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MANAGING CYBERBULLYING VICTIMISATION AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS: MODERATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT AND TYPES OF HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

The changing landscape of the teaching and learning environment presents academicians with many new challenges and stressors. Among these stressors, cyberbullying victimisation has emerged as one of the most concerning, rapidly increasing with the proliferation of internet technologies. This trend places a psychological burden on academics and requires the implementation of effective strategies to combat and mitigate the effects of cyberbullying victimisation in higher learning institutions (HLIs). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the multidimensional impact of cyberbullying on the occupational stress of academicians in HLIs and to highlight the moderating role of perceived organisational support (POS) and the types of higher educational institutions. A total of 219 questionnaires from private and public HLIs were collected and analysed. Academicians were sent a link to a set of questionnaires to complete. Structural equation modelling was used to examine the proposed framework. Cyberbullying victimisation significantly influences occupational stress. The types of HLI significantly moderated the relationship between cyberbullying victimisation and occupational stress. The results showed that POS did not moderate the relationship between cyberbullying victimisation and occupational stress. However, POS significantly and directly reduced occupational stress. This study has several implications for theoretical and descriptive studies of cyberbullying victimisation among academicians at HLIs.

Keywords: **Cyberbullying victimisation, occupational stress, academician, POS, HLI.**

INTRODUCTION

With the development of new technology in the service industry, especially in the education sector, academicians have been performing various tasks beyond their capabilities (Karner et al., 2021). Thus, various sources of stress among academicians have been examined in past literature, including class management, time pressure, recognition, workload, work support, and student conflicts (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Kourmousi et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2022). It has been found that the majority of these stressors are work-related (Merida-López, 2022). When technology has been pushed into teaching and learning, studies on academicians' stress related to technology have received widespread attention (Stathopoulou et al., 2019). The transformation of the academicians' profession has resulted in a new set of stressors. Moreover, academics face escalating demand to excel in teaching, research, institutional service, and the ability to adapt to rapidly changing educational technologies (Liu et al., 2024; Marques et al., 2024). In addition to numerous other countries, the drive for global competitiveness and adaptation to international higher education standards is also accelerating this change in Malaysia. Academics are expected to balance conflicting demands in a sometimes resource-constrained context, making these factors even more stressful (Vinez & Hastuti, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Consequently, there is an urgent need for research on the various stressors faced by academicians, particularly in light of the significant transformations occurring in their professional lives (Fitzgerald et al., 2022).

While academics navigate technology-related stressors, they must consider the integration of social media in the workplace and the evolving nature of work itself (Bucher et al., 2013). Technology such as the Internet, learning devices, and social media has received significant attention recently in the education system. The use of social media in educational settings has transformed engagement and the student-lecturer dynamic, sparked debates and led to significant negative outcomes such as stress (Purvis et al., 2020). Despite the many advantages of social media, cyberbullying has quietly become a new stressor in the academic workplace. Lozano-Blasco et al. (2020) claimed that cyberbullying has become one of the most common forms of bullying. Due to the increasing reliance on digital channels for interaction, communication, and teaching, cyberbullying is prevalent in academia. For example, angry emails, negative comments in course evaluations, and even public criticism on social media platforms are commonplace in academia. Despite their apparent casualness, these encounters have the potential to negatively impact academics' mental health and happiness at work. Furthermore, due to the hierarchical and public nature of academia, academics are under greater pressure to control their online reputation, which often increases the risk of cyberbullying. Further research is necessary to have a more profound knowledge of the impact of cyberbullying, given the transformation of working conditions for academicians in higher education (Noakes & Noakes, 2021).

While the literature on how cyberbullying has influenced stress is expanding, less is known about its influence on stress levels among working adults. The overwhelming majority of research currently published has investigated cyberbullying among students or younger generations (Jenaro et al., 2018). For example, Wong and McBride (2018) focused on students aged 11 to 15, Camacho et al. (2023) on adolescents, Balakrishnan (2015) on young adults aged 17 to 30, and Yubero et al. (2017) on university students. Studies on cyberbullying have scarcely been applied to the working context since adults operate in circumstances that are significantly more complex than those of adolescents (Zhang & Leidner, 2018). Academics are particularly at risk of becoming victims of cyberbullying, especially in an environment as formal as academia. While teenagers are primarily affected by cyberbullying when interacting with their peers, academics experience it in a professional environment where power dynamics, organisational politics, and reputational issues play an important role. Conflicts with students, colleagues, or even outsiders, for example, can lead to cyberbullying. These situations all contribute to the unique stress profile that academics encounter. Jenaro et al. (2018) explicitly advocated for more diverse research on cyberbullying and pointed out that environmental, organisational, and personal factors influence its effects.

