

Workplace bullying and employee silence

A moderated mediation model of psychological contract violation and workplace friendship

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of workplace bullying on employee silence (defensive, relational, and ineffectual silence), and to test the mediating role of psychological contract violation (PCV) in this relationship and the extent to which the mediation is moderated by workplace friendship.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 835 full-time Indian managerial employees working in different Indian organizations.

Findings – Results revealed that workplace bullying positively correlated with silence (defensive, relational, and ineffectual silence). The hypothesized moderated mediation condition was supported as results suggest that PCV mediated the bullying-silence relationship and workplace friendship moderated this mediating pathway, i.e. indirect effects of workplace bullying on employee silence via PCV were weaker for employees with high workplace friendship.

Research limitations/implications – A cross-sectional design, use of self-reported questionnaires, and gender-blind perspective to examine bullying are few limitations of this study.

Practical implications – This is the first study examining employee silence in response to workplace bullying and one of the few attempts to examine employees' passive coping strategies in response to workplace mistreatment. This study is also one of the rare attempts to examine bullying-outcomes relationship in the Indian context.

Social implications – A well-formulated and effectively implemented anti-bullying policy and management support may encourage employees to combat bullying by raising their voices against it.

Originality/value – This is the first study examining employee silence in response to workplace bullying. This study is also one of the rare attempts to examine bullying-outcomes relationship in the Indian context.

Keywords Quantitative, Workplace bullying, Workplace friendship, Psychological contract violation, Defensive silence, relational silence, ineffectual silence

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Workplace bullying – a form of interpersonal mistreatment – is defined as a situation in which an employee feels constantly and persistently subjected to negative behaviors at the hands of others in the workplace (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011), typically by those in supervisory positions (D'Cruz and Rayner, 2013; Lutgen-Sandvik *et al.*, 2007). Research over the past two and half decades has shown that workplace bullying is related to a host of negative workplace attitudes and behaviors (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012). Conventionally, the extant literature on interpersonal mistreatment (Cole *et al.*, 2016; Hershcovis, 2011; Tepper and Henle, 2011) has examined three ways in which employees respond to mistreatment at work – by withholding discretionary behaviors (e.g. reduced workplace engagement, creativity, and citizenship behaviors, Einarsen *et al.*, 2016; Lee *et al.*, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2012; Park and Ono, 2016; Trépanier *et al.*, 2015); by depicting dissatisfying behaviors and attitudes (e.g. job dissatisfaction, increased intention to quit; Giorgi *et al.*, 2015; Glasø *et al.*, 2011; Glambek *et al.*, 2014; Houshmand *et al.*, 2012; Tepper *et al.*, 2009); and by engaging in revenge and retaliatory behaviors (e.g. increased workplace deviance and neglect; Kwan *et al.*, 2016; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Peng *et al.*, 2016). Recently, scholars have begun to examine the passive



coping strategies of employees in response to mistreatment at work (e.g. silence and feedback avoidance; Kiewitz *et al.*, 2002; Whitman *et al.*, 2014; Xu *et al.*, 2015).

Employee silence, defined as an employee intentionally withholding ideas, information, concerns, and opinions about issues related to their job and the organization (Brinsfield, 2013; Dyne *et al.*, 2003), is one of the most significant passive responses that employees display in the face of mistreatment at work (Xu *et al.*, 2015). Unfortunately, there is so far only limited knowledge on the relationship between workplace bullying and employee silence (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003; Rai and Agarwal, 2017a). The present study aims to fill this gap in the research by examining the bullying-silence relationship. Building on the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we postulate that workplace bullying triggers a process of resource loss, and employees are likely to opt to remain silent in order to protect and conserve their remaining resources.

A major oversight in the extant literature on bullying is its limited focus on the underlying and intervening mechanisms involved in the bullying-outcomes relationship (Park and Ono, 2016; Tuckey and Neall, 2014). Researchers widely recognize that individuals tend to have emotional responses to events occurring within the organizational setting (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Unfavorable workplace episodes are in particular known to engender strong negative feelings (Rozin and Royzman, 2001) that, in turn, adversely influence attitudes and behaviors in relation to work (Kiefer, 2005; Cole *et al.*, 2008; Elfenbein, 2007; Kiefer, 2005). The extant literature on bullying suggests that affective states are central underlying mechanisms in the bullying-outcomes relationship (Glasø *et al.*, 2010; Glasø and Notelaers, 2012). One such significant affective state is psychological contract violation (PCV), a well-established mediator between negative workplace situations and important employee outcomes (Callea *et al.*, 2016; Kernan *et al.*, 2016; Restubog *et al.*, 2013; Tekleab *et al.*, 2005) that has recently gained attention in the literature on bullying (Rai and Agarwal, 2017a; Salin and Notelaers, 2017). In order to build on this line of research, the present study aims to examine the bullying-silence relationship with PCV as a mediator.

An emerging body of research suggests that employees' reactions to workplace situations may vary depending on the availability of resources to them (Hobfoll, 1989; Kay *et al.*, 2008; Lam *et al.*, 2010). Workplace relationships, especially with coworkers and colleagues, constitute a major resource pool for employees (Halbesleben, 2006) and are found to be pivotal in determining employees' reactions to workplace events (Rath, 2006). In this study, we also aim to examine the buffering effects of workplace friendships in the bullying-outcomes relationship. We extend the COR theory to explain the mediating and moderating roles of PCV and workplace friendships in the bullying-silence relationship. The COR theory suggests that resource loss makes employees more vulnerable to further resource loss, especially in case of negative emotional sequels and a lower availability of potential supportive resources (Wheeler *et al.*, 2010; Wright and Hobfoll, 2004).

The present study contributes to the extant literature in several ways. First, it helps broaden the existing knowledge on the deleterious impact of workplace bullying and is the first study to empirically examine employee silence in response to workplace bullying and one of the few attempts to examine employees' passive coping strategies in response to workplace mistreatment. Second, by examining PCV as a mediator in this relationship, this study seeks to determine why employees facing workplace bullying are likely to respond by engaging in silence behaviors. Third, the study contributes to the existing literature on bullying by examining workplace friendships as a potential resource that can attenuate the negative influences of bullying. An examination of such factors is important, as employees might frequently be reluctant to report negative workplace behaviors due to different reasons, and the personal and professional resources available to them may be their only recourse and source of help in coping with workplace bullying (Harvey *et al.*, 2007).

This study also contributes in terms of its context as it extends a western-centric literature to the Indian (Asian) context.

Figure 1 represents our hypothesized model.

The paper is structured as follows. The paper begins with a brief review of workplace bullying (its definition and features) and silence (its dimensions and importance of studying silence). The next section discusses arguments leading to the hypotheses. The methods and results sections present details about the study sample, the measures used in the study, and the data analyses performed. The final section discusses the main findings, the implications of the results for both theory and practice, the limitations of the research and the directions for future research.

Literature review

Workplace bullying

The following definition of bullying has been widely used in the workplace bullying literature:

Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order for the label bullying to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process, it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal ‘strength’ are in conflict (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011, p. 15).

