



Exploring the moderating role of Coping Style on the relationship between Workplace Bullying and Employee Wellbeing in South African organisations

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between workplace bullying, psychological wellbeing, and coping styles among employees in South African organisations, aiming to understand the potential moderating effects of coping strategies on workplace bullying and psychological outcomes. A quantitative survey was conducted with a sample of 273 employees from various industries in South Africa, utilising Einarsen et al. (2009) Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R), Ryff's (1989) 42-item Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS), and Johannsdottir and Olafsson's (2004) Bullying Coping Scale (BCS). Data analysis comprised descriptive statistics to describe the sample, and correlation analysis was used to assess the strength and direction between psychological wellbeing, workplace bullying, and bullying coping styles and to guide further analysis. Preliminary Exploratory Factor Analysis examined the factor loading for the Bullying Coping Scale. Multiple Regression analysis was used to model the relationship between psychological wellbeing, workplace bullying, bullying coping styles and to analyse interaction items for potential moderating effects. Results confirmed the main effects of a significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. Moderation effect results indicated that although coping styles generally did not moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, the *do nothing* coping style was a significant predictor of lower psychological wellbeing scores. The findings suggest that passive coping styles may exacerbate the negative impact of workplace bullying on employee psychological wellbeing. Interventions should focus on more proactive coping strategies that can be implemented at various levels within the organisation to mitigate the negative effects of workplace bullying and to enhance psychological wellbeing in the workplace.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, psychological wellbeing, bullying coping scale, organisational leadership, toxic leadership, employee wellbeing, bullying, coping.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABSTRACT.....	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
LIST OF FIGURES	5
LIST OF TABLES	6
1. INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 Introduction, Background, and Orientation	7
1.2 Problem Statement	8
1.3 Research Questions	8
1.4 Research Objectives	9
1.5 Significance of the Study	9
1.6 Structure of Dissertation	9
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1 Theoretical Framework – Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping	10
2.2 Workplace Bullying	11
2.3 South African Legislation	16
2.4 Employee Wellbeing.....	17
2.5 Coping.....	19
2.6 Summary	21
2.7 Research Hypotheses	22
3. RESEARCH METHODS	23
3.1 Introduction, Research Approach and Strategy	23
3.2 Research Design.....	24
3.3 Data Collection	24
3.4 Research Instruments	25
3.5 Sample and Sampling Approach.....	28
3.6 Data Preparation.....	28
3.7 Data Analysis Techniques.....	30
3.8 Research Ethics, Informed Consent, and Social Responsibility	31
4. RESULTS	32
4.1 Introduction.....	32
4.2 Descriptive Statistics.....	32
4.3 Correlation Analysis	46
4.4 Regression Analysis.....	47
4.5 Summary of Results	56
5. DISCUSSION	58

5.1	Introduction.....	58
5.2	Findings of the Study	58
5.3	Theoretical Implications	65
5.4	Practical Implications.....	66
5.5	Strengths of the Study	70
5.6	Limitations and Future Research	71
5.7	Conclusion	73
	REFERENCES.....	75
	APPENDIX A.....	87
	APPENDIX B	88
	APPENDIX C	89
	APPENDIX D.....	91
	APPENDIX E	94

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	<i>Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping</i>	10
Figure 2	<i>Visual Representation of Psychological Wellbeing</i>	36
Figure 3	<i>Visual Representation of Workplace Bullying</i>	38
Figure 4	<i>Scree Plot</i>	42
Figure 5	<i>Visual Representation of Assertiveness Coping Style</i>	43
Figure 6	<i>Visual Representation of Avoidance Coping Style</i>	43
Figure 7	<i>Visual Representation of the Do Nothing Coping Style</i>	44
Figure 8	<i>Visual Representation of the Seek Help Coping Style</i>	44
Figure 9	<i>Scatterplot of Workplace Bullying by Psychological Wellbeing</i>	47
Figure 10	<i>P-Plot Psychological Wellbeing and Assertiveness</i>	49
Figure 11	<i>Scatterplot Psychological Wellbeing and Assertiveness</i>	49
Figure 12	<i>P-Plot Psychological Wellbeing and Seek Help</i>	49
Figure 13	<i>Scatterplot Psychological Wellbeing and Seek Help</i>	50
Figure 14	<i>Scatterplot Homoscedasticity</i>	51
Figure 15	<i>Normality Bell Curve</i>	52

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	<i>Definitions of Toxic Leadership</i>	16
Table 2	<i>South African Statutory Law</i>	17
Table 3	<i>Sample Demographics</i>	33
Table 4	<i>Job Position</i>	33
Table 5	<i>Tenure</i>	33
Table 6	<i>Industry</i>	34
Table 7	<i>Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale</i>	35
Table 8	<i>Negative Acts - Revised (NAQ-R) Scale</i>	37
Table 9	<i>Workplace Bullying Descriptives - Total Sum and Percentages</i>	39
Table 10	<i>Workplace Bullying Descriptives - Split Frequencies and Percentages</i>	40
Table 11	<i>Bullying Coping Scales - Exploratory Factor Analysis</i>	41
Table 12	<i>Bullying Coping Styles</i>	42
Table 13	<i>Cronbach's Alpha Values</i>	45
Table 14	<i>McDonald's Omega Values</i>	46
Table 15	<i>Pearson Correlation Outputs</i>	47
Table 16	<i>Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality</i>	52
Table 17	<i>Collinearity Diagnostics Values</i>	53
Table 18	<i>Variable Models</i>	54
Table 19	<i>Regression Model Summary</i>	55
Table 20	<i>ANOVA</i>	55
Table 21	<i>Regression Coefficients</i>	56

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction, Background, and Orientation

Workplaces are important environments for employees, especially in the context of wellbeing. Since most waking hours are spent working, it is essential for organisations and employees to follow healthy change and wellbeing practices (Kestel, 2019; Nielsen, 2019). Stress can significantly affect how leaders and employees show up and perform, potentially hindering psychological safety, which is vital for people, learning development, and performance to thrive (Edmondson, 1999; Hebles et al., 2022). Additionally, stress impacts psychosocial health (Pfeffer, 2018). A workplace can either be a source of fulfilment and health, or a source of unhealthy stress that reduces wellbeing and negatively affects organisations (WHO, 2022).

Supportive organisations, led by individuals who manage behavioural dynamics effectively and create environments where individuals and teams feel psychologically safe, can help alleviate employee health issues. Balancing commitments in work and personal contexts, while dealing with workplace toxicity indicators such as narcissism, bullying, and harassment increases distress (Edmondson, 1999; Padilla et al., 2007; Pfeffer, 2018). Leaders risk harm to employees, organisations and themselves if they fail to create safe environments, through intentional or unintentional toxic behaviour, such as bullying (Edmondson, 1999; Pfeffer, 2018).

Globally, workplace bullying remains a significant issue that affects employee psychological wellbeing and overall productivity. Studies show that bullying can lead to debilitating mental health issues, including anxiety, severe stress, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidality (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). In South Africa, the prevalence of workplace bullying is also alarmingly high, with many employees reporting experiences of bullying and harassment in their workplaces (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016; Calitz, 2022). This highlights the urgency for effective interventions and policies to address and mitigate the impact of workplace bullying on employee wellbeing.

This study examines the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa, and explores the moderating role individual coping styles may have on this relationship. Adopting certain coping styles may buffer the relationship between workplace stressors (e.g., bullying) by alleviating the negative impact of bullying, such as stress (Bernstein, 2016). Bernstein and Trimm (2016) found that specific coping styles can intensify the adverse effects of workplace bullying on individual outcomes. Certain coping styles are passive, and termed maladaptive, including avoidance, doing nothing or ignoring the behaviours expressed by a bully. Other coping styles are active, and termed adaptive,

including assertive behaviour, for example seeking help from others or direct confrontation with the bully (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004).

The aim of this study is to add to the South African workplace literature on relationships between bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, exploring coping styles as moderators. The findings may be of interest to employees, leaders, and organisational researchers and practitioners to support and inform employee wellbeing interventions that drive positive outcomes for organisations and individuals.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite established ethical standards and legislative frameworks, such as the Employee Equity Act's (EEA) Code of Good Practice, bullying remains rampant, and its effects inflict considerable harm to individuals, teams, organisations and society (Calitz, 2022). Workplace bullying can lead to severe mental distress for individuals, including anxiety, stress, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and even suicidal ideation (Nielsen et al., 2012; Leach et al., 2016; Magnusson et al., 2023). These effects, beyond immediate individual distress, can affect longer-term psychological and physical wellbeing and can extend to team and organisational issues such as compromised team cohesion, unhealthy organisational culture, and loss in productivity and morale (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002).

In South Africa, workplace research exploring the dynamics of bullying, its impact on psychological wellbeing, and the role of coping styles in moderating these effects, is limited (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016; Farley et al., 2023). This lack of research creates a gap in understanding workplace bullying in the South African context, limiting the ability for organisations to address this issue effectively and protect employees' wellbeing. Addressing this gap is essential to inform policy, improve workplace environments, and align organisational practices in South Africa with ethical obligations and existing legislation.

1.3 Research Questions

This research study asks the following questions:

RQ1: What are the relationships between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa?

RQ2: What are the moderating effects of coping styles on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to explore the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing within organisations in South Africa, and to understand the negative effects workplace bullying has on employee psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, to understand how various coping styles may moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing and to analyse how these coping styles may influence the severity of workplace bullying's impact on employee psychological wellbeing.

1.5 Significance of the Study

By exploring the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, including a view of coping style as a potential moderator of this relationship, this study will be contributing to the limited research currently available in South Africa. Given South Africa's unique context and multi-cultural diversity, there is a need to raise awareness of workplace bullying in South Africa by offering key insights into protective and risk factors for employees, and leaders, where workplace bullying is an issue, and contributing to the development of informed organisational policies and interventions that can reduce the negative impact that workplace bullying has on employee psychological wellbeing and align with South African legislation.

1.6 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 includes the research topic, background information, problem statement, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, and the dissertation structure. Chapter 2 introduces a theoretical framework, and reviews relevant literature on workplace bullying, employee wellbeing, coping strategies, and the moderating effect of coping on workplace bullying and employee wellbeing. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including research design, sample and sampling information, measuring instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis techniques. Chapter 4 presents results, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression, and moderation analysis. Chapter 5 discusses the findings relative to the research objectives and the research questions, hypotheses, theoretical implications, practical implications, limitations, and future directions. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the study by summarising the key findings and providing recommendations for future research.

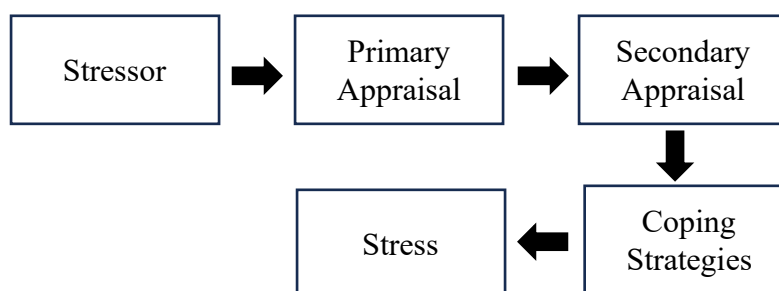
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter critically reviews a theoretical framework to underpin the study on the moderating effects of coping style in the relationship between workplace bullying and employee wellbeing. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC) is reviewed and discussed to contextualise workplace bullying, coping style, and employee psychological wellbeing. Then, workplace bullying, employee psychological wellbeing, and coping variables are defined and discussed. Finally, strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the literature about this study is critically reviewed before concluding.

2.1 Theoretical Framework – Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

The TTSC (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) is a framework that remains relevant and forms the basis of much of the psychological stress and coping research across multiple disciplines (Biggs et al., 2017). TTSC was developed to help people manage stressful events or situations by objectively assessing the stress and developing coping strategies to deal with it (Biggs et al., 2017). This framework encompasses three key elements: Primary Appraisal, Secondary Appraisal, and Coping Strategies in stress management (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This literature review defines the research scope and examines the TTSC in the context of the moderating effect that coping style could have on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing.

Figure 1
Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping



Note. This figure illustrates the conceptual framework of the TTSC model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

This theory suggests that post-appraisal of the stressor, ‘coping strategies’ act as a buffer in the relationship between the stressors and stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this study, the stressor is the subjective experience of workplace bullying and acts as the independent variable. Coping strategies act as moderating variables, and stress is the dependent variable under employee wellbeing.

2.2 Workplace Bullying

Workplaces consist of leaders, subordinates, and peers, and their interactions with each other, their environment, and the organisational culture, which encompasses the atmosphere, beliefs, values, and behaviours that guide how individuals and teams perform their work (Schein, 2010). Despite differing opinions on a precise definition of workplace bullying, understanding its meaning is crucial for guiding organisations towards health. Workplace bullying can be described as harmful behaviours that adversely affect communication, interactions, and experiences among leaders, subordinates, co-workers and key stakeholders, ultimately impacting wellbeing and organisational outcomes (Einarsen et al., 2009; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Reed, 2004; WEF, 2021). Moreover, it is essential to recognise that not all behaviours and experiences can be classified as bullying or toxic. The way leaders, subordinates, and co-workers express themselves, sometimes only in how they show up, or fail to show up, can also impede psychological safety, increase harmful stress and harm people and performance (Edmondson, 1999; Hebl et al., 2022).

Another characteristic of workplace bullying is excessive workload or job demands, such as perpetuating back-to-back meetings where no time is left to complete tasks during a work day (Pfeffer, 2018). The literature also highlights toxic leadership, bullying, harassment, gossip, incivility, alienation, and public ridicule. Bullying is a significant source of stress, and toxic leadership harms wellbeing at work (Pelletier, 2010; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006).

According to Matthiesen and Einarsen (2010), Brodsky (1976) pioneered research on bullying in his book, “The Harassed Worker”, which highlights anecdotes of bullying and harassment in the workplace. The claims by Brodsky (1976), and later supported by Einarsen et al. (2011), highlight the critical role organisational systems play in either mitigating or perpetuating workplace bullying, depending on how these systems respond to such behaviour (Brodsky, 1976; Einarsen et al., 2011). Despite an elusive, universally agreed-upon definition for workplace bullying, the following two definitions have been adopted for this study:

“Repeated actions and practices that are directed to one or more workers, which are unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but cause humiliation, offence, and distress, and that may interfere with job performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment.” (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010, p. 205).

Secondly, Einarsen et al (2020) offer a definition that includes offensive behaviour, such as harassment and social exclusion, where the offensive behaviour towards someone is carried out repeatedly and regularly (e.g. daily or weekly), in a process that escalates over time (e.g. about six months). Furthermore, they suggest a power dynamic that emerges where the perpetrator exerts superior power over the victim, enabling further negative social acts in the workplace (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2020). Therefore, key features when defining workplace bullying include an escalating process of repeated negative behaviour targeted toward employees of perceived unequal power, over a medium-long term.

Although this literature review focuses on employees in the context of workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, it is important to briefly highlight leadership as a risk factor. Leaders hold power in organisations, and therefore, play a pivotal role in either alleviating or perpetuating toxicity in the form of workplace bullying, and how this relates to the promotion or hindrance of employee psychological wellbeing (Dirik & Eryilmaz, 2018). Therefore, it is important to recognise that workplace bullying is not only an interpersonal issue but a systemic challenge requiring organisational accountability.

2.2.1 Antecedents of Workplace Bullying

Factors contributing to workplace bullying have emerged and evolved over the last two decades, highlighting a persistent and ongoing problem in the workplace (Acquadro Maran et al., 2023; Ozer & Escartin, 2023). In their study, Acquadro Maran et al. (2023) included more than 200 female employees in the healthcare industry in Italy and identified several individual and organisational risk factors and consequences of workplace bullying. Some individual factors are comprised of demographics, personality, and negative relationships with colleagues, while some organisational factors are comprised of role conflict, high workload, high stress, organisational restructuring, and leadership style, to name a few. Individual consequences of workplace bullying could lead to psychological and physical distress symptoms such as depression, anxiety, exhaustion, fatigue, illness, and general detrimental effects on mental health and wellbeing (Acquadro Maran et al., 2023). Organisational consequences could lead to higher absenteeism rates, productivity issues, and staff turnover. Collaboration and teamwork could also be negatively impacted due to colleagues' witnessing workplace bullying (Hoel et al., 2010). Workplace bullying is suggested as a symptom of organisational dysfunction (Valle et al., 2018).

Many studies have identified various antecedents of workplace bullying in South African organisations. Pietersen (2007) and Kalamdien (2013) highlight the role of power imbalances, positing that managers and those in leadership positions are more likely to perpetrate bullying.

Discrimination, racial tensions, and a lack of recognition are significant factors (Pietersen, 2007). Smit (2014) and Cunniff & Mostert (2012) further emphasise the impact of personal, organisational, and societal factors, with lower levels of education and a lack of workplace bullying policies increasing the risk of bullying. The prevalence of workplace bullying in specific industries, such as mining, healthcare and legal professions, highlights a need for industry-specific interventions (Visagie et al., 2012; Ariza-Montes et al., 2013; van Eck & van Staden, 2023).

2.2.2 Core Tenets of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying involves repeated mistreatment of one or more individuals, by one or more offenders and includes behaviour such as harassment, intimidation, aggression and social exclusion (Einarsen et al., 2011). The main principles of workplace bullying – repetition and persistence, intent to harm, imbalance of power, impact on health and wellbeing, and organisational culture as a contributor, will be defined next.

Although consensus is lacking for a global definition of workplace bullying, many scholars agree about workplace bullying being a pattern of repeated behaviours over time. These behaviours range from covert actions such as social exclusion or undermining tasks to overt aggression, such as yelling and swearing (Leymann, 1996). Although intent is difficult to measure, definitions consider workplace bullying as intentional, differentiating bullying from unintentional or accidental harm (Einarsen et al., 2011). There is often a power imbalance between bullying perpetrators and targets, where the targets feel defenceless against the perpetrator. This imbalance can be due to hierarchical positions, access to information or social influence within the organisation (Salin, 2003). Severe impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals, due to workplace bullying, with outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and depression, (which can also lead to physical manifestations), have been well-documented (Hoel et al., 2010; Acquadro Maran et al., 2023). In organisational cultures where bullying is ignored or tolerated, this can perpetuate the negative impact that bullying has on wellbeing and organisational results (Einarsen et al., 2007).

2.2.3 Types of Workplace Bullying

Two main types of bullying have been identified, namely conflict-focused and predatory-focused bullying (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen et al., 2020). Conflict-focused bullying consists of bullying behaviours that arise as a result of interpersonal or relational conflicts that escalate over

time, and that involve harmful actions such as verbal aggression, rumour-spreading or social exclusion (Zapf & Gross, 2001). Predatory-focused bullying involves power dynamics where victimisation or purposeful harm is caused by perpetrators who may perceive targets as vulnerable or holding less power than they do (Leymann, 1996; Einarsen, 1999).

