

# Workplace bullying, psychological distress, and work engagement in the hospitality industry: The moderating effect of self-compassion

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## Abstract

The present study investigates the structural associations between workplace bullying, employee psychological distress, and work engagement within the hospitality setting. It also evaluates the moderating impact of self-compassion on the direct path between workplace bullying and employee psychological distress. Employing a quantitative approach, PLS-SEM has been applied to analyse the data, collected by survey, from full-time employees at 2-star and 3-star hotels in Antalya. The results indicated that workplace bullying significantly predicted psychological distress and deteriorated employee engagement. In addition, there is a significant effect of employees' psychological distress on their engagement. However, employee self-compassion did not significantly moderate the effect of workplace bullying on psychological distress. The study findings add solid and valuable contributions to concerned scholars and hoteliers by illustrating how bullying behavior could impact employees' psychological distress and their work engagement, considering the interaction role of self-compassion on the link between bullying behavior on employees' psychological distress. Limitations and future research are further discussed.

**Keywords:** Workplace bullying; Psychological distress; Work engagement; Self-compassion; Hotels

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## 1. Introduction

One of the main concerns of hotel managers and administrators has been the employment and retention of knowledgeable and qualified staff as well as the maintenance and improvement of their engagement to increase hotel productivity and boost client's satisfaction (Bakker, 2010; Putra *et al.*, 2015; Tsaur *et al.*, 2019; Wang & Tseng, 2019). On the other hand, the nature of work in the hospitality-related sector demands and exerts a lot of pressure on employees to provide the most qualified service to customers (Anasori *et al.*, 2021; Ram, 2018). The hospitality sector has consistently been recognized as being a high-pressure context, in which violent behavior is considered a part of the job (Ram, 2018). The work by Ram (2018) indicated that aggressive and bullying behavior has become a norm in the hospitality industry which has the greatest percentage of recorded instances of bullying and harassment among all sectors. According to a survey conducted by an Australian labour union, namely United Voice, in the hospitality sector, 86% of participants said they felt unsafe at work (Said & Tanova, 2021). This reflects the remarkable increase of this unfavourable phenomenon and calls for research into its causes in order to lessen its hazards and outcomes (Anasori *et al.*, 2020), while also emphasizing the importance of employee welfare and human development for the growth and promotion of the hospitality business (Said & Tanova, 2021). The normalization of bullying creates distress and strain among employees and leads to employees' mental disorders (Anasori *et al.*, 2020). Employees who are bullied also become less engaged at work and are more likely to quit their jobs (Einarsen *et al.*, 2018; Goodboy *et al.*, 2020; Park & Ono, 2017; Paul & Kee, 2020; Rai & Agarwal, 2017). Hence, individual differences cause people to react differently to stressors in the work context (Bayighomog *et al.*, 2021; Tulucu *et al.*, 2022).

Psychological resources have been specifically researched in literature as one of the elements that aid people in overcoming stressors (Dane & Brummel, 2014). Bullying behavior is one of the behavioral disorders which occasionally might be seen in the workplace and often becomes an important and complicated issue for managers and stakeholders, also it can even be a symptom of stress, depression, and anxiety in employees, which needs treatment, but in most cases, managers can reduce or eliminate this issue by quick and timely reaction (Anasori *et al.*, 2022). This variable has a stronger effect on people who have a lack of compassion toward themselves and causes more depression among those. In this vein, self-compassion is seen as a cutting-edge idea and a psychological resource that can help in diminishing people's stress (e.g., Luo *et al.*, 2019). Highly self-compassionate people try to be kind instead of being judgmental about themselves and accept their mistakes (Thimm, 2017). In addition, self-compassion diminishes anxiety and depression levels in individuals (Luo *et al.*, 2019).

Considering the aforementioned discussion, this article seeks to expand the existing literature concerning the interrelated connections between the studied variables (i.e., workplace bullying, psychological distress, work engagement, and self-compassion), particularly within the hospitality context, in various ways. First, this study investigates the impact of workplace bullying on psychological distress. Work-related stressors can cause an individual's mental health to deteriorate, which in turn, diminishes personal achievement. Stress and anxiety are common among hotel employees who work in a demanding workplace (Ram, 2018; Anasori *et al.*, 2020; Anasori *et al.*, 2021). In this regard, Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) argued that few numbers of studies have explored the processes clarifying the procedures of bullying consequences. These include psychological-associated distress in the hospitality area in particular. Second, given that the majority of earlier research was conducted in different contexts (e.g., Einarsen *et al.*, 2018; Park & Ono, 2017), the current article investigates the destructive impact that bullying behaviors and practices have on employee engagement, which has not received enough attention from academics in the hospitality domain in particular. Third, based on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, this study proposes that workplace bullying, as a job demand (van Woerkom *et al.*, 2016) and a possible source of mental distress, could deteriorate employee work engagement. In