Research on a variety of forms of interpersonal mistreatment phenomena has grown, including workplace bullying, abusive supervision, aggression, incivility, harassment, deviance, social undermining and emotional abuse (Cole *et al.*, 2016; Hershcovis, 2011; Zapf, 2004). While negative acts and the intent to harm are common to bullying and other interpersonal mistreatment phenomena, there are two key distinguishing features of bullying: persistency and power disparities (Hershcovis, 2011). Persistence of inappropriate behaviors – repetition (frequency, must occur on a regular basis), duration (over a period of time), and patterning (of a variety of behaviors involved) – is the most salient feature of bullying (Einarsen *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, a power imbalance exists between the perpetrator and the target whereby the target finds it increasingly difficult to defend him/herself. The power imbalance has been conceptualized as being derived from the perpetrator’s organizational position, informal power, the target’s dependency on the perpetrator, and/or target and perpetrator’s personality traits (Aquino and Thau, 2009; Einarsen *et al.*, 2011; Hoel and Cooper, 2001; Keashly and Jagatic, 2003; Samnani, 2013; Zabrodska *et al.*, 2014). Supervisor or managers have been identified as abusers in 60-80 percent of bullying cases (Lutgen-Sandvik *et al.*, 2007; Hoel and Cooper, 2000; Hoel *et al.*, 1999; Zapf *et al.*, 1996). Bullying encompasses behaviors that are relatively subtle (e.g. excessive workloads, persistent monitoring of work, personal jokes, gossip) to those that are explicit and

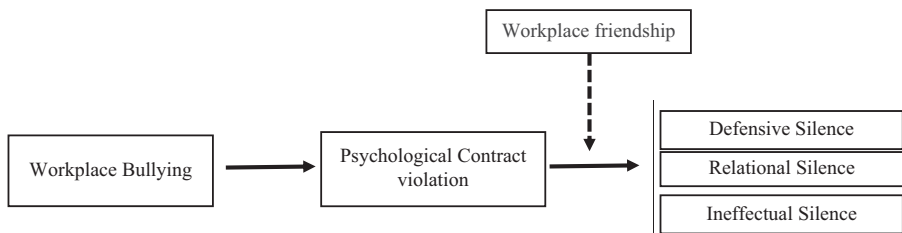


Figure 1.
Research model

identifiable (e.g. insults, threats) (Parzefall and Salin, 2010; Tepper and Henle, 2011). Bullying behaviors have been differentiated into three categories: work-related, person-related, and physically intimidating bullying (Einarsen *et al.*, 2003).

Silence

Pinder and Harlos (2001, p. 334) use the term employee silence to describe an employee's "withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstance to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress." Along with Pinder and Harlos (2001), various other researchers (Knoll and Dick, 2013b; Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Dyne *et al.*, 2003) have also argued that employee silence is a multidimensional construct, and they have categorized it into four types: acquiescent silence – a disengaged behavior stimulated by a sense of resignation; quiescent silence – a self-protective behavior stimulated by fear; pro-social silence – an others-oriented behavior that is instigated by the cooperation motive; and opportunistic silence – withholding information for one's own benefit.

Recently, Brinsfield (2013) proposed a new classification of silence based on the supervisor-subordinate relationship. The six types of silence he outlined are as follows: deviant silence – not giving all the necessary information; relational silence – not wanting to damage a relationship; defensive silence – similar to quiescent silence; diffident silence – silence resulting from self-doubt or a lack of self-confidence; ineffectual silence – similar to acquiescent silence, a feeling of resignation or an acceptance of one's circumstances; and disengaged silence – a lack of concern.

Employee silence in the workplace is not only common but also highly dysfunctional (Morrison, 2011, 2014). Silence is associated with a wide range of detrimental employee outcomes like low commitment, low motivation, job dissatisfaction, low innovation, cynicism, etc. (Knoll and Dick, 2013a; Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008; Vakola and Bouradas, 2005; Wang and Hsieh, 2013). Moreover, withholding critical information also hinders the organization in identifying and correcting the problem in a timely fashion and thereby preventing further damage (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Milliken and Morrison, 2003; Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008). Therefore, understanding the reasons behind employees' silence is extremely important for organizations (Dedahanov and Rhee, 2015). More specifically, the choice of examining silence as an outcome of workplace bullying in this study was driven by important considerations as: (a) recent qualitative inquiry into victims of workplace bullying (Rai and Agarwal, 2017b) has revealed that silence is one of the most common employee responses to workplace bullying; (b) at its core, workplace bullying fundamentally relies on the power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target, with the perpetrator usually occupying a superior organizational position (Einarsen *et al.*, 2011), and this power difference is considered one of the most important reasons for influencing employee silence (Milliken *et al.*, 2003); and (c) the Indian socio-cultural framework tends to foster silence among employees in response to workplace issues like bullying (Jain, 2015; Kakar, 1971; Sinha and Sinha, 1990). However, there are still no empirical investigations into the links between workplace bullying and silence – there is only limited literature examining the workplace mistreatment-silence relationship (Kiewitz *et al.*, 2002; Whitman *et al.*, 2014; Xu *et al.*, 2015). Given this dearth of related studies, we found the inevitable need to expand research on the workplace bullying-silence relationship.

Theoretical foundations and hypotheses development

Workplace bullying and employee silence

Very little research has been conducted to determine why employees prefer to remain silent in response to workplace mistreatment (Xu *et al.*, 2015). The silence literature has repeatedly pointed to employees' dysfunctional relationships with their superiors as the primary cause

for their decision to remain silent (Greenberg and Edwards, 2009; Morrison, 2014). Silence behaviors are target sensitive (to whom they are directed) (Detert and Burris, 2007), and research suggests that victims of mistreatment rarely report or retaliate against the offender (supervisors in the majority of workplace bullying cases) as the offender is well positioned for counter-revenge; the victim is dependent on the perpetrator for resources such as continued employment and advancement opportunities (Harvey *et al.*, 2007; Tepper *et al.*, 2007, 2009; Xu *et al.*, 2015); or the senior management is perceived to be non-supportive to such reports (Keashly, 2001; Lewis and Rayner, 2003; Noronha and D’Cruz, 2009; Roscigno *et al.*, 2009). A recent qualitative study by Rai and Agarwal (2017b) on victims of bullying has shown that victims may use silence strategically in order to avoid the negative consequences associated with speaking up (defensive silence; Kish-Gephart *et al.*, 2009; Ryan and Oestreich, 1998; Dyne *et al.*, 2003), to protect their relationship with their supervisor (relational silence; Dedahanov *et al.*, 2016), and as a way to express their acceptance of the organizational circumstances (ineffectual silence; Brinsfield, 2013, Dyne *et al.*, 2003; Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Pinder and Harlos, 2001).

Drawing on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the present study aims to empirically examine the impact of workplace bullying on these three types of silence behaviors (defensive silence, relational silence, and ineffectual silence). Moreover, the present study examines bullying in the Indian context, which is unique in terms of its socio-cultural milieu. Research suggests that cultures can create environments in which silence can occur (Bowen and Blackmon, 2003; Huang *et al.*, 2005; Verhezen, 2010), and in Indian organizations, employee silence is an especially deep-rooted phenomenon, owing to the country’s hierarchical and collectivistic culture (Jain, 2015).

The COR theory

The COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001) is one of the most cited theories in literature on organizational behavior (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). The theory proposes that human behavior is organized around the acquisition and accumulation of resources. It states, “people strive to obtain, retain and protect that which they value” (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 55), called “resources,” that “are centrally valued in their own right, or act as means to obtain centrally valued ends” (Hobfoll, 2002, pp. 307). These resources can come in the form of objects (e.g. shelter, food, tools); conditions (e.g. self-respect, dignity, security, status, social support, and job control); personal characteristics (e.g. efficacy, beliefs, and skills); and energies (e.g. time, money, and knowledge) (Hobfoll, 2001). The central tenet of the COR theory is the primacy of resource loss, which suggests that it is psychologically more harmful for individuals to lose resources than to gain them (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001). As per this tenet, stress is most likely to occur when there is a perceived threat to one’s resources; there is an actual resource loss; or the anticipated return on the investment of one’s resources does not materialize. This tenet has a motivational element as well, suggesting that depleted individuals will engage in behaviors that help avoid resource losses and try to minimize any potential threats to their resources (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014).

