

The Impact of Workplace Bullying on Emotional Exhaustion among Nursing Staff: The Mediating Role of Job Insecurity

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Abstract

The study focuses on nursing professionals, who are frequently subjected to interpersonal pressures and high job expectations that could negatively impact their psychological well-being. The study is based on the Conservation of Resources hypothesis, the Job Demands–Resources Model, and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which together explain how workplace pressures drain personal resources and lead to emotional Exhaustion. 165 nursing staff members who were chosen by simple random sampling completed self-administered questionnaires as part of a quantitative study design. Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, correlation analysis, and mediation testing using the PROCESS Macro were performed in SPSS. The results show that bullying at work considerably raises emotional Exhaustion and job insecurity. Additionally, it was discovered that employment instability significantly improved emotional Exhaustion. The association between workplace bullying and emotional Exhaustion is partially mediated by job instability, according to the mediation study. The study concludes that boosting nurses' psychological well-being requires reducing workplace bullying and increasing perceptions of job security. The results give practical implications for bolstering anti-bullying policies, supervisory practices, and employee well-being programs in hospitals. They also validate major stress and resource-based models in a South Asian healthcare context, extending existing theory.

Keywords: COR; Emotional Exhaustion; Job insecurity; J-DR Model; Workplace Bullying.

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Introduction

Emotional exhaustion is a state of feeling emotionally drained. Emotional exhaustion is a psychological symptom that reflects employees' feelings of exhaustion resulting from pressure and a lack of organisational support while performing their duties and responsibilities (Sahab et al., 2024). Emotional exhaustion is increasingly recognised as a critical issue in the global workforce. Emotional exhaustion leads to decreased motivation, impaired decision-making, lower productivity, and strained interpersonal relationships at work. In the workplace, emotional exhaustion is a chronic condition characterised by severe fatigue driven by excessive workloads, poor workplace behaviour from co-workers, and ongoing stress. Through a review of existing literature, workplace bullying and job insecurity were identified as major contributing factors to emotional exhaustion. Although past research has examined emotional exhaustion, there is a lack of studies examining the mediating effect of job insecurity on emotional exhaustion, particularly in the Sri Lankan healthcare sector. Workplace bullying is defined as repeated and persistent negative behaviours directed at one or more targets who are usually left defenceless. It is ranked among the most significant social stressors in the workplace linked to a range of negative outcomes for workers' health and well-being. Workplace bullying affects many aspects, including employee participation in the organisation. In addition, one of the consequences of workplace bullying on work engagement and health issues is that it is mediated by the presence of job insecurity in the workplace. Job insecurity is recognised as the most problematic aspect of the work environment (Indriyani et al., 2020).

Research Problem

Bullying at work is becoming more widely acknowledged as a serious organisational problem that negatively impacts worker well-being and overall organisational effectiveness, especially in high-stress industries like healthcare. Several detrimental psychological and behavioural outcomes, such as emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, decreased work engagement, and increased turnover intentions, are strongly linked to exposure to workplace bullying, according to recent empirical studies conducted between 2020 and 2025 (Indriyani et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Sahab et al., 2024). These impacts are frequently exacerbated in demanding workplaces, like hospitals, because of the emotionally draining nature of the task, which increases the negative effects of bullying on employees.

To address the lack of official evidence, preliminary scoping was carried out. 48% of the 30 nurses at Sethsuwa General Hospital who participated in a preliminary investigation study said they were bullied at work at least once a week, and 42% of them scored in the high range of emotional tiredness on a standardised burnout scale. Bullying frequency and emotional weariness levels were found to have a somewhat favourable link ($r = 0.46$) according to correlation analysis. Furthermore, nurses who experienced bullying on a regular basis were 1.8 times more likely to say they intended to quit. These speculative results point to a tenable correlation, supporting a thorough examination that goes beyond preliminary casual conversations.

The Job Expectations - Resources Model, which posits that excessive job expectations deplete employees' psychological and emotional resources, leading to burnout and disengagement, provides a theoretical framework for understanding workplace bullying. According to recent

research, bullying at work is a crucial job need that greatly increases emotional exhaustion, supporting this framework (Sahab et al., 2024). According to the Conservation of Resources theory, people who are subjected to ongoing stressors like bullying are more prone to experience resource depletion, which eventually leads to emotional exhaustion and decreased functioning.

The mechanisms by which workplace bullying affects employee outcomes remain poorly understood, despite a growing body of research. In recent research, job instability, in particular, has drawn greater attention as a significant mediating factor. Workers who experience bullying at work are more likely to believe that their job security is in jeopardy, which raises stress levels and adds to emotional exhaustion (Indriyani et al., 2020; Jalali et al., 2020). According to more recent research, job uncertainty not only exacerbates psychological stress but also functions as a conduit for bullying to affect more general consequences, including disengagement and health issues (Sahab et al., 2024). Nevertheless, there are still few and inconsistent empirical results regarding the concurrent mediation effects of emotional exhaustion and job uncertainty.

Furthermore, developing nations, particularly those in South Asia, have received very little attention in recent research, which has largely been conducted in industrialised or Western contexts. The frequency and effects of workplace bullying may be influenced by organisational, cultural, and structural variations in various settings. For example, resource limitations and hierarchical organisational cultures that are common in healthcare facilities may make workers more susceptible to bullying and its consequences. To better understand the intricate interactions among workplace bullying, job insecurity, and emotional exhaustion, context-specific empirical research that incorporates a range of mediating factors is desperately needed.