Jenaro et al. (2018) called for more diverse studies on cyberbullying. However, Noakes and Noakes (2021) specifically noted a scarcity of research on cyberbullying among academic members. The study noted that the

impacts of cyberbullying might vary depending on personal and environmental factors, and previous studies have insufficiently considered the role of the organisation (Jenaro et al., 2018). Thus, this study aims to investigate the multidimensional impact of cyberbullying on occupational stress among academicians at HLIs. Moreover, many moderating variables on understanding bullying and well-being are too narrowly focused (Farley et al., 2023) and the uncertain role of organisational support in the model of stress (Canboy et al., 2023; Farley et al., 2023; Kourmousi et al., 2015). Thus, this study also aims to test the moderating role of perceived organisational support (POS). The differences in how Malaysia's public and private HLIs are operated give the institutions greater or less autonomy in how they plan their strategies and programmes for their employees (Mohammadi & Karupiah, 2019). In light of these differences, this study further examines the role of these types of HLI as a potential mediator.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on cyberbullying and occupational stress, especially in higher education. It also highlights the importance of developing and encouraging resilient organisational frameworks that could reduce the harmful effects of cyberbullying and provide practical ideas for researchers, policymakers, and institutional leaders. This study reconfigures the framework by using Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress to understand the role of POS. Additionally, this study addresses the shortcomings in examining the distinctive operational structure of HLIs in Malaysia. This study provides strategies for HLIs to tailor stress management activities to account for system variations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress has shaped many occupational stress frameworks in past studies. Three major processes structure the model: causal antecedents, mediating processes, and effects that can be either immediate or long-term. The processes can be viewed from the physiological, psychological, and social perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of stress. Although the model appears simple, the complexity of stress leads many researchers to aggressively explore a wide range of variables to represent each process. Researchers frequently encounter challenges in categorising types of stressors, and some treat mediating variables as moderating variables due to time or circumstances.

The types of stressors investigated in previous literature fluctuate with time. Recently, one of the harmful stressors, particularly among academicians, that researchers are unaware of is cyberbullying (Noakes & Noakes, 2021), a phenomenon that has become more well-known. Salazar et al. (2024) claimed that the actual number of academics victimised by cyberbullying may be much higher than reported. This suggests that the frequency of cyberbullying may be overlooked since real incidents frequently go unreported out of embarrassment or fear of the consequences. Cyberbullying is a form of traditional bullying that is distinguished by the use of electronic technological devices like computers and smartphones (Schunk et al., 2022; Wong & McBride, 2018). Antoniadou et al. (2016) defined it as a planned act of aggression utilising information and communication technologies (ICT) performed by a person or group against another powerless person.

Cyberbullying Victimisation

The concept of cyberbullying appears straightforward; nevertheless, advancements in technology have necessitated a refinement and redefinition of its measurement. The earlier studies, such as Smith et al. (2008), focused on measuring cyberbullying through media used to channel specific messages, such as mobile phones and the Internet. Later, researchers have included the element of behaviour (Wong & McBride, 2018) and technical (Barlett, 2023). For instance, researchers have incorporated new dimensions such as anonymity, power dynamics, and repetition beyond the shift from offline to online engagement (Barlett, 2023). In contrast, Salazar et al. (2024) have provided the following examples of cyberbullying, such as "cyberharassment, denigration, flaming, mobbing, cyber-stalking, revenge porn, impersonation, trickery, outing, and exclusion". These types of behaviours have a negative impact on the well-being of the victims, especially in professional contexts like HLIs. In detail, cyberbullying encompasses two parties: the victim and the perpetrator. Numerous studies continue to develop the measurement of cyberbullying that measures both the victim and perpetrator (Wong & McBride, 2018). The study validated analogous dimensions

for both forms of cyberbullying, albeit with varied phrasing. The ongoing debate among researchers over how cyberbullying should be conceptualised (Barlett, 2023) has resulted in inconsistent findings in previous studies (Wong & McBride, 2018). Therefore, this study adopted a multidimensional approach to cyberbullying victimisation that consists of relational, pictorial, verbal, and extortion by Wong and McBride (2018).