Workplace bullying is considered a serious occupational stressor (Hoel *et al.*, 1999). Facing workplace bullying can be stressful because it is indicative of a continuous loss of intrinsic resources (e.g. status, dignity, safety, energy at work; Tuckey and Neall, 2014). If the stressful situation becomes chronic (as in the case of workplace bullying that is recurrent and persistent in nature), one’s overall resources will be depleted as a whole (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001). With fewer resources, the employee will face difficulty in withstanding threats to further resource losses, which may lead to a loss spiral that can endanger the individual’s coping abilities, sense of motivation, and general well-being (Halbesleben and Bowler, 2007). Since resource loss is much more salient than resource gain (Hobfoll, 2001), depleted employees may adopt a defensive position to prevent further

resource loss or to conserve their remaining resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Whitman *et al.*, 2014; Xu *et al.*, 2015). The COR theory suggests that silence is a calculated and deliberate decision made in order to regulate one's remaining resources (Ng and Feldman, 2012). Remaining silent within one's workplace is a natural and safe way to protect and conserve one's remaining resources (Xu *et al.*, 2015).

The relationship between workplace bullying and silence (defensive silence, relational silence, and ineffectual silence) has been explained in detail in the subsequent sections of this paper. We then introduce PCV as a mediator between workplace bullying and silence. We further expect that the second stage of this mediation (the indirect effect) is conditional on the interactive influence of workplace friendship. This expectation reflects the overall pattern of moderated mediation (Edwards and Lambert, 2007). The hypotheses proposed in this study have been outlined below.

Workplace bullying and defensive silence

Defensive silence is defined as the deliberate omission of one's voice due to the fear of the consequences associated with speaking out (Brinsfield, 2013; Dyne *et al.*, 2003; Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Studies have shown that a large number of employees are hesitant to speak up about problems at work (Milliken *et al.*, 2003; Ryan and Oestreich, 1998), especially, victims of mistreatment become silent, when the perpetrator holds higher status because of fear of negative repercussions associated with speaking up (Aquino *et al.*, 2006; Milliken *et al.*, 2003; Pinder and Harlos, 2001). One of the most crucial and distinguishing features of workplace bullying is power disparity – the victims of workplace bullying may consider themselves powerless to raise their voice in the face of mistreatment and may thus opt for a defensive silence. From the perspective of the COR theory, speaking up *per se* usually comes at a personal cost and risk as it requires extra effort, time, and energy, and those who speak up are at the risk of a potential resource loss (Bolino and Turnley, 2005; Xu *et al.*, 2015). The extant literature on interpersonal mistreatment suggests that those who speak up are at the risk of being labeled as troublemakers (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003) and may lose desirable personal resources or professional opportunities (Harvey *et al.*, 2007; Kiewitz *et al.*, 2002; Milliken *et al.*, 2003; Tepper *et al.*, 2007; Xu *et al.*, 2015). Thus, our hypothesis is:

H1a. Workplace bullying is positively related to defensive silence.

Workplace bullying and relational silence

Relational silence refers to silence whose purpose is to avoid harming relationships, or that reflects general relational concerns (Brinsfield, 2013), however, lacks altruistic and cooperative motives (Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Research suggests that besides losing desirable personal resources or professional opportunities, voice may also upset the status quo in some way or place stress on existing interpersonal relationships (LePine and Dyne, 1998). Raising one's voice increases the possibility of challenging an authority figure's status, which may result in the deterioration of the employee's relationship with that authority figure (Li and Sun, 2015), which in turn may end up costing the employee more available resources and also lead to future resource depletion (Ng and Feldman, 2012). Since avoiding one's supervisor is seldom an option in the long run (*cf.*, Porath and Pearson, 2010), subordinates have no choice but to endure and maintain a relationship with their supervisor (Hess, 2000; Tepper *et al.*, 2007; Whitman *et al.*, 2014). From the perspective of the COR theory, as subordinates are often dependent on their supervisors for resources, engaging in behaviors designed to maintain a functional working relationship is a more practical communication strategy than engaging in retaliatory behaviors with the potential to aggravate or terminate the relationship (Tepper *et al.*, 2007). However, research suggests that employees may create physical or psychological distance from their supervisor or may

engage in surface acting as a way to cope with this undesirable relationship (Tepper *et al.*, 2007; Whitman *et al.*, 2014; Wu and Hu, 2013). Research also shows that victims of mistreatment (e.g. abusive supervisors) are more likely to respond to mistreatment with reconciliation behaviors that are designed to restore the relationship with their supervisor on account of power dependence (Aquino *et al.*, 2006; Tepper *et al.*, 2007). Thus, our hypothesis is:

H1b. Workplace bullying is positively related to relational silence.

Workplace bullying and ineffectual silence

Ineffectual silence refers to a general belief that speaking up will not be useful in effecting change with regard to the focal issue, situation, or concern and will not positively affect the situation (Brinsfield, 2013). Employees engage in ineffectual silence as an indirect way of showing a heartfelt acceptance of the organizational circumstances, feelings of resignation, giving up hope for improvement, and taking the situation for granted (Pinder and Harlos, 2001; Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Continuous and persistent acts of bullying may lead to employees believing that such negative acts are unavoidable in their organization or that their managers and the organization as a whole are reluctant to tackle such issues. Such beliefs may negatively impact their perceptions regarding possible improvements (D’Cruz *et al.*, 2014; Einarsen, 1999; Leymann, 1990; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). From the perspective of the COR theory, victims of workplace bullying may adopt ineffectual silence as a means of protecting their resources (time, energy, and efforts) from further depletion, which may be a result of engaging in voice behaviors that are not likely to reap benefits (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). Research has shown that dissatisfied employees tend not to voice their dissatisfaction and concerns, because they do not think it will have a positive impact on the situation (Wang and Hsieh, 2014; Withey and Cooper, 1989). Thus, our hypothesis is:

H1c. Workplace bullying is positively related to ineffectual silence.

PCV as a mediator

Employees working in an organization have a certain set of expectations, both explicit and implicit, from their supervisors or from the organization as a whole. These are collectively referred to as a psychological contract (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). Employees psychologically analyze the important circumstances at work and compare them to their own expectations. Any significant discrepancies between their expectations and reality may be perceived as unjust and unfair (Montes and Irving, 2008; Restubog *et al.*, 2013), which employees may experience as a breach or violation. Perceptions of breach represent cognitions of disparity (i.e. a perceived mismatch between what was promised by the organization vs what was received; Morrison and Robinson, 1997). On the other hand, PCV is an “emotional and affective state that may follow from the belief that one’s organization has failed to adequately maintain the psychological contract” (Morrison and Robinson, 1997, pp. 230). Research suggests that any behavior that calls into question respect and codes of conduct (like workplace bullying) is considered to be more personalized (Rousseau, 1998) and is more likely to result in intense emotional reactions (i.e. feelings of violation; Cassar and Briner, 2011). More specifically, violation has been described as involving “feelings of betrayal and deeper psychological distress [whereby] [...] the victim experiences anger, resentment, frustration, a sense of injustice and wrongful harm” (Rousseau, 1989, pp. 129).

Past research on employees’ psychological contracts has largely focused on the social exchange theory (SET, Blau, 1964). The negative reciprocity principle of the SET suggests that employees will reciprocate negative treatment they receive from the organization through commensurate actions of their own (Zhao *et al.*, 2007). A growing body of research

has recently started approaching psychological contracts from the perspective of the COR theory, suggesting that a loss of valued intrinsic resources because of unfavorable workplace events (like workplace bullying) may be perceived as PCV by the employees and may trigger strong negative emotional reactions (Kiazad *et al.*, 2014; Lapointe *et al.*, 2013; Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016). Fairness, respect, and dignity are categorized as resources (conditions at work) within the COR framework (Hobfoll, 2001). Persistent acts of bullying like being yelled at, being belittled, having one's work persistently criticized, and being at the receiving end of insulting remarks can drain an employee's intrinsic resources and result in negative emotions like anger, sadness, frustration, helplessness, and restlessness (Brotheridge and Lee, 2010) – this can be characterized as a state of psychological resource depletion. These negative affects experienced by employees as a result of workplace bullying weaken their psychological resource reserves, rendering them vulnerable to the further resource loss resulting from bullying (Hobfoll, 2001). For instance, a feeling of violation may be accompanied by an inability to stop thinking about the issues that have given rise to such emotions (Morrison and Robinson, 1997), which further increases negative emotions. Such a situation is deeply distressing for employees as it consciously and unconsciously depletes their emotional energy and other psychological resources, and they will be preoccupied with actions aimed to conserve their remaining resources (Agarwal and Bhargava, 2014). In such cases, the employees prefer to remain silent in order to alleviate the psychological discomfort associated with contract violation (Morrison and Robinson, 1997) and to conserve their remaining resources (Ng and Feldman, 2012).