To address these gaps, this study examines the impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of job insecurity within a healthcare setting. Accordingly, based on the above research problem, the research Objectives for this study are formulated as follows.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion among nursing staff in Sethsuwa General Hospital, Hambantota, Sri Lanka.
2. To examine the impact of workplace bullying on job insecurity among nursing staff in Sethsuwa General Hospital, Hambantota, Sri Lanka.
3. To examine the impact of job insecurity on emotional exhaustion among nursing staff in Sethsuwa General Hospital, Hambantota, Sri Lanka.
4. To examine the mediating relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion among nursing staff in Sethsuwa General Hospital, Hambantota, Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

This review used the narrative literature review and employed Zotero reference management and Vosviewer software to review the literature, identify research gaps, and formulate hypotheses. The main concepts are reviewed using a narrative review. The relationship between variables is acknowledged with the support of three theories: The Transactional Theory of Stress.

(Jalali et al., 2020), Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) (Khan et al., 2021) and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. Finally, the integrated theoretical framework is drawn based on the study's hypotheses.

The study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify the research gaps. The five-stage approach has been used for this systematic literature review. The procedure used for SLR in this investigation is mentioned below.

Process of Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

Stage 01: Keyword identification. The first step is to identify the most pertinent keywords to define the subject's boundaries. First, a starting set of keywords is taken from the most crucial academic literature. The 05 keywords extracted from the essential academic literature are workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion and job insecurity.

Stage 02: This study analysed academic, peer-reviewed publications from 2015 to 2025 using six databases. The selected articles cover information synthesis and retrieval in the digital age. The Zotero reference management system automatically collected metadata, which was exported to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. The study selected 185 articles for further examination.

Stage 03: The author used the PRISMA approach to rank academic journal articles related to workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion. 87 publications were considered, with inclusion and exclusion criteria established. Duplications were removed, abstracts scrutinised, and English-only articles were considered. The last 55 publications were evaluated against these criteria to ensure data richness and minimise missing information.

Stage 04: Quantitative bibliometric analysis is a method used to evaluate the impact and quality of academic research, utilising statistical and mathematical tools to analyse 55 research articles, identify significant patterns, and map the study area.

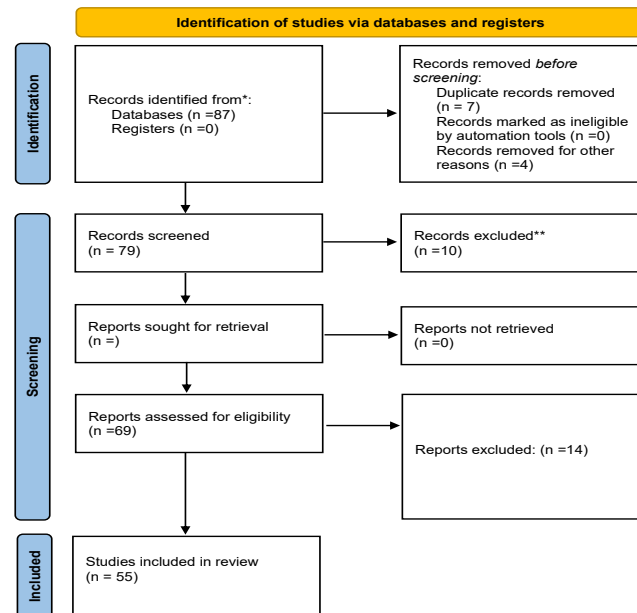
Stage 05: The author chose the following elements for coding in this study: (1) Publication timing: the growth of the number of articles over time; (2) Paper distribution by country or geographical distribution; (3) Journals: dissemination of articles with 1000 or more citations; (4) Analysis of the authors of the papers with the highest citations, broken down by year and author (5) Keywords and themes that are pertinent: the most popular keywords used by authors, (6) Tools: The technique for data analysis that was applied in the literature. Research gaps and concerns for future directions and content analysis were identified for each article to generate clusters defined by VOSviewer.

According to the PRISMA guidelines, the flow diagram for the article selection process is depicted in the figure below.

Table 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Articles published between 2015-2025 in well-known databases: Emerald, Sage, Taylor and Francis, Springer, Wiley Online Library and Elsevier	Any publication before the year 2015 and after 2025
Academic Journals	Nonacademic databases include books, online sites and grey literature (conferences, papers, working papers from research groups and technical reports)
Published as an article	Not published as an article
Articles are written in the English language	Articles are written in any other language

Source: Authors' compilation

**Figure 1.** PRISMA Flow Diagram

Source: Authors' presentation (2025)

Themes, Antecedents, and Outcomes

Cluster analysis is used to construct hypotheses for the study and to examine relationships between variables by grouping related observations into clusters based on different criteria. This study examines 55 selected articles using bibliometric methods, which reveal a "Word Cloud Relationship" between keywords extracted from article databases, presented in a circular diagram that shows the keywords' importance. Articles with similar relationships are assessed in the evaluation. A bibliographic coupling method examines the common citations of the 55 publications.

The research uses VOSviewer software for cluster analysis to produce a term co-occurrence network, with a minimum term occurrence criterion of 5; terms occurring 2 or more times in each article are included. VOSviewer extracts concepts and represents them with lines of connection based on frequency, colour-coded (blue, green, red) to produce three groupings. These lines show the relationships between words, and the related colour groups represent themes derived from comparisons of the research results across articles. The results are elaborated below in relation to three similar articles, with the co-occurrence network visualised in Figure 2.

The identified clusters in the diagram above are as follows.