2.2.4 Workplace Bullying Process

Workplace bullying occurs in several stages, that develop over time, escalating from subtle and covert behaviour to more direct and overt behaviour (Einarsen et al., 2010). Understanding the different stages can illuminate potential points for intervention to prevent further harm (Le Menestrel, 2020). Research has shown that prevention or intervention at the onset of workplace bullying is critical because, by the time the process has progressed to the final stage, it is more difficult to manage due to behaviours being entrenched and significant psychological distress being experienced by victims (Einarsen et al., 2020).

2.2.5 Workplace Bullying Behaviours

Some workplace bullying behaviours, and some outcomes, that indicate that bullying may be taking place in the workplace include, but are not limited to, professional or social isolation, silent treatment, rumours and gossip, excessive criticism or micromanagement, withholding information or purposeful exclusion, verbal aggression (yelling, insults and offensive remarks), and excessive rudeness and undermining (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen et al., 2011; Keashly, 1998; Zapf et al., 1996; Namie & Namie, 2009). Additionally, some authors have identified, unreasonable criticism (persistent and unbalanced) (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008); stress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Kivimaki et al, 2013; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012); frequent absenteeism (sick days, lateness, extended breaks) (Hoel & Cooper, 2000); decreased performance (missed deadlines and poor quality of work) (Hoel, Faragher & Cooper, 2004); undermining efforts (sabotaging someone's work, withholding necessary information or setting unrealistic deadlines) (Rayner & Keashly, 2005 in Einarsen et al) and even physical illness and unexplained ailments (headaches, gastrointestinal issues and chronic fatigue) as outcomes of bullying experiences that have affected individuals (Notelaers, 2009).

2.2.6 The Role of Leadership and Links to Workplace Bullying

Although this study focused on employees' self-reported experiences and their coping styles in the context of workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing, it is important to

recognise that leaders play a significant role in workplace bullying and wellbeing, both in terms of power dynamics and as potential targets of bullying themselves (Nielsen et al., 2024). More research is becoming available on toxic leadership, however, current literature on leadership appears biased toward positive aspects of leadership as opposed to negative behavioural aspects, such as workplace bullying (Bhandarker & Rai, 2019; Reed, 2004; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Sankowsky (1995) explored narcissistic traits in leadership, while Whicker (1996) was one of the first to define bad leaders and defines toxic leaders as “maladjusted, malcontent, and often malevolent and malicious. They succeed by tearing others down. They glory in turf protection, fighting, and controlling others rather than uplifting followers.” (Whicker, 1996, p. 12). Reed (2004) identifies three main aspects of toxic leadership: leaders who appear incongruent in their concern for employee wellbeing; express harmful interpersonal behaviour or personality traits that have a negative impact on individuals, teams, and organisational atmosphere; and display self-serving behaviour that is noticed by colleagues and subordinates. Certain leadership styles, such as ‘authoritarian’ or ‘autocratic’ can be linked to bullying because of the rigidity and control that disables employee autonomy (Duffy & Yamada, 2018; Ertureten et al., 2012). According to Hoel et al. (2010), autocratic leadership correlates with higher incidences of workplace bullying as leaders may use their authority to intimidate and micromanage subordinates and colleagues, leading to a toxic work environment. People in power can at times misuse their authority to demean or control. Salin (2003) states that power imbalances can lead to bullying and create an environment where leaders feel entitled to dominate others. In these cases, bullying may be used to maintain control and exert power over others, discouraging them from speaking up for fear of retribution. Moreover, Tepper (2000) and Tepper et al. (2017) describe destructive behaviours such as humiliation, dysregulated outbursts, unfair treatment, and exclusion as “abusive supervision” describing consistent mistreatment of others. For more than two decades, Hogan et al. (2021) have researched the “dark side of leadership” through the lens of personality. They have offered insights that include personality traits in three domains: “Narcissistic, Machiavellian, and Psychopathic” (Hogan et al., 2021). These examples of toxic leadership (see Table 1 below for definitions) highlight a significant issue alongside the detrimental effects it can have on employee wellbeing.

Table 1
Definitions of Toxic Leadership

Author and Date	Toxic Leadership Definition
Ulmer Jr. (2012)	Poisonous, destructive or harmful
Walton (2007)	Exploitative, abusive, destructive, psychologically corrupt and potentially legalistically corrupt and poisonous.
Reed (2004)	Lack of concern for employee wellbeing. An interpersonal or personality dysfunction that hurts organisational environment.
Flynn (1999)	Bullying, threatening or yelling. Mood swings influence culture and environment.
Padilla (2007)	Characteristics or behavioural traits have a negative effect on employees and the environment.
Wilson-Starks (2003)	Harmful approach to people and organisation. Poison enthusiasm, creativity, autonomy, and innovation.

Note. Extracted from *Toxic Leadership over the Years – A Review* (Indradevi, 2016)

Padilla and Lunsford (2013) posit leadership as contextual, stating that groups and followers can influence leaders and vice versa, and this, in turn, can influence their environment and vice versa.

Einarsen et al. (2007) discovered workplace bullying to be more prevalent in organisational cultures where leaders are not held accountable and bullying is tolerated and therefore normalised. Leadership positions can be demanding and stressful and lead to emotional exhaustion. However, when leaders in organisations are not held accountable for their behaviour or lack emotional regulation, those in power may feel entitled to mistreat others, perpetuating bullying and hostility in the work environment (Skogstad et al., 2007).

2.3 South African Legislation

There are no specific or direct laws that address workplace bullying in South Africa. Table 2 outlines the relevant statutory laws and how they relate to workplace bullying.

Table 2
South African Statutory Law

Statutory Law	Workplace Bullying Relevance
Employment Equity Act (EEA) (No. 55 of 1998)	The aim of the Employment Equity Act is to promote equality and fair treatment in the workplace, specifically prohibiting discrimination based on race, gender, and other protected characteristics. When workplace bullying is tied to discrimination, the EEA provides a legal avenue for employees to seek recourse.
Labour Relations Act (LRA) (No. 66 of 1995)	Should workplace bullying lead to a toxic workplace environment, employees may seek protection under this Act, making it relevant when considering legal mechanisms to address the impact of bullying on employee wellbeing (Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995).
Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) (No. 85 of 1993)	This Act places a legal obligation on employers to take measures to ensure both physical and psychological safety. Leaders and employers need to understand the scope of this Act and how it pertains to the protection of employees against workplace bullying which can lead to mental health issues such as stress, depression, anxiety, trauma, and burnout, thereby negatively impacting psychological wellbeing, individual and organisational performance.
Protection from Harassment Act (No. 17 of 2011)	This Act protects individuals who are exposed to harassment, whether it occurs in the workplace or outside of it. It is relevant for cases of extreme workplace bullying that is repetitive and harmful.
Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) (No. 75 of 1997)	Although this Act does not explicitly mention workplace bullying, it does contribute to the legal framework to ensure that working conditions do not unduly harm employee wellbeing, including their psychological health.
Employment Equity Act: Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the Workplace (2020)	This code, an amendment to the Employment Equity Act, offers practical guidance for organisations on how to mitigate the negative impact of workplace bullying and foster psychological safety. It supports the idea that coping strategies, without structural interventions at the organisational level, may not suffice in preventing and addressing workplace bullying in the workplace.
Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996	The South African Constitution provides the right to dignity and the right to a safe environment. This law implies that employees should be treated with respect in the workplace and Section 24 guarantees everyone the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or wellbeing. This can be interpreted as including protection from bullying in the workplace since it is a form of psychological harm.

2.4 Employee Wellbeing

The World Health Organisation (WHO) offers wellbeing to be a state where individuals can effectively cope with stress, work productively, realise their potential and contribute to their communities (WHO, 2022; WHO 2024). This definition extends beyond the mere absence of illness, encompassing a holistic sense of mental, physical and social health.

Employee wellbeing has received considerable attention in academic and organisational settings due to its links with job satisfaction, productivity, engagement, and reduced turnover

(Danna & Griffin, 1999; Grant et al., 2007). These factors are crucial for improving both individual performance and organisational success. A broad and multidimensional concept, where no single and universally accepted definition exists, at a basic level, employee wellbeing refers to the quality of employee health, experience, and functioning at work (Workplace Wellbeing, 2009; Warr, 1978). Ryan and Deci (2001), offer that wellbeing consists of hedonic wellbeing, focused on life satisfaction and positive mood, and eudaemonic wellbeing, focused on self-mastery, purpose, and vitality (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Although a universally accepted definition is lacking, and multiple domains and measures exist, employee wellbeing, in the context of workplace bullying, can be broadly categorised into three main components: psychological, physical, and organisational wellbeing (Farley et al., 2023). Focusing on three broad categories within a complex construct such as employee wellbeing facilitates clarity and understanding.

Psychological Wellbeing refers to subjective and cognitive experiences of individuals, which Ryan and Deci (2001) encapsulate in their definitions of hedonic and eudaemonic wellbeing. These complimentary perspectives provide a holistic understanding of psychological wellbeing, encompassing both the pursuit of happiness and fulfilment of purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryff's (1989) Psychological Wellbeing research and associated measure, the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale (RPWBS), comprise six elements of psychological wellbeing – autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance – together these elements offer a comprehensive view of psychological wellbeing, all of which translate effectively into workplace settings (Ryff, 1989; Ryff et al., 2003). These dimensions are underpinned by humanistic psychology, focusing on the eudaemonic approach, and emphasise personal development, self-actualisation, and reaching potential (Ryff, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The eudaemonic approach seems fitting for the workplace because it suggests exerting effort to pursue growth and potential, whereas hedonism suggests a relaxed state in search of pleasure (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryff and Singer (1998; 2003) suggest both a theoretical and operational definition of psychological wellbeing through the six constructs that they claim span emotional and physical wellbeing. Ryff (1989) positions psychological wellbeing as an essential component in human flourishing, often linked to higher job satisfaction, better performance, and greater resilience in the workplace (Huppert & So, 2011).

Ryff's (1989) scale has been widely used in organisational settings to explore the relationship between psychological wellbeing and various work outcomes (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000; Dhanabhakym & Sarath, 2023). For instance, Wright and Cropanzano (2000) found that employees who experience higher levels of psychological wellbeing tend to perform better. From an organisational perspective, factors influencing employee wellbeing include the social impact of leadership (and colleagues') behaviour, how jobs are designed, and how work is

done across organisations, leading to negative organisational outcomes such as productivity loss, absenteeism, and increased employee turnover (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Einarsen et al., 2011). Organisational wellbeing has typically been studied under psychological wellbeing; however, some scholars have chosen to separate the constructs to examine possible differentiating moderating variables (Inceoglu, 2018). If mismanaged, these influencing factors can lead to elevated stress levels, burnout, depression, and anxiety, which can seep into personal or family life and affect employees' general health (De Simone, 2015). Jacobsen et al (2018) provide evidence of a correlation between workplace bullying and an increase in physical pain. From a physical wellbeing perspective, in context of bullying, negative outcomes such as headaches, neck pain, and sleep disturbances have been reported (Kaaria et al., 2011; Tynes et al., 2013; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

Each of the three components possesses a unique and interconnected contribution to individual work experience and overall life satisfaction (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Due to the unique and subjective nature of employee wellbeing, the overlapping nature of wellbeing between work and home, and the interconnectedness between these primary domains, this suggests that employee wellbeing is not easily captured by a standardised definition, approach, or measure (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Grant et al., 2007; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

Although employee wellbeing is recognised as a multidimensional and interconnected construct, psychological wellbeing (PWB) is central to understanding employees' overall satisfaction and resilience in the workplace. This focus is particularly relevant given the potential for negative experiences or harmful interactions that can impact mental health (Grant et al., 2007; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Post-COVID pandemic, an increase in focus on psychological wellbeing in the workplace has become necessary (McCain & Manktelow, 2021). Therefore, emphasising psychological wellbeing as an outcome can provide insights into how employees cope with workplace stressors, such as workplace bullying, and maintain optimal wellbeing, which aligns with the goals of this study.

Various coping strategies, discussed next, can be employed to alleviate the stressful effects of workplace bullying (Johari, 2020).

2.5 Coping

Coping involves the cognitive and behavioural strategies individuals adopt to manage stressors, whether by attempting to alter the stressor, or by mitigating its emotional impact (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the context of workplace bullying, coping strategies could determine the psychological and emotional toll on individuals and their capacity to function effectively. Johannsdottir and Olafsson (2004) found that different coping strategies were adopted

at various stages of the bullying process, and each strategy adopted may depend on the intensity and duration of the bullying experience. These strategies include active/passive, assertive/submissive, or aggressive/appeasing. Specific coping styles are described as ‘avoidance’ (passive), ‘do nothing’ (passive), ‘seek help’ (active), and ‘assertiveness’ (active) (Tsuno, 2022). Passive coping styles are also described as ‘emotion-focused’ coping, and active coping styles are described as ‘problem-focused’ coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Tsuno, 2022). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) used different classifications for coping, identifying strategies that either changed the situation, controlled the meaning of the issue before the stress occurred, or managed the stress after the issue occurred. Fleishman (1984) agreed with a broader classification, arguing that coping as a nuanced and complex construct requires subgroups beyond being limited to emotion-focused or problem-focused (Fleishman, 1984). Hogg and Doherty (2001) noted that emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies were frequently used together, while other researchers note varying coping strategies used at different stages (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004; Einarsen et al., 2011).

Victims of bullying seem to use coping strategies that are more passive and avoidant rather than coping strategies that are active and assertive, which are what individuals claim they would use if they were subject to bullying (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004). Whether bullying poses an issue for employees is determined by their differences, and cognitive appraisal determines how individuals cope (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Dehuai et al., 2012). Einarsen et al (2011) suggest that when individuals are exposed to bullying varied coping mechanisms are adopted, with their choice of strategy significantly influencing wellbeing outcomes. For example, the most common coping strategy for bullying victims was found to be avoidance, suggesting an inability to defend themselves, and leading to feelings of diminished self-worth, depression, and hopelessness. Where bullying escalates in severity, and victims are forced to seek assistance, most attempts to stop bullying fail, and targets resort to suppression of feelings, further avoiding the situation, taking extended sick leave, or adopting ‘presenteeism’, where they either end up resigning or are dismissed (Einarsen et al., 2011).

According to Karatuna (2015), who concurs that most coping strategies include avoidance or ignoring strategies, and posits that if bullying victims sought help, this help would be from friends or family members, who would further advise avoidance coping strategies, potentially perpetuating bullying (Karatuna, 2015). Contrary to perspectives that frame seeking help as an active coping strategy, De Hue et al. (2012) categorise emotional support as passive coping. This could mean that while emotional support offers comfort and helps individuals cope emotionally, it does not directly address or stop the bullying. Avoidance is claimed to be one of the most

common ways to cope with stress, although it may not be the most effective against bullying (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

Socio-economic and cultural dynamics may shape how coping strategies are applied and how individuals respond to stress and adversity, which may be particularly important to South African workplace contexts (Harrison et al., 2019). Research highlights that coping effectiveness is context-dependent, with varying strategies adopted based on specific challenges faced and resources available (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005).

Coping potentially intervenes in the relationship between bullying and wellbeing. The stressor, bullying, is either reduced by introducing a coping strategy that helps alleviate an adverse wellbeing effect (i.e., stress, diminished sense of self-worth and hopelessness), or the wellbeing effect is exacerbated by the stressor if the coping strategy is ineffective against it. This study seeks to understand the moderating effect coping may have on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa.

2.6 Summary

The complexity of the relationship between psychological wellbeing and workplace bullying is evident from the literature, and coping styles that are adopted by individuals throughout the process of bullying will be unique and have varying levels of influence on this relationship (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004; Einarsen et al., 2011; Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). For example, Johannsdottir and Olafsson (2004) found that during the initial stages of workplace bullying, individuals tend to adopt active coping strategies, but as the bullying becomes more severe, they shift to passive coping strategies. This tends to be when targets exit the organisation, as a way of avoiding bullying (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010). Problem-focused coping, such as reporting bullying or receiving familial or organisational support, has been linked to improved wellbeing. However, the support received is nuanced and contextual (Chao, 2011).

Many studies have been conducted on the effects of workplace bullying on psychological wellbeing; however, most examples are recent, and research that focuses on the South African context is scarce (Einarsen et al., 2020; Hoel et al., 2010; Milner et al., 2013). Schyns et al. (2013) offer strategies to prevent toxicity, including bullying, and its adverse effects on wellbeing. However, there are still gaps in the literature regarding interventions that address the interactions between leaders, subordinates, colleagues, and organisational culture in a holistic manner to mitigate the negative impacts of workplace bullying on employee wellbeing.

Research across Europe and the US shows that nearly one in three workers are affected by workplace stress (Armstrong, 2021). Studies reveal that stress, depression, and anxiety not only impair job performance and increase absenteeism, which is detrimental to organisations, but also

highlight that treatment and prevention is feasible for individuals (Carolan et al., 2017). In the context of workplace bullying, employee wellbeing involves identifying factors of workplace toxicity, such as bullying, that harms employee psychological wellbeing. This study focuses on these determinants and aims to provide insights for intervention through prevention and treatment (Workplace Wellbeing, 2009).

2.7 Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the proposed hypotheses are as follows:

2.7.1 Main Effect:

H0: There is no significant relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing.

H1: There is a significant relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing.

2.7.2 Moderating Effects:

H2a: The *do nothing* coping style has no moderating effect on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa.

H2b: The *do nothing* coping style moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa.

H2c: The *avoidance* coping style has no moderating effect on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa.

H2d: The *avoidance* coping style moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa.

H2e: The *assertiveness* coping style has no moderating effect on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa.

H2f: The *assertiveness* coping style moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa.

H2g: The *seek help* coping style has no moderating effect on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa.

H2h: The *seek help* coping style moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa.

This concludes the literature review. The following chapter discusses this study's research methods.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction, Research Approach and Strategy

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted in this study, which explores the relationship between workplace bullying, employee psychological wellbeing and coping styles among employees in South African organisations. The study employs a quantitative survey approach, utilizing Einarsen et al.'s (2009) Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R), Ryff's (1989) 42-item Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS), and Johannsdottir and Olafsson's (2004) Bullying Coping Scale (BCS). A comprehensive explanation of the research design, including methods for gathering data, selecting samples and sampling methods, tools used, steps followed, ethical guidelines, handling of data, and techniques for analysing data that were adopted, can be reviewed in the "Research Design" section below.

3.1.1 Research Approach and Justification

The study is designed to be structured and correlational, making it suitable for a quantitative research approach (Roestenburg et al., 2021). This method enables the examination of the strength and significance of relationships between measurable variables, specifically workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in this study (Field, 2018; Howell 2014). The use of standardised data collection methods and statistical measures ensures transparency in methods and procedures, allowing other researchers to replicate the study, thereby increasing its reliability and robustness (Roestenburg et al., 2021).