this respect, many studies have been conducted to examine the positive and negative effects of various factors on work engagement (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Olugbade & Karatepe, 2019; Park & Ono, 2017), but studies on the impact of workplace violence and bullying on employee engagement are still limited (Einarsen *et al.*, 2018; Paul *et al.*, 2020). Engaged employees are motivated to attract and provide loyal customers for the organization (Young *et al.*, 2018). Constructive effects of employees' engagement on other aspects such as job performance have been shown in the literature (Halbesleben, 2021). Hence, factors that reduce employees' engagement create worries for managers on all levels in the organization. Workplace stressors play a significant role in this aspect (e.g. Stander & Rothmann, 2010). Bullying as a work stressor reduces levels of engagement, performance, and workplace productivity (Einarsen *et al.*, 2018). Research indicates that disengaged employees are less intend to work efficiently, feel committed, or satisfy their managers' or customers' expectations and they have a high turnover intention rate. This represents that disengaged employees are less involved in their work and the probability that they might leave the organization is higher. Disengaged employees might also make it a difficult condition for organizations to maintain their efficiency and productivity work (Anasori *et al.*, 2021). Despite its significance, academic research on employee engagement has been sparse, and little is understood about its causes and effects, especially in the tourism and hospitality domain (e.g., Soliman & Wahba, 2019). Therefore, the current work seeks to explore how worker's engagement could be affected by his psychological distress. Fourth, despite its protective effects in managing stress and anxiety (e.g., Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015; Lahelma *et al.*, 2012), self-compassion, as a personal attribute to alleviate the negative effects of psychological distress as a result of bullying, has not been investigated in earlier studies. In this vein, limited studies have been conducted to examine the role of self-compassion as an effective factor in reducing psychological distress, especially within the hospitality setting. To be more specific, little attention has been paid to evaluating the interaction role of self-compassion on the direct connection between workplace bullying and employee psychological distress among employees working at hotels. Investigating how self-compassion could reduce the negative outcomes of bullying behavior is of significant importance. Since people's personality traits or self-compassion have an effect on their reaction to aggression and hostility they receive from others, it is extremely important to test which personality traits help people respond to the abnormal behavior of others (Anasori *et al.*, 2022; Rai & Agarwal, 2017).

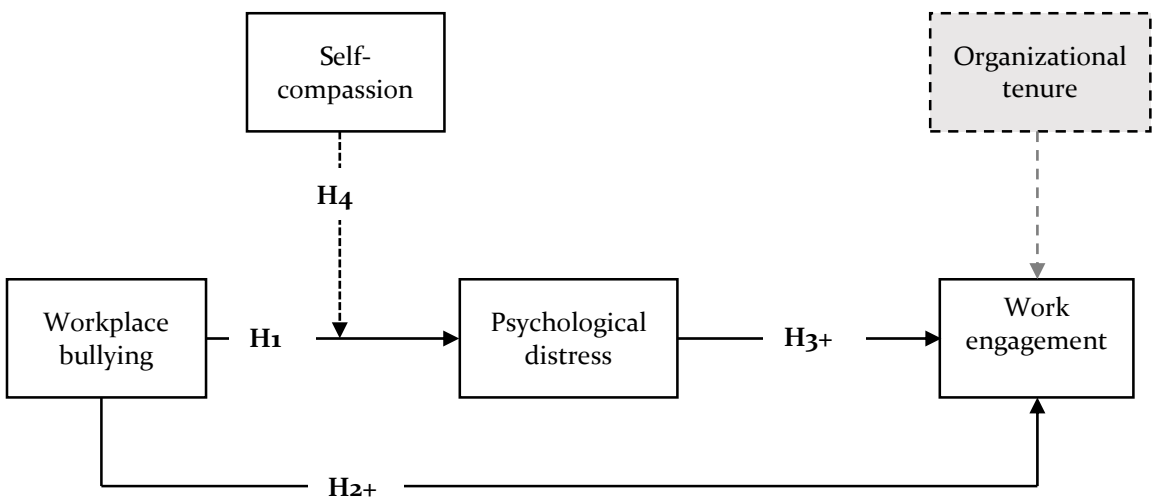
Consequently, the mains questions of the current study are: what are the major repercussions of bullying at work in the hotel industry? and could self-compassion lessen the psychological distress that bullying causes at work? Therefore, this empirical research is to (a) test the effect of workplace bullying on employees' psychological distress and engagement in hotels, (b) examine the influence of psychological distress on the engagement of hotels' employees, and (c) evaluate the moderating impact of self-compassion on the link between workplace bullying and psychological distress. By doing so, the current study provides a noteworthy contribution to the extant literature on human resources in general and workplace bullying in particular within the hospitality industry by investigating the major outcomes of workplace bullying at work.

