace bullying at Time 1 is positively associated with sleep disturbance, headaches, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections at T3.

*Hypothesis 1c:* Workplace bullying at Time 1 is positively associated with emotional exhaustion at T3.

The following section reports the results of the hierarchical regression analysis by which Hypothesis 1 is tested, according to which workplace bullying at Time 1 would impact on employees' health and well-being outcomes at Time 3. In light of attrition in this study as well as previous studies in this area (Balducci, Fraccaroli and Schaufeli, 2011; Olafsson and Johannsdottir, 2004; Salin, 2003), socio-demographic variables including gender, age and level of education as well as negative affect which is a vulnerability variable were controlled. Results in Table 18 demonstrated that the inclusion of T1 bullying experience ( $\beta = .088$ ,  $p < .05$ ) in Step 3 of the model showed little increase but significant, which was

0.6% increase in variance to the model after controlling for socio-demographic variables and negative trait affect as well as T1 depression which accounted for 20.6% and 17.6% respectively.

*Table 18 Hierarchical regression analysis predicting mental illness at Time 3*

Predictors	Standardised regression weights								
	T3 Depression			T3 Anxiety			T3 Stress		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
(I) Control variables									
Gender	.085			.149			.198		
Age	-.025			-.064			-.027		
Edu Level	-.173			-.184			-.166		
Negative Affect	.411***			.298*			.414***		
(II)T1 Mental Illness T1		.508**			.559***			.506***	
(III) Bullying Experience			.088*			.014			.086
R <sup>2</sup>	.206	.381	.387	.152	.386	.386	.247	.419	.425
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.206	.176	.006	.152	.234	.000	.247	.171	.006
ΔF	4.210**	18.165**	.569*	2.914*	24.425**	.016	5.343**	18.880**	.680

Note: \*\*\*p<.001; \*\*p<.01; \*p<.05

Meanwhile, in the anxiety model, the inclusion of T1 bullying experience ( $\beta = .014$ ,  $p > .05$ ) in Step 3 did not increase the model variance after controlling for socio-demographic variables and negative affect which accounted for a proportion of 15.2% to the model and T1 anxiety which accounted for 23.4% of variance to the model. Similarly, in the stress model, the inclusion of T1 bullying experience ( $\beta = .086$ ,  $p > .05$ ) in Step 3 did not significantly change with just 0.6% of variance after controlling for socio-demographic variables and negative affect in Step 1 which accounted for a proportion of 24.7% as well as T1 stress which accounted for 17.1% of proportion to the model.

Thus, these results provided some support for Hypothesis 1a suggesting that workplace bullying at Time 1 has a longitudinal impact towards the increase in depression at Time 3 even after controlling for socio-demographic variables and vulnerable variables including negative affect and T1 depression. However, workplace bullying at Time 1 did not have a significant impact towards anxiety and stress at Time 3 after controlling for covariates which was mostly explained by negative affect and T1 health and well-being outcomes. As for psychosomatic complaints, two models were tested which predicted

sleep disturbances and headache complaints. The results in Table 19 demonstrated that socio-demographic variables and negative affect accounted for a proportion of variance in sleeping disturbances (16.7%) with negative affect contributing the most to the increase in prediction ( $\beta = -.318$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The inclusion of T1 bullying experience ( $\beta = .690$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in Step 2 of the model further significantly added 34.2% of variance to the model. As for headache complaints, socio-demographic variables and negative affect accounted for a significant proportion of variance in the model (29.1%), with negative affect contributing the most ( $\beta = .467$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The inclusion of T1 bullying experience ( $\beta = .520$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in Step 2 of the model further significantly added 10.7% of variance to the model.

*Table 19 Hierarchical regression analysis predicting psychosomatic complaints and emotional exhaustion at Time 3.*

Predictors	Sleep Disturbances			Headache Complaints			Emotional Exhaustion		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
(I)Control variables									
Gender	.110			.202			.156		
Age	.045			.098			.150		
Edu Level	-.247*			-.125			-.155		
Negative Affect	.318**			.467***			.416***		
(II)T1 Psycho-somatic Complaints		.690***			5.201***			.491***	
(III)Bullying Experience			.096*			.107*			.068
R <sup>2</sup>	.167	.508	.515	.291	.502	.509	.258	.425	.431
$\Delta R^2$	.167	.342	.006	.291	.211	.008	.258	.167	.006
$\Delta F$	3.247*	44.466***	.830*	6.668	27.053	.968*	4.450**	18.282***	.639

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$

Workplace bullying did not have any significant relationship with gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections, hence no regression analysis was carried out on the two models. T3 emotional exhaustion, however, was not found significantly associated with T1 workplace bullying. Results showed no significant associations between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = .068$ ,  $p > .05$ ) when socio-demographic variables and negative affect ( $\beta = .416$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and T1 emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = .491$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was controlled. Thus, these results provide some support for Hypothesis 1b but

not for 1c. Summing up the findings for Hypothesis 1, results suggested that workplace bullying predicts depressive symptoms, sleep disturbances and headache complaints within employees after controlling for potential covariates (i.e socio-demographic variables, negative affect and T1 health and well-being outcome). A parallel analysis (Table 20) was carried out to further explore the reverse causation model (Hypothesis 2), according to which T1 ill-health and well-being would impact on subsequent bullying experience at T3. Socio-demographic variables and negative affect were also included to maintain the same structure of analysis testing as used for Hypothesis 1. This time, socio-demographic (gender, age and educational background) and negative affect at Time 3 were added in Step 1, bullying experience at Time 2 was added at Step 2, ill-health and well-being conditions at T1 were added as predictors in Step 3 including mental health symptoms, psychosomatic symptoms and emotional exhaustion.

**Hypothesis 2:** Mental ill-health (2a), higher somatic complaints (2b) and high levels of emotional exhaustion (2c) is positively associated with future exposure to workplace bullying.

*Hypothesis 2a:* Depression, anxiety and stress T1 is positively associated with future exposure to workplace bullying T3.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Sleep disturbances, headache, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections at T1 is positively associated with future exposure to workplace bullying T3.

*Hypothesis 2c:* High levels of emotional exhaustion T1 is positively associated with future exposure to workplace bullying T3.

The results indicated that the last step of the regression, in which I included all correlated items of health and well-being variables with workplace bullying accounted for a unique and significant proportion of variance in the criterion (12.6%). However, anxiety at T1 ( $\beta = .425, p < .001$ ) was the only one that contributed to this increase in prediction. Socio-demographic variables (gender, age, level of education) and negative affect did not account for a significant proportion of variance in predicting workplace bullying at T3 (12.3%) but the inclusion of T1 bullying experience ( $\beta = .743, p < .001$ ) in Step 2 of the model further significantly increased 47.0% of variance to the model. Thus, these results provided some support for Hypothesis 2a but not for 2b and 2c. In other words, this result

suggested that conditions of anxiety may predict subsequent bullying in the workplace by making the employee vulnerable to negative behaviours at the workplace.

*Table 20 Hierarchical regression analysis predicting bullying experience at Time 3*

Predictors	Bullying Experience at Time 3			
	Unstandardized Beta ( $\beta$ )	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>	F
<i>Step 1</i>				
Gender	.212			
Age	.087			
Education Level	-.209			
Negative Affect	.190	.123	.123	2.270
<i>Step 2</i>				
Bullying Experience T1	.743***	.593	.470	73.900** *
<i>Step 3</i>				
Depression	-.039			
Anxiety	.425***			
Stress	-.018			
Sleep Disturbances	.030			
Difficulties falling asleep	.030			
Waking up at night	-.064			
Nightmares	.016			
Headache				
Frequency	.022			
Pressure to get things done	-.076			
Frustrated or annoyed	.103			
Gastrointestinal Problems				
Nausea	.066			
Emotional Exhaustion	.070	.719	.126	2.164*

Note: \*\*\*p<.001; \*\*p<.01; \*p<.05.

The next section presents the results of the hypothesised mediation (Hypothesis 3) and moderated-mediation (Hypothesis 4) model which was tested via PROCESS macro developed for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). This method was used instead of a latent variable approach due to the restrictions in degrees of freedom, which are determined by the number of observed indicators as well as the sample size. Instead, this method uses ordinary least squares (OLS), also known as logistic regression-based path analysis, for estimating indirect effects in mediation and moderated-mediation models. This technique can be used with a single or multiple mediator (Hayes, 2013).

#### 5.4.2 The Mediating Role of Perseverative Thinking on Health and Well-being Outcomes

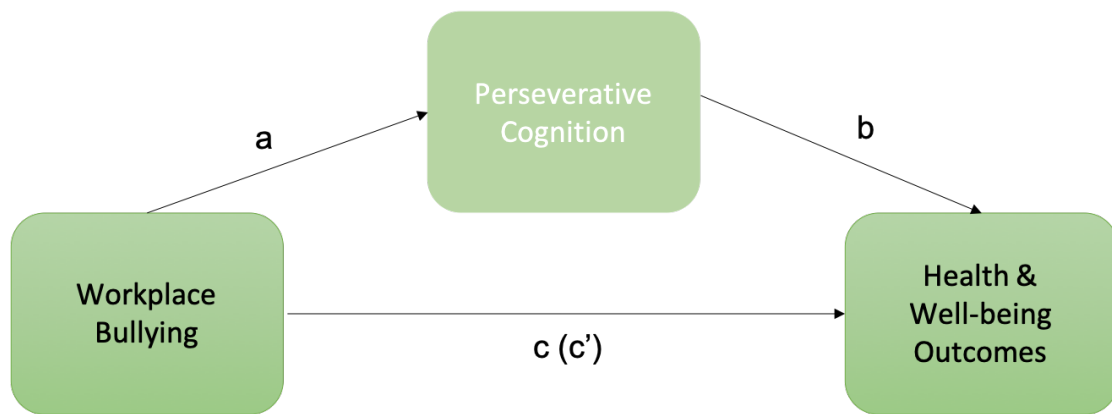
This section will present the mediation analysis carried out on the relationship between workplace bullying and health and well-being outcomes. Hypothesis 3 proposed that PC (repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) at Time 2 would mediate the effect of workplace bullying in Time 1 on employees' HWB complaints at Time 3 (Figure 16). PC was measured at Time 2 which was two months after the first data was collected in order to allow a gap for prolonged cognition to take place (if individuals do so). Thus, this would allow me to measure the effect of PC on the impact of workplace bullying at Time 1 on the health and well-being outcomes at Time 3. Below is the recap of the third hypothesis of this study.

**Hypothesis 3:** Perseverative cognition (repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and mental health (3a), somatic complaints (3b) and emotional exhaustion (3c).

*Hypothesis 3a:* Perseverative cognition (repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and depression, anxiety and stress.

*Hypothesis 3b:* Perseverative cognition (repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and sleep disturbances, headache, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections.

*Hypothesis 3c:* Perseverative cognition (repetitive negative thinking, worry and rumination) will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion.



*Figure 16 Perseverative Cognition Mediation Model*

Baron and Kenny (1986) suggested four steps must be followed to test for mediation. This is known as the causal steps approach which includes:

- (1) The independent variable must significantly predict the outcome ( $c$  = total effect)
- (2) The independent variable must significantly predict the mediator ( $a$ )
- (3) The mediator should significantly predict the dependent variable ( $b$ )
- (4) The effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable should be gone (fully mediated) or reduced (partially mediated) when the mediator is added to the relationship ( $c'$  = direct effect)

The results on Hypothesis 1a to 1c indicate that bullying experience at T1 predicted depressive symptoms, sleep disturbances including difficulties in falling asleep, waking up at night and nightmares, as well as increased pressure to get things done and frustrations within employees even after controlling for socio-demographic variables (gender, age and level of education) and negative affect at T3. Following the steps above, technically, only those who were significantly predicted by T1 workplace bullying ( $a$  = total effect) should be tested in the model. However, most researchers agree that Step 1 does not necessarily have to be met (Hayes, 2009; Rucker et al., 2011) for mediational testing. This is because it is still possible to conclude mediational relationships even if the total effect is not significant. Therefore, all variables were included to check if any of the three PC variables (RNT, worry and rumination) would mediate the relationship even though T1 workplace bullying did not significantly predict these T3 health and well-being

outcomes (e.g. anxiety, stress, gastrointestinal problems, respiratory infections and emotional exhaustion). Therefore, I used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) in conducting multiple mediations (Model 4). Socio-demographic variables including age, gender and level of education as well as negative affect at T3 were included in the model as covariates, so it would be possible to measure the unique contribution of the variables relative to one another (Hayes, 2013).

Further, the indirect effects of bullying experience on HWB complaints were bootstrapped 5,000 times, allowing me to generate the bootstrap sampling distributions of the total and each specific indirect effect through a resampling process. In addition to applying 5,000 bootstrap resampling from the obtained data, 95% bias-corrected and accelerated confidence intervals (CI) was also utilised which is an approach considered to be more accurate particularly for studies with moderate sample sizes (Shrout and Bolger, 2002). Besides that, bootstrapping methods are more efficient than other methods (e.g. causal step approach, product of coefficient strategy) for testing multiple mediators simultaneously (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). This approach suggests that an indirect effect is considered significant when the upper and lower bound of the corrected CI does not contain zero. On top of that, further exploratory tests of the pairwise contrasts of the indirect effects were carried out to identify which mediator had higher or lower indirect effects than the other.

The results below yielded effect size, standard errors, and confidence intervals for each of the indirect effects, direct effects and total model effects. Table 21 presents the mediation results for T3 health and well-being outcomes showing unstandardized coefficients for the direct effect of T1 workplace bullying on T3 health and well-being outcomes when controlling for the indirect effect (path c'), the indirect effect (a\*b) and the 95% confidence intervals. The relationship between T1 workplace bullying and the mediators at T2, repetitive negative thinking (RNT) ( $B = .58$ ,  $CI_{95} = .25, .92$ ), worry ( $B = .09$ ,  $CI_{95} = .00, .18$ ) and rumination ( $B = .18$ ,  $CI_{95} = .07, .30$ ) were the same for all variables.



Table 21 Mediation of the effect of workplace bullying (T1) on health and well-being outcomes (T3) through perseverative cognition (T2).

Outcome	Total effect (c)	Direct effect (c')	Indirect effect of X on Y (ab)						Pairwise contrast of Indirect Effects			
			RNT		Worry		Rumination		RNT vs Worry	RNT vs Rumination	Worry vs Rumination	
			B	CI	B	CI	B	CI	B	B	B	
<u>Mental Health</u>												
Depression	.08*	-.02	.05*	.01, .10	.01	-.01, .04	.03	-.01, .06	.04	.02	-.02	
Anxiety	.05	-.02	.03*	.00, .08	.02*	.00, .08	.01	-.03, .05	.01	.02	.01	
Stress	.06	-.04	.05*	.01, .11	.04*	.00, .10	.02	-.01, .05	.01	.03	.02	
<u>Psychosomatic Complaints</u>												
Sleep Disturbances	.10*	.04	.06*	.01, .11	.02	-.01, .06	-.01	-.04, .01	.04	.07*	-.03	
Headache	.11*	.05	.05*	.01, .10	.01	-.01, .06	.01	-.02, .04	.04	.04	-.00	
Gastrointestinal	.07	.00	.05*	.01, .11	.02	-.01, .07	.01	-.03, .05	.03	.04	-.01	
Respiratory	.01	-.01	.02*	.00, .05	-.00	-.01, .01	-.00	-.02, .01	.02	.02	-.00	
<u>Emotional Exhaustion</u>	.22	.10	.02	-.08, .12	.05	-.02, .12	.06	-.03, .19	-.03	-.04	-.01	

Note: T1 workplace bullying with repetitive negative thinking (RNT) (B = .58, CI<sub>95</sub> = .25, .92), worry (B = .09, CI<sub>95</sub> = .00, .18) and rumination (B = .18, CI<sub>95</sub> = .07, .30)

For the depression model, significant mediation was found only for T2 repetitive negative thinking (RNT) ( $B = .01$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.01, .04$ ) but not for T2 worry ( $B = .01$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.01, .06$ ) and rumination ( $B = .03$ ,  $CI_{95} = .01, .10$ ) with approximately 46.7% of variance accounted by the predictors in the model. RNT at T2 fully mediated the relationship between T1 workplace bullying and T3 depression with the direct effect of T1 workplace bullying on depression no longer being significant ( $B_c = -.02$ ) from its total effect model ( $B_c = .08^*$ ). Results of the pairwise contrast of the indirect effect was not reported since RNT was the only mediator with significant indirect effect.

Meanwhile, results showed no significant total effect ( $B_c = .05$ ) or direct effect ( $B = -.02$ ) for the anxiety model, but the results exhibited a significant indirect effect on T3 anxiety, mediated through RNT ( $B = .03$ ,  $CI_{95} = .00, .08$ ) and T2 worry ( $B = .02$ ,  $CI_{95} = .00, .08$ ) but not through rumination ( $B = .01$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.03, .05$ ) with approximately 35.3% of variance accounted by the predictors in the model. This time, the pairwise contrast of the indirect effect was examined since two mediators (RNT and worry) were found significant. However, results revealed that the two indirect effects (through workplace bullying and anxiety) did not differ significantly from each other ( $B = .01$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.06, .07$ ).

Similarly, although results showed no significant total effect ( $B_c = .06$ ) or direct effect ( $B_c = -.04$ ), the results exhibited a significant indirect effect on T3 stress, mediated through RNT ( $B = .05$ ,  $CI_{95} = .01, .11$ ) and T2 worry ( $B = .04$ ,  $CI_{95} = .00, .10$ ) but not through rumination ( $B = .02$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.01, .05$ ) with approximately 48.9% of variance accounted by the predictors in the model. An examination of pairwise contrasts from the results of the mediation test revealed that the two indirect effects (RNT and worry) did not differ significantly from each other in predicting stress at T3 ( $B = .01$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.06, .07$ ). This provides some support for Hypothesis 3a showing the relationship between T1 workplace bullying with T3 depression fully mediated by RNT at T2, whereas the relationship between T1 workplace bullying with T3 anxiety and T3 stress was mediated by RNT and worry at T2.

We now turn to the results of the mediation tests on psychosomatic complaints at T3 including sleep disturbances, headache complaints, gastrointestinal and respiratory infections (Hypothesis 3b). The results in Table 21 shows that T3 sleeping difficulties via T2 repetitive negative thinking ( $B = .06$ ,  $CI_{95} = .01, .11$ ) but not via T2 worry ( $B = .02$ ,

CI<sub>95</sub> = -.01, .06) and T2 rumination (B = -.01, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.04, .01) with approximately 48.5% of variance accounted by the predictors in the model. RNT at T2 fully mediated the relationship between T1 workplace bullying and T3 sleeping disturbances with the direct effect of T1 workplace bullying on depression no longer being significant (B<sub>c'</sub> = .04) from its total effect model (B<sub>c</sub> = .10\*). Results of the pairwise contrast of the indirect effect was not reported since RNT was the only mediator with significant indirect effect. Similarly, T1 workplace bullying predicts T3 headache via T2 repetitive negative thinking (B = .05, CI<sub>95</sub> = .01, .10) but not via T2 worry (B = .01, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.01, .06) and T2 rumination (B = .01, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.02, .04) with approximately 43.2% of variance accounted by the predictors in the model. RNT at T2 fully mediated the relationship between T1 workplace bullying and T3 headache with the direct effect of T1 workplace bullying on depression no longer being significant (B<sub>c'</sub> = .05) from its total effect model (B<sub>c</sub> = .11\*).

Results showed no significant total effect (B<sub>c</sub> = .07) or direct effect (B = -.00) for the gastrointestinal complaint model, but the results exhibited a significant indirect effect on T3 gastrointestinal problems mediated through RNT (B = .05, CI<sub>95</sub> = .01, .11) but not through T2 worry (B = .02, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.01, .07) and T2 rumination (B = .01, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.03, .05) with approximately 30.0% of variance accounted by the predictors in the model. This was similar for the final psychosomatic model, significant indirect effect was found in the relationship with T1 workplace bullying and respiratory infections at T3 through RNT (B = .02, CI<sub>95</sub> = .00, .05) but not through T2 worry (B = -.00, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.01, .01) and T2 rumination (B = -.01, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.02, .01) with approximately 28.9% of variance accounted by the predictors in the model. However, for emotional exhaustion at T3, no indirect effect (RNT, B = .02, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.08, .12; worry, B = .05, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.02, .12; rumination, B = .06, CI<sub>95</sub> = -.03, .19;) was found in the mediation analysis.

To sum up the findings of the mediation test in psychosomatic complaints model, outcomes fully mediated by RNT at T2 was depression, anxiety, stress, sleeping disturbances and headaches complaints. However, outcomes such as anxiety and stress had no total effect or direct effect but exhibited an indirect effect through RNT and worry. Thus, the presence of an indirect effect on psychosomatic complaints accepts Hypothesis 3b whereas the absence of an indirect effect on emotional exhaustion rejects Hypothesis 3c. After identifying the indirect effects of PC (RNT, worry and rumination) on the relationships between T1 workplace bullying and T3 health and well-being outcomes, the analysis is expanded further by investigating if the size of the indirect effect is moderated

by the hypothesised coping styles (self-doubt, ignoring, passive coping and problem-solving). The results of the analysis will be presented in the following section.

#### 5.4.3 The Moderated-Mediation Relationships among the respective coping strategies for Workplace bullying and Perseverative Cognition

This section will present the moderated-mediation analysis carried out on the relationship between workplace bullying and health and well-being outcomes. Hypothesis 4 proposed that coping strategies (self-doubt, ignore, passive, problem solving) at Time 1 would moderate the effect of workplace bullying in Time 1 on employees' tendencies to engage in PC at Time 2. Assuming that the behavioural reaction (coping) would occur almost instantaneously after bullying is experienced, coping strategies were measured at Time 1 which was at the same time when data on their bullying experience was being collected. Thus, this would allow me to measure the effect of coping strategies on the tendency to engage in T2 PC as a consequence of workplace bullying at Time 1, and hence, also effecting on the health and well-being outcomes at T3. In addition to that, I was also interested to explore if T2 coping would interact with T2 PC which could also affect the mediation relationship. Therefore, below is the recap of the fourth hypothesis of this study.

**Hypothesis 4:** The indirect association between workplace bullying and mental health (4a), psychosomatic complaints (4b) and emotional exhaustion (4c) through perseverative cognition is conditional upon types of coping, such that the relationship between workplace bullying and health and well-being outcomes is weaker when active coping is utilised.

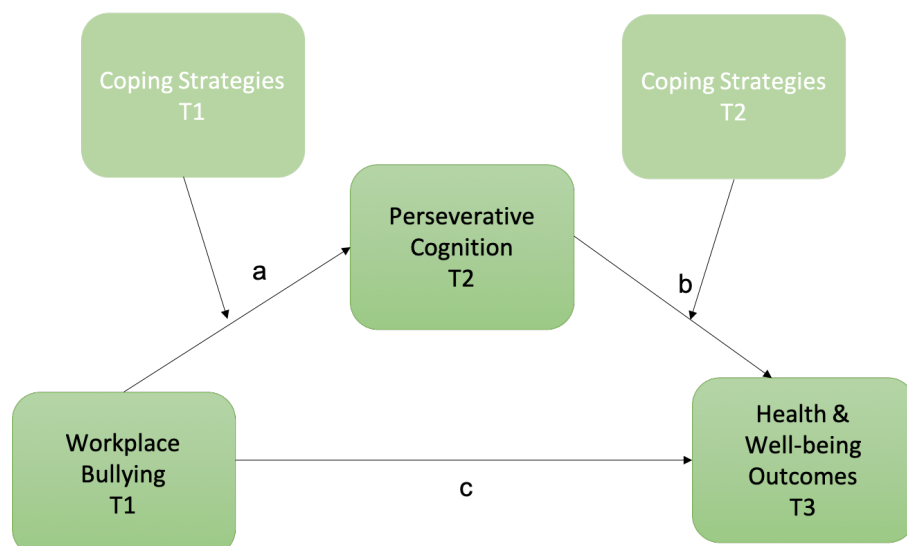
*Hypothesis 4a:* The indirect association between workplace bullying and depression, anxiety and stress through perseverative cognition is conditional upon types of coping, such that the relationship between workplace bullying and mental health outcomes is weaker when active coping is utilised and stronger when non-active coping is utilised.

*Hypothesis 4b:* The indirect association between workplace bullying and sleep disturbances, headache, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections through perseverative cognition is conditional upon types of coping, such that the

relationship between workplace bullying and psychosomatic complaints is weaker when active coping is utilised and stronger when non-active coping is utilised.

*Hypothesis 4c:* The indirect association between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion through perseverative cognition is conditional upon types of coping, such that the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion is weaker when active coping is utilised and stronger when non-active coping is utilised.

Hypotheses 4a, 4b, 4c and 4d predicted that coping would moderate the above mediation effects (Figure 17). Such effects are referred to as moderated mediation (Edwards and Lambert, 2007). There are a few methods that can be used to measure the conditional indirect effect in moderated mediation models (Edwards and Lambert, 2007). This includes the *piecemeal approach* where mediators and moderators are analysed separately, the *subgroup approach* where the sample is split based on the moderator and the mediation effects are tested within each subgroup and the *moderated causal steps approach* where moderation is tested before and after controlling for mediators. This differs from Preacher, Rucker and Hayes (2007) who suggested an interaction approach where the interaction between the predictor variable and moderator is included in the model as loading onto the relationship between the predictor and mediator. As such, coping moderates the mediated effects of bullying experiences T1 on HWB complaints T3 through PC T2 - a moderated mediation case which will be tested using Model 21 via PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013). Four models were computed using bootstrap samples for computing conditional indirect effects at various values for each moderator.



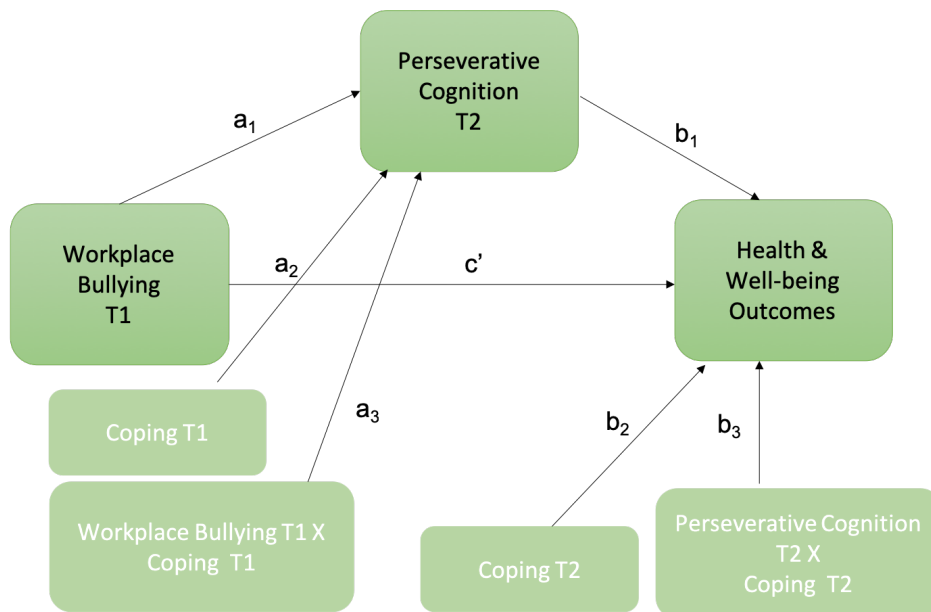


Figure 17 Coping Strategies Moderated-Mediation Model in PROCESS (Model 7)

Model 21 in PROCESS was selected to best represent the fourth hypothesis that the mediating role of PC between workplace bullying and health and well-being outcomes varies conditionally based on coping strategies. Specifically, participants engaging in higher active coping would show a weaker relationship between workplace bullying and negative health and well-being outcomes. The top model in Figure 17 depicts the conceptual representation of predicting that coping strategies will modify the path between experiencing workplace bullying and PC. The bottom model in Figure 17 represents the statistical model, depicting how in PROCESS the interaction between coping strategies and workplace bullying is utilised as the moderating variable in the model.