3.1.2 Aim of the Research

This study aimed to investigate the relationships between employee psychological wellbeing, workplace bullying and coping styles. It also sought to understand how individual coping styles might moderate the relationship between employee psychological wellbeing and workplace bullying within organisations in South Africa.

3.1.3 Research Rationale

This study's purpose was to deepen understanding of the relationship between bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in the workplace, as well as the moderating effect of individual coping styles on this relationship. Additionally, to provide organisations with empirical

data to support policy development and inform practical interventions that can improve employee psychological wellbeing and reduce the incidence of workplace bullying.

3.1.4 Limitations of the Quantitative Approach

The quantitative paradigm relies on standardised numerical data measures, which restricts a deeper, more subjective understanding of respondents' meanings attached to their lived experiences and observations of workplace bullying, coping styles and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations. This deeper understanding is achievable through a qualitative or mixed methods approach, which was not feasible due to time constraints.

The research design was correlational, focusing on identifying and measuring the strength of relationships between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. It examined the strength and effect size of workplace bullying employee psychological wellbeing, along with the moderating effect of coping styles. Consequently, it did not assess cause and effect (Field, 2018; Roestenburg et al., 2021). For instance, the study did not predict the extent to which workplace bullying causes specific indicators of employee psychological wellbeing, such as burnout or stress.

The questionnaires were self-reported and depended on respondents' subjective input regarding workplace bullying, psychological wellbeing, and coping. This reliance may introduce a risk of method bias. To mitigate or counter this bias, confidentiality and anonymity were assured (Roestenburg et al., 2021).

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional correlational research design. A quantitative approach was suitable because the study examined the relationships between predictor variables (Workplace Bullying, Bullying Coping Styles) and the outcome variable (Psychological Wellbeing). Data was collected electronically and numerically coded for statistical analysis (Howell, 2014; Roestenburg et al., 2021). The data collection was conducted using an online survey instrument, Qualtrics, with scientifically robust scales. Since the predictor variables were not manipulated, this study adhered to a non-experimental design (Howell, 2014).

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection occurred at a single point in time, making the study cross-sectional (Sedgwick, 2014). The data collection period lasted three months, from 15 July 2023 and 15

October 2023, dependent upon ethics approval, which was granted on 12 August 2023. The data was gathered using reliable, valid, and standardised instruments that employed a 5/7-point Likert scale to measure workplace bullying, employee psychological wellbeing, and the moderating variable, coping style (Batterton & Hale, 2017).

3.3.1 Data Gathering Sequence

The University of Cape Town's (UCT's) Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee granted permission to proceed with research before data gathering commenced. Once formalised, online questionnaires were created using Qualtrics, based on existing instrument criteria. Individuals were invited to participate via email, WhatsApp and LinkedIn, and were requested to extend the invitation to additional respondents.

3.3.2 Data Management

Data was collected using a secure, password-protected Qualtrics account. It is stored on a password-protected computer and cloud storage. The data was only exchanged with the researcher and will be archived according to UCT's data management policy, using password-protected cloud storage for 5 years or as per UCT policy.

3.4 Research Instruments

Three well-established tools were utilised to assess workplace bullying, psychological wellbeing, and coping styles related to bullying. These tools are Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R), Psychological Wellbeing Scale, and the Bullying Coping Scale (Einarsen et al., 2009; Ryff, 1989; Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004). For measurement tools to be appropriate and considered valid, they must accurately measure what they are intended to measure (Roestenburg et al., 2021). Each instrument was chosen based on its validity and relevance to the constructs being examined, providing a comprehensive approach to exploring relationships between workplace bullying, psychological wellbeing, and coping styles.

3.4.1 *The Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R)*

Workplace bullying was measured using the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R), which is publicly available and free to use (Einarsen et al., 2009). The NAQ-R was developed to understand behaviours, or dimensions, that underpin workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009). This instrument is highly reliable, with an overall Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.90, and consists of three subscales: work-related bullying, person-related bullying, and physically intimidating bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009). Criterion validity has been established for the NAQ-R, demonstrating that it effectively measures the traits of workplace bullying it set out to measure (Einarsen et al., 2009; Roestenburg et al., 2021).

The NAQ-R scale comprises 22 continuous variable items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). The scores were calculated to produce an overall bullying score, with higher scores indicating greater levels of perceived bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009). Appendix C includes the NAQ-R, showing dimensions or examples of statements that measure bullying under each factor, categorised as *Work-related bullying* (WRB), *Person-related bullying* (PRB), and *Physical Intimidating Bullying* (PIB).

3.4.2 *Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS)*

To measure employee psychological wellbeing, the 42-item Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS), developed by Carol Ryff (1989), was used (Ryff, 1989; Ryff et al., 2007). The PWBS is a valid and robust American-based self-reported scale, consisting of 42-items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, developed to measure psychological wellbeing at a population level (Henn et al., 2016; Ryff, 1989). Respondents rate statements about their subjective psychological wellbeing on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). The following six subscales of wellbeing and happiness are measured: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Autonomy (e.g., Q1 “I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people.”); Environmental Mastery (e.g., Q23 “I have been able to build a living environment and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking.”); Personal Growth (e.g., Q2 “For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.”); Positive Relations With Others (e.g., Q4 “People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others”); Purpose in Life (e.g., Q20 “I have a sense of direction and purpose in life.”); and Self-acceptance (e.g., Q22 “In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.”). Although the 42-item scale takes longer to administer than the 18-item

scale, it is shown to be more robust. The scale showed acceptable internal consistency reliability with Cronbach's alpha coefficient $\alpha=0.77$ (Roestenburg et al., 2021; Shryock & Meeks, 2018). Evidence for use of the 42-item scale proved adequate construct validity for an overall measure of wellbeing, however, the study cautions against the use of distinctive subscales (Springer & Hauser, 2006). There is extensive evidence of the PWBS's use in South Africa, which justifies its application in this study (Henn et al., 2016).

PWBS is suitable to assess psychological wellbeing for individuals aged 13 and older and takes 6-8 minutes to administer. Scores are interpreted for each dimension by computing responses to the relevant items in each subscale. Higher scores for each subscale indicate higher levels of wellbeing for that dimension. For example, higher scorers in the *autonomy* dimension show independence and self-determination with high resistance to social pressures and an ability to self-regulate their behaviour (Ryff, 1989; Ryff, 2007). Composite scores for overall wellbeing were used for this study.

PWBS, showing more examples of statements, and subscale questions, including reverse score items, can be found in Appendix D.

3.4.3 Bullying Coping Scale (BCS) (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004)

To measure coping with bullying, Johannsdottir and Olafsson's Bullying Coping Scale (BCS) (2004) was used. The BCS was developed in 2004 to support the evaluation of how individuals cope with bullying at work (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004). The coping measure is a 16-item, continuous variable, 5-point Likert scale asking respondents to rate statements according to how they would react if they were subject to bullying at work. Ratings on the scale range from 1 (I have done it) to 5 (I would never do it). The four subscales, including some example statements, are: *seek help* (e.g., "Tell the HR director at work about it"); *avoidance* (e.g., "Feel helpless"); *assertiveness* (e.g., "Talk to the bully and ask him/her to stop"); and *do nothing* (e.g., "Ignore it and do nothing").

The scale's reliability is good with Cronbach's alpha for general bullying being $\alpha=0.85$, and $\alpha=0.78$ for work-related bullying (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004).

To interpret BCS, scores are calculated by computing responses to relevant items for each coping style. Higher scores for each coping style indicate a greater adoption of that coping style in response to bullying (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004). Prior to analyses, items on the scale need to be reverse-coded. This ensures that higher scores represent higher levels of the construct being measured. For example, under each of the four subscales, responses for items need to be recoded

so that a response of 1 (I have done it) changes to 5 (I would never do it), 2 (I would do it) changes to 4 (I would probably not do it), and so on.

Construct validity is evidenced through a factor analysis conducted by Johannsdottir and Olafsson (2004). They identified four distinct coping strategies (avoidance, seeking help, do nothing, and assertiveness) that theoretically predict coping responses in relation to workplace bullying. This confirms the scale's structure by measuring what it set out to measure—four separate coping styles in the context of workplace bullying (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004). BCS, which shows more examples of statements and subscale statements, can be found in Appendix E.

Together, these instruments allow for the exploration of how bullying relates to psychological wellbeing in the workplace and provide a robust framework for examining the potential moderating effects that bullying coping styles can have on the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing.

3.5 Sample and Sampling Approach

Four hundred respondents were recruited for the study. A large sample was necessary to generalise the findings to the population (Roestenburg et al., 2021). The sampling technique used was non-probability, convenience, and snowball sampling, as affiliate organisations were approached and invited to participate, including an invitation to extend the invite to their affiliates. An invitation to participate was also posted on LinkedIn. A profile for the sample can be found in Chapter 4: Results (Tables 3 to 6).

3.6 Data Preparation

Data files were extracted from Qualtrics in all relevant and acceptable file formats and stored in password-protected cloud storage for easy access and coding purposes. They were then cleaned and analysed using SPSS version 24.

3.6.1 Missing Values

Four hundred responses were collected, of which 78 were incomplete and removed from the dataset, resulting in 322 responses.

3.6.2 Multivariate Outliers

Multivariate outlier detection was completed using Mahalanobis distance using linear regression in SPSS. Mahalanobis distance calculates the distance of observations from the mean

of the independent variables (Field, 2018). First, a new variable was created to determine the probability of outliers using the chi-square distribution, with the number of independent variables equal to the degrees of freedom. Then, an outlier variable was created to compute the observations that resulted in a probability below $p=0.001$. Any observations equal to 1 were flagged for deletion. A total of 29 outliers were identified and therefore removed from the dataset, resulting in 293 responses.

3.6.3 Removal of non-South African Data

This study focused on individuals who work in South African organisations. Therefore, 20 additional observations were removed from the dataset to only include observations of those individuals working in South Africa. This resulted in a clean dataset sample of 273 working individuals.

3.6.4 Reverse Coding

To ensure all items contributed positively to each construct being measured, and to prevent misinterpretation of scores, each item was checked and where applicable, reverse coded to ensure wording aligned in the same direction. The Psychological wellbeing scale guide was utilised and reverse-coding applied. The Bullying coping scale Likert scale was reverse-coded to align wording in the same direction. It was not necessary to reverse code items in the NAQ-R scale.

3.6.5 Composite Variables Computation

Composite variables were created for Workplace Bullying from the NAQ-R scale (WPB) and Psychological Wellbeing from PWBS (PWB) by computing the sum of the relevant item scores. Composite variables for Bullying Coping Style from the Bullying Coping Scale (BCS) could not be created because the items measured different types of coping responses. Instead, a preliminary exploratory factor analysis was conducted to explore the underlying structure and guide interpretation at the factor level rather than using composite scores.

3.6.6 Interaction Item Computation

Interaction items for workplace bullying and each coping style were created by first calculating the mean of each variable before creating centred variables. The centred variables

were then multiplied to create interaction terms. The interaction terms, along with main effects, were used in the regression model (Field, 2018).

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis techniques that were adopted included descriptive statistics to describe the sample using frequencies, mean, minimum, and maximum values, standard deviations for employee psychological wellbeing, workplace bullying, and coping style observations. Descriptive statistics are important to understand data distribution and to help identify data patterns and potential outliers, giving insight into further analyses that may be required (Field, 2018).

To explore relationships between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, the computation of composite scores was conducted by summing relevant items in the scales and subscales to create the following composite variables: WPB (Based on the NAQ-R and representing Workplace Bullying) and PWB (Based on the Psychological Wellbeing Scale and representing Psychological Wellbeing). A preliminary exploratory factor analysis was conducted for BCS (Based on the Bullying Coping Scale and representing coping styles) to examine its underlying factor structure and determine the dimensionality of coping responses (Field, 2018). Correlation and Multiple Regression Analyses were adopted and executed using SPSS Version 29 (IBM, 2024; Field, 2018). The relationship strength and direction between psychological wellbeing, workplace bullying and bullying coping styles was assessed using correlation analysis. It also helped to identify linear relationships and guide further analyses (Field, 2018). This assisted in answering research question 1: “What are the relationships between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing?”. To investigate coping styles as moderating variables in the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, both descriptive analysis and regression analysis were used. Multiple Regression analysis was used to model the relationship between psychological wellbeing and workplace bullying, with bullying coping styles as potential moderators. First, it was important to understand the predictive influence these independent variables had on psychological wellbeing as the outcome variable, and second, it was important to understand if there were any moderating effects of bullying coping styles on the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing (Field, 2018). Interaction terms were created by multiplying the bullying coping styles with the workplace bullying scores. The regression model included the main effects of workplace bullying and coping styles, as well as the interaction terms to test for moderation effects. This assisted in answering research question 2: “What is the moderating relationship of coping styles between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing?”

3.8 Research Ethics, Informed Consent, and Social Responsibility

Respondents were invited to participate voluntarily. Information about the study, participation instructions, and the researcher's contact details were provided on the initial pages of the questionnaire and before completing the online questionnaire. Before respondents proceeded to answer any questions on the questionnaire, informed consent was obtained via a mandatory checkbox on the online questionnaire tool. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and it was emphasised that no risk or benefit would be applied to them before, during, or after the study. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time without judgement, and a unique and anonymous identifier was used to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. This identifier was used to identify and delete relevant data from the dataset if necessary.

This concludes the discussion of the methods used in this study. The next chapter will present the results of the statistical analyses.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

First, this section presents the data preparation process and descriptive statistics results for demographics: gender, age, job position, and tenure. Next, descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, and maximum and minimum values for the main outcome variable, *psychological wellbeing*, the main predictor variable, *workplace bullying*, and the moderator predictor variables, coping styles (active: *assertiveness* and *seek help*; passive: *avoidance* and *do nothing*), are presented.

Then, Pearson correlation results are presented to explore the relationships between psychological wellbeing, workplace bullying, and the four coping styles and to help answer research question 1: What are the relationships between psychological wellbeing and workplace bullying? Then, regression analysis results are presented to explore the direct effects of *workplace bullying* and the four coping styles on *psychological wellbeing*. Finally, moderation analysis results are presented, to explore the potential moderating effects of four bullying coping styles: *do nothing*, *avoidance*, *assertiveness*, and *seek help*, and to assist with answering research question 2: What are the moderating effects of bullying coping styles on the relationship between psychological wellbeing and workplace bullying? This section concludes with a summary of the results.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1 Demographics

The sample for the study consisted of 273 employees across various industries in South Africa. From a gender perspective, 23.8% (n=65) of the sample included males, 75.5% (n=206) included females, and 0.8% (n=2) had a preference to self-describe or not be categorised. 46.2% (n=126) of the sample were between ages 18 to 34, 32.6% (n=89) were between ages 35-44, and 21.2% (n=58) were 45 years and older (Table 3).

Table 3
Sample Demographics

Gender		
Male	65	23.8%
Female	206	75.5%
Prefer to self-describe	1	0.4%
Prefer not to say	1	0.4%
Age		
Under 25	21	7.7%
25-34	105	38.5%
35-44	89	32.6%
45-54	51	18.6%
55 or older	7	2.6%

Note. n=273

In terms of job position, 74.4% (n=203) of the sample reported being individual contributors, 21.2% (n=58) reported being people managers and 4.4% (n=12) reported being C-Suite or Executives (Table 4).

Table 4
Job Position

Individual contributors	203	74.4%
People managers	58	21.2%
C-Suite / Executives	12	4.4%

In terms of tenure, 52% (n=142) of respondents reported being employed for more than 5 years, 39.9% (n=109) reported a tenure of between 1 and 4 years and 8.1% (n=22) reported being employed for less than a year (Table 5).

Table 5
Tenure

Less than 1 year	22	8.1%
1-2 years	51	18.7%
3-4 years	58	21.2%
5 or more years	142	52.0%

Note. n=273

Industry demographics resulted in 42.9% (n=117) of the sample reporting to be from the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO/contact centres) industry, 17.2% (n=47) from Consulting and Professional Services, 11% (n=30) from Information Technology and Communications, 9.2% (n=25) from Administration, 8.4% (n=23) from Banking and Financial Services, and 8.1% (n=31) from various other industries (Table 6). Differences in gender, age, job position, tenure, and industry in determining bullying experiences, coping style preferences, and psychological wellbeing outcomes in South Africa may influence findings. It may be useful to control for these variables in the future. For example, specifically focusing on separate industries.

Table 6
Industry

Administration	25	9.2%
Advertising and Media	1	0.4%
Aviation and Transport	3	1.1%
Banking and Financial Services	23	8.4%
BPO (Contact Centre)	117	42.9%
Building and Construction	1	0.4%
Clothing and Textiles	5	1.8%
Community and Social Services	2	0.7%
Consulting and Professional Services	47	17.2%
Distribution and Warehousing	4	1.5%
Education and Training	6	2.2%
Engineering	1	0.4%
Government and Public Sector	1	0.4%
Health, Medical and Pharmaceutical	2	0.7%
Information Technology and Communications	30	11.0%
Other (Governance and Risk, Legal, Mining, Retail, Real estate)	5	1.8%

4.2.2 Outcome Variable – Wellbeing

Descriptive statistics for Ryff's (1989) Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS), which was adopted to assess levels of psychological wellbeing experienced by participants using six dimensions, will be presented in this section. The PWBS uses a Likert scale of 1-7 (1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree) on a 42-item scale, across six dimensions: *Purpose in Life, Personal Growth, Positive Relationships, Autonomy, Self-Acceptance, and Environmental Mastery*. Once all reverse code items were applied, according to Ryff's (1989) guidelines, the maximum score possible per respondent is 294 and the lowest score possible is 42. A low score of

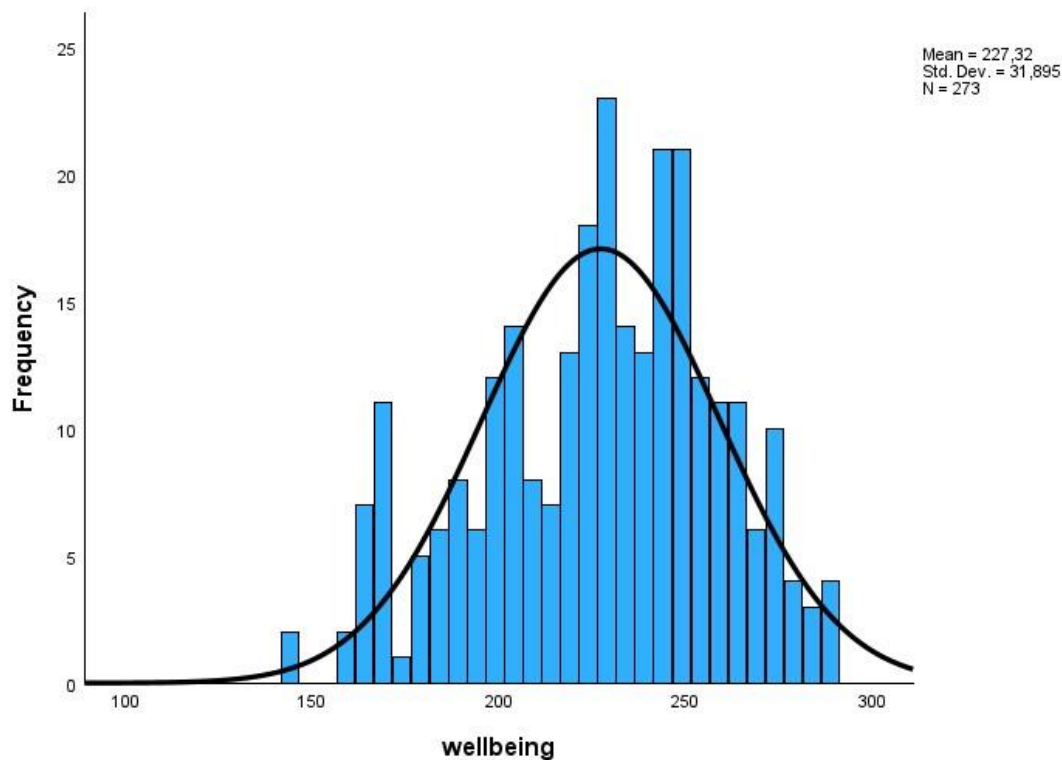
42 would indicate that the respondent experiences a low level of psychological wellbeing, and 294 indicates experience of a high level of psychological wellbeing. Participants in this study scored a maximum of 289, and a minimum of 144, equating to a range of 145. The overall PWBS mean score was 227.32 (SD = 31.90), suggesting that respondents reported moderate to high levels of psychological wellbeing. The mean scores for the six dimensions were as follows: *Purpose in Life* (M = 40.00, SD = 6.60), *Personal Growth* (M = 39.13, SD = 6.37), *Positive Relationships* (M = 38.49, SD = 6.91), *Autonomy* (M = 37.15, SD = 6.43), *Self Acceptance* (M = 36.50, SD = 7.41), and *Environmental Mastery* (M = 36.06, SD = 7.78).