Concerning the paper structure, the next section demonstrates the literature review and hypotheses. The third section illustrates research methods, while the fourth section depicts the research findings. Discussion of findings and implications are outlined in the fifth section, whereas limitations and future research directions are given in the last section.

## **2. Theoretical background and hypotheses**

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory postulates that individuals work to preserve their current resources (conservation) and achieve new ones (acquisition). Resources can be mental, emotional, or physical and staff can exploit these to overcome harsh conditions (Hobfoll, 2001). Furthermore, stress

will arise as a result of loss of resources or inability to gain extra resources to deal with stress (Hobfoll, 1989). This is also true for bullied employees who need to protect their resources in the face of violent behaviors. However, those who possess fewer resources are more prone to the adverse effects of bullying behaviors on their mental health. In addition, the research model is depending upon the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti 2007), indicating that stress is typical when job demands are high and job resources are low. Thus, this model has been used widely to study work-related engagement (e.g., Inoue *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, the current work utilized the Lazarus Theory for constructing the relationships among the studied variables. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), “psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19). When bullying as a work stressor exceeds employee psychological resources anxiety, depression, and distress will arise.



**Figure 1.** *The hypothesized framework*

The theoretical hypothesized model of the current work is presented in Figure 1. It is hypothesized that workplace bullying has a significant influence on both psychological distress (H1) and work engagement (H2). In addition, psychological distress has a significant link with work engagement (H3). Moreover, it is postulated that self-compassion moderates the association between workplace bullying and psychological distress (H4).

### *2.1. Workplace bullying and psychological distress*

Bullying at work has the potential to have negative consequences, including individual psychological distress and intentions to leave (e.g., Tsuno *et al.*, 2018). Previous studies also concluded that raising the level of job stressors in the workplace, caused by bullying-link behavior, leads to high levels of psychological distress (Bayighomog *et al.*, 2021; Park & Min, 2020; Tulucu *et al.*, 2022). In addition, a systematic review conducted by Samsudin *et al.* (2018) has shown that bullying behaviors could increase burnout levels and mental distresses in employees. According to Einarsen and Nielsen (2015), workplace bullying also creates chronic health issues for people who are exposed to it.

The connection between workplace bullying and psychological distress has been investigated in prior studies. According to Tsuno *et al.* (2018), after adjusting for individual experiences of workplace

bullying, division-level bullying was linked to higher levels of individual psychological distress. Moreover, to get a deeper comprehension of this phenomenon of employee psychological distress in the hospitality industry, Anasori *et al.* (2020) conducted a study on 252 hotel employees and revealed that those who experienced bullying at work had a higher level of psychological distress and emotional exhaustion. Similar results have been claimed by Bardakçı and Günüşen (2016). Although there are several studies to test the effect of workplace bullying on employees' mental health, however, most of them have been conducted in the healthcare setting in particular (e.g., Allen *et al.*, 2015), leading to the need to further explore the possible outcomes of bullying (e.g., stress) in the tourism and hospitality setting. Based on the abovementioned discussion, the current work suggests that being exposed to workplace bullying increases the probability of psychological distress. As a result, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H1. Workplace bullying has a positive impact on psychological distress among hotel employees*

### *2.2. Workplace bullying and work engagement*

Work engagement is a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, p. 74). Employees that are engaged and dedicated are more likely to commit, work hard, and support the organization's goals and objectives as well as increase its productivity and performance effectiveness (e.g., Soliman & Wahba, 2019). On the other hand, a bullied person is a psychologically distressed employee and this would damage their engagement as a result of energy depletion. In their study, Einarsen *et al.* (2018) mentioned that there are two kinds of job demands: challenge demands and hindrance demands. Challenge demands affect work engagement by creating reinforcement, personal growth, and encouragement for employees. However, hindrance demands block personal growth and the feeling of accomplishment, since they create negative emotions such as fear and anxiety in individuals. They assign bullying as a hindrance demand as it creates psychological strain for employees and affects one's work engagement.