In addition to the diverse operational definitions of cyberbullying, limited studies have focused on this concept among adults or young adults. The studies have established a substantial basis for further research on cyberbullying among working adults. For example, Balakrishnan (2015) found that cyberbullying persists beyond school years and that the hours spent online have an association with both cyberbullying victimisation and cyberbullying perpetration among young Malaysian adults. Similarly, Forssell (2016) discovered that men and workers with managerial responsibilities were more exposed to cyberbullying among adults aged 25 to 65 in Sweden. In the context of HLIs, Salazar et al. (2024) examined cyberbullying from the perspective of faculty members. The study found that faculty members experienced cyberbullying from various sources, including peers, administration, staff, students, and external members. In comparison to other industries, HLIs appear to engage a greater number of stakeholders in instances of cyberbullying.

Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is defined by Karner et al. (2021) as the experience of unpleasant emotions resulting from components of the profession. The academic profession is among the most stressful, and its stress levels are rising (Masoom, 2021). Schmiedehaus et al. (2023) have indicated many sources of stress, and the changes in the corporatisation of higher education are also causing faculty members to experience occupational stress. Furthermore, because it negatively affects competitiveness, morale, and productivity, occupational stress has a big impact on organisational performance. Silva and Lopes (2021) indicated that occupational stress is a major problem for organisations because it lowers production and competitiveness.

Hypotheses Development

This study adopted Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model to understand the effects of cyberbullying on occupational stress. The model perceives cyberbullying as a stressor arising from a transaction between an individual and their environment. Cyberbullying is specifically aimed at causing distress to its victims (Antoniadou et al., 2016). Several studies have identified a positive correlation between cyberbullying and psychological distress among working adults (Loh & Snyman, 2020). Similarly, Kee et al. (2024) and Li et al. (2023) found a significant relationship between cyberbullying victimisation and various emotional disorders in the younger generation. Using the transactional model developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), this study investigates cyberbullying as a stressor resulting from interactions between people and their surroundings. To investigate this phenomenon, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H1: Cyberbullying positively influences occupational stress.

Past literature demonstrates that different ideas exist about how POS affects work-related stress (Farley et al., 2023). The varying role of POS in the transactional model of stress arises from the challenges in measuring POS (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which results in a predominant emphasis on personal sources of support over organisational support (Canboy et al., 2023). Since this study focused on working adults, POS was adopted. POS denotes how employees perceive how much their organisation values their work and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS has been identified as an important variable in the study of academic stress in higher education (Masoom, 2021; Wanyama & Eyamu, 2021). Several studies have examined the direct effect of POS on occupational stress (Loi et al., 2014; Masoom, 2021; Son et al., 2022), yielding two significant conclusions. First, the studies have confirmed that POS could decrease the degree of occupational stress (Masoom, 2021; Son et al., 2022). Second, Loi et al. (2014) found an insignificant influence of POS on occupational stress. The following hypothesis emerged from the discussion:

H2: POS negatively influences occupational stress.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress emphasises the mediating process between causal antecedents and effects; subsequent studies have expanded upon this by examining variables that can act as either mediators or moderators in the stress response. For example, Attell et al. (2017) and Canboy et al. (2023) explained that POS serves as a moderator in mitigating the link between stressors and occupational stress. Farley et al. (2023) explained that the transactional model of stress has some limitations when testing a moderating effect. Therefore, a few categories of moderators have been grouped, namely, home demands, personal demands, job demands, social demands, and organisational demands. Djurkovic et al. (2008) and Goi et al. (2024) have found that POS has a significant effect on psychological distress among academicians. Djurkovic et al. (2008) further clarified that the moderation effect is significant on the degree of consensus regarding POS. The moderation effect is insignificant for employees who perceive their organisations as supportive, but vice versa for those who do not perceive their organisations as supportive. Thus,

H3: POS has a moderating effect on the relationship between cyberbullying and occupational stress.

