

STUDIES AND RESEARCHES

A multi-mediation model of the relationship among workplace bullying, coping strategies, resilience and employees' strain: Insights for a training programme

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Abstract

This article presents two empirical studies. The first one supports a multi-mediation model of the relationship among workplace bullying, coping strategies, resilience, and employees' mental strain, which was the main study's objective. The second one presents a training programme's efficiency for employees' resilience levels. The first study was composed of 172 Romanian employees (114 female; 58 male) with ages ranging from 22 to 62 years old ($M = 33.25$; $SD = 8.92$) who completed online questionnaires measuring workplace bullying, coping strategies, resilience, and strain. From these 172 Romanian employees, 15 were selected to participate in the second study based on their scores from the first study. Results of the first study showed a significant multi-mediation model in which focus on and venting of emotions, as a coping strategy, and resilience mediated the relationship between workplace bullying and strain. When workplace bullying target employees encountered workplace bullying acts, they used significantly focus on and venting of emotions, as a coping strategy, this was associated with a decreased resilience level and with an increased mental strain increased. The results of the present research provide evidence that in case of workplace bullying exposure, targeted employees will focus more on their emotion, and their level of resilience and mental strain might decrease. The results of the first study inspired the second one using a pre-test and post-test design in which a training programme is employed in order to improve employees' levels of resilience. The results showed that after participating in the training programme, participants had higher levels of resilience, and achieved the ability to separate the objective reason for workplace bullying acts from their personal beliefs about the stressful situation. These results have practical implications because they suggest human resources practitioners should develop training programmes for exposed employees in order to improve their resilience.

Keywords

workplace bullying, coping strategies, resilience, multi-mediation model, mental strain, training programme, ABCD model

Rezumat

Articolul prezintă două studii empirice din care, primul raportează un model de multi-mediere a relațiilor dintre bullying-ul la locul de muncă, strategiile de coping, reziliență și tensiunea angajaților, iar cel de-al doilea studiu raportează testarea eficienței unui program de training. La primul studiu au participat online, completând chestionarele referitoare la bullying-ul la locul de muncă, strategiile de coping, reziliență și tensiune, un număr de 172 angajați români (114 gen feminin, 58 gen masculin) cu vârstele cuprinse între 22 și 62 ani ($M = 33.25$; $SD = 8.92$). Dintre aceștia, doar 15 angajați au fost rugați să participe la cel de-al doilea studiu, studiu ce prezintă eficiența unui training menit să dezvolte reziliența angajaților. Rezultatele primului studiu pun în evidență un model de multi-mediere având ca mediatori strategia de coping denumită centrarea pe emoții și reziliență în relația dintre expunerea la bullying și tensiunea mentală a angajaților. Conform rezultatelor acestui model de multi-mediere, atunci când angajații se confruntă cu comportamente de bullying, ei apelează la strategia de coping denumită centrarea pe emoții, nivelul lor de reziliență scade iar nivelul lor de tensiune mentală crește. Rezultatele acestui studiu au arătat nevoia realizării celui de-al doilea, prezentat în cadrul acestui articol, studiu ce testează eficiența unui program de training utilizând un design de tipul pre-test-post-test. Rezultatele celui de al doilea studiu au arătat că, după training, participanții au avut nivele mai

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ridicate ale rezilienței, manifestând o mai bună abilitate de separare a motivelor obiective ale apariției fenomenului de bullying de credințele lor personale, fapt ce a avut o influență pozitivă asupra emoțiilor personale. Aceste rezultate au importante implicații practice deoarece sugerează practicienilor din domeniul resurselor umane că astfel de training-uri sunt utile pentru dezvoltarea rezilienței psihologice a angajaților expuși fenomenului de bullying.

Cuvinte cheie

bullying-ul la locul de muncă, strategiile de coping, reziliență, tensiune mentală, model de multi-mediere, modelul ABCD

Résumé

L'article présente deux études empiriques parmi lesquels la première présente un modèle de médiation multiple des relations entre l'intimidation au travail, les stratégies d'adaptation, la résilience et la tension des employés et la deuxième présente l'efficacité d'un programme de formation. Pour la première étude un total de 172 employés Romains (114 femmes et 58 hommes) âgés entre 22 et 62 ans ($M=33.25$ $ET=8.92$) ont participé en ligne en remplissant les questionnaires de l'intimidation au travail, les stratégies d'adaptation ; la résilience et la tension. Les résultats de la première étude ont relevés un modèle de médiation multiple la stratégie d'adaptation (c'est à dire, la concentration sur les émotions) et la résilience comme médiateurs dans le relation entre l'intimidation au travail et la tension des employés. Lorsque les employés sont confrontés avec des comportements d'intimidation au travail, les participants mettent en œuvre la stratégie passive telle que la concentration sur les émotions et leur niveau de tension a augmenté. En outre, lorsque les employés se sont confrontés avec l'intimidation au travail leur niveau de résilience diminué et leur niveau de tension accrue. Ces résultats ont montrés la nécessité de réaliser la seconde étude qui a testé l'efficacité d'un programme de formation. Les résultats de la seconde étude a montré que, après la formation, les participants ont rapportés des plus élevés niveaux de la résilience. Après la formation, les participants ont montré la capacité de séparer la réalité objective de celle subjective. Les résultats montrent d'importantes implications pratiques car elles suggèrent que ces programmes de formation sont utiles pour le développement de la résilience des employés exposés à l'intimidation au travail.