Recent research has theorized and examined the mediating role of contract violation in order to analyze employees' reactions to mistreatment at work (Ahmed and Muchiri, 2014; Kernan *et al.*, 2016; Rai and Agarwal, 2017a; Salin and Notelaers, 2017). For instance, research suggests that mistreatment at the hands of one's supervisor can be considered as a salient workplace event that is likely to be seen as breaking the employee's contract with his/her employer, triggering strong affective reactions in the form of a feeling of violation (Kernan *et al.*, 2016). Morrison and Robinson (1997) and Shore and Tetrick (1994) have reported that silence is one of the potential employee responses intended to help them survive PCV. Recent research has also proved that an experience of mistreatment at work (e.g. abusive supervision) typically evokes negative emotions (e.g. fear, anger) and, in turn, behaviors related to avoidance and self-protection in subordinates like silence (Kiewitz *et al.*, 2002; Nifadkar *et al.*, 2012). This leads to the next hypothesis as:

- H2. PCV mediates the relationships between workplace bullying and employee silence – defensive, relational, and ineffectual silence.

Workplace friendship as a moderator

Research suggests that the availability of a resource in one distinct context can compensate for another resource that has been drained in a separate context. Employees in an organization do not only interact with their supervisors but also with their colleagues with whom they form bonds of friendship. Workplace friendship is defined as voluntary, informal, person-related interactions, and reciprocal relations among employees in a workplace setting (Berman *et al.*, 2002). This network provides employees with the emotional and social support needed to cope with adverse workplace situations (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001; Sias, 2009) and serve as avenues from which to draw upon resources during times of stress (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001); thus, workplace friendships can both widen one's pool of available resources and can replace or reinforce one's lacking resources (Hobfoll, 1989). It is likely that workplace bullying can result in PCV, but the extent to which PCV will result in silence behaviors will be a function of the employee's resource availability.

The COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll and Freedy, 1993) suggests that in unfavorable work conditions, employees who have high levels of resources in the form of workplace friendships (or social support) are more capable of dealing with the demands placed on them and are less likely to face negative outcomes. As per the COR theory, “support is the major vehicle by which individual resources are widened outside the limited domain of resources that are contained in the self” (Hobfoll *et al.*, 1990, pp. 467). Supportive actions from others (for instance, advice, reassurance, or encouragement) may help employees release stress (Halbesleben, 2006) and energize them to restrain the depletion of their resources and offset their withdrawal from work and the organization (Lahey and Cohen, 2000; Lam *et al.*, 2010; Tyler and Burns, 2008; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2007). Supporting actions are also believed to enhance employees’ ability to cope – the belief that support is available leads to appraising potentially threatening situations as less stressful (Lahey and Cohen, 2000). For instance, if coworkers show concern and courtesy toward another employee’s situation by appearing to be understanding, sympathetic, and trying to cheer the employee up, it will make the employee feel like the coworkers care about him or her, which in turn might encourage him or her to speak up (Xu *et al.*, 2017). Employees may discuss their experiences with their friends in the workplace – such social coping mechanisms make it more likely for them to proactively address their problem (Knapp *et al.*, 1997) and less likely to remain silent. Furthermore, among friends, employees may express their anger and frustration, which can help them release their stress (Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2007). From a psychological standpoint, receiving support contributes to a positive sense of self in addition to a feeling that one can overcome the demanding circumstances (Hobfoll, 2002; Hobfoll and Freedy, 1993; Hobfoll *et al.*, 1990) and also serves as a recovery mechanism (Mayo *et al.*, 2012; Sonnentag, 2003). Based on the above reasoning, we hypothesize a weak relationship between PCV and employee silence for employees with high workplace friendship. Thus, our next hypothesis is as follows:

H3a. Workplace friendship moderates the relationships between PCV and employee silence – defensive, relational, and ineffectual silence – such that the relationships are weaker for employees with high – as opposed to low – levels of workplace friendships.

Assuming workplace friendship moderates the PCV and employee silence relationship, it is also likely that workplace friendship will conditionally influence the strength of the indirect relationship between workplace bullying and its outcomes, thereby demonstrating a pattern of moderated mediation between the study variables, as depicted in Figure 1. Because this study predicts a weak relationship between PCV and its outcomes when workplace friendship is high, we expect the following hypothesis to hold true:

H3b. Workplace friendship will moderate the strength of the mediated relationships between workplace bullying and employee silence – defensive, relational, and ineffectual silence – via PCV, such that the relationships are weaker for employees with high – as opposed to low – levels of workplace friendships.

Methodology

Sample and study procedure

Data were collected from full-time managerial employees working in 11 Indian organizations. Participants ranged from a wide variety of sectors including manufacturing, utility, aviation, retail and trade, information technology, telecommunications, and consulting.

Stratified sampling was done to ensure good coverage of employees from various organizational departments and job positions within the organizations. In all, 1,300 managers were sent an invitation to participate in the study via office e-mails and 950 volunteered to participate.

To reduce the effects of common method variance (CMV) associated with single-source and one-time data collection, data were collected in two stages with the antecedents separated from the outcomes (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In the first stage, a questionnaire – containing demographic details and the independent variable (workplace bullying) – was administered to the employees during working hours. This study was conducted strictly in accordance with the ethical protocols of informed consent, protection of anonymity, and data confidentiality. Out of the 950 employees who volunteered to participate, 930 were available during this stage. Data on dependent variables (silence behaviors and PCV) and the moderator variable (workplace friendship) were collected through a second survey instrument (stage 2) after 14 days. Each questionnaire was assigned an identification code that enabled us to link responses from the two stages without the need for participants' names. The number of participants further dropped to 870 in the second stage of the survey. In all, 35 questionnaires were discarded because of missing or inappropriate data.

A total of 835 employees comprised the final sample, resulting in a response rate of 64 percent. The average age of the participants was 32 years ($SD = 8$), 81 percent were male, and the average organizational tenure was 8.7 years ($SD = 7.7$). In all, 30.8 percent of the participants were from junior-level management, 60.2 percent from middle-level management, and the rest were senior management employees. With regard to educational qualifications, 58.6 percent were graduates, 32.4 percent were post-graduates, and rest had a PhD degree.

Measures

All measures used in this survey were adopted from the established scales written in English. The specific measures used in the study are described below.

Workplace bullying

Workplace bullying was measured with a 22-items Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) developed by Einarsen *et al.* (2009). The NAQ-R consists of three subscales, namely, work-related, person-related, and physically intimidating behaviors. Scale items were anchored on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). Sample items are: “being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines” (work-related), “being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work” (person-related), and “being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger” (physically intimidating). The three subscales of the NAQ-R were combined additively to create an overall workplace bullying scale. The α coefficient was 0.97.

Silence behaviors

Silence behaviors were measured with 15 items representing defensive, relational, and ineffectual silence (five items each) from Brinsfield (2013) scale on silence behaviors. Scale items were anchored on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item for defensive silence is “I feel it is dangerous to speak up”; for relational silence is “I don't want to harm my relationship with others (supervisor/co-worker's)”; and for ineffectual silence is “I believe my concerns would not be addressed”. The α coefficients for subscales were: defensive = 0.90, relational = 0.95, and ineffectual silence = 0.89.