In addition to prioritising academic production as a result of budget cuts caused by economic uncertainty at HLIs, bullying has increased as a direct result of this productivity demand (Hollis, 2015). Hu et al. (2019) examined the relationship between the dimensions of school climate and academic stress, discovering that school climate influences academic stress significantly. The types of HLI have been found to influence differences in occupational stress (Tytherleigh et al.,2005). HLIs in Malaysia can be classified as either public or private. Public HLIs are funded by the government, whereas private HLIs are self-sufficient (Goi et al., 2014; Mohammadi & Karupiah, 2019). Both types of HLIs have their own challenges in providing quality education programmes to the students. Public HLIs in Malaysia, for example, are continuously struggling to maintain the quality of their services with limited resources. On the other hand, the private HLIs in Malaysia, for example, are faced with heavy academic teaching workloads, providing and maintaining quality standards, stiff competition, and limited resources (Anis et al., 2018). Similarly, Mohammadi and Karupiah (2019) found that the quality of work life at Malaysian public and private universities differs in a few important ways. As a result, different organisational contexts may result in different occupational stress among academics. Drawing on the discussions by Hollis (2015), Hu et al. (2019), and Tytherleigh et al. (2005), as well as the distinctions between public and private HLIs in Malaysia, this study hypothesises the following:

H4: Types of HLI have a moderating effect on the relationship between cyberbullying and occupational stress.

Control Variables

According to Ferguson et al. (2015), stress can be influenced by a wide range of circumstances, including intrapersonal, interpersonal, congregational, and community levels. Following the suggestion of Cappe et al. (2021), three control variables, e.g., gender, age, and teaching experience, were tested concerning occupational stress.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design, using an online questionnaire to collect data. An email with the link to the questionnaire was sent. The email addresses were collected through each university's directory. A total of 2000 emails were randomly selected among academicians in public and private universities. Following the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) on informed consent, a cover letter was included with the questionnaire to clarify the study's purpose, the voluntary aspect of participation, and the confidentiality of the data (APA, 2014). For PLS-SEM, the recommended sample size should be more than 100 (Hair et al., 2019). A follow-up email was sent out two months after the initial one. After three weeks with no further responses, the final sample collected amounted to 229. After screening the data for outliers using z-scores, a total of 214 data points were utilised to test the hypothesis. The final sample consisted of academicians from both public and private universities;

Table 1 provides comprehensive demographic data.

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristic		Frequency	Percent
Types of HLI	Public	106	49.5
	Private	108	50.5
Gender	Male	41	19.2
	Female	173	80.8
Age	26 to 30	6	2.8
	31 to 35	38	17.8
	36 to 40	56	26.2
	41 to 45	49	22.9
	46 to 50	36	16.8
	51 to 55	13	6.1
	56 to 60	10	4.7
	Above 61	6	2.8
Experience	Below 1 year	1	0.5
	1 to 5 years	23	10.7
	5 – 10 years	51	23.8
	10 – 15 years	70	32.7
	15 – 20 years	28	13.1
	Above 20 years	41	19.2

The items used to measure the relevant variables are listed in Table 2. Cyberbullying victimisation was measured using Wong and McBride (2018) and consists of 15 items. Despite the lack of validated measures for adults, this study chose the measurement because it has proven effective in Asian populations. This study anticipated the need to eliminate certain items from the analysis. The measurement is validated in four dimensions, namely, relational, pictorial, verbal, and extortion. Following testing, four dimensions and 11 items were retained. A four-item scale for measuring occupational stress was adopted from Ferguson et al. (2015). A five-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "never" and 5 denoting "always," was used to score each item for cyberbullying victimisation and occupational stress. POS measurement was adopted from Canboy et al. (2023), consisting of eight items. After the test, two items were eliminated. Respondents rated on a 5-point Likert scale for all, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Table 2.
Measurement Items

No	Cyberbullying Victimisation (Wong & McBride, 2018)
	Rational
1	Some delete or block you purposefully and ask others to do the same to you.
2	Some put you through “public trial” or “public shaming”.
3	Some isolate or boycott you on the internet.
4	Some blacklisted you.
	Pictorial
5	Some make insulting/unflattering edits to your photos and post them onto the internet.
6	Some make insulting/unflattering videos of you and upload them onto the internet.
7	Some take unflattering videos or photos of you and upload them onto the internet to insult you.
8	Some share insulting/unflattering edited photos of you on the internet.