Mots-clés

l'intimidation au travail, les stratégies d'adaptation, la résilience, la tension mentale, modèle de médiation multiple, le modèle ABCD

Study 1: A Multi-mediation model of the relationship between workplace bullying, coping strategies, resilience, and employees' strain

Workplace bullying is a particular form of aggression where direct or indirect acts lead an employee to being systematically subjected to acts involving degrading and disrespectful treatment due to serious personal differences between employees (Einarsen, Hoel, & Nielsen, 2005). Previous research has looked at such undisclosed behaviour as sexual harassment, emotional and physical abuse, and workplace aggression, the psychological impact of these behaviours on the individual, as well as the organisational cost implications (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Hoel & Faragher, 2004; Penney & Spector, 2005)

The most cited workplace bullying definition was the one elaborated by Einarsen, Zapf, Hoel and Cooper (2003) who have seen this phenomenon as being an escalated process containing offensive, harassment, socially excluding and sabotage acts. During this

process, the affected person becomes the target of these persistent and negative acts, thus ending up in an inferior position. Later, Elder, Fox, Gater and Johnson (2010) defined workplace bullying as being those repetitive abusive acts or repetitive threatening acts meant to intimidate the employee and to determine him to leave his job. Furthermore, Escartin, Rodriguez-Carballeira, Gomez-Benito and Zapf (2010) defined workplace bullying as being that situation where a person perceive herself as being persistently and repetitively exposed to negative acts from the part of one or more other persons and the victim ends up in an inferior position from which she can't defend herself anymore.

For the present study, the following definition was used "workplace bullying is a situation in which one or more individuals encountered in a repetitive manner a number of negative acts from the part of one or more of their co-workers, supervisors or subordinates, situation which makes the person defenceless" (Chirilă & Constantin, 2013).

The importance of studying this phenomenon is demonstrated by its negative

consequences not only at an individual level, but also at an organizational one. There is empirical evidence in the literature showing that at an individual level, the targets present somatic and psychological problems such as sleep disorders, headaches, generalized body pain, mental and physical strain, digestive disorders (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Lewis, 2006a; Hyung-Park & DeFrank, 2010) and such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, mental fatigue, anger, concentration problems, lower levels of self-trust and, in the worst cases, suicidal thoughts or actual tentative of suicidal acts (Bonnano & Hymmel, 2010; Bhagwanjee, Govender & Pening, 2010; Chirilă & Constantin, 2014b). At the organizational levels, the consequences take the form of frequent tasks mistakes, absenteeism, turnover, recruitment costs and loss of employees (Hoel et al., 2003; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005).

The present study proposes a multi-mediation model of the relationship between workplace bullying, focus on and venting of emotions, as a coping strategy, resilience and mental strain. Even though previous research (Sauer, 2013; Maidaniuc-Chirilă, 2015) tested the mediation role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' health outcomes it didn't tested a multiple mediation model of resilience and coping strategies as mediators of the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' health outcomes. The present study tries to fill this gap by proposing a multiple mediation model having resilience and focus on and venting of emotions as mediators of the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' mental strain.

The Choice of a Coping Strategy in case of Workplace Bullying Experiences

Although conflicts at work are a daily phenomenon, only a few studies analysed conflict management strategies used to deal with workplace bullying (Zapf & Gross, 2001). Thus, the major research question of this study was: What do bullied people do in case of workplace bullying?

Folkman and Lazarus (1980) defined coping strategies as being those thoughts and acts individuals use in order to change their perceptions over a stressful event, to control, diminish or to tolerate the high solicitations of this stressful event.

The study of coping strategies used in response to an extreme stressor such as bullying is important, as their effectiveness may be different in reducing the bullying. The choice of coping strategies may also reflect the severity of the bullying and the broader psychological state of the victim. Such research is useful for practitioners as it may help them to steer the victim towards more fruitful coping strategies and to give the support that is needed. Taking into account the severity of bullying, the coping skills of the individual, and other factors which may determine the choice of coping strategies (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004).

The literature interested in general organisational conflicts shows that individuals most often start with constructive strategies to solve conflicts; in some cases, they will use passive strategies and wait to see whether the conflict situation disappears (Zapf & Gross, 2001; Withey & Cooper, 1989). Is this also the case of workplace bullying?

Previous research on workplace bullying (Knorz & Zapf, 1996) has shown that bullying victims tried various active and passive conflict management strategies, which, however, did not prove successful, otherwise bullying would have been stopped (Zapf & Gross, 2001).

Although active coping strategies prove useful in situations with high control, this is not so for the case of workplace bullying which is a situation characterised with low control on the part of victims. So, if the situation cannot be changed, then intrapsychological strategies such as relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring, denial, behavioural and mental disengagement, and avoidance may prove more useful (Begley, 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Weber, 1993). Being in an inferior position and having difficulty defending oneself has been described as core characteristics of bullying victims (Leymann, 1993). If, in a workplace bullying situation, the victim lacks power and

control, then active strategies are neither possible nor useful and the victim must employ more passive strategies.

Research on coping with bullying has concentrated on identifying the most prevalent coping responses employed by targets rather than on the strength of their associations with bullying itself (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006). A literature review of the coping strategies most employed in cases of workplace bullying is presented in the EVLN Model (Withey & Cooper, 1989): exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. These authors classified these coping strategies in dimensions such as passive (exit, loyalty, and neglect) and active (voice). Later, Rayner (1997) found that the most popular responses to workplace bullying were: confronting the perpetrator, doing nothing, consulting with human resources or colleagues, and leaving the job; the least popular responses were requesting counselling, seeking outside help, threatening to tell others, threatening to harm perpetrators, and taking sick days or time off. Furthermore, Lee and Brotheridge (2006) have suggested that the most used and efficient coping strategies are cognitive restructuring, relaxation, and avoidance strategies, and Moreno-Jimenez, Rodriguez-Munoz, Pastor, Sanz-Vergel, and Garrosa (2009) showed that there is a moderator effect of psychological detachment on the relationship between workplace bullying and strain.