PCV

PCV was measured with a four-item measure developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000). Scale items were anchored on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is “I feel a great deal of anger towards my organization.” The α coefficient was 0.90.

Workplace friendship

Workplace friendship was measured with a six-item scale developed by Nielsen *et al.* (2000). Scale items were anchored on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is "I have formed strong friendship at organization". The α coefficient was 0.80.

Control variables

Since data were collected broadly from 11 organizations, rating disparities were likely. Therefore, a one-way ANOVA was performed to examine these differences. The ANOVA comparing organizations on the research variables showed that *F*-values were significant for nearly all variables. Mean differences were expected as the 11 organizations differed in their business processes and challenges. *Post hoc* analyses based on Scheffe's test were conducted to test whether pairs of mean differences among variables formed a pattern. The results did not yield a pattern that could be used as the basis for clustering organizations for further analyses.

Several demographic variables like age, gender, tenure, and organizational membership were controlled. Age was measured as a continuous variable. Gender was modeled as a categorical variable. Employee job tenure was measured as years of service and was modeled as a continuous variable. Organizational membership was measured as an ordinal variable.

CMV

Harman's single-factor test was utilized to investigate potential CMV among the study variables (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The basic assumption of Harman's single-factor test is that if a substantial amount of CMV is present, one general factor will account for the majority (> 50 percent) of the covariance among the variables. The results of this test showed that multiple factors were extracted and the first factor accounted for only 34.8 percent of the total variance. Since no dominant general factor was found in factor analysis, the concern for CMV could be partially mitigated.

We conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses to examine the distinctiveness of our study constructs. The proposed six-factor measurement model (workplace bullying, workplace friendship, defensive silence, relational silence, ineffectual silence and PCV) showed a good model fit ($\chi^2 = 3042$, $df = 985$, $\chi^2/df = 3$, $GFI = 0.89$, $AGFI = 0.84$, $NFI = 0.90$, $CFI = 0.95$, $RMSEA = 0.04$). We further examined several alternative models and compared them with the six-factor model. As shown in Table I, the six-factor model fit our data better than the alternative models, suggesting that our respondents could distinguish the focal constructs clearly.

Analytical strategy

We tested our study's hypotheses in three stages. First, we examined the direct effects of workplace bullying on employee silence (defensive, relational, and ineffectual silence; *H1a-H1c*). Second, we analyzed simple mediation (*H2*). Third, we integrated the proposed moderator variable into the model (*H3a*) and empirically tested the overall moderated mediation hypothesis (*H3b*). Prior to the analyses, all continuous measures were mean-centered (Aiken and West, 1991).

Test of mediation

Tests of mediation hypotheses are often guided by the multistep approach proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986); however, off late, methodologists have identified potential shortcomings in this approach (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2002; Shrout and Bolger, 2002). For instance, the significant

Table I.
Results of
confirmatory factor
analysis of the
measurement models

Measurement models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Six-factor model (our hypothesized model)	3,042	985	3.0	0.89	0.84	0.90	0.95	0.04
Five-factor model ^a	4,404	986	4.5	0.79	0.76	0.86	0.89	0.06
Four-factor model ^b	6,083	987	6.1	0.71	0.70	0.81	0.84	0.08
Three-factor model ^c	8,906	988	9.0	0.60	0.54	0.70	0.75	0.10
Two-factor model ^d	10,465	989	10.5	0.57	0.50	0.68	0.70	0.10
Two-factor model ^e	10,362	989	10.5	0.57	0.49	0.68	0.70	0.10
One-factor model ^f	14,509	990	14.6	0.43	0.35	0.55	0.59	0.12

Notes: GFI, goodness of fit index; AGFI, adjusted goodness of fit indices; NFI, normed fit index; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation. ^aThis model combines workplace bullying, workplace friendship into one factor; ^bthis model combines workplace bullying, workplace friendship, PCV into one factor; ^cthis model combines PCV, defensive silence, relational silence and ineffectual silence into one factor; ^dthis model combines workplace bullying, workplace friendship in one factor and PCV, defensive silence, relational silence and ineffectual silence into another factor; ^ethis model combines workplace bullying, workplace friendship and PCV into one factor and defensive silence, relational silence and ineffectual silence into another factor; ^fthis model combines all items into one factor

relationship between the independent and dependent variable is not considered a necessary criterion to establish the mediation – the mediational analysis is based on formal significance tests of the indirect effects *ab* (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The tests of the hypotheses in the present study involved path analysis employing an Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) macro named PROCESS (Hayes, 2013), which is an advanced regression-based approach focusing on mediation, moderated mediation models, and the conditional indirect effect. PROCESS SPSS incorporates the stepwise procedure described by Baron and Kenny (1986) and facilitates the estimation of the indirect effect *ab*, both with a normal theory approach (i.e. the Sobel test) and with a bootstrap approach to obtain confidence intervals (CIs).

Test of moderation and conditional indirect effect

We used the procedure proposed by Aiken and West (1991, hierarchical regression analysis) to test the moderating effects of workplace friendship on the PCV-employee silence relationship. We further used Hayes' (2013) PROCESS program (Model 15) to estimate the proposed conditional indirect effect (second stage moderated mediation).

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table II presents the descriptive statistics and inter-correlations between the study variables. The zero-order correlations were all in the expected direction, indicating preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships.

Direct and mediated effects

The SPSS macro, PROCESS (Hayes, 2013; Preacher and Hayes, 2008), was used for path analysis. Workplace bullying was positively related to defensive silence ($\beta = 0.43$, $t = 10.14$, $p < 0.001$), relational silence ($\beta = 0.13$, $t = 2.7$, $p < 0.001$), and ineffectual silence ($\beta = 0.42$, $t = 9.3$, $p < 0.001$) supporting *H1a-H1c*, respectively (Table III). Workplace bullying was significantly related to PCV ($\beta = 0.67$, $t = 18.17$, $p < 0.001$), and PCV was significantly related to defensive silence ($\beta = 0.32$, $t = 8.7$, $p < 0.001$), relational silence ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 4.3$, $p < 0.001$), and ineffectual silence ($\beta = 0.47$, $t = 12.17$, $p < 0.001$) when controlling for workplace bullying. The significant indirect effects supported the mediating role of PCV in bullying-outcome relationships (*H2*). Additionally,

Table II.
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	32	8	1									
2. Gender	0.81	0.39	0.239**	1								
3. Tenure	8.7	7.7	0.946**	0.224**	1							
4. Organizational level	1.8	0.59	0.047	-0.069*	0.042	1						
5. Workplace bullying	1.79	0.87	-0.193**	-0.024	-0.166**	0.048	1					
6. Defensive silence	2.6	1.1	-0.086*	-0.023	-0.099**	0.031	0.334**	(0.97)				
7. Relational silence	3.5	1.2	-0.085*	-0.036	-0.083*	-0.051	0.091**	0.434**	(0.95)			
8. Ineffectual silence	2.6	1.2	-0.036	-0.009	-0.045	-0.001	0.347**	0.649**	0.275**	(0.89)		
9. Psychological contract violation	2.0	1.1	-0.131**	-0.003	-0.103**	-0.01	0.533**	0.414**	0.178**	0.506**	(0.90)	
10. Workplace friendship	2.6	1.1	0.092**	0.072*	0.074*	-0.018	-0.154**	-0.074*	0.067	-0.130**	-0.116**	(0.80)

Notes: $n = 835$; α reliabilities are given in the parentheses. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table III.
Mediating role of PCV
in workplace bullying
and outcomes
relationships