	Verbal
9	Some write insulting posts to offend you.
10	Some curse or swear at you.
11	Some bombard you with senseless or offending messages.
12	Some send you personal attacks, e.g., abusive remarks about your body type or intelligence.
	Extortion
13	Some make and post unflattering screen captures of you to make fun of/insult you.
14	Some steal or hack into your account.
15	Some post your private photos or conversations onto the internet.
	Occupational Stress (Ferguson et al., 2015)
1	People in the university/college make too many demands on you.
2	You experienced stress as a result of dealing with members who are critical of your work.
3	You felt lonely and isolated in your work.
4	You experienced stress because of the challenges you faced in this university/college.
	POS (Canboy et al., 2023)
1	My university/college cares about my opinion.
2	My university/college cares about my well-being.
3	My university/college strongly considers my goals and values.
4	Help is available from my university/college when I have a problem.
5	My university/college would forgive an honest mistake from my side.
6	If given the opportunity, my university/college would take advantage of me.
7	My university/college shows very little concern for me.
8	My university/college is willing to help me when I need a special favour.

Table 3 illustrates the mean, standard deviation, CR, AVE, and Fornell and Larcker to check the central tendency, reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity of the measurement models. Indeed, all values exceed the required thresholds. Additionally, common method bias was assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF). VIF for each variable were all below the threshold of 3.3 (Relational=1.00; Pictorial=1.00; Verbal=1.00, Extortion=1.00; POS=1.59; OS=1.04).

Table 3.
Descriptive, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	Relational	Pictorial	Verbal	Extortion	POS	OS
Relational	1.17	0.33	0.82	0.61	**0.78**					
Pictorial	1.01	0.06	0.87	0.69	0.30	**0.83**				
Verbal	1.15	0.31	0.83	0.63	0.41	0.34	**0.79**			
Extortion	1.06	0.19	0.76	0.61	0.32	0.49	0.31	**0.78**		
POS	3.19	0.79	0.93	0.69	-0.02	-0.04	-0.15	-0.02	**0.83**	
OS	2.83	0.86	0.89	0.67	0.26	0.15	0.28	0.18	-0.42	**0.82**

Note. POS=Perceived Organisational Support; OS=Occupational Support; Bold figures indicate the square root of the AVE.

RESULTS

The hypotheses of this study were tested using a structural equation model (SEM), and the bootstrapping procedure

was utilised to examine the relationships between variables. Age, years of experience, and gender were tested as control variables. However, these control variables were found to have no significant effects on occupational stress, allowing the focus to remain on the hypothesised relationships. Table 4 shows the path coefficients and significance levels among the various variables. H1 proposed that cyberbullying has a positive relationship with occupational stress. Cyberbullying was found to have a positive effect on occupational stress (β=0.18, t=2.53, $p<0.05$), thus supporting H1. This finding demonstrates that individuals who encounter more cyberbullying are more likely to report higher levels of stress at work. This study highlights the positive effects of workplace cyberbullying on occupational stress.

Hypothesis 2 examined whether POS reduces occupational stress. The direct effect of POS on occupational stress was also significant (β=-0.39, t=6.16, $p<0.05$), supporting H2. POS reduces the effect of occupational stress. This finding indicates that greater POS levels considerably reduce occupational stress, confirming the vital role that organisational support plays in fostering a healthier workplace environment. The higher the POS, the lower the occupational stress among academics. Hypothesis 3 proposed that POS moderates the relationship between cyberbullying and occupational stress. Results show that POS had no significant moderating effect ($p>0.05$), therefore not supporting H3. Although POS directly lowers occupational stress, its ability to prevent cyberbullying may not be as strong.