The choice for coping with bullying in workplace settings changes with time. Previous research (Hogh & Dofradottir, 2001; Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003, Rayner, 1999; Zapf & Gross, 2001) has shown that in initial stages of bullying, victims tend to adopt more active strategies to cope with bullying, but as the situation escalates over time, victims tend to adopt more passive strategies.

The research literature addressing the link between workplace bullying, coping strategies, and victims' health shows that there is not only a direct relationship between bullying and strain (Leymann, 1996; Zapf & Gross, 2001), but also an indirect relationship which reinforces the importance of coping strategies in cases of workplace bullying (Hyung-Park & DeFrank, 2010).

The coping responses do not necessarily lead to satisfactory outcomes for the bullying targets. Zapf and Gross (2001) found that using active coping strategies (i.e., confronting the perpetrators) increases the targeting of individuals (Aquino, 2000) and retaliation of perpetrators (Rayner, 1999) and that the effect can be seen not only in conflict escalation but also heightened strain and ill-health (Hyung-Park & DeFrank, 2010). As Hoel, Sparks, and Cooper (2002) conclude that bullying indirectly affects how targets experience emotional exhaustion through the particular coping strategies they employ.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that coping with bullying is highly stressful (Hoel et al., 2002; Leymann, 1996; Zapf & Gross, 2001) and may lead to experiencing higher levels of physical symptoms (Einarsen & Raknes, 1991; Leymann, 1996; Matthiesen, Raknes, & Rokkum, 1989) as well as psychological or affective symptoms, including depression and anxiety (Bjorkvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). An inability to cope independently undermines one's physical health and affective state (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006).

Given that active coping strategies are less used in case of workplace bullying experiences (Zapf & Gross, 2001), the present study tested the mediation role of a passive coping strategy (i.e. focus on and venting of emotions) on the relationship between workplace bullying and employees mental strain. This type of coping strategy was evidenced as one of the most frequent coping strategy employed in case of workplace bullying acts (Hyung-Park & DeFrank, 2010).

The role of resilience in workplace bullying cases

Resilience, a personal characteristic that moderates the negative effects of stress and promotes adaptation, has been a topic of research for a number of years (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Frequently, the quality of resilience is attributed to individuals who, in the face of overwhelming adversity, are able to adapt and restore equilibrium to their lives and avoid the potentially deleterious effects of

stress (Rutter, 1985; Beardslee, 1989; Caplan, 1990).

Resilience is understood as a process that allows individuals, families, and larger human groups to overcome difficult situations and trauma without manifesting any psychological disorders and that allows them a personal growth in their psychological functioning (Sauer, 2013). Rutter (1987) defined resilience as a buffering factor that protects individuals from psychotic disorders and described resilient individuals as possessing self-esteem, belief in their own self-efficacy, a repertoire of problem-solving strategies, and satisfying interpersonal relationships. Druss and Douglas (1988) described resilient individuals as having unusual courage and optimism in the face of death, illness, and congenital disability. Individuals believed in their own invincibility and focused on positive aspects of their situations. Caplan (1990) conceptualized resilience as an individual's capacity to make a "psycho-social comeback in the adversity" and defined resilience as comprising ego strength, social intimacy, and resourcefulness.

Most studies have suggested that resilient persons tend to manifest adaptive behaviour, especially in the areas of social functioning, morale, and somatic health (Wagnild & Young, 1993). The mechanisms by which resilience facilitates adaptation have been described as the ability to identify what is stressful, appraise realistically one's capacity for action, and solve problems (Beardslee, 1989; Caplan, 1990; Rutter, 1985).

For the present study resilience is understood as "the ability to respond positively, despite living in challenging or threatening circumstances. This means holding out, facing, and reacting better than expected in a situation of risk, a traumatic event, or adversity affecting the psycho-social integrity of an individual" (Brooks, 2006).

The promotion of coping skills and resilience is suggested as essential to assisting targets to handle workplace bullying experiences (McCarthy, Henderson, Sheehan, & Baker, 2002). So far, little is known about resilience's role in targets of

workplace bullying and studies addressing this relationship failed to demonstrate resilience's mediating role on the relationship between workplace bullying and health outcomes (Sauer, 2013). Maidaniuc-Chirilă (2015) provided evidence for the partial mediating role of resilience on the relationship between workplace bullying exposure and employees' physical strain. This partial mediating role of resilience suggested that there may be other mediators that form part of a full explanation of the relationship between workplace bullying role and employees' physical strain.

The present study proposes a multiple mediation model having as mediator resilience and focus on and venting of emotions on the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' mental strain.

Aim of the present study

This study proposes a multi-mediation model of the relationship between workplace bullying, focus on and venting of emotions, resilience, and employees' mental strain.

Hypothesis

1. Focus on and venting of emotions and resilience will mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' mental strain.

Methods

The instruments measuring workplace bullying, coping strategies, and strain were translated into Romanian using the back-translation method. The authors of the original instruments were contacted through email in order to get the permission to use the instruments.

Workplace bullying. Workplace bullying was measured with the Romanian version of Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers' (2009) Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (Chirilă & Constantin, 2014a). The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) has 22 items referring to 22 behavioural negative

acts grouped in three dimensions (i.e., intimidation, person-related bullying, and work-related bullying). A sample item is "Someone withholding information which affects your performance". The response to this questionnaire was given on a five-point Likert scale ranging from never (1) to daily (5). The Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale is $\alpha = .93$, with $\alpha = .78$ for person-related bullying, $\alpha = .81$ for context-related bullying, and $\alpha = .82$ for intimidation.