To test the moderated-mediation (Hypothesis 4), a few conditions were examined (Muller et al., 2005; Preacher et al., 2007):

- (1) Significant effect of workplace bullying experience at T1 on HWB complaints at T3.
- (2) Significant effect of PC in T2 on HWB complaints T3.
- (3) Interaction between bullying experience T1 and coping styles T1 in predicting PC at T2.
- (4) Interaction between PC at T2 and coping styles T2 in predicting HWB complaints at T3.

- (5) Different conditional indirect effect of workplace bullying experience T1 on HWB at T3, via PC T2, across high, moderate and low levels of coping with bullying T1.

To comply with conditions 1 and 2, I included models which demonstrated mediation through T2 PC between T1 workplace bullying with T3 HWB complaints. The total number of models that were analysed for conditional indirect effect were 7 models. These included models with full mediation which are depression, sleep disturbances and headache complaints as well as models with mediation (but without a significant direct effect) which are anxiety stress, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections.

Condition 3 and 4 was examined by measuring the interaction effect of each coping style with bullying experience and PC on the eight models (depression, difficulty in falling asleep, headache due to frustration and pressure anxiety stress, having to eat carefully and indigestion). If any significant interaction is present, I will then examine the conditional indirect effects (condition 5) in each model which provides an inferential test as to whether the indirect effect is linearly related to the moderator. If the confidence interval includes zero, then there is no definitive evidence of moderated mediation. Nevertheless, if the confidence interval excludes zero, we can infer that evidence for moderated mediation emerges and the relationship between the indirect effect and the moderator is significant.

Table 22 presents the results of the interaction between T1 workplace bullying and T1 coping strategies (self-doubt, ignore, passive and problem solving) on PC at T2 (RNT, worry and rumination). Results show no significant interaction between workplace bullying and T1 coping strategies including self-doubt, passive and problem solving except for T1 ignoring which had a significant interaction on worry ( $B = .02^{**}$ ,  $CI_{95} = .01, .04$ ) and rumination ( $B = .02$ ,  $CI_{95} = .00, .05$ ) but not on repetitive negative thinking ( $B = .04$ ,  $CI_{95} = -.01, .11$ ).

Table 22 Estimates for T2 perseverative cognition as dependent variable (DV)

Direct Effects	Coping											
	Self-Doubt			Ignore			Passive			Problem Solving		
	b	SE	95%CI	b	SE	95%CI	b	SE	95%CI	b	SE	95%CI
<b>DV = RNT</b>												
Bullying Exp.	.46**	.17	.11, .81	.63**	.17	.28, .97	.51***	.17	.16, .85	.54*	.18	.18, .89
Coping T1	.60	.46	-.32, 1.52	.16	.59	-1.00, 1.33	1.23	1.08	-.94, 3.40	.75	.76	-.77, 2.27
Bullying *	.04	.03	-.01, .11	.03	.03	-.04, .10	.09	.06	-.04, .21	.00	.07	-.14, .14
Coping T1												
<b>DV = Worry</b>												
Bullying Exp.	.06	.05	-.03, .15	.12**	.04	.04, .21	.06	.04	-.03, .14	.08	.05	-.01, .17
Coping T1	.17	.12	-.07, .41	.27	.14	-.01, .55	.70*	.27	.17, 1.23	.22	.20	-.17, .62
Bullying *	.01	.01	-.01, .03	.02**	.01	.01, .04	.02	.16	-.01, .05	-.01	.02	-.04, .03
Coping T1												
<b>DV = Rumination</b>												
Bullying Exp.	.14*	.01	.02, .26	.22***	.05	.10, .33	.15*	.06	.03, .26	.19**	.06	.07, .32
Coping T1	.27	.16	-.05, .59	.22	.20	-.17, .62	.70	.37	-.04, 1.44	.13	.26	-.40, .65
Bullying *	.01	.01	-.01, .03	.02*	.01	.00, .05	.03	.02	-.01, .07	-.03	.02	-.08, .02
Coping T1												

Note: p\* < .05, p\*\* < .01, p\*\*\* < .001

Thus, conventional procedures were applied for plotting simple slopes when the score of ignoring was one standard deviation below and above the mean. The simple slope in Figure 18 showed a significant relationship between workplace bullying and worry when the scores on ignoring were average ( $M = .12, t = 3.00, p < .01$ ) and high ( $M + 1 \text{ SD} = .20, t = 3.67, p < .001$ ), whereas no significant relationship was found when scores on ignoring were low ( $M - 1 \text{ SD} = .05, t = 1.19, p > .05$ ).



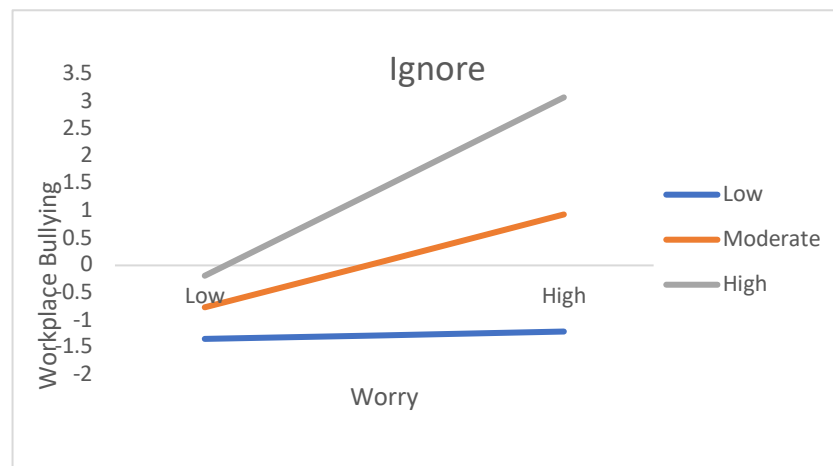


Figure 18 Interaction Effect of Ignoring between Workplace Bullying and Worry

Meanwhile, the simple slope in Figure 19 showed significant relationship between workplace bullying and rumination at all levels of ignoring: low ( $M - 1\text{ SD} = .14, t = 2.27, p < .05$ ), average ( $M = .22, t = 3.70, p < .001$ ) and high ( $M + 1\text{ SD} = .29, t = 3.86, p < .001$ ). Results from further examination on the interaction between PC and coping skills as well as the conditional indirect effects are presented in Table 23 and Table 24.



Figure 19 Interaction Effect of Ignoring between Workplace Bullying and Rumination

Table 23 presents the results for the interaction effect between coping strategies and PC and the conditional indirect effects on mental illness (depression, anxiety and stress). The direct effect of workplace bullying was not found to be significant on depression, anxiety and stress in all four types of coping ( $p > .05$ ). This aligns with the result from the mediation test indicating full mediation by repetitive negative thinking. It was hypothesised that the participants with higher engagement with active coping would show weaker mediation than those with lower engagement with active coping. Hence, this also

assumes that the participants who utilise more non-active coping strategies like self-doubt, ignoring and passive coping would show stronger mediation than those utilising active coping strategies.

Table 23 Coping style moderated-mediation model of workplace bullying experience on mental illness

Predictor	Coping											
	Self-Doubt T2			Ignore T2			Passive T2			Problem Solving T2		
	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
<b>Direct effects</b>	<b>DV = Depression</b>											
Bullying	-.02	.04	.62	.03	.04	.47	.01	.04	.78	-.01	.04	.66
RNT	.10**	.03	.00	.10**	.03	.00	.08**	.03	.01	.09**	.03	.00
Coping T2	.24*	.11	.04	-.02	.12	.86	.20	.24	.39	.47***	.14	.00
RNT*Coping T2	-.01	.00	.69	.01	.01	.22	.01	.01	.41	.02*	.01	.04
<b>Conditional indirect effect</b>	<i>Workplace Bullying → RNT → Depression</i>											
										b	SE	95%CI
Low coping (-1 SD)										.00	.00	-
Moderate coping (M)										.00	.01	-
High coping (+1 SD)										.00	.01	-
												.03,.02
<b>Direct effects</b>	<b>DV = Anxiety</b>											
	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
Bullying	.01	.05	.85	-.04	.05	.36	-.02	.05	.59	-.03	.05	.49
RNT	.07*	.03	.03	.06	.03	.80	.08*	.03	.02	.05	.03	.10
Worry	.37**	.14	.00	.28*	.14	.04	.18	.13	.17	.28*	.12	.02
Coping T2	-.05	.13	.73	-.36*	.15	.02	-.21	.28	.46	.28	.18	.12
RNT*Coping T2	-.01	.01	.11	-.01	.01	.43	-.01	.01	.23	.01	.01	.53
Worry*Coping T2	.02	.03	.50	.07*	.03	.04	-.00	.06	.97	.00	.04	.97
<b>Conditional indirect effect</b>	<i>Workplace Bullying → Worry → Anxiety</i>											
				b	SE	95%CI						
Low coping (-1 SD)				.00	.01	-						.01,.02
Moderate coping (M)				.01*	.01	.00,.03						
High coping (+1 SD)				.01*	.01	.00,.03						
<b>Direct effects</b>	<b>DV = Stress</b>											
	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
Bullying	-.03	.04	.48	-.03	.04	.44	-.04	.04	.27	-.03	.04	.42
RNT	.08**	.03	.00	.08**	.03	.00	.09**	.03	.00	.08*	.03	.00
Worry	.45**	.12	.00	.43**	.12	.00	.34**	.11	.00	.45**	.11	.00
Coping T2	.16	.11	.16	-.24	.12	.06	.21	.23	.36	.40*	.15	.01
RNT*Coping T2	-.01	.01	.26	-.01	.01	.19	-.01	.01	.45	.01	.01	.23
Worry*Coping T2	.01	.02	.56	.01*	.03	.01	.05	.05	.30	-.01	.03	.63

Conditional indirect effects	<i>Workplace Bullying</i> → <i>Worry</i> → <i>Stress</i>		
	b	SE	95%CI
Low coping (-1 SD)	.15	.17	- .19,.48
Moderate coping (M)	.01*	.01	.00,.03
High coping (+1 SD)	.01*	.01	.00,.04

Note:  $p^* < .05$ ,  $p^{**} < .01$ ,  $p^{***} < .001$

Results indicated that the effect of the interaction between T2 RNT and T2 problem solving on depression was significant ( $B = .02$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Again, simple slopes were plotted in Figure 20 where the score of T2 problem solving was one standard deviation below and above the mean. The simple slope indicates a significant relationship between RNT and depression when scores on problem solving were on average [ $M = .08$  ( $t = 3.06$ ,  $p < .05$ )] and high [ $M + 1 SD = .13$  ( $t = 3.48$ ,  $p < .001$ )]. Although results indicated the interaction effect between RNT and T2 problem solving influenced depression, a more detailed examination of the conditional indirect effects model was needed.

This was only carried out with T2 problem solving since the results did not indicate any interaction effect between T2 RNT and the other T2 coping strategies (self-doubt, ignoring and passive). The conditional indirect effect of workplace bullying on depression through RNT at the values of T2 problem solving was analysed when the scores of T2 problem solving were the sample mean and  $\pm 1 SD$ . The mean of T2 problem solving was zero because the score was mean centred. It was revealed that no significant conditional indirect effect was found as the bootstrapped CIs included zero in their values [ $M - 1 SD = BCa 95\% CI (-.01, .01)$ ;  $M = BCa 95\% CI (-.02, .01)$ ;  $M + 1SD = BCa 95\% CI (-.03, .02)$ ]. In other words, the indirect effect of workplace bullying on depression through RNT was not influenced by coping strategies.

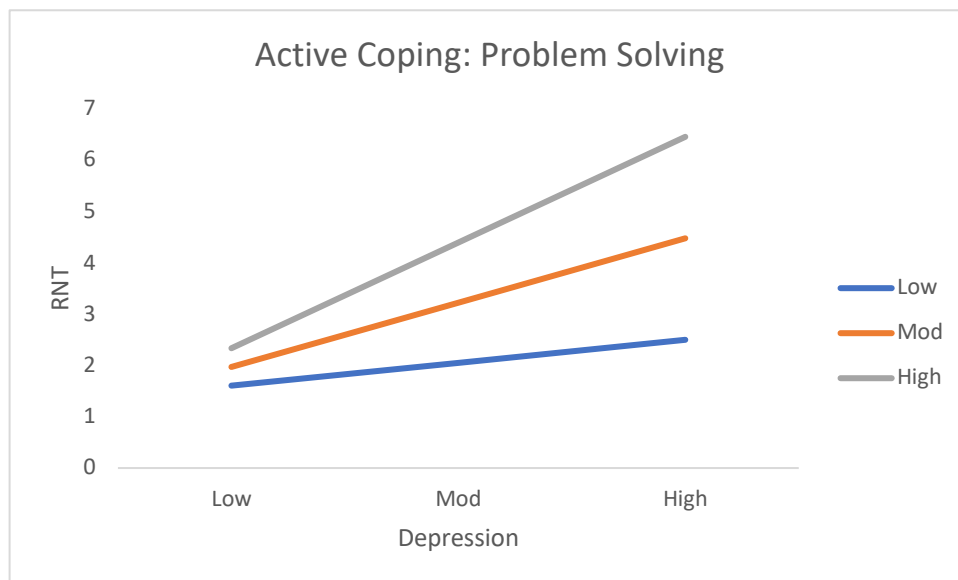


Figure 20 Interaction Effect of Active Coping Problem: Solving Coping between RNT and depression

For the anxiety model, moderated mediation was analysed twice with RNT as the mediator and worry as the mediator. RNT was not influenced by T1 coping and did not have any interactions with T2 coping in the anxiety model. However, worry was found to be influenced by the interaction between workplace bullying and high scores of T1 ignoring (Table 22) and had significant interactions with T2 ignoring ( $B = .07$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The simple slope in Figure 21 indicates significant relationship between worry and anxiety when scores on ignoring were high [ $M + 1 SD = .49$  ( $t = 3.65$ ,  $p < .001$ )]. In other words, average and high levels of ignoring at T1 moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and worry, whereas high levels of ignoring at T2 moderates the relationship between worry and anxiety. Further examination of the conditional indirect effects showed significant results when ignoring was at its mean level [ $M = BCa$  95 % CI (.00, .03)] and when ignoring was high [ $M + 1SD = BCa$  95 % CI (.00, .03)]. In other words, the indirect effect of workplace bullying on anxiety through worry were significant when score on ignoring was average or high.



Figure 21 Interaction Effect of Ignoring between worry and anxiety

Similarly, the stress model was analysed twice where first, RNT was the mediator, then secondly when worry was the mediator. Worry was found to be influenced by the interaction between workplace bullying and high scores of T1 ignoring (Table 22) and had significant interactions with T2 ignoring ( $B = .01, SE = .03, p < .05$ ). The simple slope in Figure 22 indicates significant relationship between worry and stress when scores on ignoring were average [ $M = .38 (t = 3.41, p < .01)$ ] and high [ $M + 1 SD = .61 (t = 5.34, p < .001)$ ]. In other words, high levels of ignoring at T1 moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and worry, whereas high levels of ignoring at T2 moderates the relationship between worry and stress. Further examination of the conditional indirect effects showed significant results when ignoring was at its mean level [ $M = BCa 95 \% CI (.00, .03)$ ] and when ignoring was high [ $M + 1SD = BCa 95 \% CI (.00, .04)$ ]. In other words, the indirect effect of workplace bullying on stress through worrying increased when ignoring was at mean level or high. However, workplace bullying had no effect on increasing worry when the score on ignoring was low. Thus, this significant conditional indirect effect means that ignoring amplifies the mediation effect of worrying between workplace bullying and stress. Taken together, ignoring moderates the mediation relationship of workplace bullying and anxiety and stress through worry partially accepts hypothesis 4a where ignoring (non-active coping) strengthens the mediation relationship.

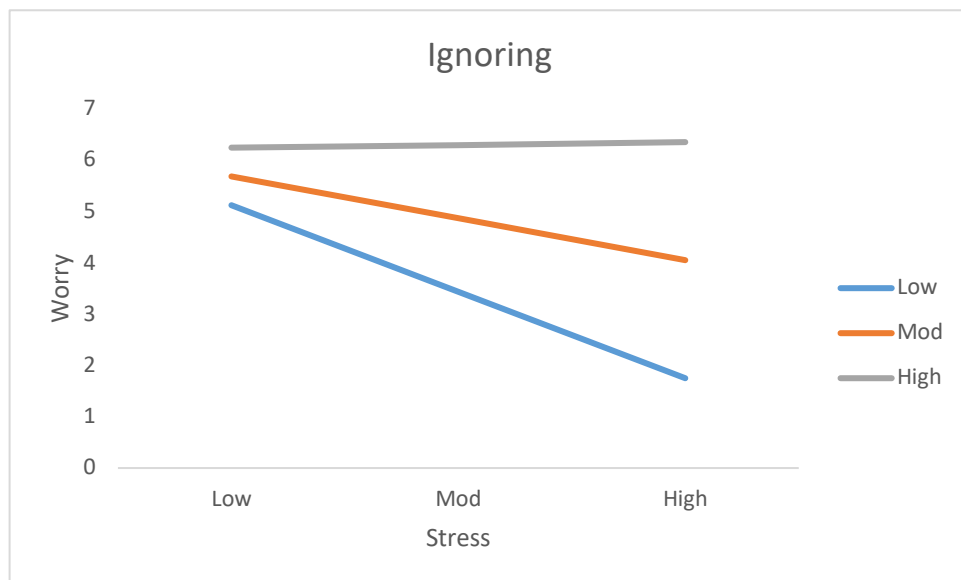


Figure 22 Interaction Effect of Ignoring between worry and stress

We now look at the moderated-mediation analysis on psychosomatic models that have mediation present in their model. This includes sleep disturbances, headache complaints, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infection. Table 24 presents the results for the interaction effect between T2 coping strategies and T2 RNT on psychosomatic symptoms. The direct effect of workplace bullying was not found to be significant on psychosomatic symptoms in all four types of coping ( $p > .05$ ). This aligns with the results from the mediation test indicating full mediation by repetitive negative thinking. It was hypothesised that participants with higher engagement with active coping would show weaker mediation than those with lower engagement with active coping. Hence, this also assumes that participants who utilised more non-active coping strategies like self-doubt, ignoring and passive coping would show stronger mediation than those utilising active coping strategies.

Results show no interaction effect that exists between RNT and coping strategies at T2 except for T2 ignoring on gastrointestinal problems. The simple slope in Figure 23 indicates significant relationship between T2 RNT and gastrointestinal problems when scores on ignoring were low [ $M - 1 = .16$  ( $t = 3.12$ ,  $p < .01$ )] and average [ $M SD = .11$  ( $t = 3.01$ ,  $p < .05$ )]. In other words, low levels and average levels of ignoring at T2 moderates the relationship between RNT and gastrointestinal problems. Although results indicated the interaction effect between RNT and T2 ignore influenced gastrointestinal problems, a more detailed examination of the conditional indirect effects model was needed.

This was only carried out with T2 passive coping since the results did not indicate any interaction effect between T2 RNT and the other T2 coping strategies (self-doubt, ignoring and problem-solving). The conditional indirect effect of workplace bullying on gastrointestinal problems through RNT at the values of T2 passive coping was analysed when the scores of T2 passive coping were the sample mean and  $\pm 1$  SD. The mean of T2 passive coping was zero because the score was mean centred. It was revealed that no significant conditional indirect effect was found as the bootstrapped CIs included zero in their values [M -1 SD = BCa 95 % CI (-.03, .02); M = BCa 95 % CI (-.02, .02); M +1SD = BCa 95 % CI (-.01, .01)]. In other words, the indirect effect of workplace bullying on gastrointestinal problems through RNT was not influenced by coping strategies.

Table 24 Coping style moderated-mediation model of workplace bullying experience on difficulty falling asleep and headaches (due to frustration and pressure to get things done)

Predictor	Coping											
	Self-Doubt			Ignore			Passive			Problem Solving		
	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
<b>Direct effects</b>												
<i>DV = Sleep difficulties</i>												
Bullying	.05	.03	.12	.04	.03	.18	.05	.03	.11	.04	.04	.31
RNT	.12***	.03	.00	.09***	.02	.00	.06*	.03	.04	.11***	.03	.00
Coping T2	-.16	.09	.09	-.02	.11	.82	-.11	.08	.17	-.07	.14	.71
RNT*Coping T2	-.00	.00	.38	.00	.01	.61	.01	.01	.40	.01	.01	.51
<b>Direct effects</b>												
<i>DV = Headache</i>												
Bullying	.05	.04	.22	.06	.04	.16	.06	.04	.18	.03	.04	.43
RNT	.09**	.03	.00	.09**	.03	.00	.07	.03	.06	.08**	.03	.01
Coping T2	.05	.11	.65	-.09	.12	.48	-.11	.23	.62	.26	.17	.13
RNT*Coping T2	-.01	.01	.19	-.00	.01	.45	.00	.01	.71	-.00	.01	.88
<b>Direct effects</b>												
<i>DV = Gastrointestinal</i>												
Bullying	.02	.05	.55	.02	.05	.74	.03	.05	.58	.01	.05	.81
RNT	.13***	.03	.00	.11**	.04	.00	.13**	.04	.00	.06	.04	.10
Coping T2	-.21	.13	.11	-.25	.16	.14	-.47	.26	.08	-.24	.21	.25
RNT*Coping T2	-.02	.01	.01	-.01	.01	.08	-.04**	.01	.00	-.03	.02	.03
<b>Conditional indirect effects</b>												
<i>Workplace Bullying → RNT → Gastrointestinal</i>												
				B	SE	95%CI						
Low coping (-1 SD)				.20	.05	.11,.31						
Moderate coping (M)				.14	.04	.05,.21						
High coping (+1 SD)				.06	.04	-.03,.15						
<b>Direct effects</b>												
<i>DV = Respiratory</i>												
Bullying	-.01	.02	.59	-.01	.02	.71	-.01	.02	.59	-.01	.02	.69
RNT	.04*	.02	.05	.04*	.02	.04	.04	.02	.07	.04*	.02	.02
Coping T2	-.02	.06	.79	.02	.08	.80	.08	.14	.55	.03	.10	.78
RNT*Coping T2	.01	.00	.13	.00	.00	.57	.01	.01	.45	.00	.01	.56

Note: p\* < .05, p\*\* < .01, p\*\*\* < .001



Taken together, the absence of significant conditional indirect effects (moderated-mediation) at varied levels of coping strategies between workplace bullying and psychosomatic complaints through PC rejects hypothesis 4b. In addition to that, Hypothesis 4c was automatically rejected as the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion through PC did not exist. Thus, we can conclude that moderated-mediation is present in anxiety and stress models through worrying where all were moderated by different levels of ignoring both at T1 and T2.

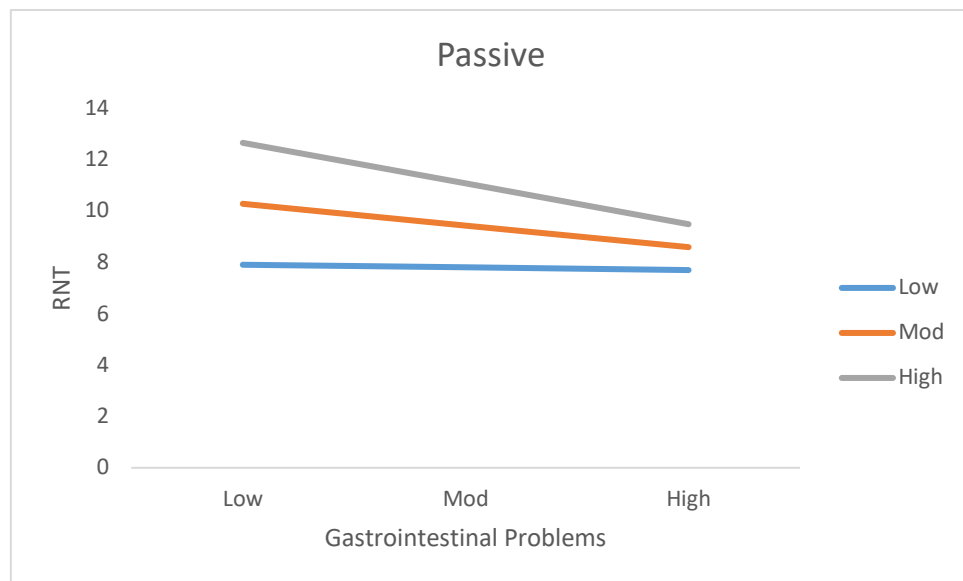


Figure 23 Interaction Effect of Passive coping between RNT and having to eat carefully

## 5.5 Discussion

The purpose of Study 1 was to identify how PC and coping played a role in the relationships among workplace bullying and health and well-being complaints. Using the mediation and moderated mediation models, I analysed the relationships among T1 workplace bullying and T3 health and well-being complaints through T2 PC and T1 and T2 coping strategies. Four hypotheses were tested in measuring the relationships after controlling for potential covariates, causal relationships, mediating role and moderated-mediating role. Overall, from the total number of participants which responded to all three waves (n=70), more than half (64%) had experienced at least one negative act on a monthly basis, and more than a quarter (38.5%) were victims of bullying where they were mistreated at least on a weekly basis. In other words, out of the 70 participants, only 1 person did not experience any of the negative behaviours listed in the survey across the

three time-points. This shows an alarming percentage of people who had experienced inappropriate behaviours at the workplace.

Many studies on workplace bullying prevalence have shown varied percentages who were victims of bullying from the total number of their sample (Ariza-Montes, Muniz, Montero-Simó and Araque-Padilla, 2013; Fisher-blando, 2008; Seo, 2010; Namie et al., 2014). However, this depended on a few reasons including response rates, differences in culture and quality of work environment, and the criteria used to identify victims or targets. Some studies used a timeframe of 12 months (Ariza-Montes et al., 2013; Fisher-blando, 2008) while some studies used 6 months as the timeframe for participants to recall their experience of being bullied (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Lutgen-sandvik et al., 2007). The prevalence rate in this study was quite high with more than a quarter from the sample of the study. However, this may be due to the nature of the study which did not provide any definition of bullying prior to survey. This could be supported by a meta-analysis study by Nielsen, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2010), where reporting of workplace bullying were lower when bullying was defined for respondents compared to surveys that did not provide any definition to respondents.

In terms of change in participants bullying experience, results showed that bullying experience decreased over time for this sample, with significant change only at Time 3 and not at Time 2. This suggests that their bullying experiences took time to decrease. Even after two months after the first response were recorded, their bullying experience did not change much. This result may suggest that the bullying experience were being prolonged which would influence them to engage in PC. The types of bullying behaviours experienced were also different across time. At Time 1, the top bullying behaviours experienced were more work-related. This was also the case in Time 2, where most participants reported more work-related bullying behaviours. However, in Time 3, where bullying experienced decreased significantly, the bullying behaviours which were most highly reported were 'being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work'. This behaviour, according to Einarsen et al. (2009), is a type of person-related bullying.