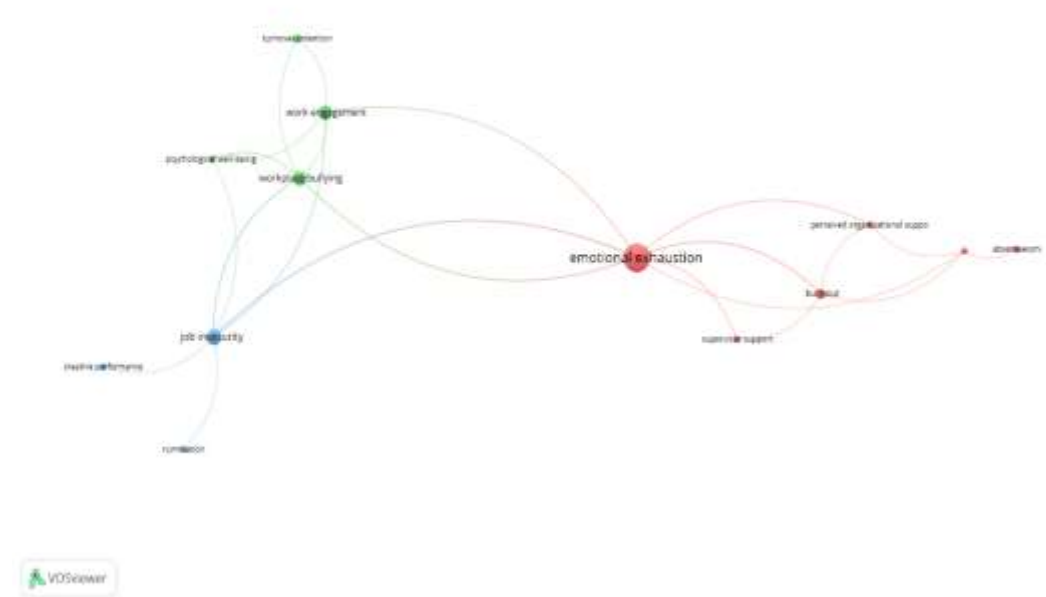


Figure 2. VOSviewer Diagram

Source: Authors' presentation (2025)

Cluster 1 (Green): This cluster illustrates the impact of workplace bullying as a critical stressor that directly affects employees' emotional states. The studies included in this cluster highlight workplace bullying behaviours, such as verbal aggression, exclusion, and power imbalance, that have a significant effect on emotional exhaustion (Jalali et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021).

Cluster 2 (Blue): The second cluster described how research on job insecurity is both an outcome of workplace bullying and a crucial mediator within the stress-strain relationship. It illustrates how bullying leads to feelings of instability, lack of control, and threats to career continuity, which in turn develop into emotional exhaustion. (Indriyani et al., 2020)

Cluster 3 (Red): The third cluster focuses on the broader consequences of emotional exhaustion for employee health, job performance, and turnover. It includes studies that apply the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model to explain how

resource loss and job demand lead to burnout and psychological distress (Anasori et al., 2020; Vander Elst et al., 2012). Based on the above clusters, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows.

Development of hypotheses

According to Hobfoll (1989), Workplace bullying, defined as repeated and enduring negative behaviours such as verbal abuse, exclusion, and work overload, is widely recognised as a severe psychosocial stressor. According to the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), persistent bullying leads to the loss of valued resources, resulting in strain and burnout. The Job Demands - Resources Model also identifies bullying as a job demand that depletes employees' emotional resources, thereby contributing to emotional exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Empirical studies confirm a positive association between bullying and emotional exhaustion. (Anasori et al., 2020; Jalali et al., 2020)

H1: Workplace bullying has a significant impact on emotional exhaustion.

Workplace bullying undermines employees' sense of stability and control over their jobs. The Transactional Theory of Stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) explains that employees perceive bullying as a threat to job continuity, thereby increasing job insecurity. Prior studies demonstrate that bullying behaviours heighten perceptions of role instability and job threats. (Glabek et al., 2018; Indriyani et al., 2020).

H2: Workplace bullying has a significant impact on job insecurity.

According to Park and Ono (2017), Job insecurity is recognised as a prominent stressor in organisational settings. From a COR perspective, insecurity threatens critical resources such as income and career stability, leading to strain. Empirical studies in healthcare and related fields confirm that job insecurity fosters stress and emotional exhaustion (Sverke et al., 2002; Park & Ono, 2017).

H3: Job insecurity has a significant impact on emotional exhaustion

Integrating COR and the JD-R Model shows that workplace bullying can be seen as a job demand that not only directly depletes emotional resources but also indirectly fuels exhaustion through job insecurity. Studies highlight the mediating role of job insecurity in the bullying - exhaustion relationship (Jalali et al., 2020).

H4: Job insecurity mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion

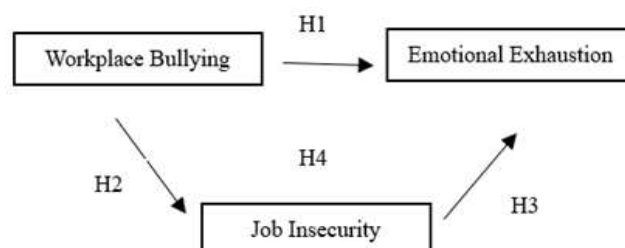


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors' presentation (2025)

Methodology

This explanatory quantitative study investigates the association between workplace bullying, job insecurity, and emotional exhaustion among nursing staff. A positivist paradigm, an objectivist ontology, and an objective epistemology support the study's deductive research approach. To guarantee rigour and reliability, a defined methodological framework was used, including research design, time frame, population, sampling, data collection, and preliminary testing. Because it makes it easier to gather uniform data from a sizable population and permits statistical generalisation, a survey research technique was used (Saunders & Bezzina, 2015). The study used a cross-sectional approach, which effectively captured correlations among the constructs by allowing data to be gathered at a single point in time, without changing the factors.