Variables	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Direct and total effects</i>				
Step 1				
Defensive silence regressed on workplace bullying	0.43	0.042	10.14	0.000
Relational silence regressed on workplace bullying	0.13	0.047	2.7	0.000
Ineffectual silence regressed on workplace bullying	0.42	0.044	9.3	0.000
Step 2				
PCV regressed on workplace bullying	0.67	0.037	18.17	0.000
Step 3				
Defensive silence regressed on PCV after controlling for workplace bullying	0.32	0.037	8.67	0.000
Relational silence regressed on PCV after controlling for workplace bullying	0.19	0.044	4.33	0.000
Ineffectual silence regressed on PCV after controlling for workplace bullying	0.47	0.038	12.17	0.000
Step 4				
Defensive silence regressed on workplace bullying after controlling for PCV	0.21	0.048	4.33	0.000
Relational silence regressed on workplace bullying after controlling for PCV	0.04	0.055	0.069	0.944
Ineffectual silence regressed on workplace bullying after controlling for PCV	0.10	0.048	2.0	0.037
Indirect effect and significance using Sobel test				
	Value	SE	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Indirect effect of workplace bullying on defensive silence	0.22	0.028	7.8	0.000
Indirect effect of workplace bullying on relational silence	0.13	0.030	4.2	0.000
Indirect effect of workplace bullying on ineffectual silence	0.31	0.031	10.10	0.000
Bootstrap results for indirect effect				
	Value	SE	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Indirect effect of workplace bullying on defensive silence	0.22	0.038	0.16	0.28
Indirect effect of workplace bullying on relational silence	0.13	0.029	0.07	0.18
Indirect effect of workplace bullying on ineffectual silence	0.31	0.039	0.22	0.32

after controlling for the mediator (PCV), the association between bullying-defensive silence ($\beta = 0.21$, $t = 4.8$, $p < 0.001$) and bullying-ineffectual silence ($\beta = 0.10$, $t = 2.0$, $p < 0.05$) remained significant with a drop in β values and the relationship between bullying-relational silence ($\beta = 0.04$, $t = 0.069$, ns) became insignificant. This analysis suggests partial mediating effects of PCV in bullying-defensive silence and bullying-ineffectual silence relationship and full mediating effect of PCV in bullying-relational silence relationship.

To test the significance of the indirect effect, we used the Sobel test (1982) and a bias-corrected bootstrapped test with 5,000 replications to ensure 95 percent CI (PROCESS macro). The Sobel (1982) test (two-tailed), which assumes a normal distribution demonstrated that the indirect effects were significant as the p -value of less than 0.05 confirmed that PCV played a mediating role in bullying-defensive silence ($z = 7.8$, $p < 0.001$), bullying-relational silence ($z = 4.2$, $p < 0.001$) and bullying-ineffectual silence ($z = 10.10$, $p < 0.001$) relationship. Bootstrapping, which makes no assumptions about the shape of a sampling distribution, corroborated these findings as bootstrapped CIs around the indirect effects did not contain 0 for bullying-defensive silence (0.22(0.16, 0.28)); bullying-relational silence (0.13(0.07, 0.18)), and bullying-ineffectual silence (0.31(0.22, 0.032)) relationship. Together, these results support the mediating role of PCV in bullying-outcome relationships. The results of direct and mediated effects are reported in Table III.

Moderated mediation

Moderated mediation refers to the indirect or mediated effect itself being contingent or conditional. Moderated mediation is demonstrated when the conditional indirect effect of workplace bullying on employee silence via PCV differs in strength across low and high levels of workplace friendship. To assess the second stage moderated mediation,

we tested the following three conditions suggested by Hernandez and Guarana (2016) (cf. Muller *et al.*, 2005; Preacher *et al.*, 2007): the indirect effect should be significant; there should be a significant interaction between the mediator and the moderator in predicting the dependent variables; the independent variable should have different conditional indirect effects on the dependent variable via a mediator at high and low levels of the moderator. The third condition is central to the existence of moderated mediation and determines whether the strength of the mediation differs with the level of the moderator (Hayes, 2013).

The results of *H2* demonstrate that PCV mediates workplace bullying-employee silence (defensive silence, relational silence, and ineffectual silence) relationship. Thus, Condition 1 for moderated mediation was met. To test Condition 2, we examined whether the interaction of PCV with workplace friendship was significant in predicting employee silence. Table IV shows that the interaction term between PCV and workplace friendship was significant in predicting defensive silence ($\beta = -0.10, p < 0.01$), relational silence ($\beta = -0.08, p < 0.05$), and ineffectual silence ($\beta = -0.08, p < 0.05$), thus supporting *H3a*. These results suggest that a positive relationship between PCV and employee silence would be weaker for employees with strong friendship networks. Hence, the results of the first two conditions indicate that workplace friendship can moderate the mediation for the workplace bullying-silence relationships (defensive, relational, and ineffectual silence). The interaction graphs are presented as Figure 2.

Next, we examined Condition 3 that requires the magnitude of the conditional indirect effect of workplace bullying on employee silence via PCV to be different across high and low levels of workplace friendship. We used Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS to compute the conditional indirect effects. We operationalized high and low levels of workplace friendship as one standard deviation above and below its mean score. Table V presents the estimates, standard errors, and bootstrap CIs for the conditional indirect effects of workplace bullying across low and high levels of workplace friendship. As shown in Table V, the conditional indirect effect of workplace bullying on employee silence (defensive, relational, and ineffectual) via PCV is weaker in conditions of high workplace friendship. Thus, *H3b* was supported.

Variables and steps	Dependent variables		
	Defensive silence	Relational silence	Ineffectual silence
<i>Step 1: controls</i>			
Age	0.030*	0.010	0.026
Gender	-0.045	-0.085	-0.079
Tenure	-0.037	-0.09	-0.021
Organizational membership	0.092	-0.009	0.034
<i>Step 2: main effects of Independent variables</i>			
Psychological contract violation	0.42***	0.18***	0.49***
Workplace friendship	0.012*	0.04*	0.17***
<i>Step 3: interaction terms</i>			
Psychological contract violation × Workplace friendship	-0.10**	-0.08*	-0.08*
R^2	0.18	0.043	0.25
R^2 change	0.008	0.004	0.005
F	26.62***	5.3***	40.16***

Notes: $n = 835$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table IV.
Moderating role of workplace friendship in PCV-employee silence relationship

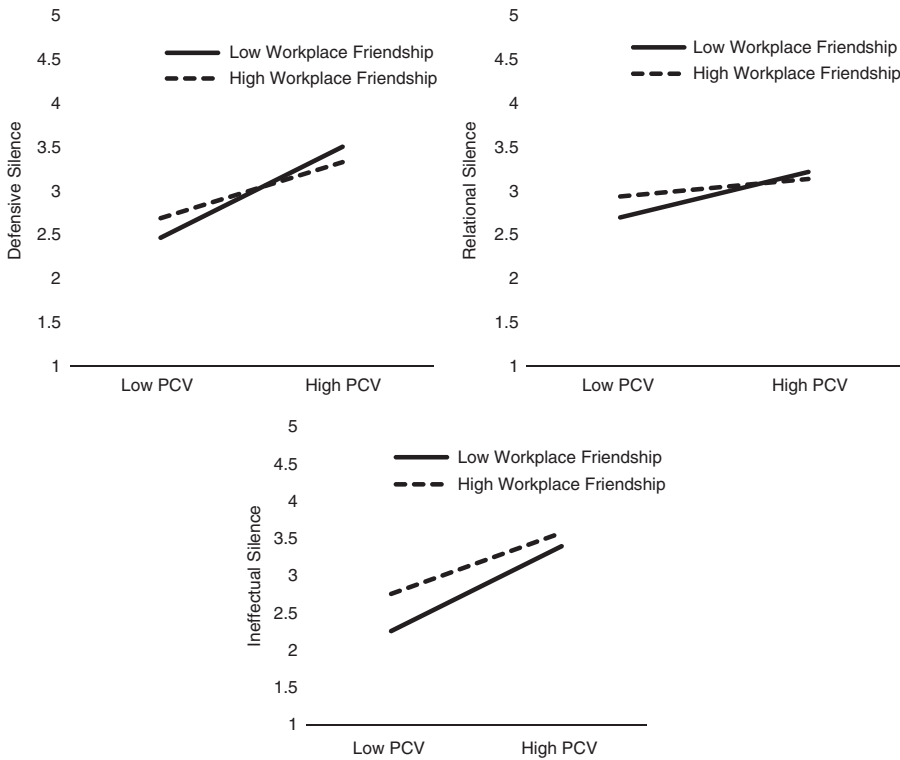


Figure 2. Moderating effects of workplace friendship on PCV-employee silence relationship