This finding can be supported by the bullying escalation theory where conflict which normally sparks from work-related arguments escalates to something that is personal over time when it goes unresolved (Zapf and Gross, 2001). In terms of the source of bullying or perpetrators, participants in Time 2 mostly reported bullying from their superiors, whereas in Time 3, responses were almost equally spread between superiors,

colleagues and customers as well as those who did not want to identify their perpetrators. Since work-related bullying were mostly reported at Time 2, it can be suggested that work-related bullying experienced by the participants were mostly top-down (bullied by their superiors). I did not have data of perpetrators from Time 1 due to a measurement error. Therefore, only data of perpetrators in Time 2 and Time 3 reported by participants were presented in this report. Studies on perpetrators specifically in workplace bullying are quite scarce and empirical knowledge is quite difficult to obtain, especially since information on this obtained primarily from self-reports of victims of bullying (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2007). Nevertheless, a lot of the bullying studies reported perpetrators to be among supervisors and managers more often than subordinates (Harris et al., 2017; Pan and Jia Lin, 2016; Whitaker, 2012).

Furthermore, a majority of the participants in the sample (84%) are considered young, aged between 18-28 years old. Studies have shown mixed evidence when it comes to age differences. Some have established that older employees are more likely to be victims of workplace bullying (e.g. Strandmark and Hallberg, 2007), while some studies have established that younger employees are more vulnerable to bullying (e.g. Sims, Sun and Sims, 2013). Relating it to a cultural point of view, the samples from this study belong to a country that has the highest score on the Power Distance Index (The Iclif Leadership and Governance Centre, 2014; The Star, 2014). Management techniques practiced by older employees who believe that young employees require close supervision and sometimes the use of threats to ensure productivity might not transition well to the modern employees with different ways of upbringing. Disciplining techniques or scolding from a person who is older in the family may be accepted. However, it might be a different case if it is from a supervisor in the organisation.

On top of that, younger and independently minded employees may no longer accept this as the norm although the results did show that the majority used ignoring as the strategy to cope with bullying while passive coping was the second most preferred coping strategy used to cope with bullying. The findings here support earlier evidence which predicted avoidance behaviours (e.g. such as taking sick leave or quitting their job) and doing nothing (e.g. ignoring the problem or wait and hope that the bullying stops) (Djurkovic, McCormack and Casimir, 2008; Hogh and Dofradottir, 2001b; Olafsson and Johannsdottir, 2004). Even though conflict research has shown that individuals often start with active/ constructive strategies (voice) (Zapf and Gross, 2001), given that the definition of workplace bullying includes power imbalance and the feeling of being

unable to defend themselves, this implies little or no control of the situation. This was also mentioned by Hogh and Dofradottir (2001) where victims often resorted to passive strategies due to being caught in an unescapable situation. Hence, it is not odd if one would use passive coping (e.g. obligation, avoidance) or ignoring the behaviour as their preferred strategy. Problem solving strategies were the least preferred strategy by the participants. This supports studies which provided earlier evidence showing little success in conflict management, especially if the conflict was not work-related anymore (Zapf and Gross, 2001). One of the limitations of using self-report surveys is that questions are close-ended, and the scope of information are within the boundaries of the questions. For example, participants in this study might be using coping strategies other than what is listed in the survey (e.g. self-doubt, ignoring, passive and problem-solving). Although I was able to identify what were the common choices of coping and what were the least preferred choices, I was not able to explore more on why or what made the participants choose those coping strategies. This highlights the importance of Study 2 where a narrative response would help me understand and obtain more insight regarding the results from Study 1.

This chapter also examined longitudinal associations between bullying experiences and the results have shed some light on the long-term effects on mental health complaints, psychosomatic complaints and emotional exhaustion via PC. Correlational results showed positive association between workplace bullying and mental illness (depression, anxiety and stress). This parallels previous studies which found similar results of the negative impact of workplace bullying on employees' mental health (Quine, 2001; Reknes et al., 2016). However, the results of some adjusted models (hierarchical regression analysis) varied slightly from the bivariate analyses (Pearson correlation analysis) after controlling for gender, age group, educational level and negative affect. That being said, the only difference was that after controlling for the potential cofounder, workplace bullying was not as significantly associated with anxiety and emotional exhaustion as it was strongly correlated with negative affect. A meta-analysis of workplace bullying and mental health could support this evidence if, in such a study, workplace bullying was found more frequently associated with depression and stress than anxiety, besides showing a larger effect of workplace bullying when PTSD and burnout was tested as outcomes compared to general stress-related psychological complaints (Verkuil, Atasayi and Molendijk, 2015).

The study also found that workplace bullying contributed to sleep disturbances (difficulty falling asleep, waking up at night and nightmares) and headache (due to pressure and frustration/annoyed) after controlling for the same variables. These findings support previous evidence where bullied employees experienced sleep disturbances and headache complaints (Agervold and Mikkelsen, 2004; Casimir et al., 2013; Hansen et al., 2016; Meseguer de Pedro et al., 2008). However, emotional exhaustion was no longer a significant consequence as it was strongly correlated with negative affect. It may be the case that emotional exhaustion is related to a person's affective state and this may vary depending on the type of emotional labour experienced. Given that the samples were among front liners, commonly referred to and regarded as 'emotional labour', who are subjected to frequent experiences of negative encounters (e.g. rude customers) because they have to comply with 'standard' emotional expression regulations established by service-oriented organisations even in unpleasant situations (Grandey et al., 2007).

Besides that, this study revealed that among the physical and psychological conditions that were examined, anxiety was found to be a significant predictor of subsequent bullying. This supports previous studies with similar findings (Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2012; Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2015). Employees that show anxious behaviours may reflect weakness or vulnerability making the employee an easy target of workplace bullying. This can also be supported by a meta-analysis which identified reversed associations reporting anxiety and stress predicting workplace bullying but this was not apparent for depression (Verkuil et al., 2015). Further, this study found that RNT fully mediated the relationship between workplace bullying and mental illness (depression, anxiety and stress) as well as psychosomatic symptoms (sleep difficulties, headache, gastrointestinal problems and respiratory infections). Worry was also found to fully mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and stress and anxiety, whereas rumination did not mediate any of the relationship.

These findings support the notion of the PC hypothesis (Brosschot et al., 2006) and previous studies which found a mediating role of PC (Van Laethem et al., 2015, 2016; Wang, Bowling and Gene, 2016) although with different types of stressors. However, the questions in the survey was limited to whether participants were engaged with PC and not on the level of construal of the cognitive behaviour. For instance, I was not able to retrieve enough information on whether participants were focused more on the importance of the outcome (abstract level) or the feasibility of the outcome (concrete level) (Trope and Liberman, 2003). As reported by previous studies, abstract level of

construal were often observed as unconstructive (Ehring et al., 2008; Ehring and Watkins, 2008) as it might be useful to explain the relationships found in this study. Thus, this can be addressed in Study 2 where a semi-structured interview could help in offering insights related to their results.

Further analysis on testing the moderating role of coping found varied results on the moderated-mediation models. Findings found that participants would be more depressed when using problem solving as a coping strategy, but this was only for those already engaged with RNT. Problem solving, however, was not a significant moderator to the overall mediation relationship. Nevertheless, this might support findings that found unsuccessful results when victims utilised active coping (Dehue et al., 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Lee and Brotheridge, 2006; Reknes et al., 2016; Richman et al., 2001), which might be the case that levels of conflict were high at the time when the bullying victims tried to resolve using active coping strategies. Results might be different if active coping were used under low levels of conflicts where findings have shown effective results (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988; Lechner et al., 2007; Stanton et al., 2007). Again, I was not able to retrieve information from the survey to determine if the bullying experience had just started or whether it had been prolonged.

Another interesting finding was that participants were even more careful in their diet to avoid stomach upset when engaging in passive coping. Again, this was only the case for those engaged with RNT. This can be supported by the evidence on studies which found individuals with gastrointestinal problem such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) often had lower self-esteem and tend to engaged in inferior coping (in this case is self-doubt) (Grodzinsky et al., 2015). Thus, passive coping may influence the individuals' eating behaviour in-order to avoid stomach upsets. Similar to problem solving, passive coping was not a significant moderator to the overall mediation relationship. This might be because people tend to deny their lack of self-confidence when asked in general terms unless it was asked about a specific situation (Drago et al., 2012).

Ignoring, in contrast, was found as a significant moderator to some of the mediation models compared to other types of coping strategies that were tested in this study. This included interactions with workplace bullying and worrying in anxiety and stress models, as well as interaction with workplace bullying and rumination in headache due to pressure and indigestion models. Participants in the study tended to engage in worrying which caused heightened anxiety and stress when they highly ignored the

problem. Although Borkovec's (1994) avoidance theory of worry suggested that worry encouraged individuals to disengage from emotional pain, long term worrying would eventually cause ineffective consequences as suggested by previous studies (Eriksen and Ursin, 2004; Verkuil et al., 2007). Ignoring the problem might just lead to missing relevant information that could help resolve the 'conflict' and in turn prolong the conflict without having to utilise constructive solutions.

This was quite the contrary with participants experiencing headache due to pressure. Although they tended to ruminate at all levels of ignoring, they would only experience headaches due to pressure of getting things done through rumination when ignoring is low. This could support the notion that ignoring negative information (inhibition) would encourage victims of bullying to reappraise and look at the conflict from another perspective (Cohen et al., 2014). Nonetheless, the survey items measuring ignoring did not explicitly ask if participants were ignoring negative information, instead focusing more on the behavioural reaction (e.g. didn't take the behaviour seriously, acted as if you didn't care, stayed calm, went along with the behaviour and ignored the behaviour or did nothing). Again, this will be addressed in the next chapter (Study 2) in order to understand their behaviours in coping with workplace bullying. Thus, the following chapter will present the findings of the qualitative study which are the interviews with workplace bullying victims.

## Chapter 6

### Study 2: Qualitative Study

*'The important reality is what people perceive it to be.'*

(Kvale, 1996)

#### 6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to capture the subjective perceptions and experience of workplace bullying among front-line employees as well as to further explore victims' cognitive reactions and coping strategies as well as the possible contributing effects of these strategies on victims' health and well-being. One facet of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is that the former conforms to the specific concerns of the researcher whereas the latter to the perspective of the participants (Bryman, 2009). While Study 1 provides a quantifiable overview of important angles of cognitive reactions (perseverative cognition) and actions (coping strategies) towards workplace bullying, the survey methodology did not allow the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences.

With this being the case, a qualitative element was introduced to provide a comprehensive insight into the issues involved in experiencing and coping with workplace bullying. The debate about what is considered as acceptable behaviours in different cultures has been restricted to discussion regarding issues on coping strategies, taking the psychological and physical implication for granted. By listening and documenting the perceptions and experiences of people who have been subjected to workplace bullying, this study examines participants' views on their bullying experiences occur and how physical, psychological and emotional well-being is being affected. This study will also help me to understand the actions taken (coping strategies) in overcoming the problem and what were the outcomes of those actions.

Based on the findings from previous qualitative studies (e.g. Karatuna, 2015; van Heugten, 2013; Zapf & Gross, 2001) this study would help me discover the different meaning and characteristics of victims' cognitive reaction (PC) and the different coping strategies from the victims' perspective. Lastly, this study would help me grasp an understanding of how employees define workplace bullying. The definition of bullying is commonly agreed by researchers in this area as repeated negative behaviours compared to workplace harassment or conflict which are termed on the first occasion (i.e. occurring



just once) (Ståle Einarsen et al., 1994; Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006b; Høgh & Dofradottir, 2001; Salin, 2003b). By using the standard definition as highlighted in Chapter 2, bullying is often mistaken for a one-off incident like harassment or workplace conflict. Data analysis and quality issues are discussed, and the findings are presented and then discussed. This chapter will address the following research questions: -

(4) How do victims perceive and define workplace bullying?

(5) What motivates victims to engage/ disengage with perseverative cognition and cope with workplace bullying?

## 6.2 Research Procedure

There are a few approaches when it comes to interviewing which differs in breadth and focus of the interview (Gilham, 2000). This study uses semi-structured interviews which involves a set of predetermined (but open-ended) questions that allow for in-depth and flexibility in responses (Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin, 2009). This particular form of interviews is perceived as most useful in avoiding the participant feeling inhibited by a more structured approach. Significant themes can only emerge by allowing participants to express their real-life experience in their way especially when the research topic is as sensitive or complex as in this study (Fielding & Thomas, 2008). I followed a process outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2005) which consisted the development of the interview guide, conducting the interview and analysing the data collected from the interview. At the beginning of each interview, participants were provided with an information sheet and a consent form as well as a clear explanation of the voluntary nature of the research participation.

The interviews were carried out in person and their preferred language; Malay or English. However, due to the time constraints I had in Malaysia, I had to resort to Skype and FaceTime as an alternative to face-to-face interviews. A list of questions was prepared before the interview; however, new questions were developed throughout the interview process based on their responses. Questions were open-ended so that it would encourage richness in content when capturing data. I was able to deviate from the interview guide at times, for instances, when an important issue was brought up, or an unusual response was given to the question asked. Probes such as “Can you tell me about...”? or “You seemed distressed as Time 1... can you tell me what happened”? It was made clear to the participants to not mention the name of their organisation to

emphasise on anonymity and confidentiality. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and were analysed using the thematic approach.

The reliability of the analysis was assessed via comparisons of independent coding and discussions between raters who had experiences with using thematic analysis. As proposed by qualitative researchers like Mays and Pope (2002), a portion of the transcripts was assessed by a second coder who is entirely independent of the research project to assess coding reliability and coding agreement. According to Julien (2008), an acceptable reliability coefficient in the qualitative analysis would have to reach an agreement of at least 60% between different coders. Twenty percent of the 20 interviews were assessed by a second coder (n=4). The second-coder was a Malaysian PhD student who spoke the native language of the participants and has knowledge and experience in using NVivo. Although not an expert in the workplace bullying literature, but the second coder is familiar with organizational research looking at behaviours within the education institution. The second coder received four randomly selected interview transcripts and was asked to code using the given coding framework.

Following the method by Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen (2013), I ran thematic analysis through coding the interview transcripts by making brackets/ segments of texts and then placing the initial codes on the left hand side of the brackets. I then made a copy but removed all initial codes leaving only the brackets of sentences. This was the coding framework that was given to the second coder. This was to ensure that the second-coder would only code the same unit of texts as I did. After the second-coder did her independent coding, we then compared our coded transcripts to see if they were any major discrepancies (Intercoder reliability). After an iterative process of discussing coding discrepancies and definitions, and refining codes, intercoder reliability gradually improved and reached a plateau of 59% reliability on average for the initial codes and initial themes combined and 62% percent reliability for the initial codes alone.

Following the intercoder reliability, I carried out an agreement approach that was negotiated between me and the second-coder. This approach is also known as intercoder agreement approach (Campbell et al., 2013). This approach is normally carried out to improve low intercoder reliability due to various reasons including different levels of knowledge in the research topic (i.e. in this case is workplace bullying or perseverative cognition). Unlike intercoder reliability approach, the intercoder agreement approach involves discussions and negotiations on the codes and are not done in isolation, or

separately. Some of the advantages in using this approach is that coding that requires sensitivity on subtle meanings (or even obvious meanings) or addressing the discrepancies in knowledge level of the topic. During the process, we kept track codes that achieved reconciliation and those that were irreconcilable. For an example,

“... because even my position, I mean, I am supposed to handle customer relations, but my boss... whenever he comes in he’ll give unnecessary work that is unrelated to my position... so I have to learn how to those tasks that were being given...” [Researcher: *Work outside of scope*; Second coder: *Taking advantage*]

After negotiation, we came to a conclusion of *experienced unfairness* as the final code. Thus, following this approach, we were able to reach a 89 percent for the initial codes and initial themes combined as 93 percent for the initial codes alone by reconciling about 90 percent of our initial disagreements.

### 6.2.1 Developing the interview topic guide

The topic guide used for this study was informed by several elements of the study. This guide includes the research aims and questions, literature review, as well as the findings from Study One (Table 25). The guide included broad but guiding questions related to the areas mentioned and was designed to extract descriptive responses from the participants. The interviews focused on several elements including the properties of perseverative cognition (e.g. thought content, level of construal, situational context) and why certain coping strategies were prioritized based on their experiences. Prompts and follow-up questions were used to encourage participants to expand or even to redirect them back to the main topic as there were a lot of times where participants became, side-tracked especially when describing a conflict that they experienced and tend to lose focus.

The first interview that was carried out was treated as the pilot interview to gauge the comprehensiveness of the questions and the timings for the interview. There were no major changes made to the guidelines. However, notes were made based on the pilot interview on questions that appear unclear to the participant where they might misunderstand the questions. For those cases, questions were restructured, and participants were given a further explanation on what the questions were asking. The pilot interview lasted about 45 minutes which provided an initial indication of the potential duration for the subsequent interviews. The pilot interview was included in the final analysis.

## Interview Questions Content

The questions focused on the four areas that are central to the study which are:

- i. their experience of workplace bullying from the start of the survey to date
- ii. their reactions to the conflict or bullying behaviours
- iii. their experience of actions taken to cope with the bullying behaviours
- iv. the impact of workplace bullying to their health and well-being
- v. their perception and understanding of workplace bullying

Below is the interview topic guide containing the primary focus of the interviews. See APPENDIX D for the full interview schedule.

*Table 25 Interview Topic Guide*

INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE	
<b>Main Interview Questions:</b> Progressively focusing on the issue	
➤	<b>Conflicts in the workplace</b>
○	Can you recall a significant incident or a conflict from when you first participated in the survey?
○	How long ago did the incident occur?
○	Who was involved (gender, age, and position)? How well did you know the person?
○	It seems as if _____ contributed to the incident. Are there any other factors that caused it?
○	Could you please describe the incident? What behaviour was displayed?
○	How did it start? How long did it last?
○	What is it about that incident that made you feel depressed/ worry?
➤	<b>Explore cognitive reaction to conflict?</b>
○	What was your reaction when that incident happened?
○	What happened after you reacted that way?
○	Do you always think about it?
○	Does it interfere with your thoughts?
○	Is there anything that you would do differently?
➤	<b>Explore actions taken to cope with workplace bullying</b>
○	How was it handled?
○	If you made a complaint, how did you make it?
○	If Yes- were your complaints taken seriously and acted upon?
○	If Not- why didn't you want to make a complaint?
○	What happened after that?
○	Have you ever asked to take leave?

➤ **Health and well-being**

- Physical health- sleepless, constant fatigue, headaches, stomach/bowel problem, nausea/vomiting, sweating, skin disorders, chest pains, diarrhoea, cough and asthma
- Psychological health- loss of confidence, loss of self-esteem, lack of motivation, anxiety, anger, depression
- How did this incident influence the way you performed your duties?
- How did it affect your working relationship? Did the relationship deteriorate? Did anyone apologise?
- How did it affect your relationship?
- Have you fallen sick because of work?

➤ **Explore their perceptions and understanding of workplace bullying**

- Did you ever felt like you were being bullied?
- How would you define bullying?

### 6.3 Recruitment of the participants

Participants were selected from the respondents of the survey in Study 1, making them a subset from the overall sample. Findings from Study 1 guided me in selecting the participants for the interview. Participants were only contacted if they had ticked agree in the previous survey indicating their agreement to be interviewed with their completed questionnaire at all three time points. Participants who experienced negative behaviours on a weekly or daily basis were identified as targets and those who were identified as targets to any of the time points were recruited via purposive sampling.

Participants were contacted through the details that were provided by them in the survey. The majority left their mobile numbers where some only provided their email addresses. This resulted in the identification of 24 potential participants for the interview. According to (Gilham, 2000), deciding on the number of interviews to conduct depends on whether the technique is being used as a preliminary exploratory stage, or to develop a framework of explanation. Four participants declined their participation leaving 20 participants who qualified for the interview. Two declined the invitation (one participant declined due to time constraint, and one was on maternity leave) and the other two participants did not reply to the invitation. The decision was made to interview 20 participants which represented 80% of those eligible.

The rest of the 20 participants who were contacted agreed to be interviewed for the study by providing initial verbal consent either by telephone or email. Information on

Study 2 was briefly provided in the invitation and participants were given a chance to reflect upon this information allowing them to consider any questions or reservations that they might have before the interview was conducted. By preparing in advance, it helps the participants to prepare mentally and allows them the opportunity to reflect on the topics that will be discussed (either they agree with it or not). This would address both pragmatic and the ethical dimension (Gillham, 2000). The information provided includes:

-

- The purpose of the study
- Topics and issues to be discussed
- Interviews would be recorded, and the interviews would be transcribed
- Details for interview including expected interview time (which was set to not more than an hour) and the importance of allocating a distraction-free period for the interview.

Participants were contacted a day before to confirm the scheduled interview. However, due to my limited time being in Malaysia, I could only manage to interview thirteen participants face-to-face. Seven interviews were carried out long distanced from the UK due to rescheduling that occurred more than once. Five interviews were carried out via video calls (Skype and FaceTime) and two were interviewed via a telephone call (WhatsApp Audio). These interviews averaged 41.7 minutes in length with a range of 21.9 minutes to 74.6 minutes. From the 20 participants, 9 participants (45%) experienced a discontinue in workplace bullying (either in Time 2 or Time 3) whereas the remaining 11 (55%) experienced bullying continuously. The majority of the participants were between the age of 18 to 28 years old, worked full time, has a bachelor's Degree with 2 to 5 years of experience working in the organisation. The interviews were carried out roughly four weeks after Study 1. At that point nine participants had already resigned from their organisation. Table 26 below shows a summary on the demographic details of the participants: -

Table 26 Demographic data for the interview participants

Interview ID	Age Group	Education	Employment	Tenure	Job Scope	Bullying Pattern	Source	Final decision
Participant 01	29-40	Undergraduate	Full Time	5-10 years	Services	Continuous	Superior	Will resign after contract ends
Participant 02	18-28	Undergraduate	Full Time	1 year	Services	Continuous	Superior & customer	Solve
Participant 03	18-28	Undergraduate	Part Time	1 year	Services	Continuous	Colleague	Resigned
Participant 04	29-40	High School Leaver	Full Time	More than 10 years	Retail	Continuous	Superior & customer	Transfer to a different store
Participant 05	29-40	Undergraduate	Full Time	5-10 years	Services	Continuous	Superior & Colleague	Ignore
Participant 06	18-28	High School Leaver	Full Time	2-5 years	Retail	Continuous	Colleague	Resigned
Participant 07	18-28	Undergraduate	Full Time	2-5 years	Services	Discontinued	Colleague	Resigned
Participant 08	18-28	Undergraduate	Full Time	2-5 years	Retail	Continuous	Superior & customer	Accept
Participant 09	18-28	Diploma	Full Time	5-10 years	Services	Continuous	Superior & customer	Resigned
Participant 10	18-28	Postgraduate	Full Time	1 year	Retail	Continuous	Superior & Colleague	Resigned
Participant 11	29-40	Diploma	Full Time	2-5 years	Retail	Discontinued	Colleague	Resigned
Participant 12	18-28	Undergraduate	Full Time	2-5 years	Services	Continuous	Colleague	Ignore
Participant 13	18-28	Undergraduate	Full Time	1 year	Services	Continuous	Superior & Colleague	Ignore
Participant 14	29-40	Postgraduate	Full Time	> 10 years	Services	Discontinued	Superior & customer	Solve, positive
Participant 15	18-28	High School Leaver	Full Time	2-5 years	Retail	Discontinued	Customer	Resigned
Participant 16	18-28	Undergraduate	Full Time	2-5 years	Retail	Discontinued	Superior & customer	Ignore
Participant 17	18-28	Postgraduate	Full Time	2-5 years	Retail	Discontinued	Superior & customer	Gave up, ignore
Participant 18	18-28	Postgraduate	Full Time	2-5 years	Services	Discontinued	Superior	Solve, positive
Participant 19	18-28	High School Leaver	Part Time	2-5 years	Retail	Discontinued	Colleagues	Resigned
Participant 20	18-28	Postgraduate	Full Time	2-5 years	Retail	Continuous	Superior	Resigned

## 6.4 The Interview

At the beginning of the interview, introductions were exchanged to build rapport. Before diving into the questions, I reminded them of the purpose of the study, the focus of the discussion and how the interview will be carried out. They were also reminded that there are no right or wrong answers and that they should feel free to express their opinions or perception. The participants were asked to introduce themselves and answer questions pertaining their employment with their current organisation. Questions like how long they have worked with the company, their job role and routine were asked to develop a rapport between the researcher and the interviewee as well as to provide a sense of background for the researcher on the interviewees' work setting. At the beginning, I did not tell them the real reason why they had been recruited (they were bullying victims based on their score in Study 1) in order to obtain unbiased responses as this information may shape a different perspective on workplace bullying. However, all participants went through a de-briefing process at the end of the interview.

After introductions, the participants were asked to recall a memorable negative incident or conflict that they have experienced within the time frame of the study. I made sure that the word 'bullying' was not mentioned in the first part of the interview. This was intentionally planned so that it would be possible to indicate whether the participants are most likely to experience repeated (bullying) or one-off incidents. However, one can argue that participants tend to recall overt behaviour more than covert behaviour, but, these types of questions might evoke covert incidents as well. Hence, the word conflict was used instead of bullying. Next, the interviewees were asked to describe the conflict such as how did it happen and who did it involve. In carrying out the interviews, I faced some difficulties in this part of the interview where the question for them to recall a significant conflict engaged an emotional response from most of the participants. Most of the time I'd find it very hard to move them to next question as the participants tend to remain focused on the conflict itself. However, no matter how irrelevant I thought it could have been, I realised that as a researcher, I should be led by the interpretations made by the participants.

They were then asked how they reacted to that incident and how was it handled or is still being handled (for those who are still experiencing on-going bullying). Depending on their responses, participants were asked why they chose to handle it that



way. These questions have an aim to encourage the participants to describe their cognitive reactions or activities, for example, whether they kept on ruminating on the incident or whether it heightened their worry coming to work. From their answers to these questions, it is possible to identify their coping process and which strategies were often utilized and check with their answers based on their results in Study 1. For some participants, their interview responses matched their survey responses. However, some had contradicting and sometimes completely different interviews responses which was not listed in the options in Study 1. This result will be discussed in the following sections within the chapter.

Towards the end of the interview, participants were asked if they have had experienced workplace bullying or felt like they were being bullied without giving any prior definition which is in parallel with Lewis's approach (1999). If definitions were given to the participants, it is difficult to capture whether participants are using the researcher's definition or their definition (Helge Hoel & Cooper, 2001). They were also asked to explain how they perceive workplace bullying and what are the behaviours which constitute workplace bullying. One of the aims of this research was to capture the subjective experience and how subjects perceive and define workplace bullying. A definition provided by the researcher may not necessarily fit the participants' definition of bullying. It is quite common that people tend to treat a one-off experience as bullying despite its repetitive characteristic. This could probably argue that higher levels of bullying reported can be due to the absence of a clear definition. Thus, by using this approach, it could help us understand if their definitions and perceptions of workplace bullying are consistent with the definition employed by bullying researchers.