Table 7
Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale

<i>Descriptive Statistics – Psychological Wellbeing (DV) + subscales</i>						
	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total_PWB	273	145	144	289	227.32	31.895
PWB_Purpose in Life	273	29	20	49	40.00	6.598
PWB_Personal Growth	273	27	22	49	39.13	6.370
PWB_Positive Relationships	273	31	18	49	38.49	6.906
PWB_Autonomy	273	28	21	49	37.15	6.430
PWB_Self Acceptance	273	37	12	49	36.50	7.413
PWB_Environment Mastery	273	35	14	49	36.06	7.775

The visual representation of *Psychological Wellbeing* shows an approximately normal distribution, suggesting that on average respondents reported high levels of psychological wellbeing (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Visual Representation of Psychological Wellbeing



4.2.3 Predictor Variable (Main Effect) – Workplace Bullying

This section provides an overview of the descriptive statistics for the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) which is used to measure workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2009). The NAQ-R assesses the frequency of negative acts or bullying behaviour experienced by employees and uses a Likert scale of 1-5 on a 22-item scale. The maximum score possible per respondent is 110 and the lowest score possible is 22. A score of 22 would indicate that the respondent experiences zero bullying, anything above this indicates some level of bullying and 110 indicates experience of a high level of bullying.

Participants in this study scored a maximum of 58, and a minimum of 22, equating to a range of 36, with most participants falling below midrange. The overall NAQ-R mean score was 31.30 (SD = 7.62) which, although it falls closer to the lower end of the scale (that is, closer to 22 than to 110), as the literature suggests, on average, respondents reported experiencing some bullying, albeit a low-moderate frequency of bullying in the workplace.

According to Einarsen et al (2009), NAQ-R has reported mean scores ranging between low 30s to 40s in various organisational settings. Therefore, aligned with the literature, participants in this study reported experiencing some bullying behaviours, albeit infrequently. The NAQ-R consists of three subscales that detail the type of negative acts that people may

experience, namely *work-related bullying*, *person-related bullying*, and *physically intimidating bullying*. *Work-related bullying* consists of seven items, *person-related bullying* consists of nine items and *physically intimidating bullying* consists of three items. This means that *person-related bullying* and *work-related bullying* are more strongly weighted on the scale. It is therefore important to consider each subscale when interpreting overall bullying scores. The NAQ-R is divided into three subscales.

Firstly, *work-related bullying* consists of items related to work tasks and work conditions (for example, unreasonable deadlines, excessive monitoring of work, pressure not to claim entitled expenses, or unmanageable workload). Secondly, *person-related bullying* consists of items related to personal attacks (for example, being humiliated, ignored, gossip and rumours being spread, persistent criticism, and relegation). Thirdly, *physically intimidating bullying* consists of items related to threats or physical intimidation (for example, being shouted at or threatened with violence). Although no universally agreed-upon cutoff scores exist, higher scores indicate a higher frequency and severity of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009). Mean scores or certain thresholds can be used to categorise levels of bullying. For example, according to Einarsen et al (2009), a common approach for researchers is to consider a total score of 30 or higher to be indicative of experiencing workplace bullying. The overall mean score for the NAQ-R in this study was 31.30 (SD = 7.62), indicating a low-moderate level of workplace bullying among participants. While the scale included three sub-scales, the scale is interpreted as a whole, according to the scale developer's recommendations.

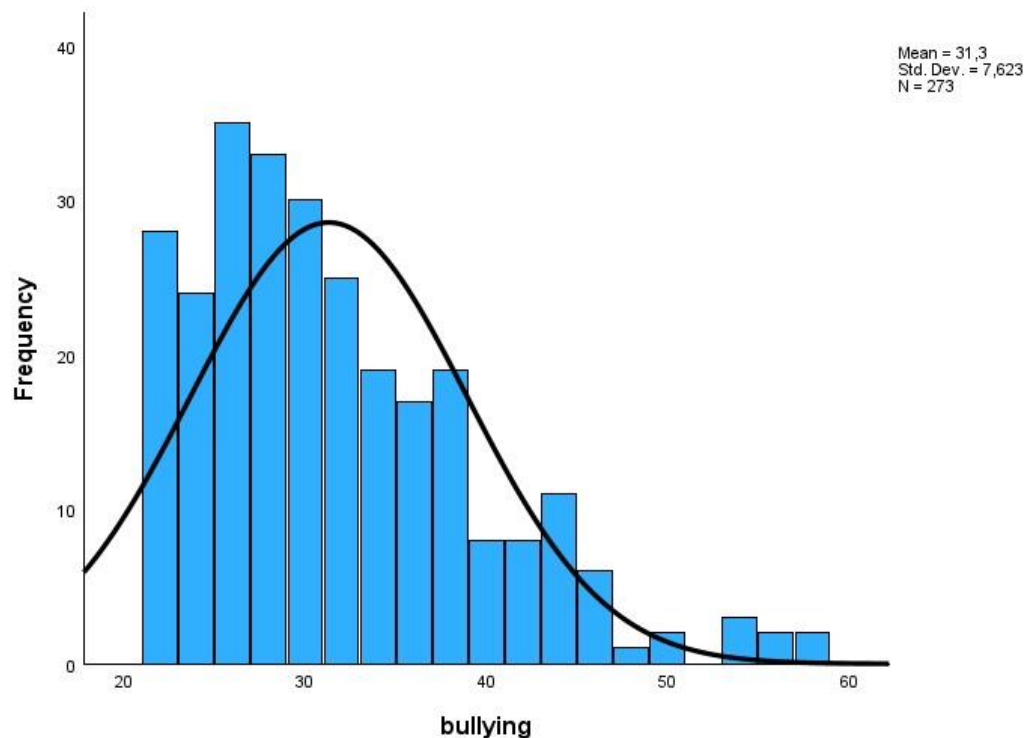
Table 8 presents the range, minimum and maximum scores, mean and standard deviation.

Table 8
Negative Acts - Revised (NAQ-R) Scale

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Workplace Bullying (Full scale)	273	36	22	58	31.30	7.623

A visual representation of *Workplace Bullying* shows an approximately normal distribution that is slightly skewed to the right, indicating that, on average, respondents reported low-moderate levels of bullying (Figure 3). Since this is the predictor variable and not the outcome variable, the skewness is not of concern (Field, 2018).

Figure 3
Visual Representation of Workplace Bullying



A frequency analysis of the NAQ-R items was conducted to determine the frequency of specific behaviours classified as bullying in the workplace. Responses indicating “never” experiencing a behaviour were excluded, as the purpose of the table was to identify the frequency of cases reporting any negative behaviour (i.e., those experienced sometimes, monthly, weekly, or daily) and to identify specific bullying behaviours reported. In Table 9, results are presented in descending order of frequency based on the sum of cases reporting any experience of the behaviour.

In Table 10, results are presented in chronological order of NAQ items, split between behaviours reported as occurring “sometimes”, “monthly”, “weekly”, or “daily”. The most frequently reported behaviour was having opinions ignored, which 60% of respondents reported at least sometimes (54%), monthly (3%), weekly (1%), or daily (2%) (Tables 9 & 10). This was followed by micromanagement, reported by 60% of respondents, which emerged from the data as the highest reported daily negative act (16%). Unreasonable deadlines (49%), pressure to not claim what is due (e.g. sick leave, annual leave or travel expenses) (49%), and having information withheld that affects performance (45%) complete the Top 5 Behaviours reported. Each of the Top 5 behaviours falls within the category of *Work-Related Bullying* (WRB), suggesting a high prevalence of WRB reported among respondents. The Top 5 *Person-Related Bullying* (PRB) behaviours were exclusion /being ignored (40%), repeated reminders of errors (40%), having gossip or rumours spread (34%), hostility (33%), and hints that they should quit their job (26%), with exclusion (34%), repeated reminders of errors (33%), and gossip (30%) being the most

predominant behaviours that happen at least sometimes. *Person Intimidating Behaviours* (PIB) were reported as shouting/targeted anger (26%), intimidating behaviour (10%), and threats of abuse (5%). All 22 negative acts were reported as being experienced at least sometimes by respondents.

Table 9
Workplace Bullying Descriptives - Total Sum and Percentages

Negative Act	Sum	%
NAQ3_WRB_Opinions Ignored	165	60
NAQ5_WRB_Micromanagement	164	60
NAQ4_WRB_Unreasonable Deadlines	134	49
NAQ6_WRB_Pressure Claims	134	49
NAQ1_WRB_Withheld Info	123	45
NAQ7_WRB_Workload	119	44
NAQ11_PRB_Exclusion/Ignored	109	40
NAQ14_PRB_Error Reminders	109	40
NAQ2_WRB_Menial Work	105	38
NAQ10_PRB_Gossip	94	34
NAQ15_PRB_Hostility	90	33
NAQ20_PIB_Shouting/Targeted Anger	72	26
NAQ13_PRB_Hints/Quit	70	26
NAQ9_PRB_Removed Responsibility	67	25
NAQ17_PRB_Practical Jokes/Non-Friends	65	24
NAQ16_PRB_Persistent Criticism	64	23
NAQ8_PRB_Humiliation	64	23
NAQ18_PRB_Allegations	63	23
NAQ12_PRB_Insults	55	20
NAQ19_PRB_Excess Teasing/ Sarcasm	44	16
NAQ21_PIB_Intimidating Behaviour	28	10
NAQ22_PIB_Threats/Physical Abuse	15	5
Valid N (listwise)	273	

Note. NAQ-R consists of 22 items that are categorised into Work-Related Bullying (WRB), Person-Related Bullying (PRB), and Physical Intimidating Bullying (PIB). Percentages are calculated based on the total number of respondents (n=273)

Table 10
Workplace Bullying Descriptives - Split Frequencies and Percentages

NAQ	Classification Negative Act	Sometimes	%	Monthly	%	Weekly	%	Daily	%
1	WRB_Withheld Info	102	37	8	3	8	3	5	2
2	WRB_Menial Work	79	29	11	4	7	3	8	3
3	WRB_Opinions Ignored	148	54	8	3	3	1	6	2
4	WRB_Unreasonable Deadlines	103	38	16	6	11	4	4	1
5	WRB_Micromanagement	75	27	28	10	16	6	45	16
6	WRB_Pressure Claims	110	40	15	5	1	0	8	3
7	WRB_Workload	94	34	15	5	2	1	8	3
8	PRB_Humiliation	59	22	3	1	0	0	2	1
9	PRB_Removed Responsibility	60	22	4	1	3	1	0	0
10	PRB_Gossip	83	30	8	3	3	1	0	0
11	PRB_Exclusion/Ignored	93	34	7	3	7	3	2	1
12	PRB_Insults	54	20	1	0	0	0	0	0
13	PRB_Hints/Quit	62	23	6	2	1	0	1	0
14	PRB_ErrorReminders	89	33	16	6	3	1	1	0
15	PRB_Hostility	83	30	5	2	2	1	0	0
16	PRB_Persistent Criticism	57	21	6	2	1	0	0	0
17	PRB_Practical Jokes/Non-Friends	63	23	0	0	1	0	1	0
18	PRB_Allegations	60	22	2	1	0	0	1	0
19	PRB_Excess Teasing Sarcasm	44	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
20	PIB_Shouting Targeted Anger	64	23	5	2	3	1	0	0
21	PIB_Intimidating Behaviour	27	10	0	0	1	0	0	0
22	PIB_Threats /Physical Abuse	15	5	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note. Percentages are calculated based on the total number of respondents (n=273) Categories with “never” responses were excluded to focus on reported negative behaviours.

4.2.4 Predictor Variable (Moderating Effect) – Bullying Coping Styles

Johannsdottir and Olafsson’s (2004) Bullying Coping Scale (BCS) measures individuals' coping strategies when subject to workplace bullying. The scale includes four continuous subscales that measure different coping styles: *assertiveness*, *avoidance*, *seeking help*, and *do nothing*. A preliminary exploratory factor analysis (EFA) confirmed the scale's four-factor model (Table 11 and Figure 4). Further details on EFA for the Bullying Coping Scale are excluded as this is beyond the scope of this study. This study applied EFA solely to the Bullying Coping Scale due to its exploratory nature and the need to assess its underlying factor structure since composite variables could not be used for this scale.

In contrast, the NAQ-R and the PWBS were utilised as established composite variables, summarising scores across all items. The primary objective was to measure the overall construct rather than investigate its dimensions. This informed the decision against the need to examine their factor structures because they were treated as unified, validated constructs. Using validated scales as composite variables ensures their intended theoretical constructs are preserved, and reliability measures such as Cronbach's alpha or McDonald's omega are sufficient to ensure internal consistency when using composite variables (Fabrigar et al., 1999). Further reliability analysis can be reviewed in section 4.2.5.

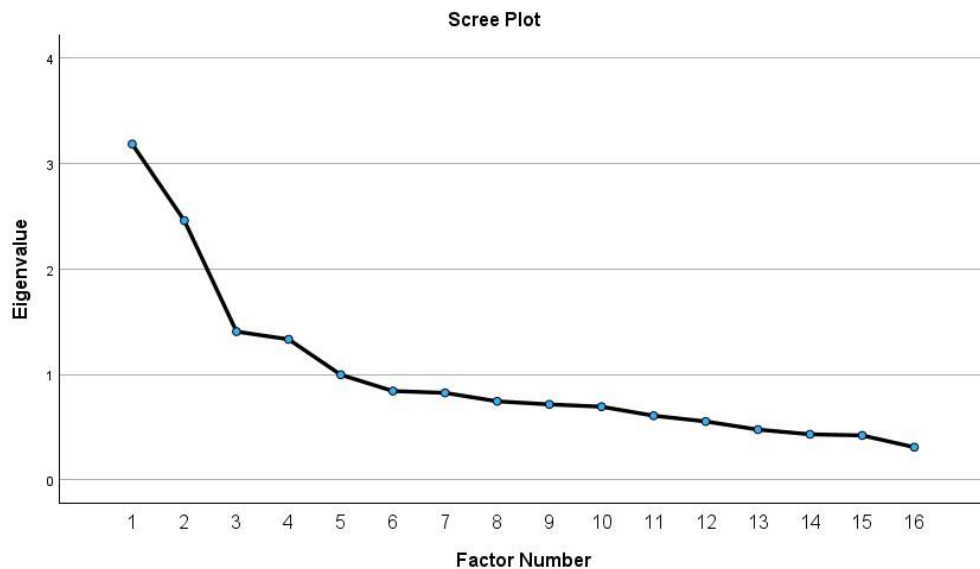
Table 11
Bullying Coping Scales - Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings ^a
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative%	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	3.185	19.905	19.905	2.582	16.136	16.136	2.164
2	2.458	15.365	35.270	1.927	12.047	28.182	1.874
3	1.406	8.787	44.058	.866	5.410	33.592	1.610
4	1.333	8.329	52.387	.687	4.294	37.886	1.322
5	.997	6.229	58.615				
6	.842	5.263	63.878				
7	.825	5.154	69.033				
8	.745	4.654	73.687				
9	.716	4.472	78.159				
10	.694	4.335	82.494				
11	.608	3.801	86.296				
12	.554	3.460	89.756				
13	.477	2.978	92.734				
14	.432	2.699	95.434				
15	.421	2.632	98.065				
16	.310	1.935	100.000				

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. When factors are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

Figure 4
Scree Plot



Each subscale consists of the following number of items: Assertiveness (3 items), Avoidance (4 items), Do Nothing (3 items), and Seek Help (6 items). Each item is rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (I have done it) to 5 (I would never do it), with higher scores indicating greater use of each respective coping strategy (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004). Descriptive statistics for BCS are presented in Table 12. The mean scores for the coping strategies were as follows: Assertiveness ($M = 8.33$, $SD = 2.52$), Avoidance ($M = 9.23$, $SD = 3.81$), Do Nothing ($M = 8.01$, $SD = 2.98$), and Seek Help ($M = 19.23$, $SD = 4.43$). These results indicate that participants, on average, reported high adoption of *seek help* strategies, and moderate adoption of *avoidance* strategies, followed by *assertiveness* and *do nothing* strategies.

Table 12
Bullying Coping Styles

	N Statistic	Range Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Variance Statistic	Statistic
Assertiveness (3 items)	273	12	3	15	8.33	2.517	6.333	0.343
Avoidance (4 items)	273	16	4	20	9.23	3.808	14.504	0.443
Do nothing (3 items)	273	12	3	15	8.01	2.981	8.886	0.301
Seek help (6 items)	273	24	6	30	19.23	4.425	19.581	-0.180

The visual representation below of the distributions of the four coping styles: *assertiveness* (Figure 5), *avoidance* (Figure 6), *do nothing* (Figure 7), and *seek help* (Figure 8) shows an approximately normal distribution for all the subscales. On average, respondents reported a predictable variation in the use of coping styles in response to bullying.