Prior studies have explored the link between bullying and work engagement. For instance, Park and Ono (2017) tried to define the relationship between bullying and work engagement through the COR theory and the job demands-resources (JD-R) model. In addition, Rai and Agarwal (2017) found that workplace bullying is directly related to work engagement in their research among 835 full-time administrative personnel who were working in manufacturing and service organizations. A similar finding was also confirmed by another study by Goodboy *et al.* (2020) through the self-determination theory, demonstrating that workplace bullying significantly decreased engagement among a sample of 243 full-time employees. Furthermore, the mediating effect of work engagement between workplace bullying and turnover intention was also evaluated by Coetzee and Vandyk (2018) who indicated that both organizational and person-related bullying were related to lower vigour and dedication, which is subsequently linked to high turnover intention. Based on the above literature, the second hypothesis is developed:

*H2. Workplace bullying has a negative impact on work engagement among hotel employees*

### *2.3. Psychological distress and work engagement*

According to Kessler *et al.* (2002), psychological distress is featured by three symptoms (i.e., depression, anxiety, and anger). The relationship between psychological distress and employee engagement has been investigated by prior research. For instance, Basta *et al.*, (2008), found that highly engaged workers in services had significantly lower rates of depression than their less engaged peers. In addition, recent studies in the hospitality domain signify that hindrance stressors deteriorate employee engagement (e.g. Karatepe *et al.*, 2020). Among the various forms of work stressors, Park and Min (2020) proposed

that job stressors provoke deleterious reactions related to job distress and also deteriorate employee engagement. Within the hospital employee work engagement, workplace stressors load targeted workers with a significant and vicious emotional effect (Gómez-Salgado *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, it threatens employees' mental health which is critical to work engagement. Distressed employees are less engaged because their feeling of emotional strain contributes to their emotional exhaustion toward their organization (Anasori *et al.*, 2021). They consequently feel less inspired in their work and detach from employing high energies because they themselves feel detached from the organization. The aforementioned discussion prompts the following hypothesis:

*H3. Psychological distress has a negative impact on work engagement among hotel employees*

#### *2.4. The moderating role of self-compassion*

Self-compassion can be described as the ability to be compassionate with oneself when faced with difficulties and setbacks (Neff & Vonk, 2009; Tran *et al.*, 2022). Self-compassion, which originates from Buddhism, has three main elements which are mindfulness, self-kindness, and common humanity (Neff, 2003). Mindfulness is awareness of people's own thoughts and emotions and being in the present moment; self-kindness is being kind and compassionate to ourselves in dealing with our mistakes; and common humanity is accepting failure as a part of human life (Neff and Dahm, 2015). Self-compassion is a novel psychological subject to protect individuals in times of adversity (Thimm, 2017).

Prior studies have emphasized the role of personality factors and psychological characteristics and resources (e.g., self-compassion) in overcoming personal and work stress (Chi *et al.*, 2016; van Heugten *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, recent studies emphasize the protective role of self-compassion in people's distress and anxiety (Marsh *et al.*, 2018). According to the study by Marsh *et al.* (2018) among adolescents, it was shown that self-compassion plays a major role in adolescents coping with stress. Also, the study by Thimm (2017) tested self-compassion factors in early maladaptive schemas among undergraduate students. In contrast to exaggerating or suppressing one's shortcomings and personal pain, self-compassion encourages favourable feelings, diminishes negative ones, and improves psychological well-being (e.g., Tran *et al.*, 2022). Indeed, this could eventually lead to diminishing psychological distress of employees. In the present research, it is assumed that self-compassion is a crucial factor in helping individuals to deal with stressors in the workplace and abates employees' psychological distress caused by bullying behavior. As work stresses in time become chronic, they create exhaustion for everyone since they affect the soul and body simultaneously. Unfortunately, enduring such stress for a long time becomes normal. One might not be able to avoid the pressures that ascend during work (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015). However, there are ways to manage the stresses that occur in the workplace. In this article, we discuss the causes of occupational stress and the importance of managing and treating stress in the workplace. As self-compassion affects one's happiness and stress level, people with high self-compassion are able to handle difficult situations coming their way since they see harsh situations as a challenge. However, people with low self-compassion do not trust their ability to tackle difficult situations; they lose their psychological resources in that case and become distressed. Then, the stressful working environment exerts a more harmful effect on people with low self-compassion (Marsh *et al.*, 2018; Thimm *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is formulated:

*H4. Self-compassion negatively moderates the impact of workplace bullying on psychological distress*

#### *2.5. Organizational tenure*

Organizational tenure has been used as a stand-in for work experience or the degree of knowledge pertaining to a position in previous research (Sturman, 2003). However, according to Ng and Feldman (2011), the period of time a person has worked for an enterprise is referred to as organizational tenure.