## 6.5 Analysis Procedure

### 6.5.1 Management of the interview data

All interviews were recorded using the Voice Memo App on my phone and were then uploaded onto my computer in a password-protected file. Copies were made in a cloud storage as backup copies. The interviews were then transcribed into a word document which formed the basis of data analysis. The interview transcripts were labelled using the same unique identification code used in Study 1 before changing them to pseudonyms. Identifying words or text such as the name of the organisation, location or promotional campaigns (in retail organisations) to minimise the potential for participants to be identified.

### 6.5.2 Adopting Thematic Analysis as a research approach

There are various approaches when it comes to analysing qualitative data. The decision or choice for which approach depends on the needs of the study (Green & Thorogood, 2009). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the approach can be divided into two types which are associated with a particular theoretical or epistemological position or is independent of them. This study adopts thematic analysis as the analytical approach in which it facilitates the search for patterns of experiences within the data set. Thematic analysis is a method used for analysing, identifying, and reporting patterns which are then merged as themes within the data. It helps with organising and describing the data in rich detail which then leads to identifying key themes and categories that make a pattern in the participants' responses.

To identify these themes, transcription was carried out using a thematic qualitative method of inquiry (Virginia Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was driven by previous bullying research that identified specific behaviours of workplace bullying (Staale Einarsen et al., 2009a; Zabrodska, Ellwood, Zaeemdar, & Mudrak, 2016), coping and reactions to workplace bullying (Ehring et al., 2011; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Zapf et al., 2015) as well as literature that suggests psychological, emotional and psychosomatic effects of workplace bullying (Casimir et al., 2013; Nabe et al., 2016; Verkuil et al., 2015). Unlike grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which uses an inductive approach, this literature-driven analysis attempts to present the significance of the themes in the previous literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is also important to note that theories that was used in the study as well as the results from Study 1 guided the questions in the interview which gave it some structure. The interview sessions began with general questions before leading to more specific questions (i.e. bullying experience, coping strategies). Responses were continued with relevant follow-up and probing questions where appropriate. During analysis, the transcripts were organized in a structure that consisted headings and sub-headings informed by the theories in the study. Coding however, were extracted fully from the data collected by the interviews. These coding were then merged into sub-themes which eventually forms the main themes of Study 2.

*Table 27 Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)*

	Phase	Description of the process
1	Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and reading the data, noting down initial ideas
2	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating the data relevant to each code
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4	Reviewing themes	Checking to see if the themes work about the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire set (level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis
5	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6	Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis, selection of vivid, compelling extract example, the final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis of research question and the literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

### 6.5.3 Transcription

The first step requires transcribing the recorded data into a written form. Interview transcripts were anonymised with a pseudonym and were transcribed in its original language which is the Malay Language. With the participant and researcher speaking the same language, there were no issues of language differences in data gathering, transcription and during the analysis. Non-meaningful utterances such as 'uhm', 'uh', etc. were excluded in the transcription. In this stage, I began to familiarise myself with the data even while transcribing. I made notes for each transcription and wrote down my initial thought of the interview as a whole. Once familiarised, I was able to move on to the next stage which was generating initial codes.

#### 6.5.4 Preliminary Coding: Exploring the data

Before the document was imported into NVivo, the paragraphs in all the transcriptions were formatted into headings (Question: Heading 1; Sub-questions: Heading 2; Answers: Normal Format). This was so that *Auto coding* could take place for a more systematic way of carrying out the analysis and automatically assigns relevant information to specific nodes. It is a way of reorganizing data for further analysis. Basically, with auto coding, headings with the same name/ label and level across documents/transcripts are grouped into one node. This way, I was able to group all the answers from different participants based on the question theme. For example, I asked a question on describing a recent conflict or any significant event (negative) which happened since the first time they participated in the survey. Follow-up questions were asked based on the participants' responses. So those questions revolve around the topic was labelled as 'conflicts in the workplace' under Heading 1. Once that had been done, the document was imported in NVivo, and preliminary analysis was carried out.

After importing the documents into NVivo, a preliminary analysis was carried out via *Word Frequency* and *Text Search*. Using the 'Query' function in NVivo, exploration on the data was carried by using the *Word Frequency* option and the *Text Search* function. The word frequency option helped to identify the frequency of certain words that were commonly used or repeated by the participants during the interview. From the word frequency tool, I was able to generate a Word Cloud (Figure 24) to achieve a better visual representation of the most common words used in the interview. Words that did not give weightage (e.g. like, totally, okay) was controlled for and removed from the word frequency analysis. The variety in word sizes represents the frequency of it appearing in the interview. Based on Figure 24, words like stress, bullying, manager, customer, company, conflict, *masalah* (English translation of problem), *berhenti* (English translation of leaving) were one of the most frequent words mentioned in the interview. Based on this illustration, it had given me a rough idea on what would the potential themes that would emerge.



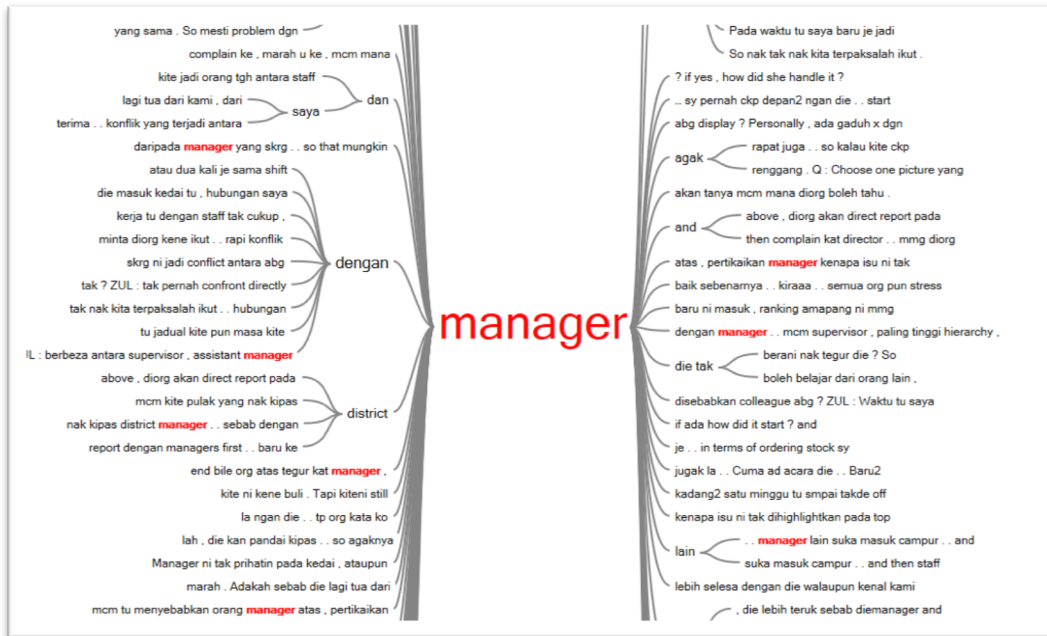


Figure 25 Tree Map

### 6.5.5 Generating initial codes

In this stage, portions of the interview transcripts were systematically analysed. Coding was carried out in the same language which was a mixture of English and mostly Malay Language. The first coding phase (open coding) is seen as crucial and is recommended to stay closely to the data as certain expressions might lose its meaning when being translated (Nes, Abma, & Jonsson, 2010). This crucial phase is treated as a fragile phase as different interpretations take place and by translating it might not truly represent the answer given in its original language. Besides, it had been recommended to use the language that best accord with the researcher's first language during analysis (Oxley, Günhan, Kaniamattam, & Damico, 2017).

Codes were grouped in a meaningful way when identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006) so that it would make the next stage of developing themes easier. Initial codes were organised based on the ideas or issues that are raised in the paragraph. For example, the following selection of transcript illustrates the code of taking advantage, lack of fairness, perceives managers as incompetent, ideas are not accepted and perceive lack of credibility in the organisation.

"So generally, they will use people like us with degrees and master's to make them look good in front of people of the parent company. So that's the upper

management and the mid-management. [**code**: organisation takes advantage]. So, because of the lack in understanding in the fundamental theories, and what is happening in the industry now, these certificate holders, [**code**: perceives managers as incompetent] basically my upper and mid-management, any modernized ideas are not accepted because to them it's always not feasible, too expensive, too unrealistic [**code**: ideas are not accepted]. Most of us are now no longer wants to share any information, no longer wants to engage with the upper and middle managements, no one believes in especially the upper management because they behave like an unprofessional company. [**code**: lack of credibility in the organisation] Like as if there are no rules, there are no laws, where they push you, they promise everything and when the time comes, they just say things like yeah, you achieved so many things. You achieve your stretch way in advance, but you are still average" [6: a full-time employee with 5 to 10 years of experience]

As illustrated in the transcript above, the participant felt that the organisation takes advantage of the staff due their incompetency and does not listen to new ideas voiced out by the employees. She also loses her trust in the organisation, and the behaviour of her managers as well as her organisation contributed to what she perceives as lack of fairness. Each paragraph might contain more than one initial code which would then merge into larger themes. A list of initial codes identified during this phase can be found in APPENDIX F. To provide some sense of conceptual order, the codes were organised in chronological order from the conflict perceived by the participants, the participants' reaction and action take (coping strategies) and consequences of the action taken and the effect on participants' health and well-being.

#### 6.5.6 Searching for themes

In this phase, 93 initial codes that were identified from the previous stage are merged into 26 initial themes via axial coding. These themes would represent broader common concepts in which the interpretive analysis of the data starts to occur (Virginia Braun & Clarke, 2006). As an example, codes such as *abuse of power between two parties, indirect or subtle actions, a type of mental and physical harassment and one-off incidents* were grouped together into an initial theme labelled as *forms of bullying*. Table 28 illustrates the initial themes that emerged at this stage of analysis.

Table 28 Initial themes based on initial codes

<b>Initial themes</b>	<b>Initial codes</b>
Forms of bullying	Abuse of power between two parties Indirect/ Subtle actions A type of mental and physical harassment One-off incidents
Perpetrators motivation	Intentionally done to hurt the weaker party Lack of empathy
Consequences	Perpetrator gets satisfaction out of bullying others Negative impact on mental health Causes people to leave the organization Causes emotional impact to others
Unfairness	Expects to complete work without paying overtime, work on weekends, personal errands Organization takes advantage New manager acts as he please, incompetent Organization takes customer's side Customer sovereignty
Undermining/ Reputation	Humiliation, scold in front of customer Does not accept ideas Micromanages Spread rumors
Perpetrators	Line manager (e.g. supervisor, manager) Organization (HR, Head of department) Co-workers/ Colleagues Customer
Threats	Giving threats (using beliefs, terminate) Make accusations, backstabbing
Work Environment	Favoritism Cliques and gangs No chance to grow Lack support from organization High internal competition
Worry	Worry about my career in this organization
Rumination	Gets lost in thoughts about the problem Lost focus at work No one to talk to about the conflict
Self-esteem	Felt worthless Felt like being undermined but not sure Reduce in confidence
Retaliation or 'silent voice'	Intentionally reduced performance Effect on tardiness and attendance Sabotage
Resilience	Religious/ Cultural views on patience Accepts behaviors ('Redha') Positive reappraisal
Avoidance/ Ignore	Avoid the perpetrator or the environment Display fake emotions to customers Did not do anything Hide feelings, behaved like nothing happened



Passive	Distract myself with other activities Seek advice from other people Meditation or prayers
Actively manage	Good support at work Resigned from the company Took leave Confrontation
Inferior/ Insecurity	Worried if I'll lose my job Feel have no support to back up the complaint Don't think that complaining would solve the problem Perpetrator may hold grudge
Sign of weakness	Has negative perception about people who like to complain Worried not 'tough' enough
Religious/ Cultural	View on patience Sympathy/ Respect towards perpetrator (age gap) Fate and destiny
Negative	Organization took sides (perpetrator) Relationship with perpetrator worsen Colleagues have bad impression Tender Resignation
Positive	Support from organization Follow up from organization Perpetrator apologizes Management persuaded not to leave
Psychological Impact	Negative impact on mental health Causes emotional impact to others Negative outbursts Felt powerless No desire to do anything or to meet other people Don't feel calm Unable to focus outside of work Reduce in confidence Emotional issues Unhappy when someone asks about work
Physical Impact	Health issues (e.g. cardiovascular, headaches, migraines) Issues with pregnancy
Social Impact	No desire to do anything or to meet other people Lose friends & family Became 'reserved' and won't socialize with people at work
Intentions to leave	Regretted joining the company Having intentions to leave Lost trust in the organization Don't recommend to others
Reduced performance	Prolongs grudge (victim) if not resolved Intentionally reduced quality of work Effect on tardiness and attendance

### 6.5.7 Review, defining and naming themes

The themes generated in the previous stage were further refined into six broader themes. These initial themes can then be used to outline an initial thematic map in which main themes and subthemes are identified (e.g. Theme: Perception; Subthemes: Forms of bullying, Perpetrators Characteristics and Consequences). These themes and subthemes are illustrated below in Figure 26 and Figure 27.

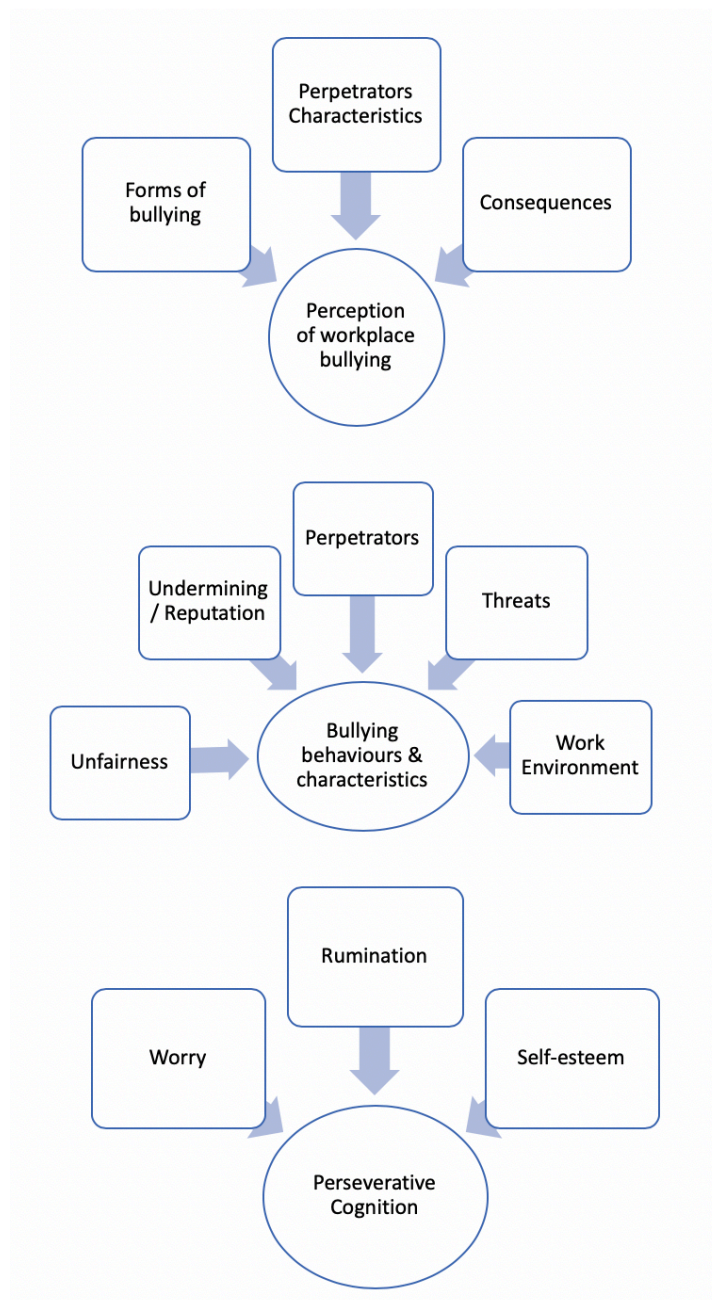
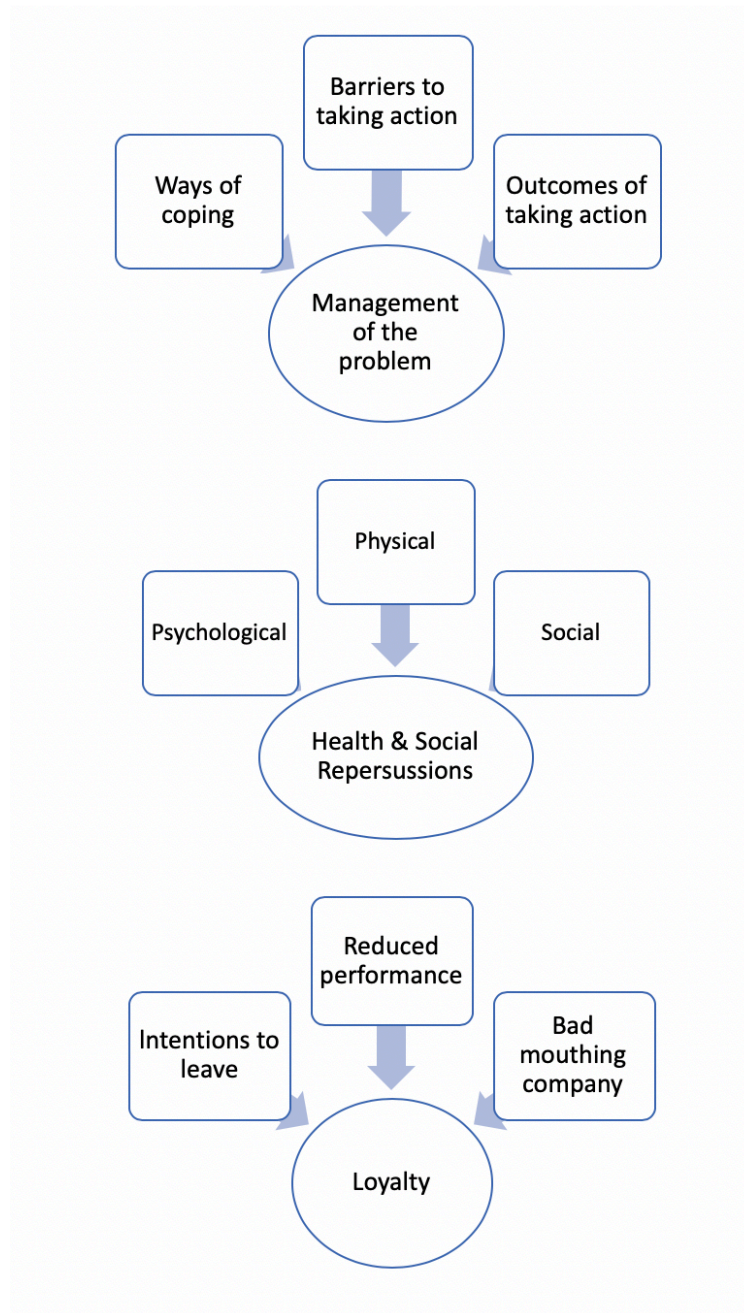


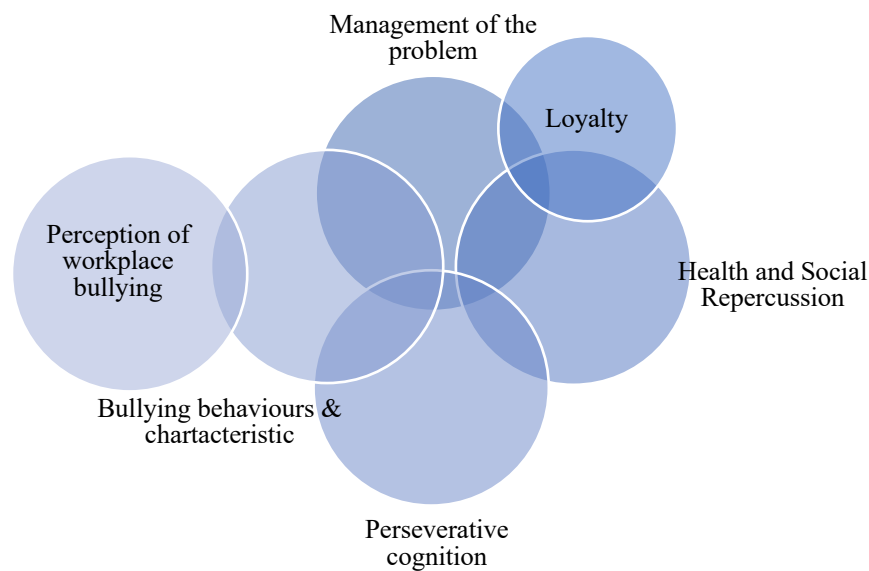
Figure 26 Broader Themes of Perception, Bullying Experience and Perseverative Cognition



*Figure 27 Broader Themes of Management of the Problem and Repercussions of Bullying*

The themes that were further refined and amalgamated were then integrated to generate a final thematic map. This is where themes begin to address research questions framed by previous theory or by the literature (Virginia Braun & Clarke, 2006). This map illustrates how the dominant themes would fit together to produce an overall pattern that tells a story of workplace bullying described by participants. These themes are placed in sequence to illustrate the event in a chronological order starting with their perceptions of bullying which influences their bullying experience. For example, perceptions of workplace

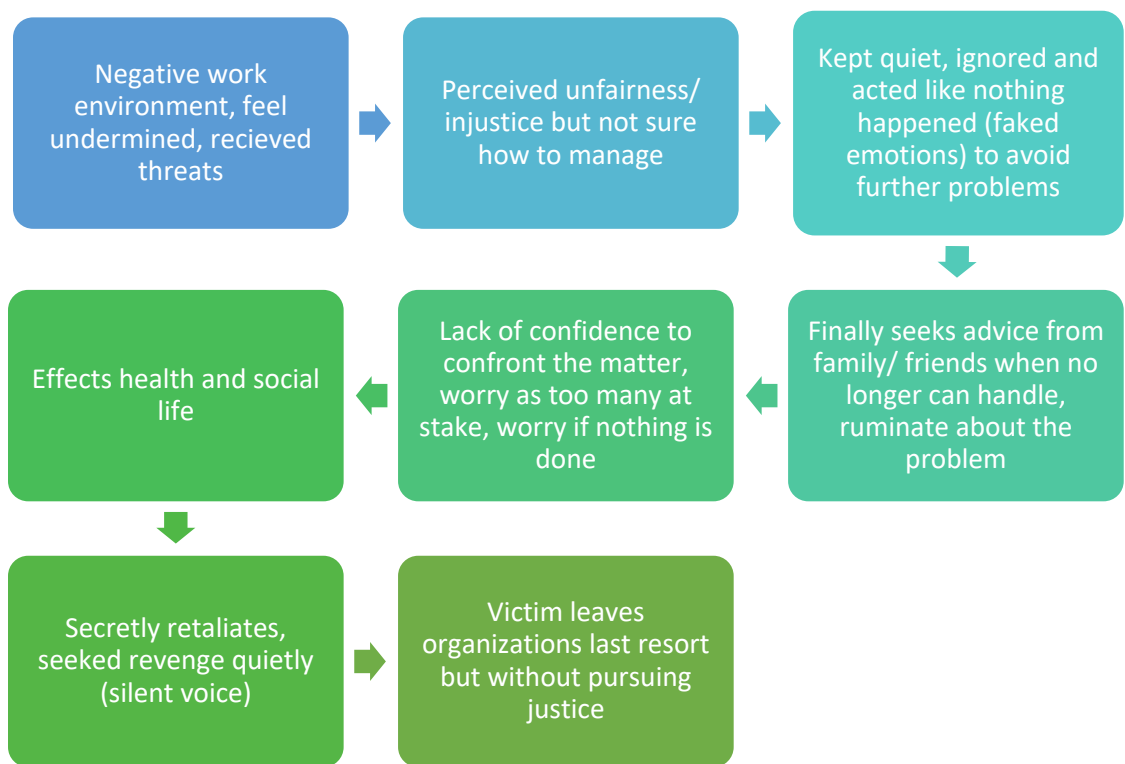
bullying (Theme 1) would contribute to participants identifying themselves as being bullied when experiencing bullying behaviours and characteristics (Theme 2). The consequences of bullying experienced by the participants contributed to the cognitive reactions (perseverative cognition) towards the behaviour (Theme 3), which in turn contributed to the participants' different ways of managing the problem (Theme 4). Negative outcomes from managing the problem would again cause a reaction to the problem leading to a negative impact on participants' health and social well-being (Theme 5) which in turn a majority questioned their loyalty to the organization (Theme 6).



*Figure 28 Thematic map*

Figure 29 describes the cognitive and behavioural reaction described by the majority of participants in the interview. Participants in general starts with not doing anything and ignoring the behaviour at first especially when they have too much at stake. However, when bullying prolongs, they would then engage in perseverative cognition and start to doubt themselves. They tend to ruminate by being uncertain of the behaviours they were experiencing, doubting themselves if they are being too sensitive or just overthinking. They would then seek emotional help from family and friends outside of work seeking advice on what to do. Participants would then worry about the repercussions of their next action (e.g. if confronting would be a good idea) and worry that the bullying would just continue if they don't do anything about it (e.g. ignoring or avoiding). Due to a lot at

stake such as job insecurity, life commitments, reputation, most participants continue to avoid the perpetrator and passively cope by seeking distractions. However, when the problems take a toll on them and eventually worsens their health and social life, participants starts to retaliate and seek revenge quietly (silent voice). Some of the example include purposely coming late to work or not coming at all (faked being sick), sabotaging their work, and bad mouth their organization. Despite being worried about losing their job due to socioeconomic pressures at the beginning, ten of them eventually resigned with one participant who is waiting for her contract to end.



*Figure 29 Cognitive and behavioural reaction to workplace bullying as described by majority of participants in the study*

## 6.6 Finalized themes of Study 2

### 6.6.1 Theme 1: Perceptions of workplace bullying

Three distinct subthemes related to perceptions of workplace bullying were identified which are the description, forms of bullying and consequences. The themes that are described by the participants support the definitions given by other researchers in this field. However, none of the participants mentioned anything about frequencies of the behaviour which is essential in differentiating bullying to other negative behaviours like harassment or incivility (Einarsen et al., 2009; Salin, 2003). This is however aligned with the initial perception that people tend to confuse a one-off incident as bullying.

#### *a) Description and forms of workplace bullying*

Three major issues that were mentioned by the majority of the participants included abuse of power, lack of empathy, the different type of negative behaviours like forcing to do something or being unfair, and with intentions. It was also interesting to observe that all participants when describing workplace bullying tends to see their superiors (or anyone else higher in the hierarchy) as perpetrators of workplace bullying. Some examples of how participants describe bullying are as follows:

"To me, bullying is when a person uses strength or power or influence to get their way... to get their way, they bully themselves in... they will use power la basically, and they know it's hard to find jobs nowadays, so people cannot move that easily... It's always my way or the high way so, in order to cover their mistakes, they will use their power...so a lot of us, including myself they know they can do it and get away with it because we are desperate for the money and we are... and it's difficult to find a job nowadays..." [05: Full-time employee with 5-10 years of experience].

When describing the different types bullying behaviours, three ideas were drawn out including mentally bullying, physical bullying and that workplace bullying often uses words (verbal) and actions but not physical aggression. Participants often use the word 'being forced' as a common type of work-related bullying. Other behaviours were also mentioned including giving threats, unconstructive criticizing, unfair treatments and undermining. Some believed that workplace bullying could be physical while others think

that workplace bullying is only subjected to verbal abuse and using actions that are not physical.