Figure 5
Visual Representation of Assertiveness Coping Style

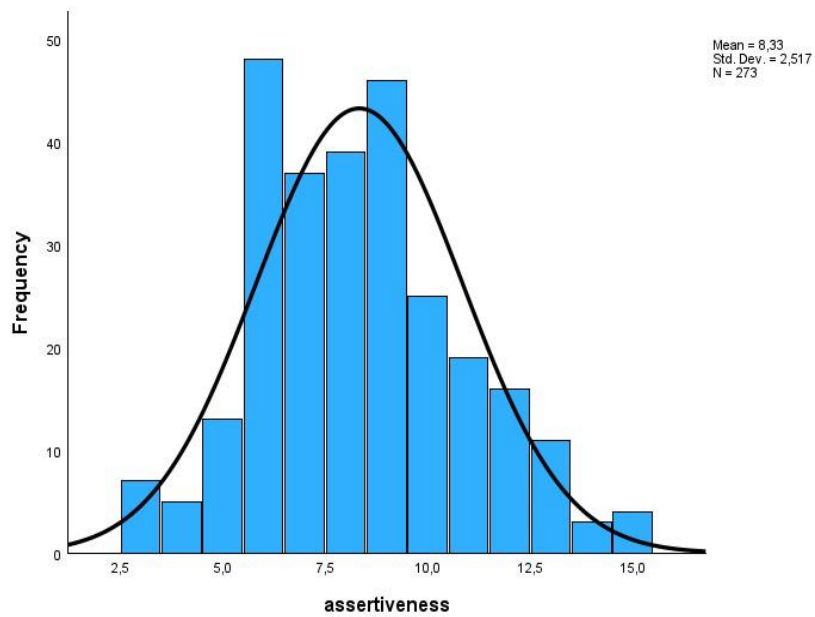


Figure 6
Visual Representation of Avoidance Coping Style

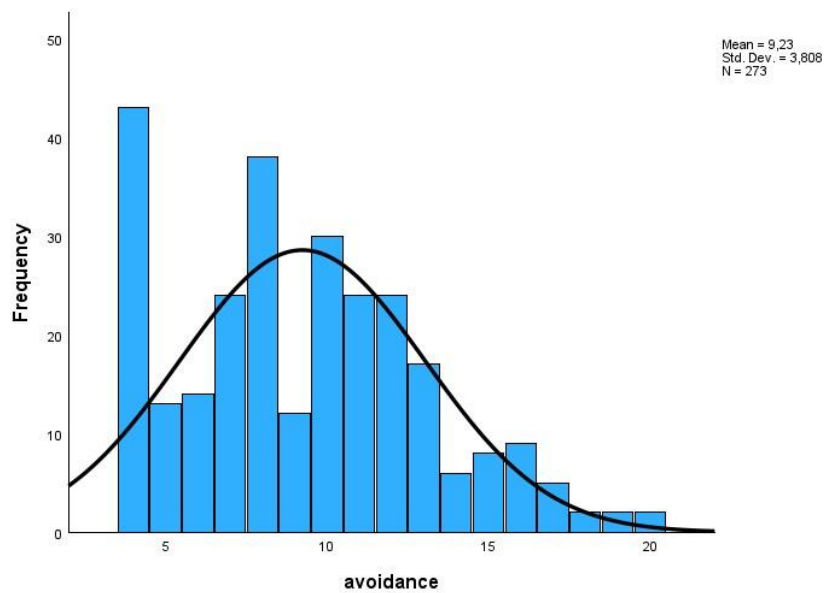


Figure 7
Visual Representation of the Do Nothing Coping Style

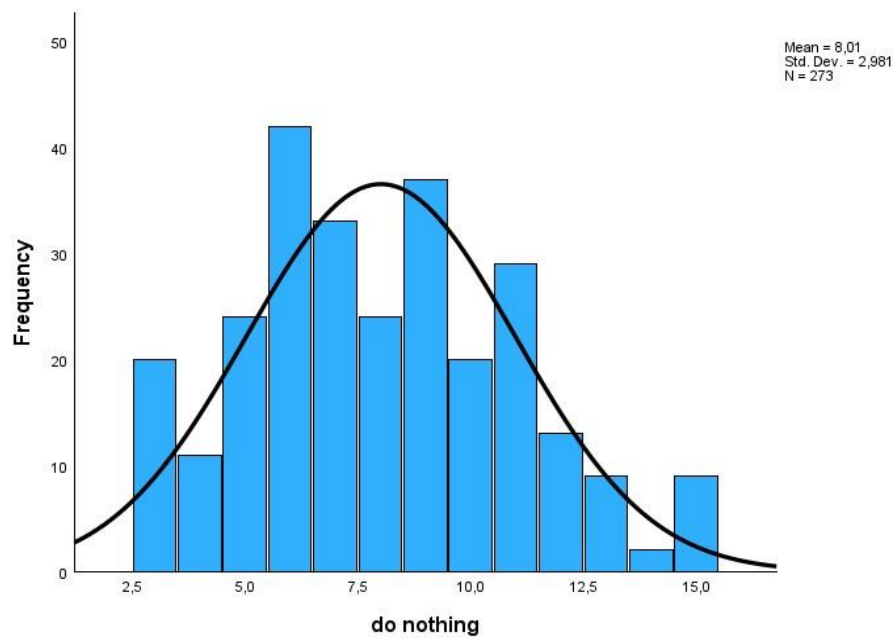
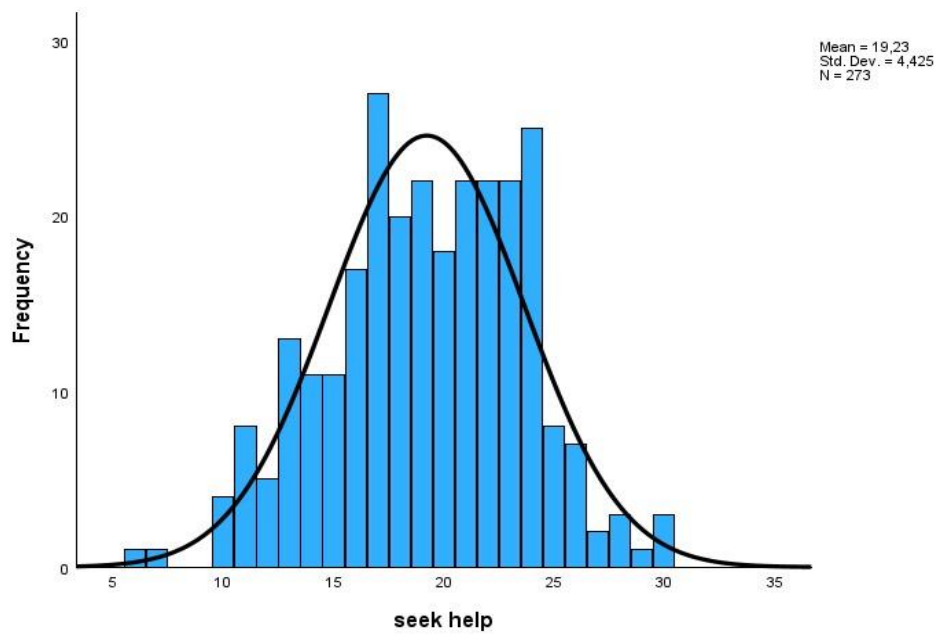


Figure 8
Visual Representation of the Seek Help Coping Style



4.2.5 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted on all three measurement scales used in this study, namely Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff, 1989), Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) (Einarsen et al., 2009), and Bullying Coping Scale (BCS) (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004).

Table 13 below shows Cronbach's Alpha Statistics for each scale.

Table 13
Cronbach's Alpha Values

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Psychological Wellbeing Scale	42	0.89
Workplace Bullying Scale (NAQ-R)	22	0.86
Bullying Coping Scale	16	0.72
Assertiveness	3	0.43
Avoidance	4	0.65
Do Nothing	3	0.54
Seek Help	6	0.68
Assertiveness + Seek Help (Active)	9	0.68
Avoidance + Do Nothing (Passive)	7	0.72

Note. Cronbach's alpha values indicate internal consistency reliability

Cronbach's alpha values of $r=0.89$ ($n=42$) for Psychological Wellbeing Scale, $r=0.86$ ($n=22$) for NAQ-R Scale (Workplace Bullying), and $r=0.72$ ($n=16$) for Bullying Coping Scale are acceptable as anything above $r=0.70$ is generally considered good internal consistency and reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The reliability for the four subscales was somewhat lower, between $r=0.43$ and $r=0.68$, which was likely impacted by the limited number of items in each subscale. As such, the reliability of the overall scale is considered a more suitable indicator of the reliability of the scale in the sample.

Table 14
McDonald's Omega Values

Scale	Number of Items	McDonald's Omega
Psychological Wellbeing Scale	42	0.88
Workplace Bullying Scale (NAQ-R)	22	0.86
Bullying Coping Scale	16	0.68
Assertiveness + Seek Help (Active)	9	0.66
Avoidance + Do Nothing (Passive)	7	0.72

McDonald's Omega of $\omega=0.88$ ($n=42$) for Psychological Wellbeing Scale, $\omega=0.86$ ($n=22$) for NAQ-R Scale (Workplace Bullying), and $\omega=0.68$ ($n=16$) for Bullying Coping Scale, similarly to Cronbach's alpha, are acceptable as anything above $\omega=0.70$ is generally considered good internal consistency and reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Although the Bullying

Coping Scale shows a slightly lower than acceptable Omega value, values below $\omega=0.60$ are considered unacceptable (McDonald, 1999). After reviewing each subscale separately, Omega values, like Cronbach's alpha values, resulted in unacceptable *assertiveness* and *do nothing* values. Reliability remained unchanged, in terms of Cronbach's alpha, and only improved on the passive scale, in terms of McDonald's Omega, when the Bullying Coping Scale was split into active (*assertiveness* and *seek help*) and passive (*avoidance* and *do nothing*). Overall, both Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega values were close to acceptable, and neither value was completely unacceptable. Therefore, a decision was made to continue with caution.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

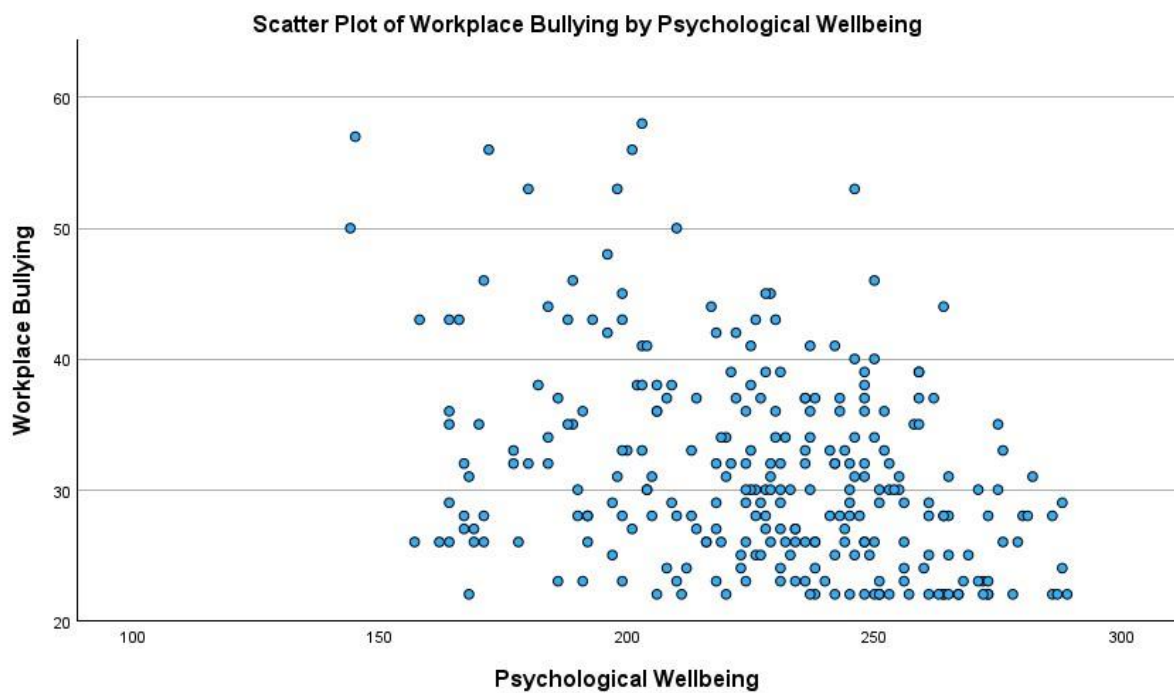
Pearson Correlation was run to identify significant correlations between the independent variables, *workplace bullying*, *do nothing*, *avoidance*, *assertiveness*, and *seek help* coping styles, and the dependent variable *psychological wellbeing* (Table 15). The analysis showed a significant negative correlation between *workplace bullying* and *psychological wellbeing* ($r=-0.35$, $p < 0.01$). This means that there is a significant negative relationship between *workplace bullying* and *psychological wellbeing*, that is, as bullying increases, psychological wellbeing decreases (Figure 9). Analysis showed a significant negative correlation between *psychological wellbeing* and *do nothing* as a coping style (bullying coping style) ($r=-0.286$, $p < 0.01$) and a negative correlation between *psychological wellbeing* and *avoidance* as a coping style ($r=-0.23$, $p < 0.01$), this means that an increased use of avoidant or *do nothing* coping style was associated with lower psychological wellbeing.

Table 15
Pearson Correlation Outputs

		Wellbeing	Bullying	Do Nothing	Avoidance	Assertiveness	Seek Help
N		273	273	273	273	273	273
Wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.35*	-0.29*	-0.23*	-0.06	0.09
Bullying	Pearson Correlation	-0.35*	1	0.14*	0.26*	0.09	-0.01
Do Nothing	Pearson Correlation	-0.29*	0.14*	1	0.47*	0.25*	-0.02
Avoidance	Pearson Correlation	-0.23*	0.26*	0.47*	1	0.17*	0.24*
Assertiveness	Pearson Correlation	-0.06	0.09	0.25*	0.17*	1	0.31*
Seek Help	Pearson Correlation	0.09	-0.01	-0.02	0.24*	0.31*	1

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

Figure 9
Scatterplot of Workplace Bullying by Psychological Wellbeing



4.4 Regression Analysis

The purpose of regression analysis was to investigate the relationships between *psychological wellbeing* (DV), *workplace bullying* (IV), and four bullying coping styles (IVs). The bullying coping style variables *seek help* and *assertiveness* were excluded from the regression analysis because there was no significant correlation between these independent

variables and the dependent variable (a required assumption for regression analysis). An exploratory regression analysis including all variables was run, which confirmed that the excluded variables were not significant predictors in the multivariate model. A reminder of the hypotheses, test results that checked regression assumptions, and the regression analysis outputs are summarised below.

The hypotheses to answer research question 1 were as follows:

H0: There is no significant relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing.

H1: There is a significant relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing.

4.4.1 Assumptions

Before a regression analysis could be run, the assumptions, in order of importance, linearity, homoscedasticity, normality, and multicollinearity, needed to be tested and results satisfactorily met (Field, 2018). A description of each of these assumptions is presented below, including a justification of the results.

4.4.1.1 Linearity. Linearity is a key assumption in regression analysis, meaning there is a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This means that the scores on the independent variables have a direct linear relationship with the scores on the dependent variable. If no direct relationship exists between any independent variables and the dependent variable, these were excluded from the model. For example, in the Pearson Correlation table above (Table 15), independent variables *assertiveness* and *seek help* were removed from the model because neither of these variables had a linear relationship with the dependent variable, psychological wellbeing. This is the most important assumption because if this assumption is not met, the model is invalid (Field, 2018). A visual inspection of the scatterplots, below, confirms linearity (Figures 10, 11, 12 and 13).