Prior studies demonstrated that organizational tenure has different outcomes. For instance, the research by Ng and Feldman (2010) indicated that employees with a longer tenure tend to perform better in their roles and exhibit better citizenship. It is intriguing that several unproductive activities were also positively correlated with organizational tenure (e.g., aggressive behavior and non-sickness absence). The claim made by Peter and Hull (1969) is that there is no direct correlation between organizational tenure and employee performance in organizations. They advocate for moving employees up organizational hierarchies until they reach roles for which they are unqualified and are no longer eligible for the promotion. Organizations are left with a high number of long-serving workers in roles that they are unable to fulfil. Depending on this argument, the current paper seeks to investigate the role of organizational tenure as a control variable on employees' engagement toward work.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1. Sample and procedures*

Data for the present study were collected from employees working at two-star and three-star hotels in Antalya, Turkey. The sample consisted of full-time employees, such as receptionists and housekeepers. Regarding sampling techniques, the current work employed convenience sampling and purposive sampling, as non-probability sampling methods, due to the nature of the population in the current article. These techniques are common and widely used in tourism and hospitality research (e.g., Mekawy *et al.*, 2022; Soliman *et al.*, 2021b). A self-administrated questionnaire was used to gather the data from the potential respondents. The survey was initially drafted in English and then translated into Turkish using the translation and back translation procedure (McGorry, 2000). The final form of the questionnaire was distributed among respondents in sealable covers with a cover letter to inform the respondents that their contribution is voluntary and their responses will be solely utilized for research purposes, confidentially and anonymously. The employees were contacted during their free time (during lunchtime or after working hours) when permission has been obtained from the general managers of the hotel. In September 2021, 225 responses were gathered and considered valid for further analysis.

#### *3.2. Measurements*

The conceptual framework of the current work (Figure 1) involves four latent variables which are reflectively measured. Each variable was measured by a multi-item scale adapted from relevant existing literature and prior studies to fit the context of this research article. A total of 53 items were used to measure the four variables (see Appendix 1). The 22-item Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised was obtained from (NAQ-R) (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009) to measure workplace bullying. The ten-item Hopkins Symptoms Checklist (HSCL-10) adopted from Kleppang and Hagquist (2016) was used to test employee psychological distress. Self-compassion was assessed using 12 items adopted from Neff (2003). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 (UWES-9) from (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2003) was adopted to evaluate work engagement.

#### *3.3. Data analysis process*

Using the SPSS 26 software, the sample profile and common method variance (CMV) were first assessed. Data were then analysed and research hypotheses were tested employing the PLS-SEM technique using WarpPLS 8.0 software (Kock, 2022). PLS-SEM is used since it is regarded as one of the most effective analytical approaches for extending current structural theory. In addition, it is a suitable technique for complex structural models with direct and indirect paths between constructs and related items (Hair *et al.*, 2020; Manley *et al.*, 2020). This method is also widely used in tourism and hospitality research (e.g., Anasori *et al.*, 2021; Hassan, & Soliman, 2021; Soliman *et al.*, 2021a; Soliman *et al.* 2021b; Tsaousoglou *et al.*, 2022). PLS-SEM involves evaluating both the measurement model and the structural model (Hair *et al.*, 2020; Kock, 2022).

## 4. Research findings

### 4.1. Sample profile

The characteristics of respondents' profiles are shown in Table 1. Among the 225 participants, 113 were female and 112 were male; 69.8% were unmarried, 45.8% had completed secondary school, 40.9 percent had completed university, and 44.4 percent were between the ages of 28 and 37. Regarding organizational tenure, 48% of them had three to six years.

**Table 1.** *Sample profile*

Features	Category	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	112	49.8
	Female	113	50.2
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	68	30.2
	Unmarried	157	69.8
<b>Education level</b>	Secondary school	23	10.2
	Above secondary school	103	45.8
	Bachelor degree	92	40.9
	Graduated school	7	3.1
<b>Age</b>	18–27	73	32.4
	28–37	100	44.4
	38–47	48	21.3
	48–57	2	0.9
	58–67	2	0.9
<b>Organizational tenure</b>	2 or less	33	14.7
	3 to 6	108	48.0
	7 to 10	34	15.1
	10 or more	50	22.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>225</b>	<b>100</b>

### 4.2. Common method variance (CMV)

Two methods were used to determine CMV. To begin, Harman's single-factor technique was used, and the findings revealed that a single component explained 30.57 percent of the overall variance (less than 50 percent). Consequently, CMV is not an issue for our study (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In addition, we investigated CMV using full collinearity VIFs. Table 2 shows that the VIFs values were less than 3.3, indicating that CMV and multi-collinearity were not present (Kock, 2022).