### ***b) Perpetrators' characteristics***

Participants mostly perceive that perpetrators intentionally bully others to hurt them especially on those who are weaker than them. Again, the power imbalance element was mentioned when describing the characteristics of a bully. Besides that, perpetrators were also described as a person who lacks empathy and that they get satisfaction out of bullying others.

### ***c) Consequences***

In describing the consequences of bullying, responses from participants aligned with what other researchers have found that including bullying causes mental illness; bullying causes people to leave, bullying causes people to get emotionally hurt and one participant mentioned about causing prolonged grudges if conflicts were not resolved.

"Workplace bullying is a behaviour where you either hurt someone's feelings causing to bring harm mentally or psychologically or it could also bring physical harm to the other party. It will cause a prolonged grudge if bullying is not being resolved." [14: Full-time employee with more than ten years of experience].

## **6.6.2 Theme 2: Bullying behaviours and characteristics**

There were three subthemes that emerged from the initial codes on the bullying behaviours and characteristics that the participant experienced and described: 1) negative environment at work, 2) perpetrators of bullying and the 3) different types of behaviour experienced. These were subthemes that which depicts the background of the bullying event which in turns contributed to the behaviour being perceived as bullying by the target. Similar behaviours have been reported in previous research to describe that workplace bullying takes place in a background where the interactions between perpetrator and targets as well as the workplace environment enable inappropriate behaviour to occur (Balducci et al., 2011).

### ***a) The negative environment at work***

The subtheme on the negative environment at work mostly emerged from participants who experienced continuous bullying. This result was retrieved from their survey scores

in Study 1, and all the participants who mentioned about having to work in a negative environment had experienced bullying at all three-time points. For example, Participant 07 expresses that she is not able to even look at her bosses and Participant 14 talked about the awkward feeling due to the negative environment where he feels unhappy and isolated.

"The environment at work is unhealthy... I can't look at my bosses faces...All of them... I'm trying not to think or complain because I don't want to make things worse...I'm rebelling at work also". [07: Full-time employee with 2 – 5 years of experience]

"I feel awkward in the workplace... there's no one to talk to, and I don't feel happy... It feels unhealthy to work in that sort of place..." [14: Full-time employee with 2 – 5 years of experience]

#### ***b) Perpetrators of bullying***

Based on the interview findings, participants reported different perpetrators including line managers, colleagues and customers. It was noted that most of the perpetrators were higher in the hierarchy such as line managers or higher managements. For examples, Participant 13 reporting his experience of bullying from his supervisor. He said that:

"The things that make it negative is that when I had a dispute with the manager on something that that wasn't my fault. I defended myself and said that it was the fault of my other colleague. But she didn't listen and blamed me for allowing her to make a mistake. "[13: Full-time employee with 2 – 5 years of experience]

Due to their role as front-line employees, they were also at risk of experiencing negative behaviours from their customers. There were also findings that identified managers to favour their customers instead of their employees. The following portion of transcription refers to a participant who works in the health sector.

"There's this problematic customer that I have. He blames me and talks bad about me to the other customers. He can't accept the fact that he has health issues. I gave him some advice, and he humiliated me in social media..." [05: Full-time employee with 1-2 years of experience]

Colleagues were the other important person when participants were talking about the person who was bullying them. Most participants reported that the colleague who was bullying them had good connections or like to 'butter up' the manager.



"... but ever since he came into the picture, his attitude that likes to 'butter-up' the manager makes me annoyed with his behaviour, especially whenever the manager is around... he would try to make me look bad in front of the manager so that he would be noticed as an employee who is attentive" [20: Full-time employee with 2 – 5 years of experience].

*c) Different types of behaviour experienced*

Table 29 summarises the types of bullying behaviours experienced by victims and the reported perpetrators, patterns of the bullying based on education level. In the interview, I asked the victims to identify the pattern or course of their bullying experienced based on the five patterns that were displayed to them (refer APPENDIX D). Half of the sample (n=10) identified No. 3 as their bullying pattern where they illustrated their experience reaching a plateau level and left unresolved. On top of that, three most common types of negative behaviour were identified which were unfairness, undermining and giving threats. Interestingly, participants with higher education qualification (e.g. university qualification) tend to experience work-related behaviours and mainly express unfairness being experienced at the workplace, mostly by their superiors. Meanwhile, employers with lower education qualification (e.g. high school leaver) tend to experience more personal-related behaviours and threats relating to belief. An example of a victim that experienced unfairness in the workplace was Participant 12 who experienced her boss giving her tasks that were not in her job description:

"... because even my position, I mean, I am supposed to handle customer relations, but my boss... whenever he comes in he'll give unnecessary work that is unrelated to my position... so I have to learn how to those tasks that were being given..." [12: Full-time employee with 1 – 2 years of experience]

Table 29 Bullying experience based on education level

ID	Education	Perpetrator	Pattern	Bullying behaviour
01	Undergraduate	Colleague	2	Takes advantage, no chance to grow. favouritism
02	Undergraduate	Superior & customer	2	Organization takes customer's side, unfair process
03	Undergraduate	Colleague	3	Organization takes advantage, attack through social media
04	High School	Superior & customer	2	Does not accept ideas, threats using beliefs
05	Undergraduate	Superior & Colleague	2	Expects to work more than should in hopes of getting promoted, high internal competition
06	High School	Colleague	3	Colleague same level micromanages, undermines and humiliation on social media
07	Undergraduate	Colleague	4	Takes advantage of capability, does not give credit
08	Undergraduate	Superior & customer	4	Manager is incompetent results in more work, customer takes advantage
09	Diploma	Superior & customer	4	High internal competition, managers breaks promises, feels used, undermined by customers
10	Postgraduate	Superior & Colleague	2	Expects to work more than should in hopes of getting promoted, high internal competition
11	Diploma	Colleague	3	Colleagues on the same level micromanages, new colleague acts as he pleased, give indirect threats online
12	Undergraduate	Colleague	3	Expect to finish other people's work, organization does not support
13	Undergraduate	Superior & Colleague	3	Have to meet clients expectation even if resources is not enough, high internal competition
14	Postgraduate	Superior & customer	5	Organization lacks support, no chance to grow
15	High School	Customer	3	Insulting remarks from customers, threats using belief
16	Undergraduate	Superior & customer	3	Organization takes advantage, favouritism
17	Postgraduate	Superior & customer	3	Give threats, accusations, organization takes advantage
18	Postgraduate	Superior	3	Expect to be available 24/7, takes advantage of knowledge
19	High School	Colleagues	5	Spread rumours, backstabbing, make accusation on social media
20	Postgraduate	Superior	3	Organization takes advantage, ask to run personal errands

Another example is a participant who had to finish his colleagues work to complete his task. He was worried that if it were marked incomplete (even though it was not his fault), he would always get the blame.

"I have this friend at work whose work is closely related to mine. The thing is, I can't proceed with my tasks if he doesn't finish his part. There have been a lot of times where my work is delayed because of him. Because of that, I have to work overtime and get home late while he gets to go home early. There were even times

when I had to make corrections on his part which ate my time completing my work. No matter what happens, because I am at the end of the chain, I will get blamed if I don't get the work done..." [14: Full-time employee with 2 – 5 years of experience]

There were also issues with being accused and blamed for something they didn't do. For instance, the case of Participant 13 where he feels that the manager is blaming him instead of his colleague who was the one really at fault because of the age gap that existed between the manager and his colleague. His colleague was much older than the manager making him feel that he was targeted not just because of the ranking but also him being younger.

"So, I was like, why should I be blamed for something I didn't do, and why is my colleague not being included in this discussion? Is it because he's older than my manager that she is scared to correct him? Is it because that I'm lower in the chain that he could treat me this way and release her anger at me?" [13: Full-time employee with 2 – 5 years of experience]

Besides that, being humiliated and undermined was also one of the most common responses in the interviews. The interview revealed the use of social media as a medium for perpetrators to humiliate the victims through postings and tweets which although does not mention them directly, but is perceived as an indirect "attack" and expressed their feeling of shame to other colleagues that read it. This was more common among participants who were bullied by their colleagues who are at the same level. Besides that, participants also talked a lot about their organisations and leaders not trusting them and this was again more frequent among younger employees. Participants mentioned about their reputation was not protected especially during face-to-face interaction with customers when their supervisors would scold them in front of their customers even when it was not their mistake. Just like what Participant 19 described:

"... they don't really care who is right and who is wrong... Just as long they can settle... what... the problem as fast as they can so it does not get to the bigger boss up there. I have to bare the shame being scolded in front of other cashiers and customers..." [19: Part-time employee with more 2-5 years of experience]

An example of a subtler behaviour would be discreet threats. Unlike tangible behaviours, this type of behaviour is quite difficult to measure and sometimes can be

misunderstood by one of the parties. For example, like what Participant 01 experienced, she felt like her boss were 'requesting' her to leave the organisation by questioning her role as a wife and a mother:

“... my boss once said, and that time I was so offended. I was in a middle of an appraisal... “So, your husband ... where is your husband?” Where is your child?” And I answered him. “Okay...so you have to think which you are going to choose... your career or your personal life...?” [01: Full-time employee with 5 – 10 years of experience]

### 6.6.3 Theme 3: Cognitive reaction to workplace bullying (Perseverative cognition)

Although there were many similarities in their experiences, there were also some differences regarding the reactions to the bullying of the individuals. The following portion of transcriptions intends to give an example for a clearer picture of what the subthemes were.

#### *a) Rumination and worry*

Based on the interviews, eleven participants were found to engage in rumination especially at night before going to bed. At times, participants were ruminating about the behaviours whether they were intentionally carried out or was it just work-related. This was commonly found among participants who experienced self-doubt normally at the initial stage. When the behaviour persists, participants tend to obsessively ruminate on the bullying experience, a desire for retaliation, and how it was giving them stress and impacting their health and work performances. This was more common when behaviour increases in frequency or intensity and then among those who actively cope with the behaviour. They would then ruminate over their actions in trying to manage the bullying experiences such as ruminate over whether it was the right thing to do to that they confronted the bully or made a complaint.

“Sometimes I have... issues with myself, which I don't... maybe more tendency on dwelling on it... It's hard for me because I'm highly emotional. I don't know sometimes I'm a bit conflicted. For example, when I see someone at work is better than me, I'll immediately lose my confidence, and my performance will drop... and then, I become emotional and feel that my boss must feel this way or that about me" [07: Full-time employee with 2-5 years of experience].

The majority perceived a great need to talk about the course of events repeatedly in the presence of a sympathetic and emphatic listener which they find it hard to look for. The victim had to convince himself/herself that the repeating negative behaviours was unjust and not his/her fault. Their thoughts were moving 'back and forth' to the point that some even blamed themselves for the conflict to occur. This work took a long time, and in this process, the bullied individual sometimes required professional help. For example:

“ I doubt myself...I sometimes just don't know you know... is it me who is the problem? Because, other people also have problems and argue...but I feel.. I don't know...why can't I just let it go? I think I am like this.. since my school years.. ”  
[07: Full time with 2-5 years of experience]

Besides that, participants also find it hard to focus at work. They tend to get lost in their thoughts about the problem, making it mentally capturing. This also means that the victims spend a lot of time thinking about the problem that they find it hard to focus at work. Nine participants mentioned that they worry that it would jeopardize their career in the future. The impact on inability to focus at work that also indirectly reduces work performance:

“When I am stressed out because of this, I lose focus... when I lose focus, of course, it will affect my performance at work... I once forgot to follow up with things or even try to remember things that were done on a daily basis” [11: Full time with 2-5 years of experience]

"The day of the incident, I couldn't at all do any work" [02: Full-time employee with 1-2 years of experience]

Besides that, interview responses also revealed that victims find it hard to control their thoughts with four participants responding to experience this especially at night before they fall asleep. For example:

“ I find it hard to just ignore it...I'm like...People just say let it go...but.. the cut is too deep for me” [07: Full time with 2-5 years of experience]

“It's normal that the thoughts will come at night, especially when its quiet and everyone is asleep... I'll think of what is going happen at work the next day” [08: Full time with 2-5 years of experience]

### ***b) Self-esteem***

There were six participants that mentioned about their education level as being a barrier or the reason for them to not perform. From their interview in general, it was as though they were blaming themselves (e.g. due to level of education, lack of experience, inability to speak in English) for the bullying to occur. Proficiency in the English language was also several times mentioned in the interviews which made it seemed like those able to speak in English were less prone to be bullied.

“... I work alongside with another colleague... and she can speak in English quite well... She seldom get insults from the customers whereas I... they look down on me... they think that they are superior if they speak in English... but I don't understand why can't they just speak in Malay... but, when my colleagues speaks, they'll listen...but it's just the same meaning...I really feel insulted...” [15: Full-time employee, high school leaver].

Participants became disappointed and helpless with a loss self-confidence as a reaction to workplace bullying. They became uncertain even though it wasn't the perpetrator who was commenting on their work. Participants felt disempowered, and some even felt like giving up:

" I thought that my boss would help me, but instead he humiliates me. Every day I go to work, I feel down... I don't know what language I should use, every time I try to give him a new idea, he right away says now and sternly says "please follow". I have no heart to care about the work, and I won't bother to be innovative anymore..." [17: Full-time employee with 2-5 years of experience].

Meanwhile, participants that exercise self-doubt tends to be among those experiencing top-down bullying where the perpetrators are among the supervisors, managers or higher in the hierarchy of the organization. This activity is also often seen in the initial phases of workplace bullying. For example, Participant 01:

"Maybe I'm judgemental, but I feel that my boss, the more I think about it, the more I feel that he has a negative view on me... I feel that I lack in self-confidence... So people who are timid like me would never have the guts to resign... People who are timid like me, I am slow, and I don't think I can survive... [01: continuous bullying by superiors, Course: 2].

#### 6.6.4 Theme 4: Managing workplace bullying

When participants become aware of the extent in which their health and well-being were negatively impacted, they would be prompted to establish a balance by achieving more control over the situation. This section gathers the subthemes that were identified based on the participants' responses which includes a) coping with the problem, b) barriers in taking action and c) outcomes of the action taken. An overall observation on the interviews revealed that certain coping strategies were linked to emotions of fear and disappointment (helplessness). Victims that were expressing fear and insecurity often reside to indirect aggression and manifesting voice through silent retaliation, whereas victims that announce sadness or disappointment tend to express through withdrawal. Interestingly, their interview responses also revealed resilience through spiritual beliefs as an outcome especially when the victims' received support from others (e.g. family members, friends, colleagues).

##### *a) Coping with the problem*

There could be a variety of ways on how one would manage or cope with workplace bullying (Karatuna, 2015; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006). Studies have shown that employees tend to mirror the negative behaviour when adopting a coping strategy. Besides that, level of intensity also played a role in deciding how one would manage the bullying behaviour. Findings from the interview responses show that the coping strategies that were adopted by participants influenced the course of workplace bullying (APPENDIX D). There were five main strategies that were used by the different participants:

- Actively managing the problem:

Seeking social support and advice was a common coping mechanism which most of the time involved emotion-focused strategies such as talking to family members, other colleagues or friends outside of work. This was mostly a way for the participants to regain morale and positivity. An example would be the case of Participant 09 where he normally seeks advice from his friends outside of work and partner at home.

“What keeps me going is the advice I get from my wife, my friends... I would just go out, hang out with my friends or family... Sometimes I hang out with colleagues from the same organisation. So when we talk, we talk about work, and we advise each other. I get a lot of support from my friends” [09: Continuous bullying by superior and customers, Course: 4].

"I would go to my project manager...and tell him...and ask him what to do...or else I would ask my colleagues for advice on what I should do" [16: Bullying discontinued by superior and customers, Course: 3].

Some of the participants used confrontation by having face-to-face conversations with the perpetrator. During these conversations, participants would try to stand up for themselves or make the perpetrator aware of his/her negative behaviour. These strategies were more common among participants who had a longer tenure at the organisation. Participants who perceive themselves as still new often opt for a different type of coping strategy.

"after that, I tried to slow talk with my manager... say that I'll make sure this thing will never happen again... and if she does not mind, can she forward the emails so that we both can be up-to-date with the instructions coming from the main office. I would try to find a fair solution so that both parties would be happy" [11: bullying discontinued by superior, Course: 3].

- Ignoring the problem

Another common strategy that was often used is ignoring the behaviour. This strategy is often used by participants when they underestimate the problem, usually at the initial stage of workplace bullying. For an example, Participant 04 decided to ignore the problem as she feels that it, might just worsen the problem, and since she has to report and work along with her superiors, it would perhaps destroy the working relationship between them.

"I'll just treat it as something that is not important because if I care so much about it, in the end, I would have to depend on them and I want to work here for a long time... So even there is a conflict with the managers, I'll just ignore and face it because I would have to see them and interact with them every day" [04: continuous bullying by superiors, course: 2]

However, some participants expressed some regrets in ignoring or avoiding the problem while it was still not serious. As Participant 20 had reported:

"I regret not doing anything at the beginning... personally, I feel that there is no career growth for me here...so I won't be here for long... that's what I think... but for the sake of surviving, savings and gaining experience... well, I don't think I can gain that much of experience here... I don't know if there is any value added in a field like this..." [20: continuous bullying by superiors, Course: 3].



- Passive or indirect

This mechanism of coping often involves participants avoiding or looking for other distractions to not to think of the problem. Participants also tend to stay away from the source of the problem and avoid the perpetrator. Majority of the participants also mentioned about calming themselves down through meditation and prayers that help them increase their patience and convince themselves that things would get better:

“I keep myself busy... I fill up my day with meetings and try to run away... Try not to be in their path... most of the time I just go to my discussions or whatever...when I come home I sleep, or I play with my cats...” [05: continuous bullying by superiors, Course: 2]

“So the one thing that could help me is patience...when I tend to think about it especially at night, I’ll straight away do my prayers... I increase my prayers to calm my thoughts... Every morning before I work, I’ll do my morning prayers so that it can help me with my work on that day...” [02: continuous bullying by customers and superiors, Course 2]

- Retaliation (silent voice)

Another common answer that I retrieved from the interview was retaliation through silent voice. This behaviour overlaps with the idea of withdrawal and indirect aggression. Using a ‘silent voice’ as a mechanism of coping may have its benefits. For an example, using ‘silent voice’ may be constructive such as looking for other job opportunities in other departments as a way of escaping the negative environment. However, silent voices may also have its dysfunctional effect such as engaging in ‘sabotage’ by intentionally reduced performance, effect on tardiness and attendance to work (Case Participant 17) or presenteeism (Case Participant 20). Participant 17 expressed that she lost interest with her job that at times she faked her sick leave (absenteeism) or purposely came late to work.

“So now I purposely come late and sometimes I even don’t come to work and ask for sick leave even though I’m not sick... I just am lazy to fight... I don’t have the interest anymore...” [17: bullying discontinued by superior, Course: 3].

Meanwhile Participant 20 reported that she led her colleagues to join her to retaliate as a group. In her case, almost all the front-line staff felt they are being treated unfairly. Even after expressing their concerns to the manager, nothing was done and in turn they were called as ungrateful. Therefore, in the end they decided to retaliate as a group to show their protest towards the organisations lack of support:

“ ... So, we only do minimal work... half-heartedly...because we feel frustrated, so I feel that we'll only gain satisfaction if we purposely lower our performance... I will not volunteer to extra anymore... so that will only be fair...” [20: continuous bullying by superiors, Course: 3].

- Resilience or 'Redha.' (Religious coping)

A common word that was often found in almost all the interviews were the word 'Redha'. I was not able to directly translate the word into English as it may deviate it from the actual meaning or use of the word. Redha if directly translated means accept. Accepting the behaviour can be due to various reason including as part of moving forward (especially among those who resigned), made comparisons (e.g. other people have it worse) while some accept out of sympathy (in trying to understand the perpetrator's background). For an example, Participant 18 who reappraised her experienced as something that she learnt from in order to improve herself.

“sometimes you feel.. when you realize something you're not doing right, then you want to try to make yourself better.. so you think about going for training.. yeah... more options for training... how to cope and do better in managing your work... so you don't miss any important information...” [18: experienced continuous bullying by superior, Course: 3].

Besides that, there exists a spiritual element (religious views) to it as participants often associate with accepting the behaviour as part of their fate. The comment below illustrates an example of 'Redha'.

"I'll just forgive him... anyway, he is older than me... so I feel sympathy towards him... I'll just 'redha' with the circumstances... and I'll just accept that all of this should happen as its being written as part of my fate and I'll have to go through this to achieve success in the future... my friends even agree with me...” [03: experienced continuous bullying by colleague, Course: 2].

This participant shared that her main support came from her religious belief and by saying that her friends agree with her also showed that she was talking to her friends on a superficial level which helped her cope with bullying at work.

### ***b) Barriers in taking action***

There are studies which have found that most victims do not report even though their organisations have the required policies or procedures (Bergman et al., 2002). In this study, most participants did not report the behaviour because of fear of victimisation, or because they were not confident any good would come out of reporting it. These responses reflect the concern that the employees who took part in the survey had in reporting the bullying behaviours that they experience, for an example like what Participant 13 responded:

"At the end, when the higher management questions the manager, the manager will eventually find out, and at the end, it will get backfired. So, I think if you complain it would just eat you then". [13: Full-time employee, Ignored the behaviour]

Besides that, the interviews also suggest apprehension about being seen as weak if they reported the behaviour and they did not have enough evidence. They expressed their concerns that reporting the behaviour would just make it worse. This was especially common among those who experienced indirect bullying either through social media or in the office. For an example:

"How can I report, I don't have enough... what they call it... evidence...I know she is talking about me in her posts, and she knows that I'm reading it... But she's close to our supervisors, they won't believe me..." [19: Part time employee, Resigned].

There were also concerns about repercussions that could result from them reporting the behaviour and this would just be worse than the problem. Some of the repercussions include losing their job where they believe that besides from seeing them as weak, the organisation would have the impression that they would be treated as 'whistle-blowers'. Besides that, they feel that complaining or reporting would not solve the problem as they believe they would not have support from the organisation. My analysis showed they believed that organisations would probably support the managers and not the lower staff making them feel obligate to comply with the behaviours. Participants also believed that by taking actions, the perpetrator might hold grudge and the bullying would just worsen, just like what Participant 10 reported:

"I'll just stick with my way of coping. Because even if I actively cope, nothing would change." [10: Full-time employee, resigned].

“... well, there is no use for me to do anything, because at the end of the day, I’s still have to report directly to him... and I might just get on his nerves... you know... he’ll surely get back at me...one way or another...” [06: Full time employee, Resigned].

Towards the end of the interview, I asked what their final decision in handling was or managing the conflict. Nine of them had already resigned, one participant was waiting for their contract to end, one person asked for a transfer, five decided to ignore the behaviour, three decided to confront the bully, and one participant decided to accept and go along with the behaviour. Among the nine participants who resigned, none of them took legal action towards their company with the most common reason being did not want to go through the hassle and eventually would lose the battle.

“I am just too lazy (lack of energy) to take any action. What’s done is done...Just treat it as today is their day, but tomorrow you might never know...” [10: Full time employee, Resigned].

### ***c) Outcomes of taking action***

Most organizations utilize internal-grievance systems as it is known to be a quick way that addresses or resolves workplace bullying. However, despite its positive outcomes, there are also studies which have shown the system to have negative outcomes for those employees who use this sort of procedure in the workplace (Boswell & Olsom-Buchanan, 2004; Cortina & Magley, 2003). Studies have shown cases of complaints being made they were not fully resolved or dealt with according to the prescribed procedure within the organisation. For example, Cortina & Maglehy (2003) found that organisation may retaliate via tangible ways (e.g. Demotion, involuntary transfer, or forced resignation) or covert ways (e.g. Isolation, accusation) against the person who is considered as a ‘whistle blower’ to the negative behaviour.

Bergman and his colleagues (2002) found that the organisational responses to the reporting of the harassment had the potential to compound the problems through minimisation of the issue and a perceived lack of real commitment to deal with it. Studies also found employees that use internal grievance systems to report workplace bullying and harassment complaints tend to report lower performance rating, high level of absenteeism, a lower rate of promotion., and high turnover (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2004, Kivimaki et al. 2003). Reporting sexual harassments contributed to an increase in job dissatisfaction and greater psychological distress more than the harassment itself

(Bergman et al. 2002). There are also studies that suggest victims sometimes escalate the conflicts themselves through inappropriate coping strategies (Einarsen & Skotsgad, 1996, Zapf & Gross, 2000).

Some of the responses are as below:

“After I made the complaint to the boss, I immediately felt like I was being judged by my boss. She even said: Are you here just for the sake of money? Not for the sake of the company". I mean, why would she say that? You don't even take care of your employees' well-being, and you expect more from us? Your employees are not ‘rubbish’ that you can treat us like dirt... So when I started getting angry, that's when I started calling the management ‘rubbish’.... [20: continuous bullying by superiors, Course: 3].

It could be suggested that most of the time, confrontation or complaining alone is not effective in putting a stop to the behaviour, but instead, it made things worse. An example is what Participant 07 experienced:

“After I complained to my boss... things just got worse... I don't know if he is trying to protect me or is he trying to find my fault... He is not that flexible with me anymore... He will check my whereabouts, intervene with my work and ... I am like...I feel suffocated... My colleagues are getting the wrong idea, saying that I am the boss's favourite now... [07: bullying discontinued due to resignation, Course: 4)

Based on Participants 07's, experience, it become even more suffocating for her when her boss tried to manage the problem. Her intent was to put a stop to the bully, but instead she felt that her boss is not as flexible as before.

#### 6.6.5 Theme 5: Repercussions of workplace bullying

Participants, exposed to workplace bullying, experienced high demands and pressures, added with lack of control over the situation and uncontrollable chain of thoughts (perseverative cognition). The interviews reported prolonged level of stress which caused them to experience emotional, psychological and psychosomatic effects on themselves as a result of bullying. On the other hand, participants might perceive they have control over the problem and decide to take action, but the unsuccessful outcome (e.g. Participants 07's experience) may also amplify negative repercussions of workplace bullying. They

suffered a wide range of health-related consequences consistent with those reported by other research including physical, psychological and social impact.

**a) Physical/ Psychosomatic Impact**

Participants reported a range of health-related problems including exhaustion, sleep difficulty, headaches, attributed miscarriage with stress at work, high blood pressure and several occasions of panic attacks. For example:

“ My head would hurt and the thoughts will just keep on playing on my mind...until it can be solved... which I don't know if it will ever... [02: Requested to be transferred to a different chain after more than 10 years of working in the company].

Five participants that sought medical attention were among them, two were pregnant. Both participants who were pregnant were advised by their doctors to resign from their organisation as it was causing negative impacts on their pregnancy. One of them eventually had a miscarriage and decided to resign from the organisation one her contract ends. The other participant followed the advice from her doctor and resigned. The following examples relate to the two pregnant participants mentioned earlier:

"First of all, I am a person who has difficulties to conceive, and when I finally got pregnant, I had a miscarriage. I strongly feel that this was because of the high stress I experience at work" [01: Decided to resign after 5-10 years of experience with the company].

“That time my doctor had warned me that I can't take in too much stress because I had a weak womb... Thank God I resigned as I was experiencing a lot of bleeding at that time...” [10: resigned after 1.5 years working with the company].