Figure 10
P-Plot Psychological Wellbeing and Assertiveness

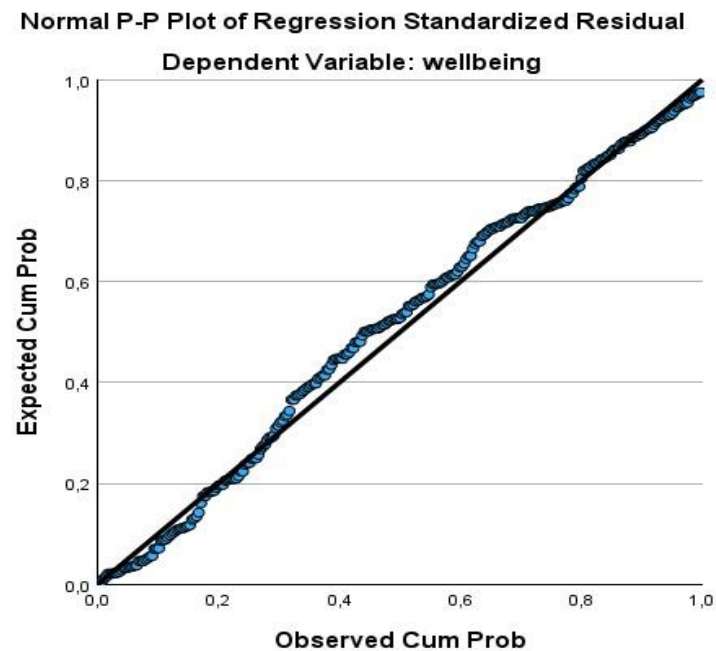


Figure 11
Scatterplot Psychological Wellbeing and Assertiveness

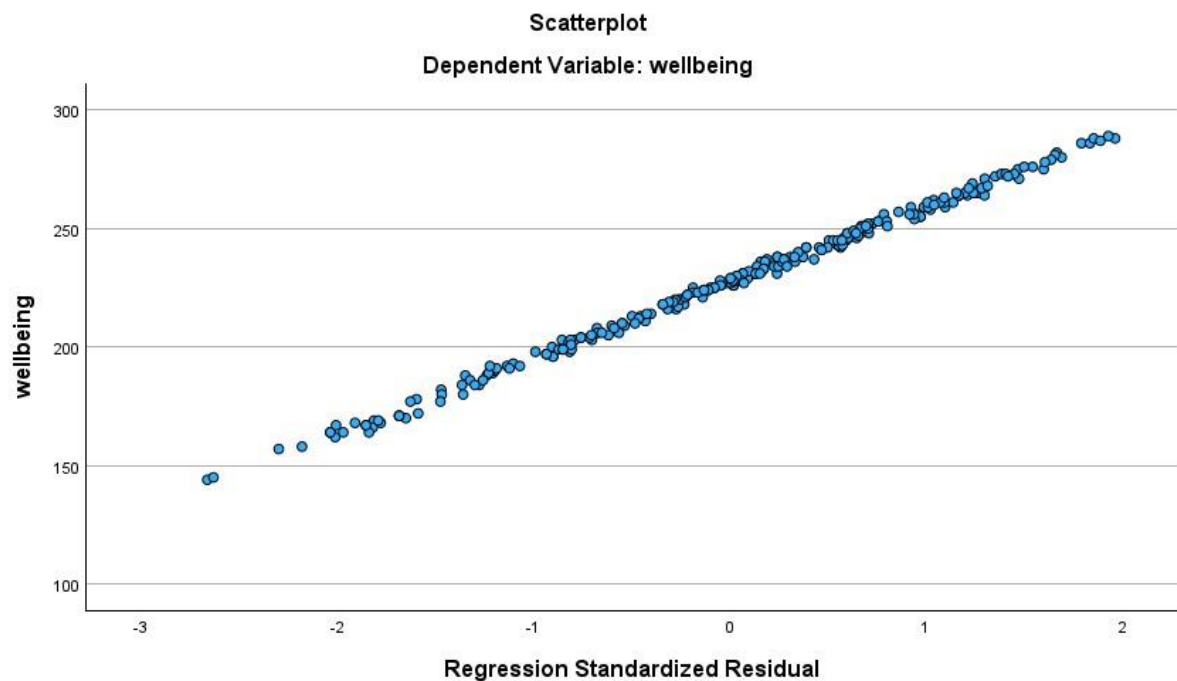


Figure 12
P-Plot Psychological Wellbeing and Seek Help

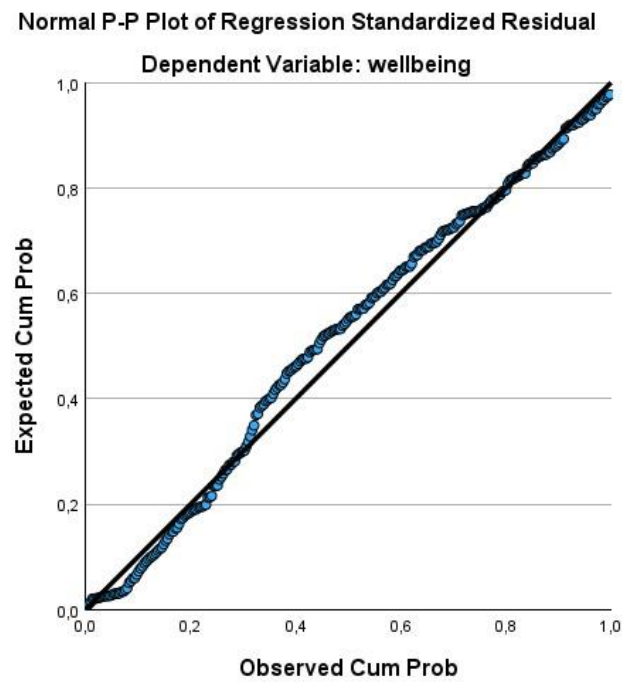
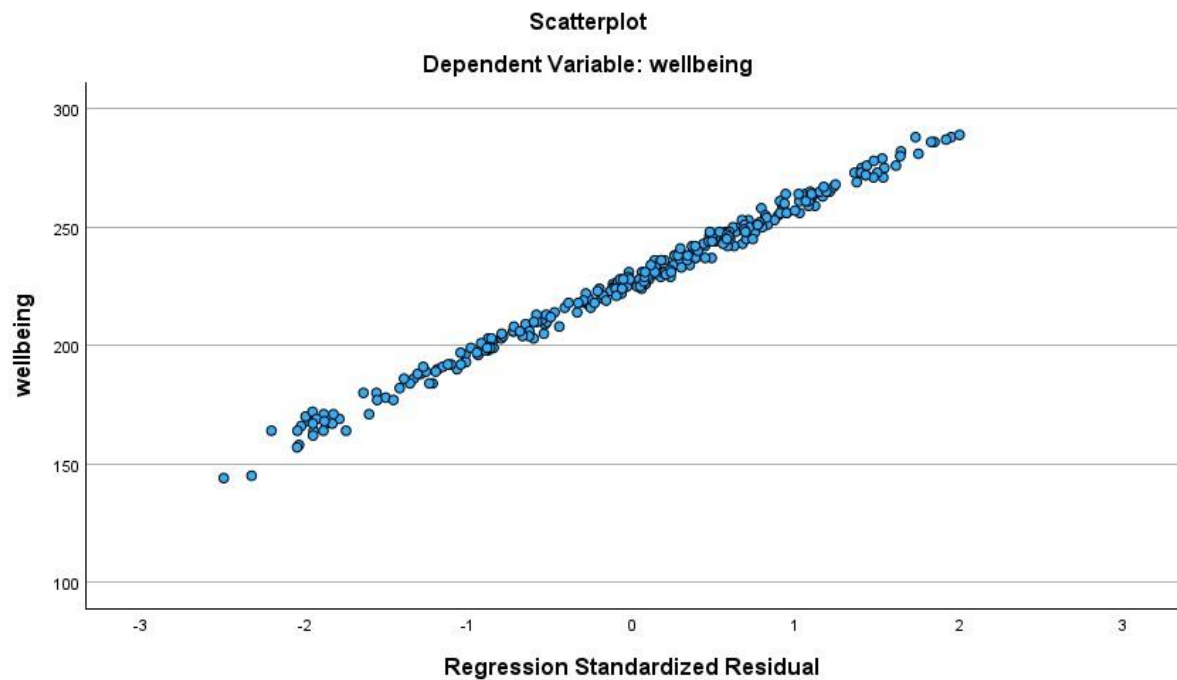
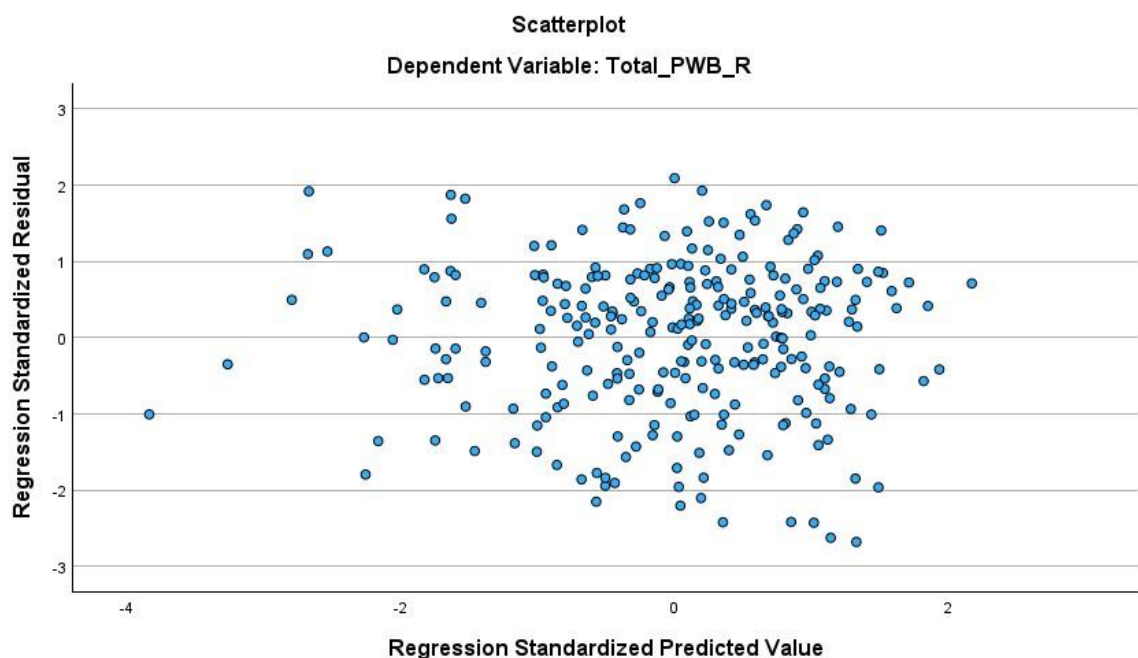


Figure 13
Scatterplot Psychological Wellbeing and Seek Help



4.4.1.2 Homoscedasticity. Homoscedasticity, also known as homogeneity of variance, is an important assumption to test for regression analysis to ensure that confidence intervals around the regression model are accurate, or when testing the significance of the model or to quantify the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. When the homoscedasticity assumption is met, the variance of errors, also known as residuals, in a regression model is relatively similar across all levels of the independent variables. The scatterplot in Figure 14 below shows a random pattern of residuals spread around the horizontal line 0, with no clear funnel shape. All points shown are between -3 and 3, confirming that homoscedasticity (or the equal variance assumption) is achieved. (Field, 2018).

Figure 14
Scatterplot Homoscedasticity

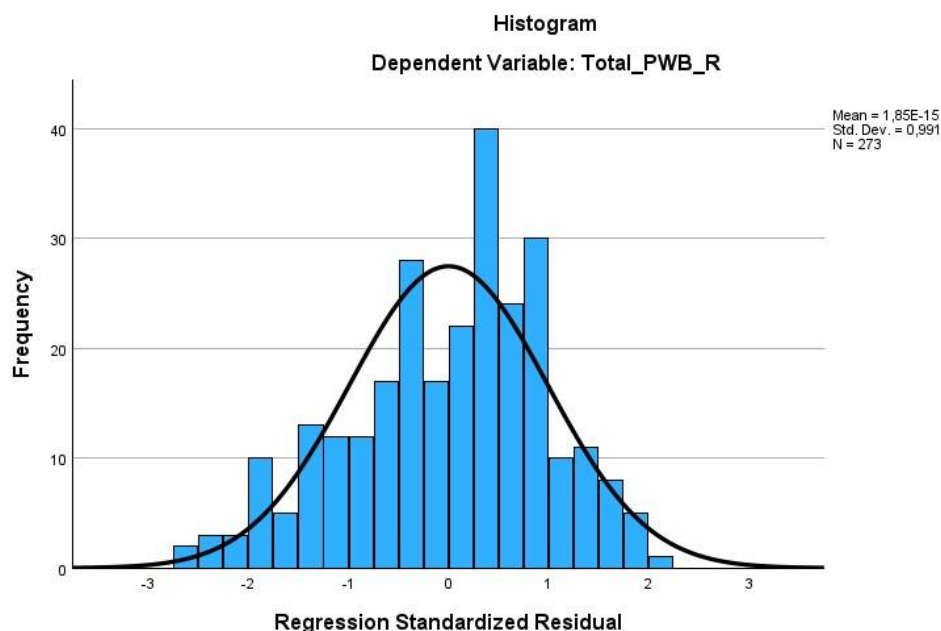


4.4.1.3 Normality. Normality is an assumption in regression analysis that the residuals (errors of variance) of the model, are normally distributed. The Bell curve (Figure 15) is approximately normal, and the Shapiro-Wilk statistic is close to 1, suggesting normality, however, the significance level or p-value is less than 0.05, suggesting the data deviate from a normal distribution. In human sciences, perfect normality is unlikely and due to the sample size being greater than $n=30$, the Central Limit Theorem is applied (Field, 2018). Shapiro-Wilk test is significant at $P<.001$, which means a non-normal distribution (Table 16). However, since the sample size is sufficient ($n=273$), and the deviation from normality is not serious due to the Central Limit Theorem, analysis proceeded without intervention (Field, 2018).

Table 16
Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality

	Statistic	df	Sig.
Total PWB	0.98	273	<.001

Figure 15
Normality Bell Curve



4.4.1.4 Multicollinearity. To accurately and reliably interpret the regression coefficients in the regression model, it is crucial to test for multicollinearity. Multicollinearity exists in a model when there are high correlations between independent variables. This is problematic because the unique effect each independent variable has on the dependent variable cannot be accurately predicted. Therefore, it is important to test for multicollinearity to improve the model's predictive statistical power (Field, 2018). The correlation table (Table 15) was examined to ensure that no pair of independent variables correlated higher than 0.8 or below -0.8, to confirm the absence of problematic multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). From the correlation matrix in Table 15 above, the highest correlation coefficient was a negative correlation between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing ($r=-0.35$, $p < 0.01$).

Collinearity diagnostics were run between the associated regression coefficients and upon inspection of variance inflation factor (VIF) values, it was determined that associated regression coefficients were not problematic (Table 17). Any VIF values greater than 10 or tolerance values below 0.1, would indicate a multicollinearity problem (Field, 2018).

Table 17
Collinearity Diagnostics Values

Coefficients ^a							
Model		Standardized		t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		Unstandardized Coefficients	Coefficients			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	276.05		23.70	<.001		
	Bullying	-1.250	-0.299	-5.209	<.001	0.924	1.082
	Assertiveness	0.094	0.007	0.124	0.902	0.836	1.196
	Avoidance	0.626	-0.075	-1.115	0.266	0.678	1.476
	Do nothing	-2.232	-0.209	-3.188	0.002	0.710	1.408
	Seek help	0.690	0.096	1.577	0.116	0.825	1.212

a. Dependent Variable: wellbeing

4.4.2 Regression Output

For the hierarchical regression analysis results in this section to be presented, it was first essential to confirm that the necessary assumptions for regression analysis were met. The assumption checks included linearity, normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity.

These assumptions were sufficiently met. The variables were entered into successive blocks and four models were specified, as shown in Table 18 below.

Table 18
Variable Models

Model number	Variables entered	Variables excluded
1	Wellbeing (DV)	Do nothing
	Bullying (IV)	Avoidance
		Bullying x Do nothing
		Bullying x Avoidance
2	Wellbeing (DV)	Avoidance
	Bullying (IV)	Bullying x Do nothing
	Do nothing	Bullying x Avoidance
3	Wellbeing (DV)	Bullying x Do nothing
	Bullying (IV)	Bullying x Avoidance
	Do nothing	
	Avoidance	
4	Wellbeing (DV)	
	Bullying (IV)	
	Do nothing	
	Avoidance	
	Bullying x Do nothing	
	Bullying x Avoidance	

In Model 1, workplace bullying was entered as an independent variable. Workplace bullying significantly predicted psychological wellbeing where 12.1% of the variance in psychological wellbeing is explained by the variance in bullying ($R = 0.348$, $p < 0.05$). As such, 87.9% of the variance in psychological wellbeing is not explained by the model. Model 1, incorporating bullying, is a significantly better predictor of psychological wellbeing than the means, $F(1, 271) = 37.345$ ($p < 0.05$). (Table 19).

In model 2, workplace bullying and the coping style *do nothing* were entered. Both workplace bullying and *do nothing* were significant predictors accounting for an additional 6% of the variance in psychological wellbeing ($R = 0.422$, $p < 0.05$). Together, workplace bullying and *do nothing* explain 17.8% of the variance in psychological wellbeing. That means 82.2%

of the variance in psychological wellbeing is not explained by the model. Model 2, incorporating the bullying coping style *do nothing*, is a significantly better predictor of psychological wellbeing than model 1, $F(1, 270) = 18.80$ ($p < 0.05$).

Model 3 included the coping style *avoidance* and resulted in a non-significant F-change, so model 3 is not a better predictor than model 2. Likewise, model 4, including the interaction items, did not result in an improved F-statistic, which indicates that there are no moderating effects present.

Table 19
Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics F	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.348 ^a	0.121	0.118	29.956	0.12	37.345	1	271	<.001
2	.422 ^b	0.178	0.172	29.018	0.06	18.795	1	270	<.001
3	.424 ^c	0.180	0.171	29.049	0.00	.439	1	269	0.51
4	.426 ^d	0.182	0.166	29.123	0.00	.315	2	267	0.73

a. Predictors: (Constant), bullying

b. Predictors: (Constant), bullying, do nothing

c. Predictors: (Constant), bullying, do nothing, avoidance

d. Predictors: (Constant), bullying, do nothing, avoidance, bullying x do nothing, bullying x avoidance

Table 20
ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	33511.654	1	33511.654	37.345	<.001 ^b
	Residual	243183.980	271	897.358		
	Total	276695.634	272			
2	Regression	49337.882	2	24668.941	29.296	<.001 ^c
	Residual	227357.751	270	842.066		
	Total	276695.634	272			
3	Regression	49708.125	3	16569.375	19.636	<.001 ^d
	Residual	226987.508	269	843.820		
	Total	276695.634	272			
4	Regression	50241.921	5	10048.384	11.848	<.001 ^e
	Residual	226453.713	267	848.141		
	Total	276695.634	272			

a. Dependent Variable: wellbeing

b. Predictors: (Constant), bullying

c. Predictors: (Constant), bullying, do nothing

d. Predictors: (Constant), bullying, do nothing, avoidance

e. Predictors: (Constant), bullying, do nothing, avoidance, Bullying_do nothing, Bullying_avoidance

According to Model 2, bullying ($t=-5.628$, $p<0.05$) and bullying coping style *do nothing* ($t=4.335$, $p<0.05$) have a significant effect on psychological wellbeing ($t=34.739$, $p<0.05$). The regression line: $y = 289.11 - 1.31x - 2.59z$ may be used to predict psychological wellbeing (y) based on bullying (x) and *do nothing* bullying coping style (z). (Table 21).

Table 21
Regression Coefficients

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		95,0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	272.899	7.675		35.555	<.001	257.788 288.010
	bullying	-1.456	.238	-.348	-6.111	<.001	-1.925 -.987
2	(Constant)	289.109	8.322		34.739	<.001	272.724 305.493
	bullying	-1.312	.233	-.314	-5.628	<.001	-1.771 -.853
	do nothing	-2.585	.596	-.242	-4.335	<.001	-3.759 -1.411
3	(Constant)	289.694	8.378		34.579	<.001	273.200 306.189
	bullying	-1.278	.239	-.305	-5.344	<.001	-1.749 -.807
	do nothing	-2.382	.671	-.223	-3.548	<.001	-3.703 -1.060
	avoidance	-.356	.538	-.043	-0.662	.508	-1.416 .703
4	(Constant)	288.785	23.075		12.515	<.001	243.353 334.218
	bullying	-1.293	.246	-.309	-5.259	<.001	-1.778 -.809
	do nothing	-.415	2.923	-.039	-.142	.887	-6.171 5.341
	avoidance	-1.929	2.276	-.230	-.848	.397	-6.411 2.552
	bullying x do nothing	-.188	.273	-.192	-.691	.490	-.725 .348
	bullying x avoidance	.188	.262	.200	.716	.475	-.329 .705

a. Dependent Variable: wellbeing

4.5 Summary of Results

As a reminder, for the main effects of the study, research question 1 was: What are the relationships between psychological wellbeing and workplace bullying in organisations in South Africa? Research question 2 was: What are the moderating effects of coping styles on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in organisations in South Africa?

To conclude the results chapter, the results of the study showed a significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing, meaning that as workplace bullying increases, psychological wellbeing decreases. The moderation analysis revealed that coping styles generally did not moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. However, the *do nothing* coping style was a significant predictor of lower psychological wellbeing scores. This finding suggests that passive coping styles may have an exacerbating effect on the negative impact of workplace bullying on employee psychological wellbeing.

To answer research question 1, the study found a significant negative correlation between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing. There was also a negative correlation between the coping style *do nothing* and psychological wellbeing. Therefore, this study rejects the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing.