### 4.3. Assessing the measurement model

According to some authors (e.g., Kock, 2022; Manley *et al.*, 2020), in order to establish the measurement model's reliability and validity, certain measures have to be assessed. These involve indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. First, indicator reliability was established since the majority of item loadings (Table 2) are greater than 0.70 (Manley *et al.*, 2020), with the exception of some indicators with values ranging from 0.40 to 0.70, which were all kept because the composite reliability (CR) and average variance-extracted (AVE) values were both higher than the suggested thresholds of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively. Second, all latent constructs have CR and Cronbach's alpha values over 0.70, demonstrating the reliability of internal consistency. Third, the AVE values, provided in Table 2, are higher than 0.50, proving convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2020; Kock, 2022).



**Table 2. Construct reliability and convergent validity**

Construct/ indicators	IL	CR	Cronbach's $\alpha$	AVE	VIF
<b>Workplace Bullying (BUL)</b>		0.964	0.960	0.556	1.238
BUL1	(0.551)				
BUL2	(0.752)				
BUL3	(0.795)				
BUL4	(0.825)				
BUL5	(0.783)				
BUL6	(0.873)				
BUL7	(0.549)				
BUL8	(0.769)				
BUL9	(0.681)				
BUL10	(0.762)				
BUL11	(0.567)				
BUL12	(0.832)				
BUL13	(0.803)				
BUL14	(0.799)				
BUL15	(0.852)				
BUL16	(0.695)				
BUL17	(0.871)				
BUL18	(0.748)				
BUL19	(0.882)				
BUL20	(0.770)				
BUL21	(0.479)				
BUL22	(0.561)				
<b>Psychological Distress (PD)</b>		0.925	0.908	0.555	1.278
PD1	(0.590)				
PD2	(0.735)				
PD3	(0.695)				
PD4	(0.816)				
PD5	(0.797)				
PD6	(0.846)				
PD7	(0.758)				
PD8	(0.877)				
PD9	(0.669)				
PD10	(0.607)				
<b>Self-compassion (COM)</b>		0.973	0.970	0.752	1.310
COM1	(0.804)				
COM2	(0.828)				
COM3	(0.834)				
COM4	(0.863)				
COM5	(0.893)				
COM6	(0.867)				
COM7	(0.877)				
COM8	(0.887)				
COM9	(0.917)				
COM10	(0.881)				
COM11	(0.873)				
COM12	(0.878)				
<b>Work engagement (EN)</b>		0.969	0.964	0.778	1.133
EN1	(0.815)				
EN2	(0.925)				
EN3	(0.912)				
EN4	(0.864)				
EN5	(0.901)				
EN6	(0.896)				
EN7	(0.900)				
EN8	(0.838)				
EN9	(0.881)				

Note: IL = Indicator Loadings; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted

Fourth, to establish discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker (1981) and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio were used, since they are amongst the most widely used approaches in the area (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). This research also uses the most recent criterion, HTMT<sub>2</sub> ratios, which is a key feature of WarpPLS 8.0 (Kock, 2022). With respect to Fornell and Larcker's (1981) approach, it is clear that the square root of each variable AVE is greater than its linkages to other variables (Table 3). Furthermore, as HTMT ratios for all latent variables are less than 0.85, the more cautious threshold of 0.85 (HTMT<sub>0.85</sub>) was confirmed. In the same way, all HTMT<sub>2</sub> ratios are less than 0.85. The above findings strongly support discriminant validity.

**Table 3.** *Discriminant validity*

Fornell and Larcker (1981)				
Variables	BUL	PD	COM	EN
BUL	(0.746)			
PD	0.397	(0.745)		
COM	-0.227	-0.282	(0.867)	
EN	-0.215	-0.191	0.299	(0.882)
HTMT ratios				
Variables	BUL	PD	COM	EN
BUL				
PD	0.431			
COM	0.239	0.295		
EN	0.229	0.204	0.309	
HTMT <sub>2</sub> ratios				
Variables	BUL	PD	COM	EN
BUL				
PD	0.382			
COM	0.184	0.275		
EN	0.221	0.169	0.304	

#### 4.4. Control variable

As a control variable, the influence of organizational tenure was investigated. There was no significant relationship between organizational tenure and work engagement ( $\beta = 0.026$ ,  $p = 0.345$ ). As a result, organizational tenure had no effect on the participants' responses.