Moderator	Conditional indirect effect	Bootstrap SE	Bootstrap LLCI	Bootstrap ULCI
<i>Dependent variable = defensive silence, mediator = psychological contract violation</i>				
-1 SD	0.27	0.045	0.18	0.36
Mean	0.23	0.032	0.17	0.29
+1 SD	0.18	0.038	0.10	0.26
<i>Dependent variable = relational silence, mediator = psychological contract violation</i>				
-1 SD	0.21	0.042	0.13	0.29
Mean	0.14	0.030	0.08	0.20
+1 SD	0.07	0.039	0.06	0.15
<i>Dependent variable = ineffectual silence, mediator = psychological contract violation</i>				
-1 SD	0.35	0.047	0.27	0.45
Mean	0.30	0.033	0.25	0.38
+1 SD	0.26	0.039	0.20	0.35

Notes: Number of bootstrap samples = 5,000; level of confidence = 95 percent. LLCI, lower level of confidence interval; ULCI, upper level of confidence interval; SE, standard error

Table V. Moderated mediation results for workplace bullying across levels of workplace friendship

Discussion

Anchored in the COR theory, the purpose of the present study was to examine employees' passive coping strategies (e.g. defensive silence, relational silence, and ineffectual silence) in response to workplace bullying. This study also examined PCV as a mediator of bullying-

silence relationship and workplace friendship as a moderator of the mediating role of PCV. The results of the study supported the proposed hypotheses. We proposed that prolonged negative interaction with the perpetrator results in a loss of resources and, in order to protect their remaining resources, employees engage in different types of silence behaviors – defensive silence, relational silence, and ineffectual silence. These findings are in line with other studies that have proved that silence is a passive but crucial response for victims of workplace mistreatment to conserve their remaining resources and avoid a further loss of their intrinsic resources (Whitman *et al.*, 2014; Xu *et al.*, 2015).

Consistent with our mediation hypothesis, we proposed that employees facing workplace bullying may develop feelings of PCV, which may enhance their loss of resources and psychological distress. To conserve their remaining resources and to alleviate the psychological distress associated with PCV, such employees are more likely to opt for passive coping strategies like silence. We found that PCV mediates the bullying-silence relationship – it partially mediates the bullying-defensive silence and bullying-ineffectual silence relationship and fully mediates the bullying-relational silence relationship. This indicates that workplace bullying has both direct and indirect effects on employee silence.

Our moderated mediation hypothesis was also supported as we found that workplace friendship moderates the conditional indirect effects of workplace bullying on employee silence via PCV. However, the results suggest that the independent and moderating effects of workplace friendships are small, most likely because workplace friendship can reduce the extent of the reactions but cannot fully alleviate the impact of workplace bullying, as the friendship network mainly provides emotional support that primarily helps employees vent their frustration and release stress. Questioning supervisors is not very common and constrained by the targets' dependency on their supervisors (Farh *et al.*, 2007; Hofstede, 2001; Jain, 2015; Sinha and Sinha, 1990). Prior empirical inquiries on victims of workplace bullying also suggest that coworkers' and friends' support helps neither complicate nor confront the bullying dynamics, as the support operates covertly in the form of advice, reassurance, encouragement, and helping the target enhance his or her ability to cope with the ongoing situation (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2011; Rai and Agarwal, 2017b).

Theoretical contribution

The present study contributes to the extant literature in several ways. First, this study extends the recently emerging stream of research that has begun to examine the passive responses of victims of mistreatment in the workplace. This study contributes to the growing pool of research on workplace bullying by examining its impact on employees' silence behaviors and to the best of authors' knowledge, this is the first empirical study linking workplace bullying and employee silence. More specifically, by means of this paper, we answer the call of Xu *et al.* (2015) to examine the potential multifaceted nature of silence in response to mistreatment at work by examining defensive silence, relational silence, and ineffectual silence as employee responses to workplace bullying (Rai and Agarwal, 2017b; Brinsfield, 2013). This study also advances insights based on the COR theory to enhance our understanding of the bullying-silence relationship. While the COR theory has been studied extensively in the context of literature on stress, and increasingly in the more broad context of organizational research, to date, we are among a few researchers (e.g. Lee and Brotheridge, 2006; Tuckey and Neall, 2014; Wheeler *et al.*, 2010) to apply this theoretical lens to research on workplace bullying. This may be an important oversight in literature on bullying as our results suggest that resources can play an important role in predicting the outcomes of workplace bullying. Researchers have explored the negative impact of diminished resources on important individual and organizational outcomes (Byrne *et al.*, 2014). This study also contributes to the emerging but limited literature on the precursors of silence (Morrison, 2014). Based on this study, we suggest that workplace bullying (or any

other form of mistreatment in the workplace) can foster silence and can be treated as an antecedent to silence.

Second, this study adds to the limited literature that has examined PCV as a mediator in bullying-outcomes relationship. This study also contributes to the growing pool of literature that extends the application of the COR theory to explain PCV (e.g. Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016). The COR theory provides a valuable opportunity for conceptualizing and investigating resource depletion as a precursor to PCV. Although silence has been treated as one of the potential employee responses to PCV (along with voice, silence, retreat, destruction, and exit; Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Shore and Tetrick, 1994), to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to empirically link PCV to employee silence. Third, we have proposed and found support for workplace friendship as a moderator in the bullying-outcomes relationship. By examining a contextual moderator of the workplace bullying-outcome relationship, this study not only complements the extant research but also highlights the role of the broader organizational context in the bullying-outcome relationship. We have also demonstrated the interrelationships between resources across contexts – in particular, we have shown that the availability of a resource in one distinct context can compensate for another resource that has been drained in another context. The moderating role of workplace friendship also points toward the bystander's behavior in the context of workplace bullying. A limited body of research suggests that bystanders can adopt various positions in the bullying process, ranging from helping the victim to helping the bully (Keashly and Jagatic, 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik and Fletcher, 2013; Paull *et al.*, 2012).

This study's contribution can also be seen in terms of its cultural context. Much of our understanding of workplace bullying is primarily based on research conducted in western nations, although the topic is important for academic and managerial practice globally (Power *et al.*, 2013). The present study extends the mainly western-centric literature to the Indian context. Recent studies (D'Cruz and Rayner, 2013; Gupta *et al.*, 2017) and popular surveys (e.g. Assocham, 2012; Job Portal Career Builder, 2014) have ascertained the high prevalence of bullying in Indian organizations (42-55 percent). This study is one of the few attempts to empirically examine the bullying-outcomes relationship in the Indian context. Finding positive relationships between workplace bullying and employee silence is particularly significant, given India's unique socio-cultural context that has a high degree of power distance and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980).