**b) Psychological Impact**

All participants experienced negative emotions including feeling angry, frustrated, couldn't see things in a positive way and were a lot of time emotionally exhausted especially after experiencing an ineffective method of coping. Working through the bullying and the course of events, both consciously and in dreams, was described as a painful process. Lack of focus, memory problems, prolonged stress, anxiety, depression were among the common impacts described by the participants which are often reported in bullying literature. For example, Participant 12 who faces continuous bullying from

his managers where at times he would get stuck in between a disagreement between the two managers causing him to feel uneasy and his heart was not calm most of the time. This would happen even outside of work whenever he thinks about work. Because of the experience, he has with working with the two bosses; it creates worry for him causing him to experience anxiety whenever the topic about work came up.

"In the office or outside, it makes me think over and over again... I will see him at work, and this makes me feel uneasy... It affects my health, and I don't feel okay... I feel lethargic, I go back late and ... I'm just not calm..." [12: Experience continuous bullying from his superiors and decides to ignore the problem]

### *c) Social Impact*

Participants reported having no desire to do anything or to meet other people (e.g. family or friends outside of work) especially among those who engage in perseverative cognition. Participants find that they start to isolate themselves from going to social activities due to the exhaustion of the stress faced at the workplace. On the contrary, three of the participants reported that they started to lose friends and families due to constantly complaining and talking about their stress at work where they are seen as 'always being negative' and hence, excluded by their family and friends. An example of this is like what Participant 01 and 08 experienced:

"...my friends even told me that I'm bitter... which I usually am not... I used to be fun, and now it's either they know that I'm stressed out...or they just don't want to hang out with me anymore... I guess... I don't have the energy to hang out all the time anyway..." [01: Decided to resign after 5-10 years of experience with the company].

"...normally, I will be in a bad mood and I will be silent and won't talk to anyone in the office... but they can see that...because I am a happy person, I like to joke around... so they'll know that I'm not in the mood" [08: Stayed on accepted the behaviour through positive reappraisal].

#### 6.6.6 Theme 6: Loyalty issues

Issues on loyalty were seen most common among those who perceives lack of support from their organisation but have no choice but to remain in the organisation. These were mainly among participants who have tried to resolve the issues but was unable to take action due to a lot at stake. This theme was also found overlapping with the theme 'perseverative cognition'. Participants either ruminated about leaving the organisation or about the best way to 'get even' with their perpetrator which were their organisation.

Related to the point where participants started to retaliate silently, feelings of withdrawal thus bringing up loyalty issues to the organisation. Besides sabotaging in order to seek revenge, two participants mentioned badmouthing their company on social media as medium for them to express their frustration. For an example:

“... I post my rage on social media to blow off some steam... Although I don't really mention my company's name... because I might get in trouble... but my friends know what I'm talking about... Comments from them do help... as though they share their support on me. ..” [15: Full time with 2-5 years of experience, resigned from company]

There were some participants who still felt vulnerable at the time of the interview where some were continuing to endure the negative behaviour. Thus, most of them had the intentions to leave the organisation in hopes that they would be able to recover their well-being.

"I want to move to another organisation that is more established. I can't progress in this place...even though my position is quite secure there, but I am not happy there... I am still thinking about it, but I have the intent to leave this place" [07: Full time with 2-5 years of experience, resigned from company].

Besides that, among the participants that expressed loyalty issues mentioned purposely reducing their performance at work. Faking their sick leave or purposely coming to work late was one of the many ways that they retaliated or silently voicing out their symbol of protest. One participant who was frequently bullied by disrespectful customers even retaliated by purposely not giving their best service:

“I'm not proud to say this...but I do this all the time...when I get so frustrated... you know the free gifts they get from buying cereal boxes... because I just can't stand the way they speak to me and demand this and that... I purposely lie saying that the free gift has finished... It gives me the satisfaction at that time... They deserved it...” [15: Full time with 2-5 years of experience, resigned from company].



## 6.7 Discussion

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of the qualitative stage of the research. It was aimed to explore the perceptions and experience of participants who were subjected to bullying behaviours in the workplace labelled as victims. The sample size of a qualitative study is usually justified by the data saturation identified from the analysis. Theoretical saturation is often associated with grounded theory studies where no additional themes emerge from the reviewing process of the successive transcripts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Similar to this is thematic saturation where it is often used in other qualitative analysis besides grounded theory (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014). However, the sample size of this study was determined by the results from Study 1 (n=20). Given that it was a small sample size, I was able to interview all of the participants and not depend on data saturation.

Nevertheless, the development of themes of this study did depend on the thematic saturation. It was observed that the first 14 interviews provided the codes which then developed the themes in the study. Six further interviews were still analyzed and went through the same procedure but were mainly used for modifying the codes, making it broader and more inclusive. By analysing and interpreting major themes, significant findings on the perceptions and experience were revealed. The findings showed that participants view what constitutes to workplace bullying matches most of what has been said in the workplace bullying literature including negative acts such as power abuse and hard to defend themselves (Ståle Einarsen, 1999; Salin, 2003a) and the negative impact on their health especially psychologically (Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006a; Reknes et al., 2016; Vartia, 2001). Most of the participants also described bullying behaviours as indirect and subtle rather than being obvious or direct.

However, the idea of time which highlights repetition as a core element to workplace bullying were absent from the participants' definition. None consciously mentioned anything about the behaviour repeating when asked about the definition of bullying although from their own interview, I was able to retrieve that they had been experiencing the negative behaviours repeatedly which often escalates and worsen through time. These behaviours were often work-related behaviours at the beginning which would then escalate to something that is personal similar to what had been suggested in previous studies (Einarsen, Helge & Nielsen, 2005; Zapf & Gross, 2001). Although, findings showed that participants with higher education qualification tend to

talk more about their experience with work-related bullying behaviours and highlights injustice to be the main issue when expressing their frustration. Meanwhile, participants with lower education level discussed more of their personal-related bullying experience and tend to associate themselves as being inexperienced or low education level as the reason why people treat them as such.

Besides that, participants tend to perceive workplace bullying to happen in a top-down structure where most of them gave examples being bullied by their superiors. However, their own experiences slightly deviated from the definition they had on workplace bullying. They did not just experience bullying from superiors, but perpetrators were also among colleagues and customers. The study identified the various form of bullying behaviour including repeated threats, unfairness, undermining as well as the negative work environment which supports these behaviours to take place. Although, interestingly the majority described bullying as intentional and some even narrated that perpetrators get satisfaction out of bullying others.

Although there is the dilemma whether bullying has to be intentional (Elfi Baillien et al., 2009; Helge Hoel & Beale, 2006; Tehrani, 2012), this finding supports previous evidence where bullying is often perceived as intentional from a victim's lenses (H Hoel et al., 2004; Lutgen-sandvik et al., 2007a). When considering perceptions of workplace bullying, culture plays an important role. This is because culture may represent a key construct in the context of targets' perceptions such that values can shape perception (Tiriandis, 2004). Moreover, bullying behaviours in the workplace are commonly subtle in nature such as withholding information, being given excessive or little workload and are more likely to be interpreted in a variety of ways (Baillien et al., 2009; Liefoghe and Mackenzie-Davey, 2010). This variety of interpretations would give influence to the reaction towards bullying (Liefoghe and Mac Davey, 2001).

These various perceptions on workplace bullying might also influence the different cognitive and behavioural reactions, though participants may experience similar negative behaviours at work. Some would ruminate over the problem while some would retaliate in action. Participants were found to express feelings of disappointment especially among participants with a longer tenure (2 years and above) and feelings of helplessness which were prevalent among participants with a shorter tenure (1-2 years of experience). Interestingly, it was also found that coping strategies differed between the intensity of the bullying. This one of the interesting finding that I was not able to retrieve

from Study 1. Majority of participants did not just use one type of coping behaviour, but multiple coping strategies were used depending on the intensity of the bullying.

There was generally a discrepancy in the participants' actual and ideal response when asked about how they wanted to deal with bullying. The interview responses revealed that participants ideally would have wanted to exercise active coping strategies, but the fear of retaliations and jeopardizing their job at the company was the most common reason for their more passive responses. Therefore, participants largely started with passive coping before attempting to change to active coping which was opposite to what was found in Zapf and Gross's (2001) study where victims in his study would attempt to try to change the behaviour first (under low levels of conflicts) before resorting to a more passive approach when no solution is found. The participants in this study prefer to seek emotional help rather than practical help from their colleagues or members of their organization. By seeking emotional help, it sorts of gives them strength to actively cope with the problem such as making a report or confronting the perpetrator.

Besides confrontation with the perpetrator, participants generally do not have the confidence in making complaints or reporting it to higher authorities. This could be explained by the 'mum effect' (Rosen & Tesser, 1970) which refers to employees being reluctant to convey negative information due to the discomfort associated with being the conveyer of bad news. Previous studies have shown evidence where the hierarchical relationship between the employee and the supervisor intensifies this effect causing employees to alter or filter negative information that is being conveyed upwards.

Depending on what is at stake and the intensity, the participants would attempt to actively change the behaviour if they perceive that the conflict was manageable and still can be controlled. However, this was seldom the case. Only three participants attempted to actively solve their problem at work resulting in only two successful cases. All three perceived their conflicts as manageable hence influenced their decision in trying to solve the conflict via confrontation. Nevertheless, only two participants succeeded in solving their problem had been working for a long time with the company (eleven years and four years) while one participant whose attempt backfired had only be working over just a year in the organization. A lot of factors could contribute to these results.

Based on their tenure, findings might suggest that experienced employees might have better resources or in solving their conflicts at work compared to employees that

have little experience working in the company. These findings did not support earlier studies (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lechner et al., 2007; Stanton et al., 2007) which have shown effective results when active coping were used under low levels of conflicts. From the interview, although conflicts were described as minor and was low in intensity, tenure tend to be an important factor when participants tried to confront their perpetrators. In relation to that, age might also be a great influence on the effectiveness using confrontation. Given that the Malaysian is a high power distance culture (Hofstede, 1973), confrontation might not necessarily be accepted as an appropriate way of handling the problem especially if there is an age gap between the victim and the alleged perpetrator with the victim being younger.

Besides that, one could also argue how confrontation is carried out as the victim might not have the right set of skills in employing effective confrontation which might in turn provoke the perpetrator and hence backfires on the victim. The ineffectiveness of using an active voice lead to repercussion on prolonged stress activation which might have influenced participant to engage in the perseverative cognition (rumination and worrying) cycle. This in turn, gives impact to the health and well-being of the participants. For example, where participants ruminate at night causing them to have difficulty in falling asleep, or where ineffectiveness of coping causes them to worry about future interactions with the perpetrator leading to uneasiness and anxiety.

For those who experienced bullying from their customers, the main problem was not with the customers. But it was the lack of organizational or supervisor's support added to them experiencing similar behaviour a day-to day basis. The recollection of the act may affect behaviour and memories as strong as the original incident or act (Bishop & Hoel, 2008). In relation to the perseverative cognition hypothesis, stress response does not necessarily require the presence of the physical stressor (in this case was the customer and/or the supervisor) but just the thought of the unresolved conflict could activate the stress response. In this case, when frontline employees face similar behaviours even though from different customers, it may still prompt the employees with the same reaction.

Even though victims may not say anything to anyone (e.g. complaining, reporting, confronting), but instead they can use active behaviours that could manifest 'voice'. Withdrawal may help in surviving workplace bullying as it helps targets to manage the problem by choosing silence as often as possible (Easteal & Ballard, 2017). For example,

those who have no choice of leaving the organisation and are forced to continue working (often due to socioeconomical reasons), would eventually resort to loyalty issues. Based on the ELVN Model (Rusbult et al., 1988) discussed earlier in the literature review, loyalty was described as remaining in the organisation with hopes that the organisation will support them and the problems will resolve whereas neglect was described as focusing on non-work matters or passively allowing conditions to worsen.

However, this study found that many described of having no choice but to remain in the company (largely due to socioeconomic problems) rather than describing their constructive support for their organization. Similar to a study by Withey and Cooper (2018), employees were loyal by biding to time while feeling trapped at work. Then this would encourage them to participate in counterproductive behaviours as a way of manifesting their voice silently.

Another interesting finding that was found in this study was that all participants that resigned from their organisation did not claim for justice towards their perpetrator. Even though they were not anymore directly linked to the perpetrator, many let go of dissatisfaction and accepted it as part and parcel of life and it was their destiny (they were chosen) to have to experience that negative chapter of their life and that they would go stronger after this chapter of their life (Redha). Even though their conflicts were left unresolved, but people were found to use positive reappraisal through their religious beliefs more consistently than other forms of coping such as self-blame. Interestingly, even going through a hard time, people were still able to be grateful and positively reflect by saying that things could have been worse. This can be related to sense of coherence (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2007) which refers to how people view life in stressful situations which influence on how they cope with it. Religious beliefs help shape how victims understand, manage the situation and find meaning to the situation which indirectly enhances resilience. This discovery supports previous findings where sense of coherence (in this case is shaped by religious beliefs) can be a protective moderator to workplace bullying (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2007; Nielsen et al., 2008).

## Chapter 7

### Overall Discussion and Conclusion

The two studies that made up this thesis examined workplace bullying from the perspectives of frontline employees. This chapter outlines the summary and overall conclusion reached by these two studies focusing on discussing findings that relate to each other. Next, the limitations and contributions of these findings are discussed in applied sense with recommendations for future search and workplace bullying policy development. The overall purpose of the thesis was to examine the role of perseverative cognition in coping with workplace bullying among frontline employees and to understand how victims perceive and react to workplace bullying and its implication to their health and well-being.

We will revisit the research questions that drove this study and respond to it through a summary of discussions that integrates the findings from Study 1 and Study 2. The first part of this thesis focused on the three elements defining workplace bullying which were adverse behaviour, duration (repetitive and prolonged) and power imbalance. We also touched on the intention dilemma discussing whether bullying has to be intentional or not necessarily. We then moved into conceptualising the theories used in this study which are cognitive - motivation – relational theory of coping (CMR) (Lazarus, 1991), cognitive activation theory of stress (CATS) (Hege R. Eriksen, Murison, Pensgaard, & Ursin, 2005) and perseverative cognition hypothesis (PCH) (Brosschot et al., 2006). All theories were discussed separately before integrating them into the research model and to be tested out in the second part of the thesis.

Then, two studies were carried out in sequence via the sequential explanatory mixed-method. Study 1 was a longitudinal quantitative study which addressed three research questions: (1) What are the effects of workplace bullying towards employees' health and well-being over time?, (2) do individuals' state of health and well-being predict subsequent bullying in the workplace and (3) how do coping and preservative cognition interplay in the relationship between workplace bullying and health and well-being impact? Participants identified as victims of bullying were then interviewed in Study 2 in which the fourth and fifth research question was addressed: (4) How do victims define and perceive workplace bullying and (5) what motivates victims to engage/ disengage

with perseverative cognition and cope with workplace bullying? This final chapter discusses and integrates the main findings from both studies and to make some conclusions about the role of perseverative cognition and coping strategies exercised by victims of workplace bullying. Theoretical and practical implications as well as limitations are also discussed in this chapter which then ends with practical suggestions for future research.

## 7.1 Overall discussions

The thesis suggests that the phenomenon of workplace bullying is prevalent and widespread among frontline employees especially due to the fact that majority of the respondents reported being exposed to negative acts with a frequency of at least now and then during the timeline of this study. This indicates that such acts are relatively common in this organizational setting. Specifically, the interviews revealed that considerable amount of bullying experiences among front liners were by their superiors and customers. The term bullying was used to describe a range of negative behaviours including one-off incident (e.g. sexual harassment), injustice and power abuse by superiors or the management, undermining by colleagues and customers as well as repeated remarks and acts of discrimination (e.g. educational level and age).

Therefore, these various perceptions highlight the subjective nature of the term bullying and support studies that show that employees interpretation of workplace bullying may differ from the 'formal' definitions (Liefoghe & Mackenzie-Davey, 2010). Additionally, through the utilization of in-depth, face-to-face interviews, this research identified several reported cognitive reaction (i.e. perseverative cognition) and behavioural reaction (i.e. coping) subsequent to workplace bullying which was parallel to their responses in Study 1. Furthermore, this research identified unreported coping strategies such as positive reappraisal through religious beliefs and reacting through the manifestation of silent voice.

Bringing together the two studies together helped me answer the research questions and identified deeper insights of how victims make sense and react to workplace bullying. Results in Study 1 allowed me to identify bullying experience at the three time point which reported continuous bullying, early onset of bullying and discontinued bullying. But then, I was not able to retrieve information from the survey if the bullying experience had just started or whether it has been prolonged and I was not able to identify

the intensity of the bullying. However, in Study 2, I was able to retrieve this information from the narrative response described by the victims and crosscheck with the patterns they have chosen (five different patterns of bullying course). It gave me a better understanding of their bullying experience, although Study 2 just focused on 20 victims. Interestingly, the majority reported their bullying experience remained unresolved even though they had resigned from the company.

Study 1 reported a decrease in percentage of workplace bullying based on the self-report questionnaire. One of the impressions that I had was that ‘victims’ no longer wanted to participate in the longitudinal study due to several reasons including the nature of the study which required them to recall the negative acts. Given that the participants may be actively engaged in this traumatic event, continuing their participation in this study had the potential to be psychologically uncomfortable. However, finding from Study 2 gave me a different perspective on this outcome. Although there were victims who did not experience subsequent negative behaviors at all three time points (e.g. bullied at Time 1 and Time 2, but not at Time 3), but their interview reported experiencing repeated negative thoughts about the conflict and how it affected their cognitive activities, health and behavior in the workplace. This highlights those participants in Study 1 who might experience bullying at only one Time point but repeatedly have intrusive negative thoughts about that particular experience.

Although Study 1 revealed that bullying experiences decreased over time but during the interview in Study 2, victims in general identified their bullying experience as ongoing and some still escalating and unresolved. However, this might be the case because study 2 only records the accounts of 20 victims while Study 1 records the account of victims (negative acts repeated at least weekly), but also those who were exposed to negative acts at least now and then and non-victims (was not exposed to any negative acts listed). Besides that, this discrepancy might be caused due to the negative acts that were experienced by victims in Study 2 that are not listed in the survey in Study 1. For an example, victims experienced situations where they felt they were taken for granted (e.g. using their knowledge and not getting credit, asking them to use their personal resources first and delay reimbursements), having to do or finish other people’s tasks, getting scolded even when it’s not their fault, the use of social media as a medium of “attacking” and using “guilt traps” or threats relating to cultural and religious values. These negative acts were perceived as bullying by the victims in the interview but were not listed in the survey questions in Study 1. On the other hand, when victims in study 2 were asked about



the NAQ- R scale, there were certain behaviors that were not perceived as unacceptable. For an example, victims viewed scolded and shouting as normal behavior especially in an aggressive environment/ fast paced working environment. Employees joke around using words that might be perceived as offensive but treated as normal in their workplaces. This was common among those who were working in the retail sector as employees were used to mean jokes as part of humor within their organizational culture.

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, research in bullying, specifically in the workplace, is relatively new in the Malaysian context, starting in the early 2000's. The qualitative interviews gave insights into victims' perceptions on the phenomena. People were uncomfortable when discussing workplace bullying. There is no appropriate or specific term that exists in the Malay Language to describe workplace bullying so instead, I used the phrase 'repeated conflict at work' to ask questions. When asked about the term 'bullying', victims describe that bullying is often associated with school children but not with adults in their workplace. When asked if it could happen in the workplace, victims' common answers describe top-down bullying which refers to bullying by superiors. This could give impact on the under-reporting of cases of workplace bullying.

Findings from Study 1 revealed that the majority of the participants reported that the source of the negative act they experienced were from their superiors. This was also the case when asked to describe what is workplace bullying in their interview (Study 2) and who are the perpetrators. However, when asked to describe the negative experiences which they reported in Study 1, some victims described customers to be responsible for those negative acts. Interestingly, when these victims were asked if they were bullied by their customers, they would not label it as 'being bullied' but instead 'customer sovereignty' emerged into the discussion. This findings reveal inconsistencies where victims in the sample do not label their customers as bullies even though their customers were responsible for the negative acts. Instead, the victims would only view superiors as bullies if the same behavior were coming from their superiors.

Another issue that was frequently brought up in the interview was the victims' level of education. Victims expressed being undermined based on their academic qualification (i.e. high school leavers, university graduates) and ability to speak English. It is being perceived in this culture that those who can speak English portrays intelligence. Therefore, people would give more respect to those who does as reported in Study 2. This supported findings from Study 1 which showed that level of education was significantly

associated with workplace bullying with those with lower qualifications experiencing more bullying (Chapter 5).

Findings from Study 1 also showed the longitudinal impact of workplace bullying on individuals' health and well-being especially on depression, sleep disturbances (difficulty in falling asleep, nightmares and waking up at night) and headache problems due to being pressured to get things done and feeling frustrated or annoyed at the workplace. In relation to these findings, Study 2 explored richer accounts from victims who shared their experiences in more detail in terms of their health and well-being. Victims often talked about having sleep difficulties and headaches on top of feeling intense exhaustion due from the conflict. But, some victims also mentioned experiencing an increase in their blood pressure and panic attacks on several occasions. There was also a case where a pregnant victim went through a miscarriage and associated this incident with being under a lot of stress from her bullying experience at work. Besides experiencing mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety and stress, Study 2 found that victims commonly expressed that they experienced difficulty in focussing at work and some even mentioned having problems with remembering things due to constantly thinking about the problem. On top of that, Study 2 also found negative consequences on the victims' social life. Victims expressed that they became distant with their family and friends and found that they lacked the energy to participate in social activities.

From the reversed causation test in Study 1, anxiety was seen to significantly predict subsequent bullying compared to other health and well-being conditions. These longitudinal associations were significant after controlling for potential covariates including education background, age, gender and negative affect. In Study 2, victims were asked about the impact on them of feeling anxious due to bullying which they revealed as jeopardizing their future. This was because victims explained the difficulty for them of carrying out their tasks as usual as they tended to worry about what would happen to them, which indirectly caused their work performance to drop as reported in Study 2. This could be a possible explanation of the findings of Study 1, where anxious employees (victims) are vulnerable to negative acts at work due to reduced work performance.

Furthermore, findings from Study 1 confirmed the role of perseverative cognition as a significant mediator between workplace bullying and individuals' health and well-being. Repetitive negative thinking was seen to mediate most of the relationships

including depression, anxiety, stress, sleep disturbances and headache. Addition to that, workplace bullying was also found significantly impacting stress and anxiety through worrying. Rumination on the other hand did not mediate any of the relationships. This could be due to a number of reasons including statistical reason (high correlations between variables), rumination scales not relating the thought process to bullying and that the participants are ruminating about something else and not related to bullying or due to attrition bias as reported earlier in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, this proves the significant role of sustained cognitive reaction (perseverative cognition) in mediating the negative impact on individuals' health and well-being due to experience bullying at work at least for RNT and worrying.

These findings were supported by victims accounts in Study 2 of having problems remembering things and being unable to focus at work due to the repetitive negative thoughts about the bullying experience at work. Although rumination was not a significant mediator in Study 1, victims did express repeatedly thinking negatively a lot, especially before bed. Some common answers about their thought content revolved around the bullying itself, how it has affected their well-being and career, their desire to retaliate and going back and forth on who was to blame (themselves or the perpetrator) and how to manage or cope with the bullying at the workplace. Many victims also expressed the need to talk about the bullying event repeatedly but only in the presence of a sympathetic and an empathetic listener who was often difficult to find. Due to this, they remain reserved and turned to actively engage in perseverative cognition, finding it hard to get rid of it out of their system.

In terms of their coping behaviour, I was able to identify that victims preferred ignoring the behaviour and that they least preferred active coping from the findings in Study 1. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, the survey items only measured ignoring as a behavioural reaction ignoring did not focus on the content. Interviews in Study 2 found that victims tended to ignore the problem especially when the conflict or the bullying behaviour was perceived as 'not serious'. Victims tended to treat it as something that would just go away, except that when the bullying escalated, the majority expressed regret in not doing anything from the beginning. What happens next is that victims tend to seek social support either from friends or family on how to cope with the bullying.

Loyalty issues and neglect emerged as one of the dominant themes where it was closely related to the ignoring behaviour. For an example, victims would resort to

ignoring the organization by engaging in neglecting behaviours such as intentionally not coming to work or purposely reduced their performance. On top of that, findings from Study 2 revealed that victims generally focused on the desirability and importance of the outcomes (abstract level of construal) more than on the feasibility and planning of outcomes (concrete level of construal). Victims often focus on meanings and implications engaging in analytical rumination involving thinking about the causes and the consequences (Watkins, 2008; Watkins & Teasdale, 2004). Therefore this finding was able to answer my question on why victims tend to cope passively. As reported in previous studies (Ehring et al., 2008; Ehring & Watkins, 2008), abstract level of construal were often observed as unconstructive as individuals in this condition tend to produce more emotional response. Hence, this reason might explain why victims' health and well-being were affected. Therefore, this might just be the answer on why victims on this study did not prefer active coping and preferred more passive coping. However, there were several victims that used face-to-face confrontation, but this was more common among employees with longer tenure. Assuming that with longer tenure, the employees have more experience which makes them feel more comfortable or confident in using active coping strategies.

Although active and passive coping, ignoring and self-doubt are often discussed as common mechanisms when coping with bullying, Study 2 found interesting insights on victims' coping mechanisms, specifically in the Malaysian context. Two important things that came out of Study 2 which was victims resorting to silent retaliation as means of manifesting their voice and spiritual beliefs that aided positive reappraisal of their negative experience. Employees who were bullied as a group tended to choose retaliation more commonly than just ignoring the problem. Like one of the cases from the victims I interviewed, they gained the courage to act upon the matter because the group experienced similar acts. However this was only the case if everyone in the group that were bullied agreed to take action as some may not want to take the risk over several factors (i.e risk in career progression, job insecurity, socioeconomical status). Another important finding that was found in Study 2 was the spiritual element which was termed as 'Redha'. This coping strategy was commonly exercised by the victims of bullying especially when they perceive that nothing can be done. This concept revolves around accepting the behaviour over sympathy (i.e sympathizes over why perpetrators behave in such a way), giving forgiveness, believing in karma and over faith and religious beliefs.

Interestingly, it was found that victims did not make any complaints even though they had nothing lose (i.e. those who have quit their job, moved on to a different department or organisation) but instead being ‘Redha’ over the situation. Relating it to spiritual beliefs, victims tend to perceive it as ‘karma’ or that they are being tested by God believing that all that happened is for a reason and that something good would come out of it. This finding although cannot be generalized is an important and significant finding given that it has not been commonly discussed in the coping literatures. Some of these findings was something new to the study which was not identified in Study 1. Thus, these addition on level of construal, negative acts that were perceived as bullying, and responses on ways of coping gave more insights on the experience of workplace bullying narrated by victims which enriched the overall findings.

## 7.2 Research Contributions

The findings from this research have provided several theoretical and methodological contributions to the bullying literature. In terms of its theoretical contribution, Study 1 makes a contribution by using an established model (Perseverative Cognition Hypothesis) (Brosschot et al., 2006) to examine the impact of workplace bullying. It has been criticized before that stress scientists have not incorporated prolonged activation as a major element in their research and theories (Brosschot et al., 2005). Therefore, this thesis have contributed by incorporating prolonged activation (perseverative cognition) in the research model. The finding from this research reveal the significant role of perseverative cognition as a mediator in the bullying research.