#### 4.5. Structural model

The current paper's structural model and hypotheses were tested using some measures involving path coefficient ( $\beta$ ),  $p$ -value or significance of  $\beta$ , and  $R^2$  (e.g., Hair *et al.*, 2020; Manley *et al.*, 2020). According to the empirical findings reported in Table 4, workplace bullying appears to have a positive and significant impact on psychological distress ( $\beta = 0.398$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The first hypothesis is thus supported by this finding. In addition, it is revealed that workplace bullying has a negative and significant impact on work engagement ( $\beta = -0.163$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This finding consequently confirms the second hypothesis. Furthermore, the results indicated that work engagement is negatively and significantly influenced by psychological distress ( $\beta = -0.122$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

The structural model's findings yielded  $R^2$  values of 0.16 for PD and 0.06 for WE as endogenous variables, demonstrating that the inner model had proper explanatory power (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 4.** Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Path coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value	Accepted?
<b>Direct path</b>			
H1: BUL → PD	0.398	< 0.001	Yes
H2: BUL → EN	-0.163	< 0.01	Yes
H3: PD → EN	-0.122	< 0.05	Yes
<b>Moderation impact</b>			
H4: BUL×COM → PD	0.028	0.339	No

#### 4.6. Moderation analysis

One of the purposes of this study is to evaluate whether self-compassion could help moderate the direct link between workplace bullying (an independent construct) and psychological distress (a dependent construct). The path coefficients of the self-compassion influence on workplace bullying → psychological distress was non-significant ( $\beta = 0.028$ ;  $p = 0.339$ ), as shown in Table 4. As a result, the fourth hypothesis is rejected.

### 5. Discussion and implications

The present study sought to empirically test the structural connections between three constructs, namely workplace bullying, psychological distress, and work engagement, considering the interaction role of self-compassion among hotel employees. The empirical results of this article do produce various theoretical and managerial contributions in various ways.

The findings indicated that workplace bullying has a significant and positive impact on psychological distress. The higher bullying at work, the greater levels of employees' psychological distress. This finding is in line with previous studies which examined the effect of stressors on employees' mental health (e.g., Bayighomog *et al.*, 2021; Tulucu *et al.*, 2022) and the work by Samsudin *et al.*, (2018), demonstrating that bullying behaviors created distress such as burnout and mental strain in individuals. Theoretically, the current work adds to the theory by expanding the knowledge and supporting the results of existing studies on the JD-R theory. In addition, this study's findings also extend the current research examining the effect of bullying on employees' psychological distress (e.g., Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015; Giorgi *et al.*, 2016), especially within the hospitality setting. In addition, it is revealed that work engagement could be negatively and significantly affected by workplace bullying. This result confirmed the hypothesis that workplace bullying causes employee work-linked engagement to deteriorate. The decline or loss of psychological integrity threatens employee engagement. This result also supports the existing literature illustrating that workplace bullying as a hindrance stressor is a threat to individuals' mental health which subsequently leads to employee disengagement (Park *et al.*, 2017; Coetzee & Vandyk, 2018). Moreover, the findings of this paper revealed that psychological distress had a negative and significant impact on work engagement. This finding supports the results provided by prior studies such as Karatepe *et al.* (2020), Park and Min (2020), and Anasori *et al.* (2021) depicting that high levels of employee stress could lead to low levels of his/her engagement in work. Based on COR theory, the results suggest that an employee suffering from bullying at work suffers from mental integrity pressures, which leads to psychological distress. As a result, the aforementioned results contribute to the COR theory, demonstrating that when employees lack sufficient resources, they feel desperate and disengaged from work (Hobfoll, 2001). In addition, it can be argued that the current paper is considered one of the limited attempts that have been conducted to develop an integrated theoretical model assessing the structural paths between workplace bullying, psychological distress, and work engagement, especially in the hospitality setting.

Further, the alleviating effect of self-compassion on psychological distress created by bullying has been explored. It is proposed that self-compassion will decrease psychological distress created by bullying behavior. Based on previous studies, highly self-compassionate people are kinder to themselves instead of being judgmental about their mistakes (Thimm, 2017). However, this hypothesis was not supported. Specifically, self-compassion did not significantly mitigate the detrimental effect of bullying on employees' mental health. These outcomes did not verify the results of previous studies (e.g., Chi *et al.*, 2016; Marsh *et al.*, 2018; Thimm, 2017; van Heugten *et al.*, 2012) which found that self-compassion is an influential factor in response to stress. In fact, it is an unexpected finding, however, we can argue that this result might be found due to the nature of the respondents and the context of this paper. In other words, it might be self-compassion at two-star and three-star hotels is not a focal area and priority of employees working at such categories of hotels compared to employees working in different sectors and between different groups, as revealed by the prior studies. Another justification for this finding might be argued by hotel employees' perceptions of the ineffectiveness of their self-compassion in reducing the psychological anguish brought on by bullying at those establishments. In sum, investigating the moderating role of self-compassion on the direct path between workplace bullying and psychological distress presents a theoretical contribution to the body of knowledge on human resources management in tourism and hospitality research considering the few studies examining such a relationship in the hotel sector.