Coping strategies. To measure the coping strategies employed in case of workplace bullying exposure, the COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) was used. This inventory includes 15 different types of coping strategies such as (i.e. active coping, denial, positive reinterpretation and growth, disengagement with its two subscales such as mental disengagement and behavioural disengagement, focus on and venting of emotions, instrumental support, emotional support, acceptance, planning, religious coping, humour, restraint, substance use, and suppression of competing activities). For the present study, only the coping strategy named focus on and venting emotions ($\alpha=.77$) was used. This subscale was composed from four items and the response was given on a four-point Likert scale ranging from I usually don't do this (1) to I usually do this (4). A sample item is "I let my feelings out".

Resilience. In order to measure resilience the Resilience Scale developed by Wagnild (2009) was used. This questionnaire is formed from 14 items measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale is $\alpha = .86$. A sample item is "I can get through difficult times because I've experienced difficulty before".

The questionnaire ends up with another seven yes or no items referring to depressive symptoms, diet, substance abuse, alcohol consumption, ideal weight, physical exercising, and general health and wellness.

Mental strain. The scale measuring mental strain was extracted from the short Dutch version of Occupational Stress Inventory (Evers, Freese, & Cooper, 2000). Participants were told to answer these

items in reference to their past six months. The responses were given on five-point Likert ranging from never (1) to always (5). The mental strain scale consisted of seven items with $\alpha = .61$. A sample item is "Are there times at work when you feel so exasperated that you think to yourself that 'life is all really too much effort'?"

Participants and procedure

The study was composed of 172 (114 female; 58 male) Romanian employees who completed online questionnaires (between August 2014 and January 2015) measuring workplace bullying, psychological resilience, and strain. Their ages ranged from 22 to 62 years ($M = 33.25$; $SD = 8.92$). Their work experience ranged from three to 240 months ($M = 44.06$; $SD = 49.72$) and their highest level of education included a bachelor's degree (63), master's degree (74), and doctoral degree (21). Their employers included public institutions (47), private institutions (47), private firms (61), and non-governmental institutions (11). Their employers varied by size: under 10 employees (37 participants), 10–40 employees (42), 41–200 employees (41), 201–1,000 employees (23), and over 1,000 employees (24). The participants were asked for their email addresses so that they could be contacted for a future training programme; 149 of them gave their approval.

The questionnaires were placed in a specific order. The first questionnaire was the Romanian version of Negative Acts Questionnaires-Revised, the second was the COPE Inventory measuring all coping strategies, the third was the Resilience Scale, and the fourth was composed of the two scales measuring mental and physical strain from Occupational Stress Inventory. Participants were told to answer the last three questionnaires in the context of being exposed to or encountering negative acts in their workplaces.

Only those employees with a work experience at their present job over than six months were selected. They were contacted through e-mail. Personal e-mails were sent to them, e-mails explaining the scope of the present study and the possibility of participating to a training programme

designed to increase their level of stress resistance and their levels of personal resilience. A total of 5000 personal e-mails were sent to employees all over the country

during August 2014 and January 2015 and only a total of 172 employees responded positively to the request.

Results

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among workplace bullying, coping strategies, psychological resilience, and employees' strain

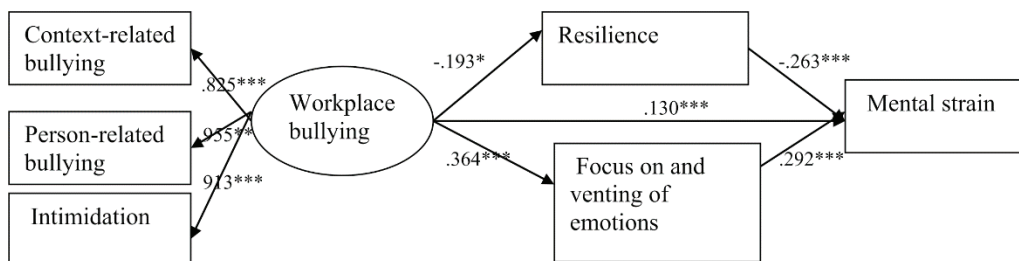
Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. workplace bullying	1.74	.59	1			
2. focus on and venting of emotions	2.38	.72	.351**	1		
3. resilience	5.88	.69	-.181*	-.280**	1	
4. mental strain	2.09	.43	.282**	.407**	-.364**	1

** p < .01; * p < .05

According to the above table, workplace bullying significantly correlated with focus on and venting of emotions, resilience, and mental strain. Moreover, focus on and venting of emotions significantly correlated with resilience, and mental strain. Furthermore,

resilience significantly correlated with mental strain.

Because all of these four variables are in significant relationships with each other, this study proposes the following multi-mediation model.



*, p<.05; **, p<.01; ***, p<.001

Figure 1. The multi-mediation model with standardized coefficients

Table 2. The absolute and relative indicators of the two mediation models

Models	χ ²	df	p	RMR	RMSEA [LO90; HI90]	GFI	AGFI	NFI	IFI	CFI
The multi-mediation model	12.493	7	.085	.024	.068 [0.000; .128]	.976	.928	.975	.989	.989

All indicators (i.e. the absolute and relative ones) indicate a good mediation models, meaning that this model fits the data.

$\chi^2(7)=12.493$, $p=.085$, the observed data and the variance-covariance matrix proposed by this multi-mediation model don't

significantly differ, meaning that the data support this multi-mediation model. All the other absolute and relative indicators reveal very good fit indices, thus indicating this model is well supported by the empirical data.