Given that time is a core element in defining workplace bullying (Zapf & Gross, 2001), the more reason perseverative cognition should be included in bullying studies. This thesis has provided evidence in the mediating role of perseverative cognition on the workplace bullying impact on employees’ health and well-being specifically through repetitive negative thinking and worrying. Therefore it has proven to be a relevant variable which is still yet to be explored deeper in the bullying literature. As mentioned earlier, there are studies on worry and rumination in the bullying literature (Niven, Sprigg, Armitage, & Satchwell, 2013; Rodriguez-muñoz et al., 2011), but perseverative cognition has various mechanisms and could be measured in different ways.

Thus, findings from this research stress the importance of studying perseverative cognition in the resolution of bullying. Interventions could be developed around this

phenomena which promotes victims to disengage in the perseverative cognition especially for cases that have escalated or have remained unresolved for a long period. If stopping the bullying behaviour remains impossible, we could at least train employees to exercise coping behaviours that reduces engagement in sustained cognitive activation. For an example, providing organizational and social support to employees as seeking support tends to be the first coping strategy that victims in this study utilizes.

This research also confirms many of the features of workplace bullying described in particular negative acts, power imbalance, intention and the importance of work environment in an Asian context. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, workplace bullying research has mostly focused on Western countries. Therefore, this research has contributed accounts of workplace bullying experience from the lens of Asian employees. Findings from Study 2 revealed that certain negative acts such as using guilt traps in relation to cultural and religious values as well as being taken for granted or making them feel ‘used’ were perceived as workplace bullying to them.

Given that the samples belong to a country with high power distance, behaviours such as being asked to finish other colleagues tasks or getting scolded for other people’s mistakes were the common behaviours perceived as bullying although not listed in the NAQ-R. Addition to that, findings from Study 2 revealed bullying experiences that are executed online mainly through social media. This acknowledges the need to include cyberbullying within working context. Interestingly, none of the victims in Study 2 had insights that their own behaviours including ignoring or retaliating behaviour may have contributed to the escalation of conflicts. In fact, they would blame the perpetrator or the work environment for the bullying incident. This can be supported by a previous study that found targets often have little insight on how their behaviours may have contributed to the bullying process (Zapf, 1999).

In terms of its methodological contribution, this research has contributed in validating the existing scales such as the revised version of the Negative Act Questionnaire (NAQ-R) and Perseverative Thinking Questionnaire (PTQ). Confirmatory factor analysis was carried out for validation purpose (Chapter 3). Besides that, this research has been carried out in the Malay Language. Therefore this thesis has utilized the Malay version of NAQ-R and other scales in the thesis (e.g. PTQ, DASS, PSWQ, RRS) which went through a back translation procedure. Although, the bullying scale can be improved by adding more coverage on power imbalance especially when power

imbalance is a core element of the workplace bullying definition. In relation to that, 'silent voice' which emerged quite frequently in the interview responses highlights the need to include it into coping scales when studying bullying especially when the samples share similar characteristics with the samples in this study (e.g. non-Western samples, frontline employees).

Research in workplace bullying has focused a lot on employees from sectors that reported high number of cases of bullying including the education, health and hospitality sectors (O'Driscoll et al., 2011). However, this thesis has contributed the use of front line employees that include samples from call centres, retail, sales sectors. This study also does not only focus on top down and lateral bullying from superiors and colleagues respectively, but also collects information on the samples' bullying experience from their customers and clients. Results in Study 1 have provided evidence where participants has almost equal ratio of bullying experience from superiors, colleagues or customers meanwhile in Study 2, the interview responses revealed that bullying by customers are experienced simultaneously with bullying by their superiors which are often perceived as bullying due to lack of support from their superiors.

Besides that, meta-analysis on methods used to study workplace bullying revealed the limited approach in examining this phenomena (Neall & Tuckey, 2014). This research has contributed by using a more complex design and analyses in the efforts of examining the impact of workplace bullying on employees' health and well-being as well as the mechanisms (cognitive and behavioural) in dealing with workplace bullying. The use of a sequential explanatory mixed method had helped me measure the impact of workplace bullying on employees' health and well-being and identify the role of PC and ways of coping with workplace bullying via the quantitative study.

Meanwhile, Study 2 provided victims' perception of workplace bullying as well as to deeper understand their experience and reactions in dealing with the phenomena. Thus, by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approach in this research, it has allowed me to carry out a more robust research in examining workplace bullying. Overall, the results of the mixed methods study lay the groundwork for more empirical research into the impact that perseverative cognition have on coping with workplace bullying (and vice versa) from the perspectives of the victims.

### 7.3 Limitations of the study

There are several limitations to the two studies which needs addressing. Firstly, this research focuses on one group category which are front liners in a private sector setting. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to other work categories that does not involve dealing directly with the consumers (e.g. customer, patients, clients). Focusing on the limitations of Study 1, the sample involved a majority of employees aged between 18-28 years old (84%). This may be due to the fact that the jobs within these sectors are mostly filled by individuals in this age group. Thus, findings also could not be generalised to other age groups as it has also been reported that younger employees tend to find workplace bullying as less acceptable than those who are older (Power et al., 2013) and they are likely to be bullied more often than older employees (Lewis, Giga and Hoel, 2010). Besides that, younger employees in this study have less experience and exposure to conflicts at work thus might influence on how they react and manage conflicts at work.

In terms of its statistical power, although PROCESS approach could provide calculations on the significance paths among variable, but it does not provide any information about the goodness of fit of the overall measurement model proposed in the study as well as the measurement error of the use of latent variables. A suitable approach to obtain this information is by using structural equation modelling via AMOS. A hybrid moderated-mediation model (Bollen, 1989) could be measured by assessing the model fit of the measurement model followed by the structural model. However, this approach requires at least a minimum of 200 participants which this study does not qualify. Hence, a larger sample would be necessary for this approach to take place. Therefore, it is also necessary to consider the size of sample used in this research.

This study had a good response rate at the beginning (90%) but then faced attrition of 66% (from 270 participants to 92 participants) whereby only 70 of those responses were usable in the data analysis. A larger sample size could have reduced the standard errors in the regression analyses which could have increased the possibility of finding a significant result (Miles et al., 2001). A small sample size could have caused result to be spurious which may present insignificant to the analysis. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider an appropriate effect size to determine a suitable sample size. For instance, Cohen (1988; as cited in Miles et al., 2001) define a small effect size as  $R^2 = 0.02$ , a medium effect size as  $R^2 = 0.13$  and a large effect size as  $R^2 = 0.26$ . The lack of statistical



power, unreliability of measures, nonlinear forms of interaction, or sampling error may lead to the failure in finding statistical significance for variable interaction.

Another reason that could have affected attrition is the length of the survey in Study 1 causing them to experience response fatigue. It generally took them about 40 minutes in average to complete the surveys. Although participants had the option to pause and return back to survey, most only completed it halfway and might have forgotten due to other commitments. On top of that, those who did returned to the surveys might be affected by various factors such as having a different mood, changed perception on the experience or might have just answered sparingly in order to complete the survey.

Another limitation is on trying to capture real time data as questionnaire are retrospective and may cause bias. The selection of time facets varied from between T1 and T3 which may or may not have caused bias. Different time periods or gaps were used in measuring workplace bullying in Study 1. At Time 1, participants were required to recall negative acts that they have experienced in the workplace which occurred from six months ago, whereas at Time 2 and Time 3, the participants had to recall from only 2 months ago which was from the last time they responded to the survey. By having different time periods, it brought out a few limitations to the study.

The dilemma while planning for the time facets within the longitudinal study was to allow reasonable amount of time between observations for participants to rest before the next observation, but then allowing too much time in between may encourage recall biasness or the issue might have been already resolved causing participants to have a different view on the bullying experience. Similar to what Kessler (1987) notes, that is if “one is premature or late with regard to the time lag selected for measures of prior symptomology and the actual longitudinal analysis, then bias can be introduced into the prediction equation”.

Participants in Time 1 may report higher frequency of negative acts due to the longer time period. With a six-month period, participants were more exposed to negative acts compared to those with a two months’ time period (Time 2 and Time 3). Long-term health consequences may be less prevalent in a survey with smaller time gaps. Besides that, there could be a possibility that victims of bullying (i.e. those who experienced negative acts on a daily basis) withdrew from the study causing a decrease in frequency of participants experiencing negative acts at Time 2 and Time 3.

Another issue that is on the use of self-report measurement, is that employees with worse psychological health however may perceive their work environment in a negative way, hence reporting more bullying (Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2015a). In relation to that, the measures only focus on the frequencies but not on the intensity or severity of the acts which might have different impact than others. Bullying experience at different levels may lead to different levels of cognitive and behavioural reaction and thus may or may not lead to certain negative outcome. This type of survey measure (multi-list items) cannot capture all possible negative behaviours and some behaviours though experienced, might be acceptable to individuals given that the sample is from a different culture. With that being the case, individual factors are necessary to consider when examining workplace bullying especially when research is focused on the individual level (e.g. predicting cognitive reaction, coping behaviour).

Besides that, another possible limitation to the study is whether the constructs within the NAQ-R appropriately captured all of the theoretically defining features of workplace bullying. For an example, the behavioural checklist does not address power imbalance despite power imbalance being a core element in defining workplace bullying. It still remains an empirical question whether specific durations (e.g., 6 months, 12 months), frequencies (e.g., once per week) and number of acts (e.g. at least two negative acts) of exposure actually lead to greater or different types of harm relative to other exposure patterns. Likewise, it is not clear whether a one-time exposure to extreme physical or verbal abuse leads to more severe outcomes than more subtle forms of harassment such as undermining which take place over a longer period of time. On that note, perseverative cognition may be a good indicator in assessing the severity of the outcomes of different bullying behaviours.

Moving on to the limitations in Study 2, is the coding errors. Coding longer passages like the ones in this study, tend to create lower reliability as it allows more room for coders to overlap their interpretation which produces more than one code or theme which resulted in a quite complex coding scheme. Rarely did a unit of text in the transcripts received a single code. With a more complex coding scheme, the greater risk there is for coding errors to occur (Fahy 2001). This is often the limitation faced in using semi structured interview compared to structured interviews (rigid protocols) which tend to have better intercoder reliability (Hruschka et al., 2004). On top of that, the participants' past experience could also be considered as an extraneous variable (e.g. witnessing someone else being bullied).

Also, a long time lag may have given individuals the opportunity for too much rest and recoup after the stressful event, and thus when interviewed, the victims did not consider their previous situation to be as stressful, thus accounting for low perceptions of bullying. This may have occurred during the study where perception of workplace bullying was assessed along with the victims' health and well-being outcomes after the bullying had occurred or resolved. This may have given victims the time to select a coping strategy that was suited to them and to their situation. As a result, individuals may have come to realise that seeking help and assertiveness were less effective coping strategies which most of the victims turned to avoidance and ignoring.

The latter coping strategies thus allowed the individual to cope well with the situation, and in turn the situation was deemed resolved. Therefore, if bullying is again experienced, the victims would then be able to select the most effective coping strategy to begin with which in this case is ignoring or silently retaliating. Although taking all the limitations that were just discussed in my approach to this research, the findings and conclusion are only an interpretation of workplace bullying among frontline employees mostly from the retail industry. This is especially due to the fact that the victims in the interview are likely to vary in the amount of genuine disclosures and that this research relies substantially on participants' retrospective accounts of their bullying experiences. Besides that, it was impossible to verify to what degree did my interaction with the victims affected the interview process and victims' responses.

## 7.4 Practical Implication

There are a few suggestions regarding workplace bullying prevention and intervention. The applied results of these two studies suggest a strong need for bullying policies and complaint procedures that incorporates effective and fair process which mitigates prolonged activation of stress. Policies have to be distinct on bullying, sexual harassment, racial and ethnic harassment and discrimination, workplace conflict, violence making it accessible to all employees. Findings from the interviews reveal that employees are not aware of such policies and that they don't have the knowledge of a formal complaint procedure when asked. Hence, victims' tend to manage in their own way which puts not just the victim at risk but other employees and even the organisation. For an example, frustrated victims who bad mouth the organization to others would hurt the organizations' reputation, or victims who silently retaliate and purposely reduced their commitment at work would affect other colleagues work progress.

Besides that, there has to be reinforcement of written organizational policies. Organization should not leave conflicts unresolved and should intervene as early as possible to avoid drastic escalation. Frequent communications such as attitude campaigns, well-being campaigns, and systematic work should be encouraged to build an anti-bullying culture within organizations and the society by making it public. Furthermore, earlier precautions should be taken by promoting training in conflict management. This should be included in the requirement of a human resource manager and other managers to have formal training in conflict management so that they become more sensitive towards behaviours around the office where early detection could help hinder or eradicate conflict escalation which leads to bullying. Besides that, encouraging spiritual coping which promotes positive reappraisal (as mostly victims described in the interview).

However, this would be limited to individuals with religious beliefs. Besides that, this research also found that individuals tend to engage in silent retaliation (in this case termed as ignoring by the victims) especially when they perceive that nothing can be done to solve their bullying problem at work. This however is a maladaptive coping strategy that encourages bullying escalation. As a result, it brings loss not just to the individuals but amplifies negative impact onto the people within the environment (e.g. witnesses, bystanders, customers) and the organisation as a whole. In addition, findings from the interview found overlapping descriptions between loyalty and neglect, therefore, it should be reconceptualised when discussing within the bullying frame.

Findings from this thesis revealed that cyberbullying rarely occurs in isolation from traditional forms of workplace bullying. Therefore, preventive intervention should address all forms of bullying rather than focus heavily on the traditional form. Anti-bullying programs should include components on workplace bullying within the context of broader efforts to prevent interpersonal conflict. Besides that, the findings also indicate that mental health problems can be both consequences (depression, anxiety and stress) and determinants (anxiety) of victimisation and bully-victim roles. Anti-bullying interventions should therefore include mental health as a core element in tackling the phenomena.

We could also summarise that there are a number of responses which suggests a person-environment misfit where low fit exists either between the employee and his job (customer interaction, team or organisation). In order to avoid this, employees tend to take the easy way out, even if it brings loss to them. Hence, allowing the maintenance of a healthy work environment may help diminish the emergence of workplace bullying. A suggestion could be that organisations make annual checks on the conflict management climate within the organisation which has shown to predict less workplace bullying and securing high levels of work engagement among employees (Ståle Einarsen, Skogstad, Rørvik, & Lande, 2016) . For example, asking their employees if they know who they can contact within the organisation to get help if they have a serious dispute.

Moreover, organisations should make a formal surveillance which refer to carrying out a follow-up on safety, health, and environment (SHE) systems. Guidelines should be provided for capacity building to the point of becoming a whole company team, and the whole organization takes on the responsibility of extinguishing bullying to create a more harmonious work environment. In sum, the findings of this research provide organizational leaders with a challenge to take a pragmatic stance against bullying in the workplace and their impacts on employees' health and well-being. The results of this study are transferrable beyond the sample and provide valuable information on creating a better work environment.

## 7.5 Recommendations on future research

Findings from the mixed methods studies indicate a need for further research to review the work environment of an organization that allows bullying. Future longitudinal studies should emphasize on the correct selection of time facets and if possible using approaches that allow to capture real time data such as diary studies. Additionally, as reported in the current thesis, how one perceives a certain bullying act as acceptable or not may influence their responses and coping appraisals. One way of overcoming it is through the use of multi-variate analysis (Miles et al., 2001). That is, instances where confounding variables are included in the design that can enhance further research studies by way of checking for spuriousness. Besides controlling for demographic variables and affect, potential variables detected from the current research with regard to spuriousness is individuals' personality and locus of control variables that, as discussed above, may explain certain deviations in the results and hence lead to unexpected findings (Linton & Power, 2013). Thus, on examination of the confounding variables, if any are found to exist they can be statistically removed or partial out.

Besides that, perseverative cognition was a vital mediating factor in conveying a negative impact of workplace bullying towards employees' health and well-being. Given that time is fundamental in defining bullying (e.g. escalation, repetition), this amplifies the importance of incorporating perseverative cognition in the bullying research. It would be an advantage to study other possible factors that could influence this mediation, as there are many potential factors in the workplace environment that could affect employees to engage or disengage in repetitive negative thinking. Addition to that, negative work environment including high internal competition and having cliques was a few of the common variable when victims perceive workplace bullying. This supports previous research has shown that victims, non-victims and even witnesses would tend to report having a poor work environment in workplaces where bullying happens (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2013). Besides that, outcomes of this study suggest that silent retaliation (or termed as neglect) and religious coping participant should be added in coping instruments when doing bullying-related research.

Furthermore, while the results from the current research show disparities in the social process surrounding workplace bullying and health and well-being outcome, future research should aim to understand if conceptualization of workplace bullying are distinctly unique for those who may be experiencing gender based harassment in addition

to bullying. Besides that, items related to power abuse and cyber bullying should be added to the existing instruments when researching bullying. If there were a chance to make any changes to this study, it would be to refocus the interviews to be more targeted at specific individuals in the workplace. There would be three separate interviews for the employees, for the supervisors, and for organizational leaders instead of interviewing just employees.

### Concluding Remarks

All in all, this thesis makes a number of key contributions to the existing literature, being one of the few to explicitly study perseverative cognition as a mediator to the bullying-wellbeing relationship.

The five most prominent takeaways from this thesis may be suggested as follows:

1. Mental health problems can be both consequences (depression, anxiety and stress) and determinants (anxiety) of victimisation and bully-victim roles over time.
2. Repetitive negative thinking is prominent in enhancing the negative impact of workplace bullying on health and well-being specifically, mental health and psychosomatic complaints, whereas worrying enhances the negative impact of workplace bullying on mental health.
3. High levels of ignoring enhances engagement in repetitive perseverative thinking which amplifies the mediation relationship in the bullying-well-being relationship.
4. Resilience through religious coping is an important outcome that needs more acknowledgment in the bullying literature

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## APPENDIX A

Letter of Invitation to Participate in Study



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

# Invitation to Participate

A PhD Research Project: - Experiencing  
Behaviors in the Workplace

LEAD RESEARCHER: DANIELLA MOKHTAR  
INSTITUTE OF WORK PSYCHOLOGY, SHEFFIELD UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT SCHOOL

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# 1. Summary

This proposal acts as an invitation to your organization to participate in this PhD project.

The proposal contains the following elements:

- Brief introduction and purpose of my research
- The project design including time frame
- Details of what will happen if you decide to participate
- Possible advantages and disadvantages
- Ethics consideration of the study
- Results of the study
- Key personnel

## II. Introduction

Healthy and fit employees are one of the key elements of effective organizations. We believe that is crucial for organizations to pay attention to behaviors in the workplace. How people behave within the organization can either be a powerful ally or real barrier that inhibits or slows down organizational strategic goals to achieve impact.

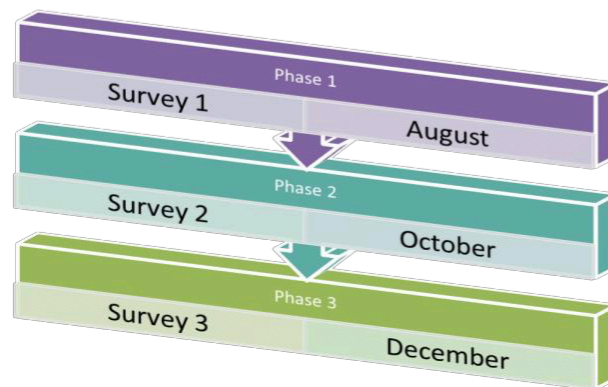
The aim of this project is to look at how employees experience and react to behaviors in the workplace. I am especially interested to look at employees in the front-line where dealing with customers or clients is one of their main job descriptions. Having to entertain customers regularly requires effort and to maintain a positive mood throughout the day can be exhausting.

In regard to this, I would like to propose the participation of your organization in this study. More details on the project will be discussed in the following section.

### III. Project Design

The study involved a three time-point survey. This means that you would have to distribute the links via email on three different months. There will be a two months gap between each phase and the questions will mostly be similar (Figure 1). The rationale in doing a long-term study or also more commonly known as a longitudinal study is that, when you want to see a trend or change, it would involve multiple times of data collection. This is to achieve a more reliable and trustworthy data and thus, producing a more credible report.

Figure 1: Project design and estimated dates



### IV. What will happen if I take part?

I will provide you with an email which will contain a link that can be sent to the employees via your organizations' e-mailing system. The survey is both web and mobile friendly and employees are free to answer it at their own time and pace. Email contains:

- Welcome note/ Introduction to the study
- A Link which contains the questionnaire, information sheet and consent question.
- Contact Details of the Research Team

## V. Possible disadvantages/ risks

Although there is no intention of implying any harm, but due to the nature of the study that requires participants to recall and record experiences of some negative behaviour in the workplace, it may indirectly cause psychological harm (i.e. negative emotion, stress, worry, etc). Participants will also be asked to provide approximately 20-30 minutes to answer the surveys and this will be repeated twice every two months. (eg. Survey taken in July, will be repeated in September and November). This is due to the longitudinal design of this research.

## VI. Possible advantages/ benefits

We cannot promise that the study will help you directly but the information we get may help you evaluate and reflect based on the employees' feedback. Besides helping us to achieve better understanding on employees' health and well-being, you are also supporting the organization by engaging with your employees. You will also have the privilege of obtaining a statistical report on which it could serve as a reference for you to identify areas that needs improvement (upon request). This may also guide your organization to have a clearer vision in developing strategies that will translate into well understood priorities and will also be supported by a cohesive team.

## VII. Ethics Considerations

When doing research with human participants, ethics will be priority to consider. Possible ethical issues have been carefully thought-through along the process in designing this study.

\*This study has been sent for review and approval to the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee.

ETHICAL ISSUES	Approach
<b>Voluntary Participation</b>	Participation will not be forced, and participants will be made aware that they CAN withdraw at any point of the study and CAN choose not to answer questions that might offend or intrude their privacy. If participants are keen to participate in a continuing interview, they may leave their contact details (in the link given) and only I will have access to their contact details.
<b>Informed Consent</b>	The participants will be given an information sheet containing details of the project. They will then have to give their consent in a form that is linked to the survey. There is a separate consent form for a continuing study (interview) and this will only involve participants that have agreed to participate and had left their contact details in the survey study.
<b>Anonymity &amp; Confidentiality</b>	All participants are to rest assured that they are not required to leave their names on the survey. Those who have agreed to participate in the interview are also kept anonymous. All data and transcript will be kept securely, and no record of names will be kept.
<b>Data Privacy</b>	The use of online questionnaires enhances confidentiality and participants are not required to leave contact details that might identify them. They are only required to create a unique ID Code only for the sole use of research. This is required as data will be collected from the same participants at three different times. Therefore this ID Code will help me locate and relate the three time points. Another reason, if the participants decide to withdraw from the study, he/ she will only have to provide their ID to me and I will delete his data from the study.
<b>Data Storage &amp; Access</b>	Data will only be accessible to the research team (me and my two supervisors) and the data will only have your unique ID Code. All data will be stored not more than 5 years and it will be kept in a password protected file. After 5 years, all data will be destroyed. This is recommended by the British Psychological Society.

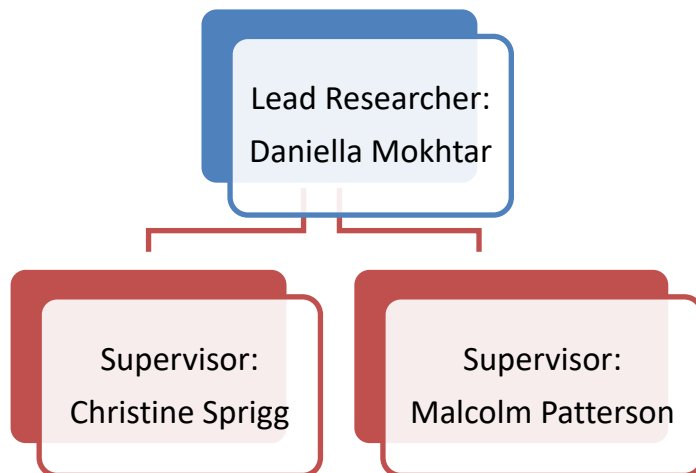
## VIII. Results of the research

Once data has been collected, I will run the analysis to test the hypotheses of the research. The analysis will enable me to look at relationships either correlational or causal. I will carry out my own analysis using an analysis software, and this will then produce a statistical result. Once results have been obtained, I will then discuss the findings and relate it with the hypothesized theories. This will then lead me to the completion of my PhD thesis.

**You may request a copy of the report for your keeping at the end of the study.**

## IX. Key Personnel

This research is led by me and supervised by two academic supervisors.



### CONTACT DETAILS:

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## APPENDIX B

### Ethics Approval



Downloaded: 13/12/2016 Approved: 26/07/2016

Daniella Mohamed Mokhtar Registration number: 140249422 Management School  
Programme: PhD

Dear Daniella

**PROJECT TITLE:** Workplace Bullying: The mediating role of Perseverative  
Cognition on its Health and Well- being Impact

**APPLICATION:** Reference Number 006937

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 26/07/2016 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

University research ethics application form 006937 (dated 25/07/2016).  
Participant information sheet 1022387 version 1 (25/07/2016). Participant  
information sheet 1022386 version 1 (25/07/2016). Participant information sheet  
1016964 version 4 (25/07/2016). Participant information sheet 1016963 version  
1 (07/04/2016). Participant consent form 1022384 version 1 (25/07/2016).

Participant consent form 1022385 version 1 (25/07/2016). Participant consent  
form 1016965 version 1 (07/04/2016).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Miller  
Ethics Administrator Management School

## APPENDIX C

### STUDY 1: INSTRUMENT

#### Section A: Introduction

#### **You are invited to participate in our study!**

Thank you for showing interest in this study. If you would like to take part in this study, please spare some time to read the following information regarding the project.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between experiencing negative events in the workplace, thinking and coping with the events and their impact on employees' health and well-being.

As a volunteer it is **not mandatory** for you to take place in this project. It is entirely up to you to participate or not. Also keep in mind that you are allowed to withdraw at any point of the study.

The study consists of statements about you and your experiences in the workplace. You are expected to respond by stating the degree of agreement in those statements and some questions might ask you the frequency of you experiencing it.

Please bare in mind that this study looks at traits and personalities. Therefore, it requires a large number of questions. You might also experience repetition in questions, but don't worry, there is a reason for that!

There is no time limit and no right or wrong answers. You may answer it at your own time and pace; at home or at work. Due to the number of items, you are allowed to PAUSE in between and return to the survey at any time within the 7 days from the date you started the survey. Helpful reminders will also be sent to you in case you might forget to continue your answers.

Just like the previous phase, you are entitled to your results of the survey. By having to answer this for the second time, a comparison can be made and you will be able to spot any differences from the time you last answered. Therefore, please be honest while answering and hopefully, this study will help you get to know yourself better especially at the workplace.

#### **THERE ARE NO QUESTIONS THAT WILL LEAD YOU TO EXPOSE YOUR IDENTITY.**

All data will be kept private and confidential. No names will be asked and only the lead researcher and her supervisors will have access to your data.

**IMPORTANT:** If anything were to go wrong during your participation, you can contact the lead researcher to inform her. Help and support can be provided throughout your participation at any time.

\*This project has received ethical approval by Sheffield University Management School's ethics board.

\* An information sheet is available for your further references on this study.