However, H4 posited that types of HLI have a moderating effect on the relationship between cyberbullying and occupational stress (β=0.26, t=1.99, p=0.05). Thus, supporting H4. Types of HLI were grouped into public and private. The findings suggest that the types of HLI significantly influence the intensity of the relationship between cyberbullying and occupational stress. In particular, compared to employees in public HLIs, those in private HLIs seem to have a stronger effect on the relationship between cyberbullying and occupational stress. The results suggest that academics in specific HLIs exhibit an increased occupational stress reaction to cyberbullying relative to their counterparts.

Table 4.
Structural Model Test Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	SD	t	p	Remark
H1	Cyberbullying -> OS	0.18	0.07	2.53	0.01	Supported
H2	POS -> OS	-0.39	0.06	6.16	0.001	Supported
H3	POS x Cyberbullying -> OS	0.04	0.09	0.44	0.66	No supported
H4	Types of HLIs x Cyberbullying -> OS	0.26	0.13	1.99	0.05	Supported

DISCUSSION

This study reconfigures the framework of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress. This study tests POS as a moderator, considering the inconsistent findings in past literature about its role in mediating stressors and occupational stress, following the suggestions of Attell et al. (2017) and Canboy et al. (2023). This study also examines the multidimensional form of cyberbullying as a contemporary stressor on occupational stress among academicians in HLIs. Additionally, types of HLI are tested as additional moderators due to the unique nature of the operational system in Malaysia. The Human Resource (HR) Department in a public university in Malaysia is generally associated with the Public Service Department, which serves Malaysian citizens. In contrast, the HR department in a private university operates inside a profit-oriented company. Therefore, this study enriches the knowledge by examining the framework within two different working cultures that share similar job characteristics. The findings of this study have three important theoretical implications for understanding occupational stress.

First, POS has been found to directly influence occupational stress, highlighting that workers are better able to handle stress when they believe their organisations are helpful. However, POS does not moderate the relationship

between cyberbullying and occupational stress, implying that although organisational support is useful in lowering overall workplace stress, it might not be able to directly treat stress brought on by interpersonal and personal problems like cyberbullying. Important considerations concerning the limits of POS and its suitability for dealing with workplace digital harassment are brought up by this research. These results are in support of the findings by Canboy et al. (2023), Masoom (2021), and Son et al. (2022), while contradicting the findings presented by Loi et al. (2014). This study further enhances the current body of knowledge by revealing the significant role of POS in reducing occupational stress among academicians. Based on the Transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the discussion of Farley et al. (2023), this study gives useful information about how different variables affect each other. The results align with Lazarus and Folkman (1984), suggesting that a moderator does not influence the relationship between stressors and their effects. However, this finding is discrepant with Farley et al. (2023) and Goi et al. (2024) in terms of views on the role of the moderator. These highlights underscore that those academicians who feel supported by their organisation (mean is larger than the median) tend to experience lower levels of stress (mean below the median). This study, therefore, supports the explanation of Djurkovic et al. (2008) for those academicians who have high POS; POS does not moderate the relationship between cyberbullying and occupational stress. It appears that POS is more relevant to direct work-related stressors and may not extend to intervention for personal issues like cyberbullying (Farley et al., 2023).

Second, the study offers a sophisticated knowledge of how occupational stress in the academic profession is influenced by cyberbullying. This contemporary stressor is becoming more and more common in the digital age. The results contribute to the academic debate regarding the influence of cyberbullying on occupational stress. In alignment with Loh and Snyman (2020), this finding suggests that cyberbullying significantly influences occupational stress. While the majority of researchers (Kee et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023) have examined cyberbullying among the younger generation, this study shows that cyberbullying also significantly influences occupational stress among academics in HLIs. This increased integration of digital platforms into administrative, instructional, and learning activities underscores the significance of cyberbullying as a distinct stressor.