Table 3. Standardized and un-standardized regression weights

	B	SE	β	p
Resilience <- workplace bullying	-.264	.107	-.193	.013
Focus on and venting of <-workplace bullying emotions	.529	.108	.364	.000
intimidation<-workplace bullying context-related<-workplace bullying	1		.913	
bullying	1.312	.086	.825	.000
person-related<-workplace bullying	1.149	.057	.955	.000
bullying				
mental strain <-workplace bullying	.111	.065	.130	.000
mental strain<-resilience	-.163	.043	-.263	.000
mental strain<-focus on and venting emotions	.172	.043	.292	.000

The data in table 3 represent the standardized and un-standardized regression weights for all the variables listed in the model

and their significance levels. As it can be seen all regression weights are significant.

Table 4. The un-standardized and standardized regression weights representing the direct and indirect effects

	B	β
<i>Direct effect</i>		
Mental strain<-workplace bullying	.111	.130
<i>Indirect effect</i>		
Mental strain<-workplace bullying	.135	.157

Table 4 presents the un-standardized and standardized regression weights of the direct effects of workplace bullying on mental strain and also the indirect effect of workplace bullying on mental strain (i.e. the path containing psychological resilience and focus on and venting of emotions as mediators) and the relative indicators for the mediation model. As can be seen in the table, the direct effect is smaller than the indirect effect and the mediation model is significant.

Discussion

This study aimed at exploring and proposing the best multi-mediation model of the relationship among workplace bullying exposure, coping strategy (i.e. focus on and venting of emotions), psychological resilience, and employees' mental strain. Since the relationship between workplace bullying exposure and resilience has been understudied, so far there is little information about resilience's role in workplace bullying victims. Sauer (2013) studied this relationship

on a sample of health care employees and failed to demonstrate resilience's mediating role. Later, Maidaniuc-Chirilă (2015) studied resilience's mediation role in a sample of employees exposed to bullying and found evidence of a mediating role for resilience for the relationship between workplace bullying and Romanian employees' physical strain.

Having as a start point this simple mediation model and previous research results (Maidaniuc-Chirilă, 2015), a multi-mediation model containing psychological resilience and focus on and venting of emotions as mediators of the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' mental strain was proposed.

The multi-mediation model proposed showed good absolute and relative indicators meaning that the model fits the data. Moreover, the regression weights are significant and the indirect effect is bigger and than the direct effect meaning that psychological resilience and focus on and venting emotions are mediators of the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' mental strain.

The results of the present study completes the results of the previous one (Maidaniuc-Chirilă, 2015) by showing not only that resilience act as a mediator between workplace bullying and employees' strain but also that the coping strategy named focus on and venting of emotions acted also like a mediator on this relationship

This study suggests that psychological resilience is an important personal resource when facing difficult situations at work and that the coping strategy focus on and venting of emotions is not an efficient one. Research in the field showed that psychological resilience can be achieved with time and is often improved after facing difficult situations in life (Wagnild, 2009). Since resilience plays the same role when employees are faced with workplace bullying, human resources practitioners can improve their training programs by introducing new ways to achieve resilience among exposed employees.

Based on the first study's results, the second one presents the results of a training programme designed to develop employees' mental resilience. These results may stand at

the basis of more complex training programmes developed by human resources practitioners.

Study limits

One of the limits of the present study is that data were collected using self-reported questionnaires administrated online without employing any form of controlling neither the way data were completed, nor the possible differences between employees completing the questionnaires during holiday and those completing them during normal work ours. This could potentially introduce some biases in reporting the manifestation of workplace bullying acts.

Another limit is the fact that this article reports cross-sectional data. Causal relationships between variables are better studied with longitudinal data. Further research should use longitudinal designs to address the relationships among workplace bullying, coping strategies, resilience, and strain.

Study 2: Developing employees' resilience: A two-day training program for workplace bullying targets

The first study revealed the mediation roles of resilience and focus on and venting of emotions on the relationship between workplace bullying exposure and employees' mental strain. The fact that employee resilience decreased when they were exposed to workplace bullying and they employed focus on and venting of emotions as a coping strategy while their strain levels increased showed the importance of designing a training programme in order to increase resilience levels of employees exposed to workplace bullying.

Given the complexity and multi-dimensionality nature of workplace bullying, "no single, off-the-shelf policy will suit every organization with a variety of elements useful in developing an effective bullying policy" (Woodman & Cook, 2005, p. 10).

Hubert (2003) proposed a systematic approach to addressing workplace bullying that included five stages: prevention, uncovering, support, intervention, and after-care. McCarthy, Henderson, Sheehan, and Barker (2002) suggested that any effective response to workplace bullying needs to include prevention, redress/resolution, and support. Branch and Murray (2007) suggested that a comprehensive training programme consist of workplace bullying awareness and that strong people skills will help reduce the occurrence of workplace bullying. So far there have been few studies reporting training programmes designed to develop employees' resilience levels and few studies have reported results of the efficiency of such training programmes.

Typical methods of preventing workplace bullying include "training, counselling and consultation" (Vartia, Korppoo, Fallenius, & Mattila, 2003, p. 296). In general, training to increase awareness about what constitutes workplace bullying, its impacts, and what interventions can occur are considered vital steps in preventing workplace bullying and should occur throughout the whole organisation (McCarthy et al., 2002). Training about workplace bullying should outline the importance of clear objectives, roles, and processes within the workplace, as well as causes, impacts, and how workplace bullying is handled in the current workplace (Vartia et al., 2003). Moreover, the promotion of coping skills and resilience is also suggested as essential to assisting targets to handle workplace bullying experiences (McCarthy et al., 2002).