Researcher: Daniella Mokhtar  
Email : dmmokhtar1@sheffield.ac.uk  
Contact : +44(0)7478656653

Supervisors: Dr Christine Sprigg (c.a.sprigg@sheffield.ac.uk)  
Dr Malcolm Patterson (m.patterson@sheffield.ac.uk)

**Please agree to all conditions below in order to continue with the survey.**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point of the study. In any case that I do not wish to answer any particular answer, I am free to do so.
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission to the lead researcher and her supervisors to have access on my anonymous responses. I also understand that I will not be linked with the research materials and will not be identifiable in the report from this study.
4. I agree for the data collected might be used in future research.

I agree to take part in this study.

- Yes
- No

In order to maintain your anonymity, you are not required to give us your name. Therefore, a 6-digit code will be created using a combination of your =- FIRST TWO LETTERS of your last name + DATE (day of your birthday month) + LAST TWO LETTERS of your first name  
*eg. my last name is AHMAD, I am born on the 17 of April and my first name is SITI. Therefore, my 6-digit code is AH17TI.*

**REMINDER: Please use the SAME ID Code for returning participants.**

I agree to be contacted for a further study (interview).  
If yes, please leave us your contact number and/or email for an interview to be arranged.

**IMPORTANT:** I will be the only person that will have access to you contact details.

Contact No

Email

---

**Section B: Negative Act Questionnaire**

Have you experience these situations in the office during the past 2 months?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Now and then	Monthly	Weekly	Daily

No	Item	Score
1.	Someone withholding information which affect your performance	
2.	Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	
3.	Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	
4.	Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	
5.	Spreading of gossip and rumours about you	
6.	Being ignored, excluded or being “sent to Coventry”	
7.	Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person (i.e. habits and background), your attitudes or your private life	
8.	Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger (or rage)	
9.	Intimidating behaviour such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/ barring the way	
10.	Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job	
11.	Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes	
12.	Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach	
13.	Persistent criticism of your work and effort	
14.	Having your opinions and views ignored	
15.	Practical jokes carried out by people you don’t get on with	
16.	Being given tasks with reasonable or impossible targets or deadlines	
17.	Having allegations made against you	
18.	Excessive monitoring of your work	
19.	Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)	
20.	Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm	
21.	Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	
22.	Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse	

How often do you experience those kinds of behaviours from the following groups?  
(Give answer in percentage)

Superior	<input type="text"/>
Colleague	<input type="text"/>
Client/ Customer	<input type="text"/>

**Section C(a): The Perseverative Thinking Questionnaire (PTQ)**

How do you typically think about negative experiences or problems? Please read the following statements and rate the extent to which they apply to you when you think about negative experiences or problems.

- 0 : Never
- 1 : Rarely
- 2 : Sometimes
- 3 : Often
- 4 : Almost
- 5 : Always

No	Item	Score
1	The same thoughts keep going through my mind again and again.	
2	Thoughts intrude into my mind.	
3	I can't stop dwelling on them.	
4	I think about many problems without solving any of them.	
5	I can't do anything else while thinking about my problems.	
6	My thoughts repeat themselves.	
7	Thoughts come to my mind without me wanting them to.	
8	I get stuck on certain issues and can't move on.	
9	I keep asking myself questions without finding an answer.	
10	My thoughts prevent me from focusing on other things.	
11	I keep thinking about the same issue all the time.	
12	Thoughts just pop into my mind.	
13	I feel driven to continue dwelling on the same issue.	
14	My thoughts are not much help to me.	
15	My thoughts take up all my attention	

**Section C(b): Rumination (RRS)**

People think and do many different things when they feel stressed. Please read each of the items below and indicate whether you almost never, sometimes, often, or almost always think or do each one when you feel down, sad, or depressed. Please indicate what you generally do, not what you think you should do.

- 1                      2                      3                      4
- Almost              Sometimes              Often                      Almost
- Never    Always

No	Item	Score
1	think "What am I doing to deserve this?"	
2	think "Why do I always react this way?"	
3	think about a recent situation, wishing it had gone better	
4	think "Why do I have problems other people don't have?"	
5	think "Why can't I handle things better?"	
6	analyse recent events to try to understand why you are depressed	
7	go away by yourself and think about why you feel this way	
8	write down what you are thinking about and analyze it	
9	analyse your personality to try to understand why you are depressed	
10	go someplace alone to think about your feelings	

**Section C(c): Worry (PSWQ)**

Rate each of the following statements on a scale of 1 (“not at all typical of me”) to 5 (“very typical of me”). Please do not leave any items blank.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not typical of me	Neutral	Typical	Very typical

No	Item	Score
1	If I do not have enough time to do everything, I do not worry about it.	
2	My worries overwhelm me.	
3	I do not tend to worry about things.	
4	Many situations make me worry.	
5	I know I should not worry about things, but I just cannot help it.	
6	When I am under pressure I worry a lot.	
7	I am always worrying about something.	
8	I find it easy to dismiss worrisome thoughts.	
9	As soon as I finish one task, I start to worry about everything else I have to do.	
10	I never worry about anything.	
11	When there is nothing more I can do about a concern, I do not worry about it anymore.	
12	I have been a worrier all my life.	
13	I notice that I have been worrying about things.	
14	Once I start worrying, I cannot stop.	
15	I worry all the time.	
16	I worry about projects until they are all done.	

**Section D: Coping with bullying**

We would like you to indicate to what extent you, yourself, used each of these coping methods.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

NO.	Item	Score
1.	Ignored the behaviour or did nothing	
2.	Avoided the person	
3.	Asked the person to stop	
4.	Threatened to tell others	
5.	Told my supervisor/ boss	
6.	Went along with the behaviour	
7.	Got someone else to speak to the person about the behaviour	
8.	Talked with others about the behaviour	
9.	Behaved extra nice to the person	
10.	Felt bad about myself	
11.	Felt worthless	
12.	Felt helpless to do anything	
13.	Lowered my productivity	
14.	Thought about quitting	
15.	Thought about getting revenge	
16.	Didn't take the behaviour seriously	
17.	Acted as if you didn't care	
18.	Stayed calm	

**Section E(a): Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS)**

Please read each statement and indicate how much the statement applies to you over the past week.

0	1	2	3
Did not apply to me at all	Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time	Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time	Applied to me very much, or most of the time

NO.	Item	Score
1.	I found it hard to wind down	
2.	I was aware of dryness of my mouth	
3.	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	
4.	I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	
5.	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	
6.	I tended to over-react to situations	
7.	I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands)	
8.	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	
9.	I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	
10.	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	
11.	I found myself getting agitated	
12.	I found it difficult to relax	
13.	I felt down-hearted and blue	
14.	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	
15.	I felt I was close to panic	
16.	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	
17.	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	
18.	I felt that I was rather touchy	
19.	I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	
20.	I felt scared without any good reason	
21.	I felt that life was meaningless	

**Section E(b): PHYSICAL HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE (PHQ-14)**

The following items focus on how you have been feeling physically during the past 2 months. Please respond accordingly.

- 1 : Not at all
- 2 : Rarely
- 3 : Once in a while
- 4 : Some of the time
- 5 : Fairly Often
- 6 : Often
- 7 : All the time

No.	Item	Score
1	How often have you had difficulty getting to sleep at night?	
2	How often have you woken up during the night?	
3	How often have you had nightmares or disturbing dreams?	
4	How often has your sleep been peaceful and undisturbed?	
5	How often have you experienced headaches?	
6	How often did you get a headache when there was a lot of pressure on you to get things done?	
7	How often did you get a headache when you were frustrated because things were not going the way they should have or when you were annoyed at someone?	
8	How often have you suffered from an upset stomach (indigestion)?	
9	How often did you have to watch that you ate carefully to avoid stomach upsets?	
10	How often did you feel nauseated ("sick to your stomach")?	
11	How often were you constipated, or did you suffer from diarrhoea?	
12	How many times have you had minor colds (that made you feel uncomfortable but didn't keep you sick in bed or make you miss work)?	
13	How many times have you had respiratory infections more severe than minor colds that "laid you low" (such as bronchitis, sinusitis, etc.)?	
14	When you had a bad cold or flu, how long did it typically last?	

**Section E(c): EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION (Maslach Burnout Inventory)**

During the past 6 months, how many times have you encountered these situations?

Please respond accordingly

- 1 : Never
- 2 : A few times
- 3 : Monthly
- 4 : A few times a month
- 5 : Every week
- 6 : A few times a week
- 7 : Every day

No.	Item	Score
1	I feel emotionally drained from my work	
2	I feel used up at the end of the workday	
3	I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job	
4	Working with people all day is really strain for me	
5	I feel burned out from my work	
6	I feel frustrated from my job	
7	I feel I'm working too hard on my job	
8	Working with people directly puts too much stress on me	
9	I feel like I'm at the end of my rope	



## Section F: Control Items

1. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988)

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then list the number from the scale below next to each word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment.

1	2	3	4	5
Very Slightly/ Not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely

- 1 Interested
- 2 Distressed
- 3 Excited
- 4 Upset
- 5 Strong
- 6 Guilty
- 7 Scared
- 8 Hostile
- 9 Enthusiastic
- 10 Proud
- 11 Irritable
- 12 Alert
- 13 Ashamed
- 14 Inspired
- 15 Nervous
- 16 Determined
- 17 Attentive
- 18 Jittery
- 19 Active
- 20 Afraid

1. Were you on any sick leave during the past month. If yes, how long? (in days)
2. What were you thinking about during the time you were answering these questions?
3. Tell us something that we did not ask about in this questionnaire.
4. Please fill your answers in all the boxes.
  - a. Gender
  - b. Ethnic
  - c. Age Group
  - d. Education
  - e. Employment Status
  - f. Tenure

## APPENDIX D

### Study 2: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

#### **B) Introduction: Ice Breaking & Building Trust**

- Exchange introductions
- Explain what use will be made of recordings—only used by researchers and identity of interviewee will not be revealed
- Explain focus of discussion
- Explain that interviewee should be free to express opinions, no right or wrong answers
- Ask if the interviewee has any question; ask to sign Study 2 consent form

#### **C) Semi-focused Questions:**

##### ➤ **Background, Job Role, Work Environment**

- How long have you been with this firm? - What did you do previously?
- How long have you been in this work unit? - What is it called?
- Where else have you worked in this firm?
- What type of work do you do?
- Describe a typical day for you at work (include breaks, lunch).
- Does everyone in your work unit do the same thing? - How is what you do differently?
- What kinds of things do you work on together? - Do you work well together?
- What's important about your job? Why are you important to this division?
- What activities are rewarded in your work unit?
- What activities are frowned upon?
- Are you still working with the organisation?

#### **C. Main Interview Questions: Progressively focusing on the issue**

##### ➤ **Conflicts in the workplace**

- Can you recall a significant incident or a conflict in the last six months?
- How long ago did the incident occur?
- Who was involved (gender, age, and position)?
- How well did you know the person?
- It seems as if \_\_\_\_\_ contributed to the incident. Are there any other factors that caused it?
- Could you please describe the incident? What behaviour was displayed?
- How did it start?
- How long did it last?
- What is it about that incident that made you feel depressed/ worry?

##### ➤ **Reaction to conflict?**

- What was your reaction when that incident happened?
- What happened after you reacted that way?
- Do you always think about it?
- Is there anything that you would do differently?

➤ **Coping**

- How was it handled?
- If you made a complaint, how did you make it?
- If Yes- were your complaints taken seriously and acted upon?
- If Not- why?
- What happened after that?
- Have you ever asked to take leave?

➤ **Health and well-being**

- Physical health- sleepless, constant fatigue, headaches, stomach/bowel problem, nausea/vomiting, sweating, skin disorders, chest pains, diarrhoea, cough and asthma
- Psychological health- loss of confidence, loss of self-esteem, lack of motivation, anxiety, anger, depression
- How did this incident influence the way you performed your duties?
- How did it affect your working relationship? Did the relationship deteriorate? Did anyone apologise?
- How did it affect your relationship?
- Does it interfere with your thoughts?
- Have you fallen sick because of work?

➤ **Intentions to leave**

- Are you aware of anybody at your workplace leaving employment as a result of this incident?
- Do you have any intentions to leave?
- Are you worried if you leave?
- What encourages you to keep on working with the organisation?
- Why did you decide not to leave?
- 

➤ **Workplace Bullying**

5.5.2 Did you ever felt like you were being bullied?

5.5.3 How would you define bullying?

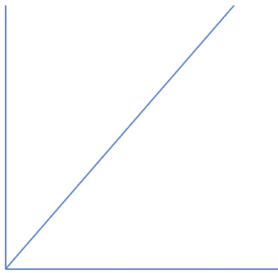
**D. Closing Remarks**

- Is there anything that would have done differently?
- Anything that you feel has not been covered?
- How could responses be improved in the future?
- What would have helped you?

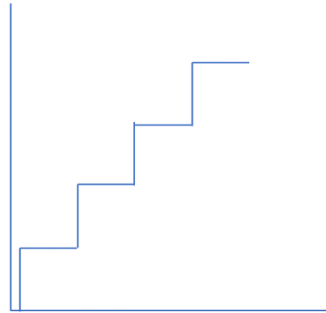
**E. Course of bullying**

- Choose one picture that best describes your bullying experience.

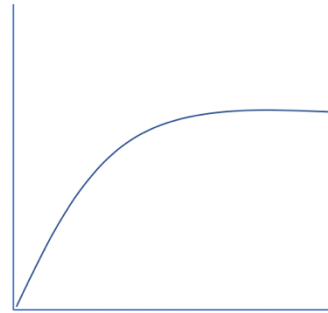
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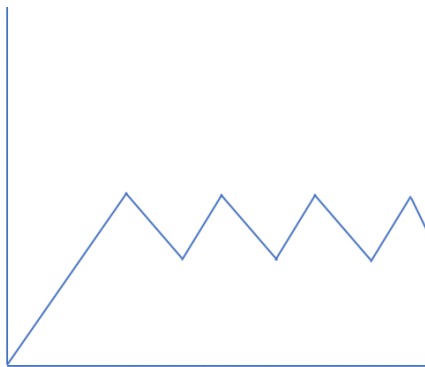
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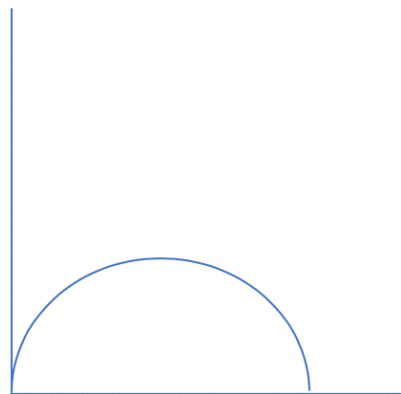
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**4**

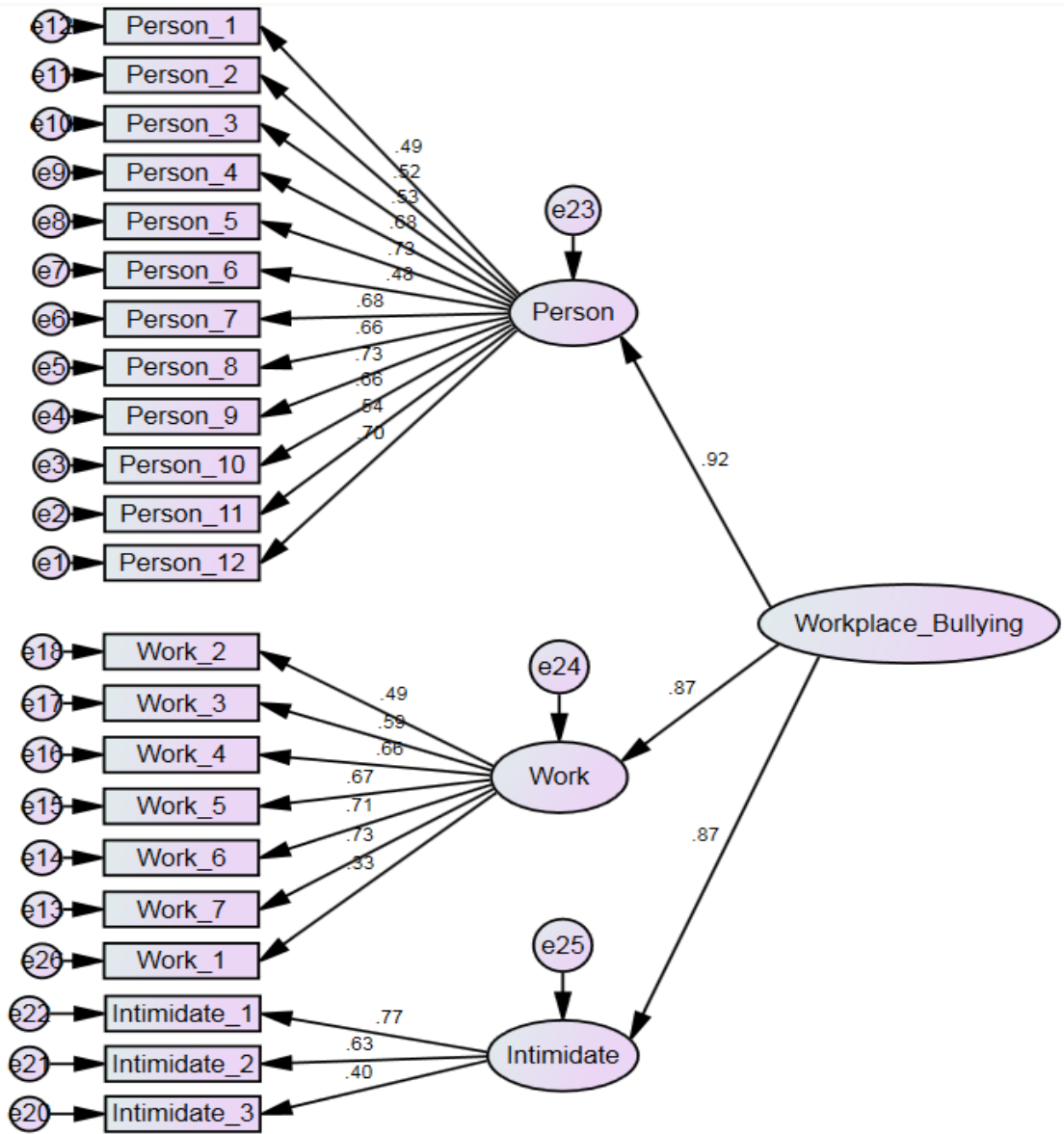


**5**



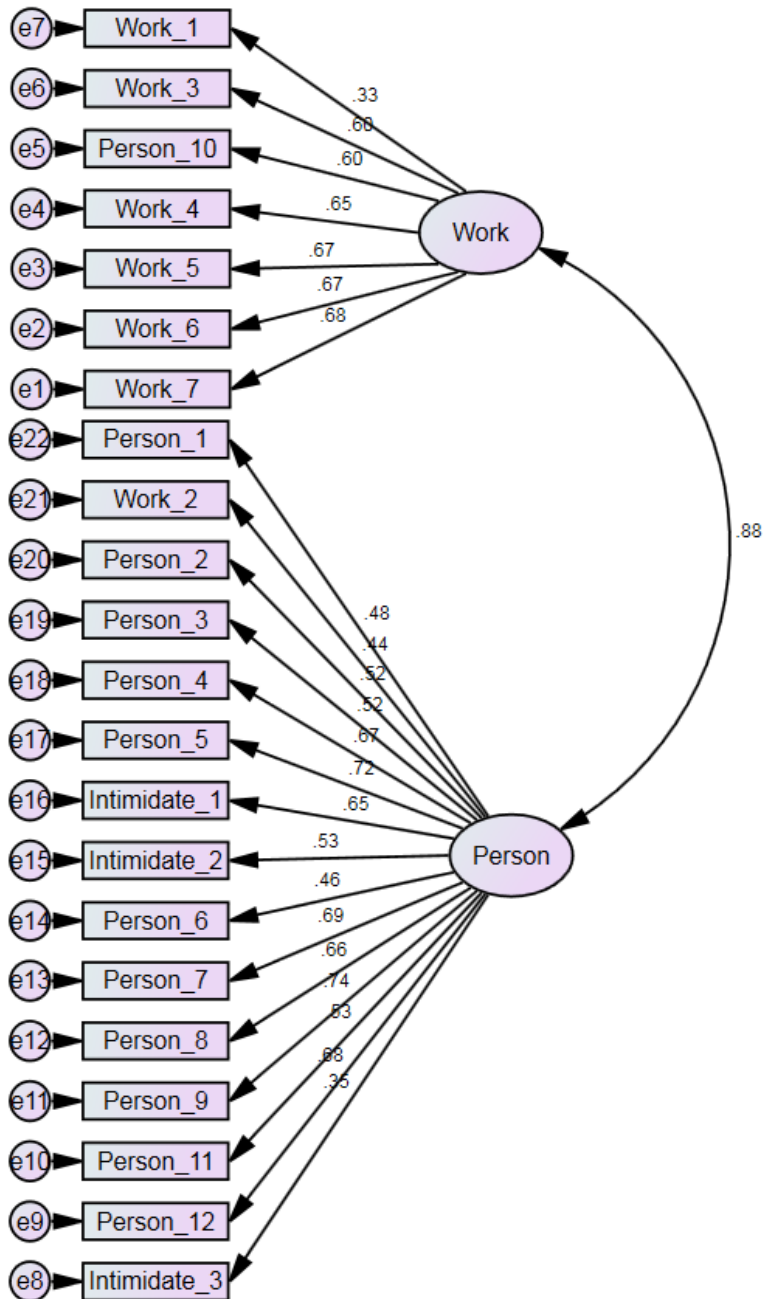
# APPENDIX E1

The three-factor model based on 22 items



## APPENDIX E2

Two-Factor Model (Yahaya et al. 2012)



## APPENDIX F

### Initial Codes Including Notes and Personal Reflection Made during the Coding Process

<b>Labels</b>	<b>Initial codes</b>	<b>Notes/ Interesting categories within code/Personal reflections</b>
P	Abuse of power between two parties	Direction of bullying is top-down either from supervisors/ managers/customers
P	Perpetrator gets satisfaction out of bullying others	View bullying as intentional
P	A type of mental and physical harassment	Participant view this behavior as bullying
P	Intentionally done to hurt the weaker party	View bullying as intentional
P	Lack of empathy	Perpetrator focused on performance, does not offer flexibility
P, Bully	One-off incidents	Issues like sexual harassments, racism
Bully	Expects to complete work without paying overtime, work on weekends, personal errands	Giving false hope as though extra work will have extra merits
P, Bully	Indirect/ Subtle actions	Often are covert in nature, makes it hard to find evidence
Bully	Line manager (e.g. supervisor, manager) as perpetrator	Line manager does not support them, due to pressure from upstairs, employees gets pressured
Bully	Organization (HR, Head of department) lacks support	Higher management have no communication, relationship on a personal level
Bully	Co-workers/ Colleagues as perpetrators	A lot of these are indirect, where victims get isolated due to being the least favorite/ or most favorite
Bully	Customer sovereignty	Customers are always right
Bully	Giving threats (using beliefs, terminate)	As a way to force employees to comply
Bully	Make accusations, backstabbing	Point fingers, colleagues get away with it
Bully	Humiliation	Scolding in public as an example to others
P, Psy	Negative impact on mental health	Causes employees to experience high levels of stress

P, L	Causes people to leave the organization	Participants mention about leaving the organization, but often is only intention as a lot of factors does not support intention to leave
P, Psy	Causes emotional impact to others	Even though it is between two parties, but it impacts emotions of the witnesses
PC	Prolongs grudge (victim) if not resolved	Participants hold grudge and has the intention to seek revenge, recalls all unresolved conflicts
WE	Unhealthy work environment	Gossiping and rumors, having cliques and gangs
		Internal competition
		Problem with new manager
		Favoritism
WE	Unfair system	Unclear procedures, no proper orientation given, no trainings, issues swept under carpet
		Managerial roles
WE	Feels insecure, no career progression	Stagnant, no future in the company
PC	Felt like being undermined but not sure	Unsure if being targeted, thought about the behaviors again and again
PC, L	Regretted joining the company	But stuck in a situation that makes them hard to leave the job
PC	Gets lost in thoughts about the problem	Overthinking without coming to a solution,
PC, L	Worry about my career in this organization	Feels insecure, dilemma
PC, L	Having intentions to leave	Too difficult to execute
PC	Lost focus at work	Focused too much on problem, feel that the boss is watching
PC	No one to talk to about the conflict	
L, W	Intentionally reduced performance	Quiet revenge to the company
L	Effect on tardiness and attendance	Don't look forward in going to work



Psy	Negative outbursts	But to others, not to the perpetrator e.g. shouting and crying, loss temper
Soc	Became 'reserved' and won't socialize with people at work	Have doubts that others will spread false rumors
Psy	Felt powerless	Couldn't tolerate anymore, Lack of energy/ spirit
L	Lost trust in the organization	Don't feel loyal to the company, spread negative things about company to others
PC	Felt worthless	Have doubt on self, feel stupid/ not qualified
W	Positive reappraisal	Cultural reasons, spiritual belief
W	Accepts behaviors	Don't want to lose job, views as training to be more tough
W	Avoid the perpetrator or the environment	Absenteeism, fake sick leave
W	Display fake emotions to customers	To avoid further problems with supervisor
W	Distract myself with other activities	Try out non-work-related activities
W	Seek advice from other people	Support from family/ friends outside of work
W	Meditation or prayers	Focused on selfcare
W	Good support at work	Advices and social support from colleagues,
W	Resigned from the company	Successful Unsuccessful
W	Did not do anything	No choice
BR	Worried if I'll lose my job	High commitment, reputation
BR	Perpetrator may hold grudge	Fear of safety (future)
BR	Sympathy/ Respect towards perpetrator (age gap)	Respect the elders, treated as part of training
BR	Has negative perception about people who like to complain	Saw complaining as weak
BR	Don't think that complaining would solve the problem	Previous unsuccessful experiences (self/others)
		Inexperienced managers
BR, W	Religious/ Cultural views on patience	Thoughts about 'karma', afterlife

BR	Feel have no support to back up the complaint	Lack of evidence
W	Hide feelings, behaved like nothing happened	Afraid to be seen as weak among colleagues
R	Organization took sides (perpetrator)	
R	Relationship with perpetrator worsen	
R	Support from organization	Positive
		Negative
R	Follow up from organization	Yes
		No
R	Perpetrator apologizes	
R	Management persuaded not to leave	
Phy	Health issues	Cardiovascular issues, Headaches and migraines, Flu/ Cold due to not enough rest
Phy	Issues with pregnancy	
Psy	Difficult to sleep at night	Thought about unresolved conflict, consequences if being fired
Psy, Soc	No desire to do anything or to meet other people	No 'mood' to go to work
W	Took leave	Sick leave, stress leave, annual leave
Psy	Don't feel calm	Shivering and gets easily agitated
Psy	Unable to focus outside of work	Fatigue
Psy, PC	Reduce in confidence	Feel worthless, reduce involvement
Psy	Emotional issues	Burnout, Exhaustion, Negative emotions e.g. angry, sad, frustrated
Psy	Unhappy when someone asks about work	Gets sensitive and emotional
Soc	Lose friends & family	Friends say I'm changing to a person who is always 'bitter'
		Problems at home

## **Legend**

BR	Barriers to taking action
L	Loyalty
Bully	Perpetrator Behaviors & Characteristics
P	Perception
PC	Perseverative cognition
Psy	Psychological Impact
Phy	Physical Impact
R	Repercussions to coping
Soc	Social Impact
W	Ways of coping
WE	Work environment