250 nurses were working at Sethsuwa General Hospital in Hambantota. A sample of 250 respondents was chosen using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. To guarantee equal selection probability and minimise bias, simple random sampling was used using the hospital personnel list and a random number generator. Both Sinhala and English questionnaires ensured inclusivity and comprehension. Self-administered formats reduced interviewer bias, while anonymity encouraged honest responses. Using validated scales improved reliability, and print plus online options increased participation among diverse nursing staff. To evaluate clarity, wording, and completion time, a pilot study including 30 nurses (24 females and 6 males) who were not included in the final sample was conducted prior to the main survey. 90% of the 30 nurses in the pilot trial (24 females and 6 males) reported no difficulty understanding the items. The average completion time was 12 minutes. The main study's viability was supported by a preliminary analysis, which revealed a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.32$) between reported workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion. Controlling bias ensures an accurate assessment of the true relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion, thereby improving the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings.

Based on comments, a few minor changes were made. Internal consistency was acceptable, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha. SPSS version 23 was utilised for data analysis, and the measurement and structural models were assessed using two-step analysis techniques and preliminary screening.

Operationalisation of Variables

This study operationalises variables using a structured measurement approach to ensure clarity and consistency. Demographic data are measured using nominal and ordinal scales, while the main constructs are assessed using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Emotional exhaustion is a unidimensional construct that represents the depletion of emotional resources due to work demands. Workplace bullying is conceptualised as repeated negative behaviours creating a hostile work environment. It is measured using eleven items adapted

from the same source, covering workload issues, criticism, humiliation, exclusion, and inappropriate conduct.

Job insecurity refers to perceived uncertainty about maintaining one's job. It is measured using four items adapted from Jalali et al. (2020) that focus on concerns about job loss and career instability. Overall, validated instruments from prior studies are used to ensure reliability and content validity, enabling effective quantitative analysis of the relationships among the study variables.

Analysis and Results

The SPSS data analysis process is described in this section. Printed questionnaires were used to gather data from the nursing staff at Sethsuwa General Hospital in Hambantota. 165 valid responses (66% response rate) were collected from the 250 questionnaires that were circulated. SPSS version 23 was used to code and analyse the data, and the initial screening revealed no missing values. There were 165 viable cases for study after outliers and missing values were found and eliminated.

Demographic profile

This section presents the demographic profile of the study sample, used solely to describe respondent characteristics and not for hypothesis testing. The study comprised 165 nursing staff members from Sethsuwa General Hospital, Hambantota, and their demographic attributes were examined based on gender, age, years of experience, and marital status.

The sample was predominantly female, with 81.8% of respondents being women, while males accounted for 18.2%. Regarding marital status, most respondents were married (69.1%), while 30.9% were single. The age distribution shows that the majority of participants were relatively young, with 80% in the 25-34 age group, followed by 13.3% in the 35-44 age group and 6.7% in the 45-54 age group. Regarding work experience, 60.6% of respondents had 1-5 years, 37% had 5-10 years, and 2.4% had less than 1 year. This indicates that most participants have moderate professional experience in nursing.

The demographic findings indicate that the sample is largely composed of young, female, and moderately experienced nursing professionals. This profile is consistent with the general workforce structure of the public healthcare sector in Sri Lanka and provides a relevant context for interpreting the study's findings.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the study's key constructs.

Descriptive statistics related to key constructs of the study.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Element	Workplace Bullying	Emotional Exhaustion	Job Insecurity
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N	165	165	165
Range	2.18	2.83	2.25
Minimum	3.91	3.83	2.75
Maximum	6.09	6.67	5.00
Mean	5.4424	5.7313	4.4242
Std. Deviation	.48267	.56297	.46067
Skewness	-1.641	-1.136	-1.558
	.189	.189	.189
Kurtosis	2.110	1.102	2.333
	.376	.376	.376

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

Normality

Normality is an underlying assumption of multivariate hypothesis testing. Hair et al. (2013) claimed to assess normality for metric variables. Since this study uses metric data, it is necessary to test multivariate normality. However, Hair et al. (2013) suggest that, as it is practically difficult to test multivariate normality, it is satisfactory to achieve 34 univariate normalities for all variables. Thus, univariate normality is tested for all three variables in this study. Field (2009) declared that when the sample size is large (> 30), the selected sample can be approximately normal. Since the sample size in the present study is 165, it tends to diminish the non-normality, according to this declaration. Both graphical and numerical methods are used to test normality in this study. Histograms for each variable and normality plots were drawn using the summated means for constructs (Field, 2009).

According to Hair et al. (2013), the shape of any distribution can be described by two measures of dispersion: skewness and kurtosis. Skewness focuses on the distribution's symmetry, and kurtosis focuses on its tallness. Figures obtained for each measure of dispersion for each variable are presented in Table 4.3. A rule of thumb was established: the skew index should be less than 03 and the kurtosis should be less than 10, indicating satisfactorily univariate normality.

Normality was also assessed by skewness and kurtosis, as in Table 3. Skewness measures symmetry in a distribution, and kurtosis measures peakedness or flatness. The independent variable had a skewness of -1.641 and a kurtosis of 2.110. The dependent variable had skewness of -1.136 and kurtosis of 1.102, and the mediator had skewness of -1.558 and kurtosis of 2.333.