Recent research has also found that training focused on emotions can assist in increasing the emotional intelligence of individuals within organisations (Murray & Jordan, 2006). Examples of training include building awareness of others' and one's own emotions, emotional triggers, emotional progressions, and strategies for emotional repair. Training programmes implementing these strategies will have as a final result an improved level of psychological and emotional resilience. Participants will develop the appropriate skills to voice their dissatisfaction while also considering the feelings of others (McCarthy et al., 2002).

Generally, training programmes conducted in order to increase a person's level of resilience include three phases: building mental resilience by applying Albert Ellis's model, building and strengthening personal key abilities, and building strong interpersonal relationships.

Albert Ellis' model proposes a way to build mental resilience in four phases. Its starting point is the awareness of the emotional consequences of the trauma experienced. According to this model, emotional consequences (C) manifest indirectly through personal beliefs (B) about the adversity and not directly from the adversity (A). Teaching people how to separate adversity from personal beliefs about the adversity will have a positive impact on individuals' emotional consequences and will enable them to remove personal beliefs about the adversity (D). From this point on, we will refer to Albert Ellis's model as the ABCD model.

The training programme presented in this study focused on increasing Romanian employees' awareness about what workplace bullying is, the importance of emotions in labelling a stressful behaviour as being a bullying one, and practicing Albert Ellis' technique in order to increase mental resilience.

Methods

The training programme had two aims:

1. To increase Romanian employees' knowledge about workplace bullying by presenting its main characteristics.
2. To improve Romanian employees' mental resilience by employing Albert Ellis' ABCD model.

Participants. For the present study, fifteen Romanian employees were selected to participate in a training programme designed to develop employees' resilience. These employees were selected from the sample of 172 employees presented in the first study on the basis of their scores on the questionnaires measuring workplace bullying exposure, resilience level, coping strategies, and mental and physical strain. Only those employees whose scores on bullying questionnaires were above 3, whose scores on the resilience scale

were under 4, and whose scores were higher on passive coping strategies (i.e. denial, mental disengagement, behavioural disengagement and focus on and venting of emotions) and strain were selected to participate in the training programme.

Their ages ranged from 24 and 36 years old ($M = 27.13$; $SD = 3.58$); four were male and 11 were female. They had work experience between six months and 12 years and they worked in public institutions and private firms in positions such as teachers (3), call-centre operators (3), career counsellors (3), human resource assistants (2), web developers (2), and team leaders (2).

Measures

Mental resilience. Albert Ellis' ABCD model was presented during the training to measure employees' level of mental resilience and to improve participants' mental resilience level.

The first exercise is composed of a task in which participants are asked to present a negative, stressful, and prevalent event experienced at work and to answer three questions referring to the reason for which the stressful event happened, the feelings they experienced, and what they did to minimize the negative impact. The second exercise consists of answering the same three questions but from the point of view of the ABCD model.

The reasons offered in the first exercise (before presenting the ABCD model) were compared to the reasons offered in the second exercise (after presenting the ABCD model). The qualitative data are analysed in order to see if participants have the ability to separate the reason for the appearance of the stressful situation from their own personal belief about the stressful situation.

Design. The training has a pre-test post-test design. Differences appeared in the reasons for which the stressful situation appeared at their in the first (i.e. before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model) and in the second moment (i.e. after presenting the ABCD model) will be analysed at a qualitative level.

The training programme was sustained during a week-end period (January 31th 2015-February 1st 2015) so that employees

participated at this training programme during their free time and they came from intrinsic reasons such as personal development. The training was sustained with the agreement of dean of the Psychology Department from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University and ethical aspects (such as participants' anonymity, data confidentiality) were discussed with two psychologists and associated professors from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University.

Procedure. The Romanian employees completed two tasks meant to establish their ability to separate objective reasons from their personal beliefs about the reasons for the appearance of stressful events at their workplaces. They completed a practical exercise before the presentation of ABCD model and after the ACBD model has been presented.

Moment 1. The participants were told, at the beginning of training programme, to:

- (1) Present a prevalent stressful situation they experience at their workplaces (Adversity, A)

After presenting the situation they are asked to:

- (2) Present the reason for the appearance of the stressful situation (their personal beliefs toward the stressful situation, B);
- (3) Specify what how they felt during experiencing the stressful situation (emotional consequences, C)

and

- (4) What they did to face the stressful situation (D)

Moment 2. The presentation of Albert Ellis' ABCD model

Moment 3. After a coffee break of 30 minutes, participants were told to review their stressful workplace situation stated at the beginning of the training and to re-evaluate it in accordance with Albert Ellis' ABCD model. They had to re-evaluate the reason for the appearance of the stressful situation, to try to separate their emotions when they had to state the reason for the appearance of stressful situation and to say if there are, now, any differences in the way they understand the stressful situation.

Results

Their responses gave at the two moments (i.e. before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD

model and after presenting this model) are listed in the table above.