Finally, this study further examined the moderating role of different types of HLI. Types of HLI can moderate the relationship between cyberbullying and occupational stress. This is an interesting finding; the types of HLI can buffer the effects of cyberbullying on occupational stress among academicians. Thus, the results further elucidate the findings of Hu et al. (2019) and Tytherleigh et al. (2005). The results suggest the importance of considering the context of HLIs when developing interventions aimed at reducing the effect of cyberbullying on occupational stress. The remarkable conclusion of the study is that the type of HLI has a moderating effect on the relationship between cyberbullying and work-related stress. According to the results, the institutional environment — public or private — has a major impact on how cyberbullying affects workplace stress. The organisational cultures, structures, and policies of public and private HLIs are different, which could affect how academics view and deal with cyberbullying. Academics in private HLIs face more pronounced occupational stress due to the stronger effects exhibited by these institutions. Given that a one-size-fits-all approach may not work, this conclusion emphasises the importance of tailoring intervention tactics to the unique characteristics of different types of institutions.

The findings of this study have important practical implications for various stakeholders involved in addressing cyberbullying and occupational stress. This empirical study provides insights into how organisations, or specifically the HR department, assist academics in reducing occupational stress. Given that the mean score for cyberbullying (1.10) is far below the median score (3.00), this study concluded that cyberbullying was not an important stressor among academicians in HLIs. Cyberbullying, despite its positive impact on occupational stress, remains a significant factor. With the widespread adoption of social media in teaching and learning, cyberbullying could emerge as a significant contributor to occupational stress. Many HLIs have begun to utilise social media extensively within educational contexts for promotion, teaching, learning, and stakeholder engagement. Cyberbullying should not be underestimated. HLIs are integral to the social system; educating academicians about cyberbullying offers exemplary cases that may prevent them from being victims or perpetrators.

Considering the mean score for occupational stress (2.83) is slightly below the median score (3.00), HLIs may need to design strategies to better support the academics. HLIs must create a working environment where employees feel supported by their organisations. Although this study failed to support the moderating effect of POS, it revealed the mediating role of types of HLIs on the relationship between cyberbullying and occupational stress. Therefore, this study strongly encourages practitioners in both private and public HLIs to adopt unique strategies to enhance POS. A few elements of these differences may relate to organisational culture, organisational structure, and policies on cyberbullying. Following the suggestion of Djurkovic et al. (2008), elevated levels of POS can mitigate the effect of stressors on work outcomes. All HLIs should tailor strategies to address the specific dynamics of cyberbullying within their organisations and customise interventions according to their organisational culture. The findings also emphasise the importance of adapting treatments to the particular dynamics of both public and private HLIs. Both public and private HLIs should concentrate on establishing a robust policy framework that fits the nature of the institutions. The formulated policy addressing cyberbullying should be accessible to all stakeholders through their social media and digital learning platforms. Proactive steps are crucial to combat cyberbullying, such as implementing strong anti-cyberbullying policies, offering guidance on courteous online behaviour, and establishing easily accessible support systems.

CONCLUSION

While this study provides valuable insights, it also opens avenues for future research. First, the research on cyberbullying among academicians and its relationship with occupational stress is less mature compared to other stressors. Future research could further examine a unique measurement of cyberbullying for adults and test its relationship with occupational stress. In the service industry, where academicians directly contact many stakeholders, future research could compare the effects of cyberbullying across different occupations. Comparing the impacts of cyberbullying in other industries could improve knowledge even further. Second, this study found that POS has a direct influence on occupational stress, but did not examine the mediating role that leads to occupational stress as suggested by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Future research could explore other potential antecedents that cause employees to seek organisational support to reduce their stress. Finally, future research should specifically examine the occupational stress in private HLIs due to the profit orientation of these institutions. More research should look at how these characteristics affect occupational stress and how institutional assistance might help reduce it, given the particular difficulties faced by private institutions, such as profit-driven priorities.

The finding of this study contributes to the growing literature on occupational stress by demonstrating the critical importance of cyberbullying as a predictor of occupational stress among academics in higher learning institutions (HLIs). The findings provide insight into a little-known problem that is becoming increasingly important in the digital age by placing cyberbullying in the wider context of workplace pressures. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of types of HLI in reducing stress levels and the need for institutions to foster a supportive organisation. In an increasingly digitised world, HLIs can lead by example by combating cyberbullying and professional stress through such programmes and supporting efforts to create workplaces that value respect and well-being.

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