Table 3. Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics Indicating Normality of Constructs

Workplace Bullying	Skewness	Kurtosis
(Independent Variable)	-1.641	2.110

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

For the variable Workplace Bullying, the skewness is -1.641, and the kurtosis is 2.110. Both values fall within the acceptable range, indicating that the data distribution for workplace bullying is approximately normally distributed. The negative skewness indicates a slight left skew, meaning that a small number of respondents reported higher levels of workplace bullying than the majority. However, this deviation is not large enough to violate the normality assumption.

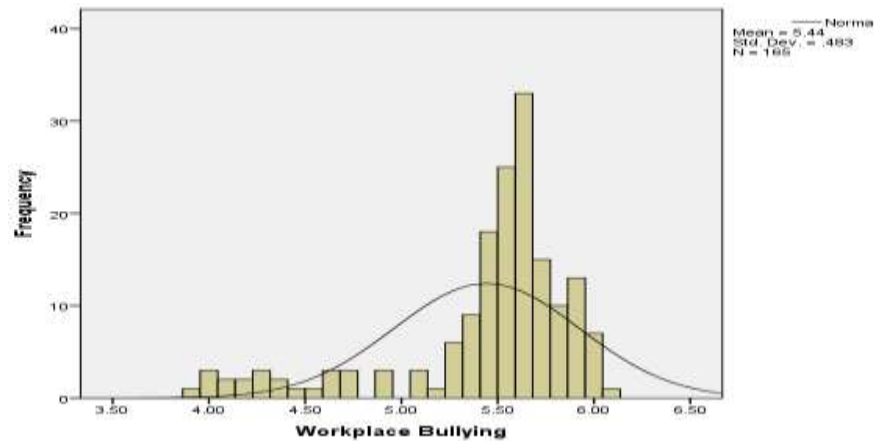


Figure 4. Normality – Workplace Bullying [IV]

Source: Authors' Presentation (2025)

For the variable Emotional Exhaustion, the skewness is -1.136, and the kurtosis is 1.102. Both values are within the acceptable thresholds suggested by Kline (2005), confirming that the data are approximately normally distributed. The negative skewness value indicates that responses are slightly concentrated toward higher levels of emotional exhaustion. In contrast, the kurtosis value close to zero suggests a distribution shape that is fairly similar to a normal curve.

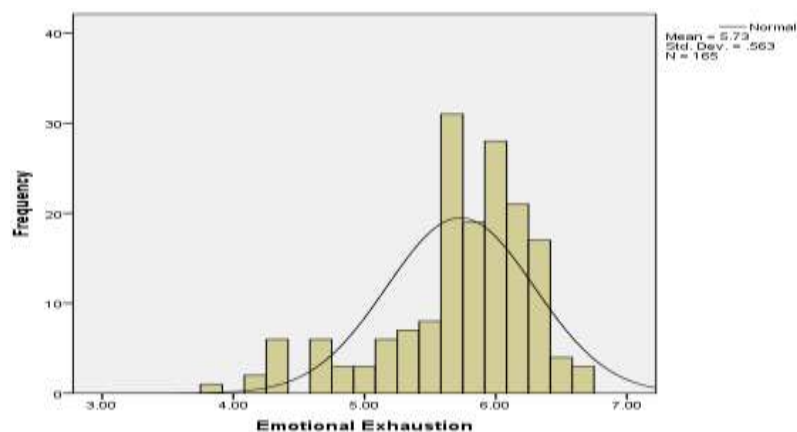


Figure 5. Normality – Emotional Exhaustion [DV]

Source: Authors' Presentation (2025)

According to the rule-of-thumb skewness and kurtosis indices, the results indicate that the sample data are normally distributed and that data transformations are not required to address problems of non-normality, as stated by Hair et al. (2013).

Linearity

The assumption about the linearity behind the two variables is a straight-line relationship. (Hair et al., 2013). All relationships in the study's conceptual model were examined to ensure linearity among variables.

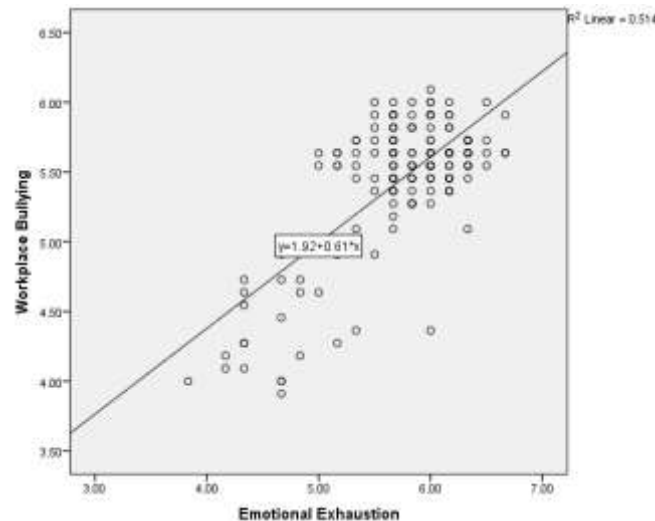


Figure 6. Linear Regression Analysis of Emotional Exhaustion and Workplace Bullying

Source: Authors' Presentation (2025)

The data points are closely distributed around the regression line, indicating a strong positive linear relationship between the two variables. This means that when emotional exhaustion increases, workplace bullying tends to increase as well.

Validity

Internal validity of a questionnaire refers to its ability to measure what it is intended to measure (Saunders & Bezzina, 2015). Often, when discussing the validity of a questionnaire, researchers refer to construct validity. Validity in the context is discussed as follows.

Construct validity

Construct validity is the extent to which measurement questions actually measure the presence of those constructs intended to be measured. (Saunders & Bezzina, 2015). It answers the question 'How well can one generalise measurement questions to the construct? Construct validity is also known as factorial validity. (Field, 2009). Therefore, factor analysis must be done to ensure construct validity. "Factor analysis is an interdependence technique, whose primary purpose is to define the underlying structure among the variables in the analysis" (Hair et al., 2013).