Table 1. Participants' stories about their stressful workplace situation and their explanations

Participant no. 1 (female employee)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	My supervisor asked me to give him all the evaluation tests offered at the end of seminars in order to be re-evaluated by him because according to him it is not normal to have so much un-promoted students at his subject.	His high level of corruption	Injustice	I have actively coped with the situation by sending him only students' final grades
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		His and also students' high levels of corruption (A) I am not appreciated (B)	I felt his action as being one attacking my professional competence (C).	I have given up at some negative thoughts and I've focused on positive things (D).
Participant no. 2 (male employee)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	My supervisor constantly rejected my ideas referring to my professional activities.	My superior's insecurity referring to my ideas' efficiency on long-term.	I felt Unappreciated.	I've increased my attention and vigilance to his future actions.
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		The reason for my supervisor's insecurity came from external reasons (A).	A need for personal security (C)	I've looked for ideas that would be more appreciated by my supervisor (D).
Participant no. 3 (female employee)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	I am constantly involved in many activities and I have a high work-overload in professional tasks.	A constant need to prove my self that I can do many things; I am a perfectionist.	stressed emotionally exhausted fear, guilt	Focussing on positive thinking time management time for my self
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		(A) Work-overload tight deadlines (B) I am irresponsible	fear (C) pressure (C)	Positive thinking (D) time management (D) narrative practices (D)

Participant no. 4 (female employee)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	Being constantly supervised at work even in those moments in which a close supervision wasn't mandatory.	A personal need for progress and professional development	guilt, frustration overwhelmed	time management
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		Being constantly supervised (A) Automatic thought of failure (B)	fear(C)	writing as a therapy (D) time management (D)
Participant no. 5 (female employee)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	Being a leader for my team I am also the interface between my supervisor and my colleagues and I am constantly under pressure when it comes to maintain a fluid communication between management and my colleagues, but I've confronted up constantly with my colleagues constant lack of interest in reading my written communications and often I'm confronted up with situations in which I am directly responsible for my colleagues' failure to meet deadlines.	I can't figure out why my colleagues don't read my written communications.	disappointed angry	I've told my emotions to my best colleagues and the I've discussed the the situation with those who failed to meet the deadlines.
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		My colleagues don't want to read my written communications (A) I probably want to do more than I was told to do (B)	Frustration (C)	I look at the situation from different points of view (D).
Participant no. 6 (male employee)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before training</i>	Supervisor's attitude toward addressing some errors appeared in the work-task of the team. He always finger pointing and looking for guilty	The constant absence of a qualitative solution and the constant need of a group communication	I'm defensive all the time I feel I lack of self-trust	I often avoid the moment when the suggested solutions are evaluated.

<i>After training</i>	persons, his constant criticism and need to put you in a wrong light.	The constant absence of a solution (A) My ideas are not good enough (B)	Lack of self-trust (C)	Avoid the situation (D)
Participant no. 7 (female participant)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	The constant morning meetings where my supervisor used to question each of employee including me about my past day of work, where he established tight deadlines so you can meet them, his constant need to humiliate an employee and his constant need to threaten to dismiss someone.	The manager needs to control situation, to stimulate and motivate employees' to become more efficient. maintaining my scope (making work experience)	fear, intimidation, desire to talk as little as I can frustration helplessness	discussions with colleagues, discussion with my husband at home, making fun of the the situation looking at the bright side,
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		The use of aggressive management style in order to become more efficient at work (A). I was constantly in an alert mood having negative flashes in front of my eye (B)	Frustration Helplessness Fear Tension (C)	Trying not to pay so much attention, detachment, focusing my attention to other aspect of my career (D).
Participant no. 8 (female participant)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	My colleague constant failure to meet deadlines which affected my own deadlines.	My colleague's incompetence to meet deadlines, the lack of a good communication system.	angry tired unappreciated overwhelmed	I've taken some of her tasks being forced by the situations.
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		Being incapable of meeting my own deadlines (A). I don't know to manage my relationships with colleagues (B)	Frustration	I've focused my attention on my own person and tried to evaluate myself.

Participant no. 9 (female employee)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	Being new at my job I felt I was overwhelmed by the work-overload and tight deadlines.	The rhythm was normal for the organization and moreover, the organization experienced some changes.	Fear to make mistakes angry	I constantly told those around me I have so much on my had right now.
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		Beside the changes Guilt in the organization I had to take over my colleagues tasks Too (A). Images of failure in front of my eyes (B)		
Participant no. 10 (female participant)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	I am constantly exposed to work-overload with tight deadlines.	The big number of professional activities I have to deal with in a short time.	Tension	I enjoy my coffee and cigarette breaks I listen to music I watch films
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		Task-overload Tension with tight deadlines Fear (C) (A) Flash images of failure (B)		
Participant no. 11 (female participant)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	I constantly experience work-overload with tight deadlines at work.	I think I'm creating myself this situation as a consequence of my need to demonstrate I can do everything.	guilt fear overwhelmed physically and psychologically exhausted	Trying to take things one step at a time. I recognize to myself that I can't manage to pay attention to one thing at a time.
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		Work-overload (A) Negative thoughts that I will fail (B)		
			fear guilt (C)	I think at that moment when everything has past and I managed to finish with success all my work-tasks (D).

Participant no. 12 (male employee)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	My team-colleagues are not involved not only mentally but also emotionally in the work-tasks and often the deadlines aren't met.	The reason for this situation is the recruitment and selection inefficient process.	angry	I solve my colleagues tasks in their place.
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		The recruitment process is inefficient. (A)	angry (C)	I'm doing also my colleagues work-tasks.
Participant no. 13 (male participant)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	I am being excessively supervised at work and I feel my supervisor always on my back.	I'm not sure of the reason for mistakes look vulnerable. why I am being excessively supervised Probably I show A low self-trust.	fear to make	I am trying not
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		Being excessively Supervised (A). Automatic thoughts of being miss-judged or negatively evaluated (B).	Fear (C)	I am trying to analyse more carefully my thoughts and to give up to the negative ones (D).
Participant no. 14 (female participant)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	Being constantly threatened with being dismissed if I don't meet the deadlines.	I was constantly telling my supervisor that I can't meet the deadlines because the data bases are too old and that were cases in which the persons I've called have died in the meantime.	angry frustration	I detached my self from work-tasks.
<i>After presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		Meeting a sale target impossible (A). I believed that I am not good at this job (B).	angry frustration (C)	Rationalising the facts.