Cultural values have a significant impact on communication (Botero and Dyne, 2009; Hirokawa and Miyahara, 1986). Employee silence – especially defensive and relational silence – is expected employee behavior in Indian organizations due to the country's culture of high power distance (insecurity or fear) and collectivistic norms (the need for affiliation and dependency; Jain, 2015). Employees in countries like India that have a culture of high power distance will be less inclined to challenge their superiors' inappropriate attitudes by speaking up (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1999) as, in such cultures, speaking up is considered as challenging the status of the superior (Porter *et al.*, 2003) and disobeying the norms of the organization (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1999). Employees in such cultures tend to behave more passively and submissively when interacting with a more powerful person and avoid disagreements and going over the heads of authority figures (Farh *et al.*, 2007; Kirkman *et al.*, 2009). Hierarchical differences make upward communication – especially communication intended to express discontent regarding inappropriate behaviors – threatening, and employees are less likely to voice their concerns to their superiors in order to avoid direct conflicts with them (Cortina and Wasti, 2005; Hofstede, 1991) and the negative consequences associated with speaking up (Botero and Dyne, 2009; Ryan and Oestreich, 1998). Employees in such cultures are more tolerant of supervisory mistreatment and morally illegitimate conduct by authority figures – they may even have a deep-seated acceptance of such behaviors (Lian *et al.*, 2012; Tepper, 2007; Tyler *et al.*, 2000). Relational orientation is a virtue of collectivist societies like India (Hofstede,

1991) where preserving social relationships is considered as the paramount goal (Li and Cropanzano, 2009) and is regarded as an end in itself (Kirkman *et al.*, 2006; Shao *et al.*, 2013; Triandis, 1994). Employees in such cultures refrain from retaliating against violations of fairness for the sake of protecting their social relationships (Hofstede, 1991; Ho and Chiu, 1994) and prefer “giving face” and “saving face” in threatening situations (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Ting-Toomey *et al.*, 1991) and only have subtle responses by maintaining silence (Au and Bemmels, 2000).

The mediating role of PCV and the moderating role of workplace friendship can also be justified from a cultural perspective. While employees from high power distance cultures accept inequity, tolerate unfair treatment at work, and overlook occasional ill-treatment from authority figures, they expect dignified treatment and respect from their organization and supervisors (Aggarwal and Bhargava, 2009; Agarwal and Bhargava, 2014). Persistent acts of bullying are demeaning and undermine work relationships; they negate the non-tangible relational aspects of the contract made with the organization (Rousseau, 1995). The present findings suggest that bullying erodes employees’ implicit expectations from their organization, which may in turn lead to frustration, anger, and silence as a way to survive a PCV. Employees from countries with a collectivistic culture are more likely to emphasize social support-related strategies in dealing with stressful experiences compared to those from countries with individualistic cultures (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Coping via social support is especially common among collectivistic employees as they place emphasis on interconnectedness with their social group (Sinha *et al.*, 2000) and are more likely to express and experience other-focused emotions such as sympathy (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). For such employees, the mere perception of having socially supportive networks can be stress reducing, even if the social support network is not explicitly mobilized for dealing with stress (Thoits, 1995).

Limitations of the study and future research directions

Although the results of this study supported the hypothesized relationships, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, we have used a cross-sectional design which does not allow inferences to be drawn about the causal relationships between bullying and its direct and indirect outcomes. Second, all constructs were measured with self-report questionnaires from a single source. Although data were collected on independent and dependent variables at different points in time; by doing so, we tried to curtail the likelihood of results plagued by CMV, however, we cannot rule out this possibility. Third, our sample comprised mostly male respondents (81 percent). In light of gender differences in experiences of workplace bullying (Lee *et al.*, 2013), a more gender-balanced sample may yield different results. Future research could employ a longitudinal analysis to make the causal relationships examined here more robust and could decrease the threat of CMV by collecting dyadic data. Examining gender differences is especially relevant in high power distance cultures where women are more likely to experience bullying (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996). From a cross-cultural perspective, a major limitation of the study is that the present study has been conducted with Indian employees, thus generalizability of results to western nations may become an issue. Similar studies should be carried out in contexts similar (Asian nations) and different than India (western nations) to enhance the generalizability of these findings.

This study presents several promising directions for future research. Research examining how and why employees remain silent is a recent phenomenon; thus, additional studies are required to broaden our understanding of employee silence in response to workplace mistreatment. Future studies could also examine other possible mediators and moderators in the workplace bullying-employee silence relationship. It is plausible that victims of bullying not only experience anger, resentment, and frustration but also

simultaneously experience other negative emotions such as fear (Kiewitz *et al.*, 2002; Kish-Gephart *et al.*, 2009), emotional exhaustion (Xu *et al.*, 2015) and a lack of psychological safety (e.g. Ashford *et al.*, 1998; Brinsfield, 2013; Edmondson, 2003; Harlos and Pinder, 2000). It is also possible that an unpleasant event like workplace bullying may result in feelings of distrust in the supervisor (Tepper, 2007; Xiqi *et al.*, 2012), which may, in turn, result in employee silence. In addition to contextual variables, individual dispositions could also be examined as moderators in the bullying-silence relationship. For instance, research suggests that conscientiousness, emotional stability, and assertiveness are negatively related to employee silence (Nikolaou *et al.*, 2008; Kiewitz *et al.*, 2002). Given India's socio-cultural milieu, examining the moderating role of cultural dimensions like power distance and collectivism (Huang *et al.*, 2005; Rhee *et al.*, 2014; Dedahanov *et al.*, 2016) in the bullying-silence relationship is a very promising avenue for future research.

Managerial implications

Academic literature, reports, and surveys indicate that the frequency of workplace bullying has increased in recent years (e.g. 27 percent, Workplace Bullying Institute Survey, 2014). Since workplace bullying is found to be detrimental to employees and costly to the organizations, it is sensible for employees to speak up or voice their concerns about it in an effort to reduce it. However, the findings of the present study suggest that employees prefer to remain silent in response to acts of mistreatment in the workplace. Therefore, organizations should put more emphasis on inhibiting workplace bullying (Einarsen *et al.*, 2003) and should promote voice behavior among employees. Previous studies have identified that increasing awareness on bullying (its nature, forms, causes, and consequences); clear and publicly imposed policies such as “zero-tolerance for bullying at work” and “managing with respect”; and clear procedures and protocols for reporting bullying are potential deterrents to workplace bullying (Hoel and Cooper, 2000; Tuckey and Neall, 2014). The extant literature on workplace bullying points toward unsupportive HR policies and practices and management's lax attitude (Lewis and Rayner, 2003; Noronha and D'Cruz, 2009) as one of the prime reasons for silence behaviors among victims. A well-formulated and effectively implemented anti-bullying policy will encourage more active HR involvement in organizations. Senior management should be sensitive to employee complaints and should take quick measures to address them. Considering that employees may be reluctant to openly report incidences of bullying in high power distance cultures (as in India), anonymous reporting solutions like hotlines and mobile applications like STOPit should be adopted by organizations. Organizations can also establish an organizational ombudsman system that functions outside the traditional hierarchy to provide a mechanism for employees to share work-related problems (Milliken *et al.*, 2003). Such a system would keep the employees' identities confidential (Milliken *et al.*, 2003), and they would thus not be concerned about creating tension and damaging their relationships with their superiors (Dedahanov *et al.*, 2016). Thus, supportive HR policies and practices and management support may encourage employees to combat bullying by refusing to accept it and by raising their voices against it (Salin, 2008).

Given that bullying is an organizational reality (Rayner and Hoel, 1997), it is often impossible to create a completely bullying-free environment (Vartia *et al.*, 2011); therefore, in addition to attempting to put a stop to the situation, by gaining a better understanding of the prevalent bullying dynamics, managers may be able to limit its consequences. Findings suggest that the impact of workplace bullying on work outcomes is not direct and is preceded by certain reactions. For instance, employees facing workplace bullying are likely to feel anger and frustration (PCV), which can enhance their resource loss and psychological distress. Managers and HR professionals should be sensitive to these cues and should take timely measures to relieve employees from these negative emotions. Organizations should

provide employees with avenues to express their anger, such as psychological consultation services, for victims to be heard and feel a sense of relief. Organizations should also promote a supportive workplace, fostering strong interpersonal and informal networks among the employees, as well as provide employees with adequate social support and job enhancement opportunities to cope with adverse workplace conditions.

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