To test the construct validity, KMO and Bartlett's test were performed for each variable. The results of the three variables are as follows.

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test – Workplace Bullying

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.800
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	377.365
	df	55
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

According to Table 4, the sampling adequacy for workplace bullying was 0.800, which is significant at the 0.05 level. Moreover, the Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings was 53.914, which is also greater than 50%. Thus, the construct validity of workplace bullying was guaranteed.

Table 5. KMO and Bartlett's Test – Emotional Exhaustion

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.723
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	183.198
	df	15
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

The sampling adequacy coefficient for emotional exhaustion was 0.723, which met the minimum threshold of 0.5 and was significant at the 0.05 level. The Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings were 60.127, which is also greater than 50%. Thus, the construct validity of emotional exhaustion was guaranteed.

Table 6. KMO and Bartlett's Test – Job Insecurity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.543
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	70.975
	df	6
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

The sampling adequacy value for job insecurity also reached the 0.5 threshold at the 0.05 significance level. Moreover, it is significant at the 0.05 level. Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings was 68.992, which exceeded 50%, indicating that the construct validity of job insecurity was established.

Reliability

According to Field (2009), reliability is the ability of an instrument or measure to be interpreted consistently across different situations. Cortina (1993) recommends that instruments used in basic research have a reliability of about 0.7 or better, and states that values substantially lower indicate an unreliable scale.

Table 7. Reliability Statistics of Measures

Measure	Cronbach alpha	Number of items
Workplace Bullying	0.793	11
Emotional Exhaustion	0.717	6
Job Insecurity	0.702	4

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

According to Table 7, all measures are reliable, and all coefficients exceed 0.7. The Cronbach's alpha of each measure and the largest scale if an item is deleted indicate that none of the items requires deletion. These higher reliability values resulted from providing clear instructions to respondents and using a sufficient number of items to measure each construct.

Correlation

Correlation is the extent to which variables are related to each other. The correlation coefficient is a measure of linear association between two variables. Values of the correlation coefficient are always between -1 and +1 (Saunders & Bezzina, 2015). Carl Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used in the study, as the data are interval-scaled and normally distributed. Correlation values can be assessed against the criteria provided by Field (2009), and the threshold values are noted at the end of Table 4.10. Correlation statistics for the model variables and the control variables are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Pearson Correlation Statistics

Variables	Workplace Bullying	Emotional Exhaustion	Job Insecurity
Workplace Bullying		.717**	.671**
Emotional Exhaustion			.634**

Notes ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

(1) Between .1-.3: small effect. (2) Between .3-.5: medium effect. (3) Above .5: large effect.

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

The correlation between Workplace Bullying and Emotional exhaustion is $r = .717$, indicating a strong positive relationship. This implies that when workplace bullying increases, employees' emotional exhaustion also increases.

Similarly, Workplace Bullying and Job Insecurity are positively correlated ($r = .671$), showing that higher levels of workplace bullying are associated with greater perceptions of job

insecurity among employees. Furthermore, Emotional exhaustion and Job Insecurity show a positive correlation ($r = .634$), indicating a strong relationship between the two variables.

All the correlation coefficients exceed 0.5, confirming that the relationships among the key variables are strong and significant, supporting the theoretical expectations of the study.

Multicollinearity diagnostics

There are no significant problems between job instability and workplace bullying, according to multicollinearity diagnostics. The predictors are adequately independent because the tolerance value (0.550) exceeds the minimum criterion of 0.10, and the Variance Inflation Factor ($VIF = 1.818$) is well below the critical value of 10. Variance percentage diagnostics and condition index readings (23.486 and 32.671) do not show detrimental multicollinearity. Overall, robust and trustworthy regression estimates are supported by each predictor's distinct contribution to the explanation of emotional exhaustion.

Homoscedasticity (Equal Variance of Errors)

Because the error variance is consistent across emotional tiredness levels, the homoscedasticity requirement is satisfied. Bullying at work is a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .717$, $p < .001$), accounting for 51.4% of the variance ($R^2 = .514$). There is no significant heteroscedasticity, as indicated by the residual statistics (mean ≈ 0 , $SD = 0.392$). The absence of extreme outliers that could compromise variance stability is confirmed by the standardised residuals, which range from -2.271 to 2.976 .

Independence of errors

A Durbin - Watson statistic of 1.578, which is within the permissible range of 1.5 to 2.5 and shows no autocorrelation across residuals, supports the independence of mistakes. The lack of systematic error patterns is further supported by the near-zero residual distribution, which strengthens the reliability of the model estimates.

Outlier and Influential Case Diagnostics

Influence diagnostics indicate overall model stability. Precision is indicated by the low standard errors of the predicted values, which range from 4.45 to 6.27. Even though one studentized erased residual is marginally higher than ± 3 , this is not a serious issue. Cook's Distance (maximum = 0.174) verifies that no single observation significantly affects the model, while Mahalanobis Distance values (maximum = 10.09) show a few multivariate outliers.

Common Method Bias (CMB)/ Common Method Variance

The data is not severely affected by Common Method Bias (CMB), according to the CMB analysis, since the first factor accounts for only 30.10% of the variation, which is below the 50% threshold. The lack of dominant technique bias is further supported by the distribution of variance across several factors, with eigenvalues greater than 1.