Furthermore, the findings of the current work provide valuable managerial implications and practical-related guidelines for policymakers, hotel managers, and administrators. To begin with, the present study signifies the critical role of workplace stressors (e.g., bullying at work) in affecting employees' mental health and their efficiency and engagement with work. As a result, human resources administrators and hoteliers require to adopt intervention strategies to deal with bullying behaviors in the work environment. They need to formulate and implement preventive strategies to tackle incidences of bullying behaviors. To do so, practitioners need to educate employees about this issue and its consequences. This can be achieved by conducting awareness sessions and face-to-face meetings between managers and employees at different levels. Then, anti-bullying policies such as bullying whistleblowing should be implemented in organizations, to reassure employees that they can fearlessly report these kinds of behaviors. Finally, hotel industry executives need to implement policies to promote a friendly work environment that mitigates abusive behaviors. In line with the COR theory, practitioners need to provide a safe environment for employees and train them to develop personal resources.

## **6. Study limitations and future research**

Directions and suggestions for upcoming research are provided based on a number of the present work's limitations. First, future research may consider implementing a longitudinal research plan for similar research subjects or topics, since the current study applied a cross-sectional design which might produce common method bias. Moreover, a mixed-method approach could be applied to further research to provide in-depth insights into the interrelated associations between the investigated variables. Second, scholars are recommended to conduct and examine a similar research model within the hospitality sector in other geographical regions, along with different accommodation types. This could help gain a more holistic view of the whole industry and develop the existing literature on such subjects in the tourism and hospitality context. In addition, a cross-country study and multi-group analysis are recommended for future research. Third, it is suggested to extend the current research model by incorporating other psychological resources to clearly explain the main determinants that might decrease the effect of bullying on employees in the work environment. Since the sample of this paper consisted of hotel employees who are dealing with workplace violence such as bullying and the hospitality context is a stressful environment, in which always providing quality services to customers

is a priority (Ram, 2018), just being self-compassionate toward oneself seems not to adequately efficient. The question of what factors play the role of self-compassion in reducing its effect on stress can be explored in future research, which will be mentioned in that section.

**Appendix 1. Measurement scale**

Construct and source	Items	
Workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009)	BUL1 BUL2 BUL3 BUL4  BUL5 BUL6 BUL7  BUL8 BUL9  BUL10 BUL11 BUL12 BUL13 BUL14 BUL15 BUL16 BUL17 BUL18 BUL19  BUL20 BUL21 BUL22	Someone withholding information, which affects your performance. Humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your Work. Ordered to work below competence Having key areas of responsibilities removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks Spreading of gossip and rumours about you Being ignored or excluded Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes, or private life Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger Intimidating behavior such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way Hints from others that you should quit Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach Persistent criticism of your work Having your opinions and views ignored Practical jokes carried out by people you do not <i>get along</i> with Being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines Having allegations or accusations made against you Excessive monitoring of work Pressure not to use earned job benefits (e.g., sick leave, vacation time, travel expenses) Being the subject of excessive teasing and Sarcasm Unmanageable workload Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse
Self-compassion (Neff, 2003)	COM1 COM2 COM3 COM4 COM5 COM6 COM7 COM8 COM9 COM10 COM11 COM12	When I fail at something that's important to me I tend to feel alone in my failure. When I think about my inadequacies it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world. When I'm feeling down I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am. When I'm really struggling I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it. When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance. When I'm feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness. When something painful happens, I try to take a balanced view of the situation. When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective. When something upsets me, I get carried away with my feelings. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong. When something painful happens, I tend to blow the incident out of proportion. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.

Construct and source	Items	
Work engagement (Schaufeli <i>et al.</i> , 2003)	EN1 EN2 EN3 EN4 EN5 EN6 EN7 EN8 EN9	At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous. I am enthusiastic about my job. My job inspires me. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work. I feel happy when I am working intensely. I am proud of the work that I do. I am immersed in my work. I get carried away when I'm working.
Psychological distress (Kleppang & Hagquist, 2016)	PD1 PD2 PD3 PD4 PD5 PD6 PD7 PD8 PD9 PD10	Suddenly scared for no reason. Feeling fearful. Faintness, dizziness, or weakness. Feeling tense or keyed up. Blaming yourself for things. Difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep. Feeling blue. Feeling of worthlessness. Feeling everything is an effort. Feeling hopeless about future.

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