To answer research question 2, there were no significant moderating effects for any coping styles on the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing therefore the study fails to reject the null hypotheses related to this research question. These findings provide valuable insights into the relationships between psychological wellbeing, workplace bullying, and bullying coping styles in South African organisations. These insights will be discussed, alongside limitations and future recommendations of the study, in the next chapter.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This aim of this study was to explore the relationship between employee psychological wellbeing and workplace bullying, and to understand whether different coping styles have a moderating effect on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. The primary goal in analysing the moderating effects was to explore if any coping styles might buffer or exacerbate the effect of workplace bullying on employee psychological wellbeing. The results showed a significant negative correlation between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, which was expected. Coping styles *do nothing* and *avoidance* were found to be significantly correlated to psychological wellbeing, meaning that when either of these two coping styles were adopted in response to workplace bullying, it correlated to a reduction in employee psychological wellbeing. Findings also showed that, together, workplace bullying and the *do nothing* coping style explained 18% of the variance in psychological wellbeing.

However, contrary to expectations, there were no moderating effects for coping styles on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. That is, no buffering or exacerbating effect was found for any of the four bullying coping styles on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. This final chapter discusses these findings in the context of existing literature, theoretical and practical implications or recommendations, limitations and strengths, and recommended future research before concluding.

5.2 Findings of the Study

This section discusses the key findings of the study, highlighting how workplace bullying and coping styles, specifically the *do nothing* coping style, relate to employee psychological wellbeing. These results are discussed in the context of the hypotheses, offering insights into the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, how different coping styles influence this relationship, and what role the moderating effects, if any, play.

5.2.1 Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Employee Psychological Wellbeing

The findings from the current study confirm the significant negative correlation between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. This study provides

evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H0), as the findings indicate a significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. Therefore, the data support H1, indicating that as workplace bullying increases, employee psychological wellbeing decreases.

The findings align with previous research suggesting that bullying leads to a range of mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, and burnout (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Singh et al., 2021). According to Einarsen and Nielsen (2015), psychological distress and lower levels of wellbeing are significantly correlated with exposure to workplace bullying. Similarly, Verkuil et al. (2015) directly link increased levels of depression and anxiety to workplace bullying, emphasising the profound negative impact of a hostile work environment on mental health. Moreover, Bernstein and Trimm (2016) found that exposure to workplace bullying negatively impacts employees' mental health, showing increased levels of stress and burnout while lowering job satisfaction and engagement. In a more recent study, Hogh et al. (2021) underscore that employees who are bullied often report lower levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction, contributing to a decline in overall wellbeing. Although it is well documented that workplace bullying has a detrimental effect on employee psychological wellbeing, there are differences in specific aspects of workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing outcomes that are notable. Some of these include the context and frequency of bullying behaviours, intensity of the relationship and severity of outcomes, and the short- versus long-term effects that bullying may have on the relationship to wellbeing.

5.2.2 Frequency and Type of Bullying Behaviours

Workplace bullying, employee psychological wellbeing and the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, is unique and multi-faceted. In the current study, 33% of participants experienced some form of bullying behaviour, reportedly experiencing a frequency of at least 'sometimes' to as frequently as 'daily', during the previous six-month period. That is, a third of participants from this study reported exposure to bullying behaviours at least sometimes. This finding aligns with literature in Europe and in South Africa that documents high prevalence rates of workplace bullying. For example, Einarsen et al. (2011) report a prevalence of workplace bullying behaviour ranging from 10%-30% in European countries. In South Africa, Cunliff and Mostert (2012) reported that 31.1% of their sample (n=13 991) had been subject to workplace bullying. The differences in reported frequencies may be attributed to the definition and measurement of workplace bullying behaviour. In a meta-analysis conducted by Nielsen et al. (2010), higher prevalence rates were

shown in studies with a broader definition and single instances of bullying behaviour.

However, studies conducted by Einarsen et al. (2009), where bullying is specifically defined as persistent bullying behaviour experienced over time (about 6 months), result in lower reported frequencies of bullying behaviour. These inconsistencies in the frequency of bullying behaviour tend to be a common distinction between occasional interpersonal issues or conflict and persistent bullying behaviour. There is inconsistency amongst studies about behavioural thresholds for behaviour to be defined as bullying. Some studies require that bullying behaviour occur weekly for at least six months, while others define behaviour as bullying with less frequent occurrence (Einarsen et al., 2010; Hoel & Cooper, 2000). In the present study, participants were surveyed to reflect on their experiences of workplace bullying in the last six-month period, which suggests that persistent bullying may have taken place over a period of six months. However, there is a possibility that bullying was under-reported in this study due to varying definitions and resultant potential downplay of bullying experiences.

In the current study, participants reported having their opinions ignored, excessive monitoring of their work, exposure to unreasonable deadlines, pressure not to claim entitled benefits, withheld information, and unmanageable workloads, indicating the highest frequency of bullying behaviour falling into the *work-related bullying* category.

In addition, the next most frequently reported bullying behaviours were reported as exclusion or being ignored, constant reminders of their mistakes, menial work, gossip or spreading of rumours, and hostility, most of which are considered *person-related bullying*, except for menial work, which is considered *work-related bullying*. From a *person-related bullying* perspective, this aligns with Einarsen et al. (2011), who found that psychological forms of bullying, such as exclusion and gossip, are the most frequently reported types of workplace bullying. *Physically intimidating bullying*, though less common, was still reported (verbal aggression, finger pointing and threats of physical violence). The rise in technological advances and, therefore, an increase in remote and hybrid work environments may underscore lower levels of physical bullying due to limited physical proximity to colleagues. However, recent studies report an increase in the prevalence of bullying exposure to remote workers, and in industries where remote or hybrid work is impossible, such as nursing or healthcare laboratories, psychological forms of bullying still prevail (Chiou et al., 2023; Munro & Phillips, 2023). This means that regardless of whether employees work remotely or on-site, workplace bullying is still prevalent. Therefore, workplace bullying needs to have a broad enough definition and needs to be contextualised to the ever-changing nature of the workplace.

5.2.3 Intensity and Duration of Workplace Bullying and Severity of Psychological Wellbeing Outcomes

Exposure to workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing outcomes has been well documented, and emphasis is on the significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing outcomes (Keashly & Harvey, 2006; Einarsen et al., 2020). The significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing aligns with the data in this study. However, the overall employee psychological wellbeing scores remain within a normal, moderate to high range. This result suggests resilience among employees despite being exposed to bullying. This could imply that although bullying harms wellbeing, it may not completely diminish employee wellbeing scores. This may mean that other mitigating factors buffer the effects of bullying on wellbeing, such as alternative coping strategies, supportive relationships at work or home, organisational resources, bullying intensity or duration variation, or a variation in reporting (Farley et al., 2023).

According to Nielsen et al. (2017), social support within the organisation or from personal networks can buffer against the psychological harm caused by bullying. Moreover, individual differences, such as personality traits or resilience, have been shown to protect against diminished wellbeing (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Individuals who possess higher levels of resilience are better able to cope with stress, and hardiness is one example of a personality trait that can mitigate trauma, such as the stress and possible trauma that could be caused by workplace bullying (Bonanno, 2004; Nielsen et al., 2017; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). This means that despite bullying, employee psychological wellbeing scores may reflect access to sufficient resources or support systems such as workplace counselling or mental health programmes. This is evidenced by Nielsen and Einarsen (2018), who suggest that even in environments with bullying, organisational resources such as wellbeing support programmes or employee assistance programmes can maintain levels of wellbeing among employees, provided the bullying remains at low intensity. Aligned with this, Reknes et al. (2016) found that the intensity and duration of bullying significantly influence whether coping style moderates the bullying and wellbeing relationship. They posit that if bullying is high intensity, there are detrimental effects regardless of what coping style is adopted (Reknes et al., 2016). Although the data show that workplace bullying does harm psychological wellbeing, the fact that psychological wellbeing scores remain moderate to high suggests that workplace bullying in the present study seems to be low intensity. This could also explain why no moderating effects were found on the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing.

From a leadership perspective, there may be nuances in the intensity and duration of bullying behaviours. Studies show that leaders who engage in bullying behaviours potentially do so as a response to their stress or role conflict, however, these actions can have severe consequences for organisational culture and employee wellbeing (Agotnes et al., 2020; Blomberg et al., 2024). Moreover, Hoel et al. (2010) highlight that leadership styles, particularly destructive or laissez-faire leadership, are significant predictors of workplace bullying. While leadership positions are often stressful and demanding, this does not justify or condone the use of bullying as a maladaptive coping mechanism (Skogstad et al., 2014). Branch et al. (2012) provide evidence for the link between workplace bullying and emotional intelligence and Ashraf and Khan (2014) demonstrate the moderating effects that emotional intelligence has on the relationship between workplace bullying and job performance. Therefore, while leadership stress is a reality, it is imperative that leaders develop adaptive coping strategies and emotional intelligence to prevent the manifestation of bullying behaviours in their roles and work environments.

The dominant presence of behaviours such as unreasonable deadlines, pressure not to claim benefits, withheld information, ignored opinions, and unmanageable workload in the present study's data may indicate broader systemic issues that could reflect two perpetuating factors: leadership practice and organisational culture. Aligned with literature, this may suggest that workplace bullying could be influenced, and potentially perpetuated, by leadership style, organisational culture, or both, and further suggests prioritisation of performance and outputs over employee wellbeing (Rhodes et al., 2010; Einarsen et al., 2011; Blomberg et al., 2024). These bullying behaviours, together with bullying intensity and duration, may affect psychological wellbeing differently; however, exploration of this was beyond the scope of this study.

5.2.4 Coping Styles and the Relationship Between Workplace Bullying and Employee Psychological Wellbeing

Although data showed a significant negative correlation between *employee psychological wellbeing* and *avoidance* and *do nothing* coping styles (meaning that an increase in the use of either of these coping styles was associated with reduced psychological wellbeing), the only significant predictor of *employee psychological wellbeing* concerning *workplace bullying* was the *do nothing* coping style. Despite expectations, no significant moderating effects were found for any of the four coping styles between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing.

This study provides evidence that fails to reject the null hypotheses H2a, H2c, H2e and H2g, as none of the coping styles were found to have a moderating effect on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. Therefore, the findings suggest insufficient evidence to support the alternative hypotheses H2b, H2d, H2f, and H2h. This finding indicates that bullying coping styles do not buffer or exacerbate the impact that workplace bullying behaviour has on employee psychological wellbeing, despite the expectation that there would be moderating effects for at least some of the coping styles. The next part of the discussion considers factors that may have influenced the results, with possible reasons.

Coping styles in the current study were found to have non-significant moderating effects in the bullying-wellbeing relationship. These findings may suggest that the coping styles were either ineffective in moderating the relationship or that variations existed in the frequency with which the sample population utilised these coping strategies when dealing with workplace bullying during the reported period (Hewett et al., 2018). In contrast to the present study, some studies found that coping styles can moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing (Hewett et al., 2018; Reknes et al., 2016; Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). However, in Bernstein and Trimm's (2016) study, instead of buffering (or moderating) the relationship, the moderators, specifically *avoidance* and *do nothing*, worsened the effects of the relationship between bullying and wellbeing (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). Zapf and Gross (2001) note that *assertiveness* and *seeking help* in the form of social support, are linked to lower levels of psychological distress among bullied individuals, suggesting that these two active coping strategies may have a buffering effect on the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing. However, the effectiveness of coping styles, and any moderating effects, may depend on the severity of the bullying, the bullying process, leadership support, and the organisational culture. Coping style is individual, and efficacy is dependent on perceived control because different strategies work in some contexts and not in others, this could explain some of the mixed findings (Dijkstra & Homan, 2016). Although some studies have found coping style to significantly moderate the workplace bullying-employee wellbeing relationship, the present study did not find significant moderating effects. This suggests that the moderating effects could depend on the context, timing, sample and specific coping styles examined, as well as the wellbeing outcomes examined. These factors can all influence whether coping acts as a buffer or exacerbate negative outcomes. Discrepancies could be partially explained by variations in culture or organisational differences (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Additionally, the fact that this study found the *do nothing* coping style to be a significant predictor of lower wellbeing aligns with

research that indicates passive coping to be maladaptive, often leading to greater psychological strain when bullying persists (Keashly et al., 1994; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006). Passive coping approaches, such as *do nothing*, may leave employees vulnerable to persistent bullying and may increase the intensity of bullying over time as bullying persists (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004). This discrepancy in findings highlights the complexity of coping in workplace bullying situations. Although some active or supportive coping styles may mitigate the negative impact that workplace bullying has on employee psychological wellbeing, passive coping may fail to buffer the relationship or even make the situation worse

(Coyne, 2012). This study's finding, that doing nothing predicts lower wellbeing, highlights that ignoring bullying does not protect wellbeing, and in fact, wellbeing is negatively impacted if nothing is done about workplace bullying.

The limited scope of Johannsdottir and Olafsson's (2004) four bullying coping styles: *seeking help*, *do nothing*, *assertiveness* and *avoidance*, compared to other possible coping styles that could have been used in this study, may have prevented moderating effects from being found (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004; Smith et al., 2015). These strategies might not include all the nuanced ways employees could cope with workplace bullying, especially in South Africa, where cultural factors such as Ubuntu or community-based support play a role (Van Breda, 2018). Cultural values, societal expectations, and workplace dynamics unique to South African organisations might influence how individuals respond to workplace bullying, making coping styles in this study less effective in moderating the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing (Mazibuko & Govender, 2017). Although coping style moderating effects may not have been strong enough to be statistically significant, this could also indicate that other factors, not measured in the current study, such as emotional support, personal resilience, or leadership support, could play a more prominent role in buffering the effects of bullying. For example, Blomberg and Rosander (2021) found supportive leadership to be a strong buffer in the relationship between bullying and ill health and that these buffering effects worsened when leadership was minimal or absent. This highlights the importance of supportive and healthy working relationships between employees and leadership. The bullying process may also play a significant role in the adoption of different coping styles at different stages of the process, and this could influence the moderating effect that coping style has on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC) by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is the theoretical framework used in this study. This framework helps understand how individuals assess and manage stressful events, and develop coping strategies against stressful events, such as workplace bullying, and the cyclical nature of workplace bullying. The TTSC includes three key elements: Primary Appraisal, Secondary Appraisal, and Coping Strategies. In this study, *workplace bullying* is the stressor (independent variable), coping strategies are *assertiveness*, *seeking help*, *do nothing* and *avoidance* (potential moderating variables), and stress acts as an outcome of *employee psychological wellbeing* (dependent variable).

5.3.1 Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC)

According to TTSC, stress is seen as a product of the interaction between an individual and their environment, specifically when the individual perceives their capacity to deal with the situation as lower than their capacity to cope. Workplace bullying, when understood through the TTSC framework, can be seen as a stressor that requires ongoing appraisal by the individual. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) posit that individuals continuously appraise stressors in their environment, assessing whether the situation is a challenge, a threat or harmful. In the case of workplace bullying, individuals may continuously appraise bullying events as harmful to their psychological wellbeing. Over time, this persistent stressor may lead to cumulative stress reactions and exacerbate the negative effects on an individuals' mental health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Workplace bullying is cyclical by nature, that is, behaviours repeat and escalate, where individuals need to constantly assess and reassess the threat and adjust their coping strategies accordingly. Based on this continuous appraisal, it is important to understand how bullying becomes an ongoing source of stress, as opposed to a one-time event (Einarsen et al., 2020). It is also important to note that bullying behaviour may start because of stress, further compounding the systemic and environmental stress that is experienced by individuals.

The interaction between coping strategies and workplace bullying as a cyclical process extends the TTSC framework by demonstrating how individuals' different coping choices can influence whether bullying (the stressor) is resolved, reduced, or perpetuated over time.

Framing this study in the TTSC can align to the Demerouti et al (2001) Job Demands-Resources (J-DR) model which shows that individual coping mechanisms can either buffer or exacerbate the impact of workplace bullying on psychological wellbeing, depending on how

stressful the individual's demands are versus the availability of coping mechanisms or resources available to the individual during a workplace bullying situation (Demerouti et al., 2001). According to TTSC, individuals experience stress when they appraise a situation (eg. workplace bullying), as a threat or harmful and perceive they lack effective resources to cope.

Workplace bullying can be seen as a chronic social stressor, or the cause of stress itself, which could make for a theoretical argument that workplace bullying and workplace stress could be overlapping concepts (Einarsen et al., 2020). The findings from this study, which confirm the negative effect that workplace bullying has on employee psychological wellbeing, aligns to ongoing research on the prevention of negative organisational outcomes through better stress management approaches (Tuckey et al., 2017). What is evident from the study's findings, is that different coping styles may be utilised at various stages of the workplace bullying process, making it difficult to ascertain what individual styles may work best at any given stage of the process. This may explain why the present study failed to find any of the coping styles to be moderators in the workplace bullying-wellbeing relationship. Furthermore, systemic interventions, rather than individual approaches, could be more effective in eliminating workplace bullying and improving employee psychological wellbeing. This aligns with research by Nielsen and Einarsen (2018), who suggest expanding on research to combine organisational/group analysis with individual analysis and to include experimental designs that can assess, analyse and intervene using various moderators and mediators at specific times.

5.4 Practical Implications

The present study found moderate levels of bullying taking place across organisations in South Africa. Additionally, workplace bullying is a significant predictor of decreased wellbeing, and that doing nothing as a bullying coping style is a further predictor of decreased wellbeing. As such, interventions are needed to mitigate the negative impact of workplace bullying and to ensure that effective coping skills can be implemented to navigate the negative and pervasive effects of workplace bullying on employee psychological wellbeing. Given the findings in this study, it is crucial for interventions to be implemented at multiple levels within organisations, such as the organisational level, by leadership, the employee level, and by practitioners, HR professional and policymakers, to address workplace bullying and to effectively support employee wellbeing. Recommended interventions, at each of these levels, will be discussed next.

5.4.1 Organisations

It is recommended that organisations have clear anti-bullying policies and procedures in place, that are aligned and compliant with legislation. Channels for reporting bullying incidents must be clear and empowered, to consistently manage these policies and to ensure a safer work environment. Organisations whose leaders and employees express bullying behaviours should be held accountable for their actions and this may help mitigate the harmful effects of workplace bullying (Bhandarker & Rai, 2018). Promoting supportive leadership by training leaders and employees to cultivate healthy working relationships, to recognise and address bullying behaviours through accountability measures, can assist in fostering a culture of psychological safety where individuals, teams and organisations can thrive (Edmondson, 1999). Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping an organisation's culture and working environment, due to their power in their roles, which can either mitigate or exacerbate workplace bullying behaviour (Blomberg et al., 2024; Bhandarker & Rai, 2018). For example, to reduce the intensity and duration of workplace bullying and to safeguard employee psychological wellbeing, active, supportive and visible leadership is called for, where leaders intervene as bullying behaviours arise, and thereby build healthier workplace environments (Agotnes et al., 2023). In contrast, laissez-faire leadership has been identified as an enabler of workplace bullying (Hoel et al., 2010). Therefore, it is vital that leaders, and the leadership teams to which they belong, commit to co-creating healthy organisations through regular, clear, consistent communication and congruent, inclusive behaviour.