Measurement Model Assessment (Before Structural Testing)

Acceptable concept validity is shown by the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) evaluation of the measurement model. With a significant Bartlett's test ($p < .001$) and strong sample adequacy ($KMO = 0.800$), workplace bullying (WPB) accounts for 53.91% of the variance. Emotional exhaustion (EE) accounts for 60.13% of the variance and exhibits sufficient structure ($KMO = 0.723$). Job insecurity (JI) accounts for 68.99% of the variance and produces a lower but acceptable KMO rating (0.543).

Normality of residuals

Under residual normality is confirmed, with standardised values within ± 3 and roughly normally distributed residuals (mean ≈ 0 , $SD = 0.392$). The model shows strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.514$, $p < .001$). When taken as a whole, these findings support the robustness, validity, and reliability of the results for additional structural analysis by confirming that all important regression assumptions are met.

Hypotheses Testing

A hypothesis is an assumption about a population parameter. They are testable propositions stating a significant relationship between multiple constructs. Hypothesis testing refers to the formal procedures used by statisticians to accept or reject statistical hypotheses. Regression is a parametric test predicting the impact, influence, or effect of one variable on another. Field (2009) explained that simple regression is used when there is a single predictor variable.

Regression Analysis

The summated means for each case and each construct were calculated using SPSS for regression analysis.

Testing H1: Workplace bullying has a significant impact on emotional exhaustion

The first regression is performed to test the effect of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion. The results revealed that Workplace Bullying significantly predicted emotional exhaustion, $F(1, 163) = 172.689$, $p < .001$. This indicates that workplace bullying plays a significant role in increasing emotional exhaustion among nursing staff.

The standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = .717$, $p < .001$) indicates a strong positive relationship: when workplace bullying increases, emotional exhaustion also increases. The model's R^2 value of .514 indicates that 51.4% of the variance in emotional exhaustion is explained by workplace bullying. Table 09 summarises the findings.

Table 9. Model Parameters and Model Summary of H1

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R^2	F	p-value	Hypothesis Supported
H1	Workplace Bullying →	.717	.514	172.689	.000	Yes

Emotional
Exhaustion

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

Testing H2: Workplace bullying has a significant impact on job insecurity

The next regression is performed to test the effect of workplace bullying on job insecurity.

The results revealed that Workplace Bullying significantly predicted Job Insecurity, $F(1, 163) = 133.371, p < .001$. This indicates that workplace bullying plays a significant role in increasing job insecurity among nursing staff.

The standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = .671, p < .001$) indicates a positive relationship: when workplace bullying increases, job insecurity also increases. The model's R^2 value of .450 indicates that 45% of the variance in job insecurity is explained by workplace bullying. Table 10 summarises the findings.

Table 10. Model Parameters and Model Summary of H2

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R^2	F	p-value	Hypothesis Supported
H2	Workplace Bullying → Job Insecurity	.671	.450	133.371	.000	Yes

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

Testing H3: Job insecurity has a significant impact on emotional exhaustion

The next regression is performed to test the effect of job insecurity on emotional exhaustion.

The results revealed that Job Insecurity significantly predicted Emotional exhaustion, $F(1, 163) = 109.685, p < .001$. This indicates that job insecurity plays a significant role in increasing emotional exhaustion among nursing staff.

The standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = .634, p < .001$) indicates a positive relationship: as job insecurity increases, so does emotional exhaustion. The R^2 value for the model is 0.402, indicating that 40.2% of the variance in emotional exhaustion is explained by job insecurity. Table 11 presents the summary of the results.

Table 11. Model Parameters and Model Summary of H3

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R^2	F	p-value	Hypothesis Supported
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H3	Job Insecurity → Emotional Exhaustion	.634	.402	109.685	.000	Yes
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Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

Testing H4: Job insecurity mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion

According to Field (2009), the unstandardized coefficients (b values) represent the contribution of each predictor to the model. The total effect of Workplace Bullying on Emotional Exhaustion was statistically significant ($b = 0.8366$, $t = 13.1411$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of workplace bullying are associated with higher emotional exhaustion among nursing staff.

When the mediator, Job Insecurity, was included in the model, the direct effect of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion decreased but remained significant ($b = 0.6188$, $t = 7.5241$, $p < 0.001$). This reduction in the coefficient suggests that part of the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion is transmitted through job insecurity.

The indirect effect ($b = 0.2178$, $SE = 0.0596$) was significant, with a 95% bootstrap interval excluding zero, confirming mediation. Results indicate partial mediation, where workplace bullying influences emotional exhaustion directly and via job insecurity. Consistent with stress theories, bullying increases insecurity, though remaining direct effects suggest additional mechanisms like psychological distress or reduced support.

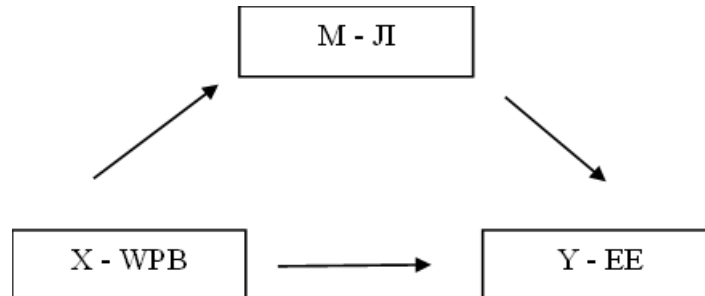


Figure 7. Hypothesis Testing - H4

Source: Authors' Presentation (2025)

Total effect = 0.8366

Direct Effect = 0.6188

Indirect Effect = 0.2178

As noted by Field (2009, p. 239), “the smaller the value of significance (and the larger the value of t), the greater the contribution of that predictor.” Thus, both workplace bullying and job insecurity significantly contribute to the prediction of emotional exhaustion among nursing staff. Table 12 summarises the findings.