Participant no. 15 (female participant)	<i>The workplace stressor</i>	<i>The reason for its appearance</i>	<i>The emotional consequence</i>	<i>Participants' coping choice</i>
<i>Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>	As a team-leader I was overloaded with tasks and I had problems constantly to manage the team.	I think my position needed in fact two persons instead of one	overwhelmed	I've told my supervisor I need more breaks during a work day
<i>After Before presenting Albert Ellis' ABCD model</i>		Work-overload (A) Thoughts of failure (B)	fear(C)	time management

Table 1 shows the 15 participants' answers to the two exercises before and after the presentation of the Albert Ellis' ABCD model. Analysing their answers, the data show that, in general, training participants had understood the role of ABCD model and had the ability to apply it to their stressful situation at work, thus helping them overcome their negative emotions. Furthermore, after the training programme had finished, there were 30 minutes of discussion with the participants where they were asked if they understood the characteristics of workplace bullying acts and the ABCD model, if they already had applied this model in order to verify their perception on the reason for the appearance of the stressful situation and if they found this model to be useful for their workplace prevalent stressful situation. In general, participants said that now they can recognize better workplace bullying acts and they can separate them from acts of simple conflicts, and a part of them (i.e. four participants) have, in some way or another, applied Albert Ellis' ABCD model but they didn't know the model and they labelled this model as being efficient for understanding stressful situations.

Discussion

The second study evaluated the results of a training programme designed to increase awareness about workplace bullying and to increase participants' own resilience level by implementing Albert Ellis' ABCD model. This model explains that having the ability to separate the objective reason for the appearance of adversity from personal beliefs

about the reason of the appearance of the stressful situation will have a positive impact on their emotions and will increase participants' resilience levels.

Furthermore, taking part in training designed to improve employees' resilience at work has a potential positive impact on their emotional life.

The second study presented only qualitative data extracted from the practical exercises solved during the training. So far there are few studies interested in presenting training programmes and their efficiency (Branch & Murray, 2007). According to Branch and Murray's (2007) literature review, an efficient workplace bullying and resilience building training should not only promote information about workplace bullying and its early manifestations, but also implement different strategies in order to increase employees' workplace resilience.

The present study took into consideration Branch and Murray's (2007) suggestion and tested a workplace bullying and resilience building training programme and managed to suggest that such a training programme is useful for the targeted employees in order to better understand this workplace stressor and to remain productive for the organisation. The results of this study constitute important information for human resources employees by helping them develop more fruitful training programmes in order to build not only more resilient employees but also more resilient organisations.

Limits of the second study

The second study presents some limitations. First, there is a lack of information from participants as to whether they actually implemented the ABCD model in their workplace settings and if it worked for them at an emotional level. Future similar studies should collect additional data from participants at least one month after their participation in the programme. Furthermore, a new assessment of workplace bullying exposure and resilience level should be made at least one month after participation in order to make the results more powerful and helpful for human resources practitioners. Moreover, future training programs should include more than 15 participants in order to compute also quantitative data, more than on time meeting. Training programs designed to collect data in two or more than two distinct moments should be more efficient.

General conclusions from both studies

The present article reports two empirical studies about the relationships among workplace bullying, coping strategies (i.e. focus on and venting of emotions), resilience, and employees' strain.

The first study proposed and tested a multi-mediation model using structural equation modelling with Amos 20. Its results showed resilience worked as personal resources in workplace bullying cases and using the passive coping strategy such as focus on and venting of emotions isn't efficient because it increases employees' mental strain and decreases their resilience levels.

This means that resilience acts like a personal resource in cases of workplace bullying exposure and can partially explain the direct relationship between workplace bullying and employees' mental strain. Moreover, using focus on and venting of emotions is inefficient for those employees experiencing workplace bullying acts because it leads to more mental strain.

It is a known fact that people react differently to the same stressful situation. This is because they have personal coping styles and inner resources that enable them to face

the difficult situation. This was found in the first study, which showed that coping with workplace bullying in a passive way will increase employees' strain. Furthermore, when employees were faced with bullying acts, their resilience level decreased and their strain increased.

These results present important practical implications for human resources practitioners because they point out the importance of coping styles and employees' resilience levels.

In order to increase the scope of its findings, the present article presents a second study reporting the efficiency of a workplace bullying awareness and resilience building training programme. There have been only a few studies interested in and conducting a training programme in order to test its efficiency (Branch & Murray, 2007). This gap is addressed by the second study reporting a training programme designed to increase awareness of what workplace bullying is and how to strengthened employees' resilience levels. The results of the second study complete the results of the first one by explaining how resilience can be improved through some exercises and how these exercises can be easily implemented in real work environments. The analysis of their responses gave at the two different moments during the training sessions demonstrated a good ability to apply the ABCD model to their own stressful work situations. Moreover, when they were asked if they were familiar with the ABCD model, only a few of them (four, only one of whom had actually tried it) were familiar with the model; when they were asked if they will apply the model to future stressful situations at work, they said that they would. Participants evaluated this model as being practical and easy to implement.

Even though the two studies reported in this article have their limits (e.g., the cross-sectional data of the first study limits the ability to make causal inferences; the second study's lack of a third assessment of resilience, and actual ABCD model implementation in real stressful work situations), the results present key implications for human resources practitioners by showing them the important roles of coping strategies and employees' resilience when facing workplace bullying acts. Moreover, the results of the second study

can be the basis of more complex training programmes that can be developed and sustained by human resources practitioners.

Acknowledgement

This paper is supported by the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government under the construct number POSDRU/159/1.5/S/133675.

Received January 10, 2015

Revision received March 20, 2015

Accepted April 2, 2015

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