5.4.2 Employees

The findings highlight several practical strategies that employees can implement to reduce workplace bullying and improve their psychological wellbeing. An important anecdotal finding was that some participants reflected that they were unaware of the definition of workplace bullying before completing the NAQ-R. This suggests that more awareness is needed for employees to understand what constitutes workplace bullying, how workplace bullying behaviours manifest, what negative outcomes can result from workplace bullying, and how to best identify the signals in the process over time. An important finding, from the literature, is that although the process could start subtly and covertly, before becoming more direct and overt, it is important to intervene earlier in the process for the best results in preventing harm (Einarsen et al., 2011). Unfortunately, due to the nature of the current study being cross-sectional, it was not possible to determine at which stage of the workplace bullying process each person was when responding to the questionnaire. This means that interventions

would need to target different stages of workplace bullying with corresponding metrics on impact.

Additionally, providing employee support programs that offer counselling services, stress management workshops, and resilience training can help employees cope with the effects of bullying and improve their overall wellbeing. Although the study found no significant moderating effects of coping styles, it was found that *do nothing* was a significant predictor of reduced wellbeing. Therefore, promoting active and positive coping strategies, such as seeking help, assertiveness, and others not covered in this study through training and support programs, may still benefit employees. Most research indicates that employees tend to adopt passive or avoidant coping styles to stress, which can worsen the negative impact of workplace bullying for two reasons (Reknes et al., 2016; Johari, 2020). First, these coping strategies do nothing to prevent bullying, and second, the longer the bullying persists, the worse the risk of intensity and possible harm inflicted (Notelaers & Einarsen, 2012). On a positive note, and aligned with research, the use of active coping strategies can reduce the negative psychological impact of workplace bullying. However, this may depend on awareness and education about workplace bullying (Dijkstra & Homan, 2016). Furthermore, to ensure successful intervention, it would be crucial for employees to adopt a certain level of courage to turn toward active coping styles, commit to practice, and review success measures over time.

Promoting self-awareness, self-care, and psychological wellbeing to employees and leaders alike, requires effort to commit to and focus on wellbeing practices. Leaders can support this by practising empathy, encouraging the development of self-awareness, and role-modelling their own self-awareness, self-care, and psychological wellbeing. Peer support systems, led and run by employees, can provide a sense of belonging and emotional support (Carrol & Lauzier, 2014). It is challenging if leadership promotes a culture that tolerates workplace bullying, however, it is important for employees, including leaders, to clarify safe channels and guidelines to report bullying behaviours and to acknowledge the detrimental effects of workplace bullying on humans and business. According to Einarsen et al (2011), fostering a culture where reporting is safe and supported by leadership can significantly decrease the prevalence of workplace bullying and associated negative effects. Addressing potential barriers, such as fear of retaliation, lack of awareness, and insufficient leadership support, can enhance the effectiveness of interventions.

These practical implications emphasise early and proactive steps that employees can take to protect their psychological wellbeing from the harmful effects of workplace bullying. By adopting active coping strategies, building peer support networks, and seeking help for

themselves and others, when necessary, employees can mitigate the negative impacts and promote a healthier work environment.

5.4.3 Practitioners, HR Professionals and Policymakers

The findings of this study may be of interest for organisational practitioners and HR professionals aiming to create healthier workplace environments. Given the detrimental impact of workplace bullying on employee psychological wellbeing, several practical strategies can be implemented to mitigate bullying and build healthier workplace environments. Typically, practitioners would implement these interventions at the leadership and employee levels, with a recommendation to implement them in teams or small groups. It is important to note that top leadership buy-in, and commitment to wellbeing, including anti-bullying policy, is vital. A key endeavour would be for practitioners and HR professionals, in collaboration with legal professionals, to develop anti-bullying policies, and regularly review and update these policies in alignment with any updated legislation. The development of wellbeing programmes that include bullying assessment and awareness campaigns, educational sessions, and various interventions, such as peer support networks, on topics ranging from stress, workplace bullying, coping strategies (such as assertiveness, resilience, effective conflict management), emotional intelligence practice, and cross-cultural awareness, to self-care and training for wellbeing champions and people leaders. Leadership development programmes that use a top-down, bottom-up and cross-functional approach, and that include emotional intelligence and wellbeing awareness covering a continuum of unhealthy, neutral and thriving environments, as well as promoting leadership styles that support healthy and thriving environments, could assist in eliminating intolerable behaviours and instilling behaviours more conducive to healthier workplace environments. Enhancing support systems, such as promotion of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), and leading collaborative inter-disciplinary and cross-functional initiatives, both within and external to organisations could benefit and equip organisations, leaders, employees, practitioners and HR professionals with the means to minimise the harmful effects of workplace bullying and collectively work towards improving employee psychological wellbeing and cultivating healthier workplace cultures. Finally, in line with research, ensuring role ambiguity and role conflict is kept to a healthy minimum through effective organisational design and strong, healthy leadership vision and action, can ensure minimal workplace bullying and enhanced employee wellbeing (Agotnes et al., 2023; Blomberg et al., 2024).

It is recommended that practitioners, HR professionals, and policymakers be aware of how workplace bullying links to legislation and to keep updated with the latest legislation to safeguard employee wellbeing and the organisation. In South Africa, while workplace bullying is not addressed directly in a single statute, several pieces of legislation provide a legal framework that protects employees from harassment, discrimination, and unsafe working conditions, while providing guidance and advice to organisations for compliance and policy development. Although the Code of Good Practice covers workplace bullying under harassment as a broader term, no specific “workplace bullying” legislation exists in South Africa. The Code of Good Practice refers to guidelines and principles that aim to eliminate all forms of harassment in the workplace and provide steps that employers need to take to manage harassment and ensure a safe, fair, inclusive, and respectful workplace environment for all employees, suggesting it is the employer’s responsibility to proactively and effectively address workplace bullying (Code of Good Practice, 2022). Employees, leaders, practitioners, and HR professionals need to be aware of and understand the laws about workplace bullying and how organisations can be held accountable, alongside the rights that employees have regarding workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing. Statutory laws provide a legal and regulatory framework that could be used as a reference guide. These laws can be found in Table 2, in Chapter 2.

Workplace bullying and its effects on wellbeing and organisational outcomes make it imperative for organisational leaders, employees, organisational practitioners, HR professionals and policymakers to develop and implement anti-bullying policies, wellbeing programmes and stay informed on relevant legislation to foster healthier workplace environments, protect employee psychological wellbeing and ensure compliance with legal frameworks.

5.5 Strengths of the Study

This study has several strengths that contribute to the significance of the findings. An unexpected outcome was that some participants provided reflective feedback, indicating that completing the NAQ-R questionnaire clarified their understanding of what constitutes workplace bullying. This highlights a potential need for more awareness and education about workplace bullying. Secondly, while the coping styles themselves did not significantly moderate this relationship, these findings suggest that there may be other confounding variables that may influence the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. Some confounding variables include personality traits, such as

hardiness or resilience, level of emotional maturity, cultural background and beliefs, to name a few. Thirdly, the results are robust and generalisable because this study employed well-established and validated instruments, that are recognised in workplace bullying and psychological wellbeing research. Additionally, the robustness and generalisability of the study are further demonstrated by multiple industries in South Africa being covered, potentially attracting a range of stakeholders across sectors who may be interested in implementing evidence-based studies. This allows findings to resonate across diverse contexts rather than one specific sector. Finally, this study addresses critical gaps in the literature by focusing on workplace bullying within South African organisations, offering interdisciplinary interventions, and by contributing insights to a relatively under-researched context. This enhances understanding of how bullying dynamics may play out in the South African workplace context, providing a foundation for more targeted and interdisciplinary awareness, education, and intervention, in this region.

Highlighting these strengths shows meaningful contributions of the study to both academic literature and practical workplace interventions to help advance understanding of how employees and leaders in organisations, specifically in South Africa, can maintain psychological wellbeing despite the existence of workplace bullying behaviours and offer insights to manage, mitigate and potentially prevent, workplace bullying.

5.6 Limitations and Future Research

Although this study offers insights into the relationship between workplace bullying, employees' psychological wellbeing, and coping styles, it is important to acknowledge limitations. The sample size for this study was sufficient to allow generalisability to the population, however, it is relatively small when compared to the total South African workforce, which, according to Statistics South Africa, is currently at 16.9 million (Stats SA, 2024). Additionally, although the sample from multiple industries was identified as a strength, this can also be viewed as a limitation in the current study due to an inability to analyse potential cultural factors specific to individual workplaces. A cross-sectional design, which collects data at a single point in time, makes it challenging to establish causality and pinpoint where in the process exposure to bullying occurs and what effect this has on psychological wellbeing. Longitudinal and experimental designs are better suited for understanding progression in a relational process and causal relationships of stressors and may better inform what interventions may be more effective at different stages of the workplace bullying process. In contrast, cross-sectional designs can only reveal associations without considering the timing

of exposure and outcomes (Wang & Cheng, 2020). However, this was beyond the scope of the present study, which aimed at establishing the relationships between the variables, not causality.

The sole use of self-reported data limited this study to respondents' subjective views; however, this limitation was mitigated using robust scales. Adding personal interviews would better enable systemic insight into the relationship between workplace bullying, employee psychological wellbeing, and coping styles. Using both questionnaires and interviews may be beneficial for future research to enrich and broaden the collection of bullying experiences from research participants. It may be beneficial to include perpetrators, victims, and workplace bullying witnesses in the sample (Pietersen, 2007; Bernstein & Trimm, 2016; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Coping strategies in this study are limited to the simplified contexts of problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused strategies in Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theoretical framework, and Johannsdottir and Olafsson's (2004) bullying coping styles, which might not capture the full complexity of coping strategies that could be adopted by individuals in response to bullying exposure. Both frameworks contextualise coping as a static response to stress or bullying; however, since bullying is a dynamic process that evolves, so would coping responses need to change accordingly (Zapf & Gross, 2001). Furthermore, individuals in lower socio-economic settings may rely on community networks as collective coping, which aligns with South Africa's collectivist cultural values, and emphasis on interdependence and shared resilience, however, this broadens the scope from individual coping to collective coping (Kuo, 2012;) Additionally, systemic challenges such as income disparity and limited access to mental health resources potentially influence coping approaches that would be adopted by individuals. Further research that considers both the structural barriers and adaptive strengths present within the South African environment is needed.

Finally, this study did not control potential confounding variables such as personality traits, level of emotional intelligence or emotional maturity, organisational culture, and presence of support systems, which may affect the interpretation of the study's results. Further research is necessary to understand how leaders perceive themselves and to explore the interactions and potential intervention opportunities that emerge between leaders, their subordinates, co-workers, and organisational culture. This is particularly important in understanding the impacts of workplace toxicity, such as bullying, and in supporting employee wellbeing. By acknowledging limitations, these gaps could form part of future research to explore the complexity of workplace bullying and its effects on employee psychological wellbeing.

In conclusion, this discussion highlighted the significant impact of workplace bullying on employee psychological wellbeing within organisations in South Africa. The findings underscore the detrimental effects of workplace bullying, especially when bullying is ignored, can lead to adverse psychological outcomes. Despite expectations to the contrary, the findings revealed a lack of significant moderating effects of coping styles on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee wellbeing. This indicates that coping styles examined, such as *avoidance*, *do nothing*, *seeking help*, and *assertiveness*, did not significantly influence the negative impact of *workplace bullying* on employee *psychological wellbeing*. This suggests that interactions between workplace bullying, coping styles and employee psychological wellbeing may be more complex than originally hypothesised and that there could be additional confounding variables that could more significantly influence the relationship.

The moderating results of this study were disappointing due to no moderating effects being found for each of the four coping styles on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. However, this does not mean that the adoption of each of these coping styles as interventions against bullying would be ineffective, just that they did not show up in the present study as significant predictors. Future research that explores alternative coping strategies as moderators or mediators in this relationship may yield more promising results.

5.7 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing in South African organisations and the potential moderating role of individual coping styles. The research aimed to explore how different coping strategies, such as *avoidance*, *do nothing*, *seeking help*, and *assertiveness*, influence the impact of *workplace bullying* on *employee wellbeing*.

The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing, indicating that bullying leads to increased stress and other adverse psychological outcomes. However, contrary to the initial hypotheses, the study found no significant moderating effects of the coping styles examined. This suggests that the coping strategies assessed did not significantly alter the negative impact of workplace bullying on employee wellbeing. However, *bullying* and *do nothing* together were found to significantly predict decreased wellbeing.

Several possibilities could explain the lack of moderating effects, including measurement issues with the instruments used to assess coping styles, sample characteristics, unique contextual factors within South African organisations, and the complexity of the

interactions between workplace bullying, coping styles, and employee psychological wellbeing. Additionally, the coping styles examined might not be the most relevant or effective in moderating the relationship.

Given these findings, the study emphasises the importance of implementing comprehensive interventions to address workplace bullying and support employee wellbeing. Effective interventions could include promoting supportive leadership, developing clear organisational policies, providing employee support programs, and encouraging positive coping strategies beyond those examined in this study.

Future research should continue to explore the complex interactions between workplace bullying, coping styles, and employee wellbeing to develop more effective interventions. Future studies may target specific workplaces or industries to explore any insights that specific workplaces or industries may offer regarding the relationship between workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. It will be useful to control for specific variables that may influence both workplace bullying and employee psychological wellbeing. Studies could include specific leadership styles, power dynamics, and personality traits of both leaders and employees, including resilience, emotional intelligence, and emotional maturity. When controlling for specific variables, it may be useful to take an experimental or longitudinal approach, to explore the effects each variable might have at specific points in each timeframe. A qualitative or mixed methods approach could provide rich and broad insights into the complexity of the individual and systemic impact of workplace bullying on employee wellbeing. Using different scales, the role of gender, and the role that cultural background plays on the impact of workplace bullying on employee psychological wellbeing could provide insights and individual and organisational culture-specific intervention insights.

By addressing workplace bullying issues holistically, organisations can create healthier and more supportive work environments for their employees, thereby enabling both organisations and employees to move beyond surviving to thrive.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Letter

Dear Prospective respondent,

You are hereby invited to participate in a Master's research study which aims to explore the relationships between workplace bullying, coping and employee wellbeing. This research has been approved by UCT's Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason, and without judgement. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this study.

You will not be requested to provide any identifiable information, and your responses will remain anonymous. Data will be kept confidential, and results of the study will be used for academic purposes only. All data will be stored on a secure and password protected platform.

If you are willing to participate in this study, and support my research, please check the box, and complete the information contained in this consent form. Completing and submitting your responses will be considered as informed consent to participate in this study. There will be no incentive for participation in this study.

If you have any questions, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me, or my supervisor, at the email addresses provided below.

Thank you for your time.

By checking the appropriate box, I agree/disagree (check the applicable option) to participate in this study.

Contact Details:

Researcher Name: Colleen Leclercq

Researcher Email Address: LCLCOL001@myuct.ac.za

Supervisor Name: Professor Linda Ronnie

Supervisor Email Address: Linda.Ronnie@uct.ac.za

APPENDIX B

Demographics Questionnaire

- 1 Age:
- 2 Gender:
- 3 Marital status:
- 4 Job position:
- 5 Industry:
- 6 Tenure: How long have you been with your company?

APPENDIX C

The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (Einarsen et al., 2009)

Using the scale below, please indicate the frequency with which you experience each of the following statements:

Response Options:

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

Work-related bullying (WRB)

1. Someone withholding information which affects your performance
2. Being ordered to do work below your level of competence
3. Having your opinions ignored
4. Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines
5. Excessive monitoring of your work
6. Pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)
7. Being exposed to an unmanageable workload

Person-related bullying (PRB)

8. Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work
9. Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks
10. Spreading of gossip and rumors about you
11. Being ignored or excluded

12. Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes or your private life
13. Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job
14. Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes
15. Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach
16. Persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes
17. Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get along with
18. Having allegations made against you
19. Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm

Physically intimidating bullying (PIB)

20. Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger
21. Intimidating behaviors such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way
22. Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse

APPENDIX D

Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) (Ryff, 1989)

Instructions: Indicate how much you agree or disagree on a scale of 1-7, using the response key below: 1 Strongly agree;

- 2 Somewhat agree
- 3 Slightly agree
- 4 Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 Slightly disagree
- 6 Somewhat disagree
- 7 Strongly disagree

Autonomy: Q1, Q13, Q24, Q35, Q41, Q10, and Q21.

Environmental Mastery: Q3, Q15, Q26, Q36, Q42, Q12, and Q23.

Personal Growth: Q5, Q17, Q28, Q37, Q2, Q14, and Q25.

Positive Relations with Others: Q7, Q18, Q30, Q38, Q4, Q16, and Q27.

Purpose in Life: Q9, Q20, Q32, Q39, Q6, Q29, and Q33.

Self-Acceptance: Q11, Q22, Q34, Q40, Q8, Q19, and Q31.

Reverse score items that are worded in the opposite direction of scales measure:

Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q6, Q7, Q11, Q13, Q17, Q20, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q27, Q29, Q31, Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38, and Q40

1. "I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people."
2. "For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth."
3. "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live."
4. "People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others."
5. "I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons."
6. "I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality."
7. "Most people see me as loving and affectionate."

8. "In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life."
9. "I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future."
10. "I tend to worry about what other people think of me."
11. "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out."
12. "I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me."
13. "My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing."
14. "I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago."
15. "The demands of everyday life often get me down."
16. "I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others."
17. "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world."
18. "Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me."
19. "My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about themselves."
20. "I have a sense of direction and purpose in life."
21. "I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important."
22. "In general, I feel confident and positive about myself."
23. "I have been able to build a living environment and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking."
24. "I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions."
25. "I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things."
26. "I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me."
27. "I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me."
28. "When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years."
29. "Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them."
30. "I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns."

31. "When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am."
32. "I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life."
33. "I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life."
34. "I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have."
35. "I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus."
36. "I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life."
37. "I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time."
38. "I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family members and friends."
39. "My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me."
40. "I like most parts of my personality."
41. "It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters."
42. "I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities."

APPENDIX E

Coping Scale (Johannsdottir & Olafsson, 2004)

Please indicate your response per item number that best describes how you would react if you were subjected to bullying in your workplace?

1. I have done it
 2. I would do it
 3. I would probably do it
 4. I would probably not do it
 5. I would never do it
-
1. Tell my boss
 2. Take sick leave
 3. Wait and hope it stops
 4. Answer back
 5. See psychologist (or other) for counsel
 6. Talk to union representative at work
 7. Ask colleagues for help
 8. Not let it affect me
 9. Talk to the bully and ask him/her to stop
 10. Feel helpless
 11. Tell the HR director at work about it
 12. Quit my job
 13. Bully the bully myself
 14. Ignore it and do nothing
 15. Ask for transfer with the company
 16. Go to my union