Table 12. Results of the Bootstrapping Process- Total Effect H4

Effect Type	Effect (b)	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	Decision
Total							
Effect of WB on EE	0.8366	0.0637	13.1411	0	0.7109	0.9623	Significant
Direct							
Effect of WB on EE	0.6188	0.0822	7.5241	0	0.4564	0.7812	Significant
Indirect							
Effect via JI	0.2178	0.0596	—	—	0.0936	0.3281	Significant mediation

Note: $p < 0.05$; CI = Confidence Interval; WB = Workplace Bullying; JI = Job Insecurity; EE = Emotional Exhaustion.

Source: SPSS output of PROCESS Macro v4.2 (Model 4), 5000 bootstrap samples (2025)

Conclusions

As demonstrated by significant regression results ($\beta = .717$, $R^2 = .514$), this study concludes that workplace bullying is a robust predictor of emotional weariness among nursing staff. Additionally, it greatly raises job uncertainty ($\beta = .671$, $R^2 = .450$), which leads to emotional tiredness ($\beta = .634$, $R^2 = .402$). A substantial indirect effect ($b = 0.2178$) was also found by mediation analysis, suggesting partial mediation through employment insecurity. By showing both direct and resource-depleting indirect pathways, these results provide empirical support for COR Theory, the JD-R Model, and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. The necessity for focused organisational solutions in Sri Lankan hospitals is highlighted by the fact that workplace bullying both directly and indirectly exacerbates emotional exhaustion by eroding perceived job stability.

Theoretical Contribution

By enhancing and expanding important theoretical frameworks, this study adds to the body of knowledge on workplace bullying and worker wellbeing. It expands the application of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory in a South Asian healthcare setting. The results verify that bullying at work is a major job demand that exhausts nursing staff's emotional and psychological reserves.

By highlighting employment uncertainty as a crucial mediating mechanism, the study expands on these views. The results show a more complicated stress route where workplace bullying raises feelings of job insecurity, which in turn amplifies emotional tiredness, in contrast to earlier research that mostly focuses on direct impacts. By showing that resource loss is both immediate and anticipatory, resulting from perceived threats to job security, this expands on COR

theory. Job insecurity can be viewed as an extra demand brought on by bullying within the JD-R paradigm.

Thus, by verifying these models in the Sri Lankan healthcare system, the work makes a cross-cultural contribution and underscores their applicability beyond Western settings.

Practical Contribution

This study has several significant practical ramifications for Sri Lankan policymakers and healthcare administrators. First, the results show that bullying at work is a serious organisational problem that greatly raises nursing staff members' emotional exhaustion. As a result, hospital administration should give top priority to creating and implementing stringent anti-bullying policies that include explicit reporting procedures, zero-tolerance rules, and frequent behavioural monitoring.

Second, the study highlights that one of the main ways that bullying influences emotional exhaustion is through job instability. This implies that lowering psychological stress requires raising workers' perceptions of job security. To reduce employee uncertainty, healthcare organisations should foster open communication about working conditions, career advancement opportunities, and organisational changes.

Third, leadership techniques and supervisory assistance have to be improved. To reduce bullying behaviours and enhance the overall work environment, training programs for nurse managers and supervisors should emphasise respectful communication, conflict resolution, and supportive Leadership.

Lastly, the results point to the importance of employee well-being programs, including peer support networks, stress management courses, and counselling services, in lowering emotional exhaustion. Healthcare organisations can improve nurses' well-being, increase job satisfaction, and ultimately ensure better patient care and organisational performance by addressing both workplace bullying and job insecurity.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the study was conducted at a single public hospital in Sri Lanka, limiting the applicability of the findings to other medical facilities, private hospitals, or cultural contexts. Second, the cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships among workplace bullying, job insecurity, and emotional exhaustion, as data were collected at a single point in time. Third, despite efforts to ensure anonymity, the study relied on self-reported surveys, which may be subject to social desirability bias and common method bias. Fourth, although the sample size was statistically sufficient, it was limited to 165 respondents, potentially limiting the ability to accurately reflect differences across nursing subgroups or hierarchical levels. Fifth, other potential mediating or moderating factors, including organisational support, leadership style, and coping techniques, were not taken into account; instead, the study examined job insecurity solely as a mediator. Lastly, because qualitative insights were not recorded, the use of standardised questionnaires may have restricted the depth

of responses. These limitations emphasise the need for more thorough future research and imply that the results should be viewed cautiously.

Directions For Future Research

This study needs to be expanded upon in several significant ways by future research. To improve the generalizability of results across Sri Lanka and other South Asian contexts, research should first be conducted at a variety of hospitals, including both public and private healthcare facilities. Second, to investigate causal linkages and monitor changes in workplace bullying, job insecurity, and emotional exhaustion over time, longitudinal research methods are advised. Third, to provide a more thorough understanding of the model, future research should include additional mediating and moderating variables, such as perceived organisational support, leadership styles (e.g., transformational or laissez-faire), coping mechanisms, and psychological resilience. Fourth, research comparing professional groups across the healthcare industry, such as physicians, nurses, and administrative personnel, may provide a more in-depth understanding of the unique experiences of bullying and emotional exhaustion within each role. Fifth, to obtain deeper, context-specific insights into employee experiences, mixed-method approaches combining quantitative and qualitative data are recommended. Lastly, cross-cultural research in both developed and developing nations would help determine the cultural influences on the dynamics and psychological effects of workplace bullying. Theoretical advancement would be greatly strengthened by such extensions, which would also have stronger practical implications for enhancing staff well-being in healthcare companies.

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