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### Article

**Citation** (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

**Ladan, S, Nordin, NB and Belal, HM (2017) Does Social Support and Burnout Matter? Effects of Role conflict and Workload on Workplace Bullying: A proposed Framework. Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, 5 (2). ISSN 2348-7186**

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## Does Social Support and Burnout Matter? Effects of Role conflict and Workload on Workplace Bullying: A proposed Framework.

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*Abstract: The prevalent and negative impact of workplace bullying has called the attentions of both practitioners and researchers to begin investigations on its causes and outcomes on the targets and perpetrators, and how to ameliorate it. Some of the possible reasons for bullying studied include leadership, job characteristic, organizational culture, and work environment. Despite these studies, few have attempted to investigate the influence of workload and role conflict on workplace bullying. Further, previous studies also indicated conflicting results, and the mechanism through which workload and role conflict influences workplace bullying are not adequately addressed. Therefore moderator and mediator variables are suggested. This paper proposes social support and burnout as potential moderator and mediator on the relationship between workload, role conflict and workplace bullying.*

**Keywords: workload, role conflict, bullying, burnout**

### 1.1 Introduction

Workplace bullying is anti social behaviour (Hassan, Talib, Al, & Hashim, 2015; Jackson, 2009) or dysfunctional behaviour (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; Name et al., 2014), deviant behaviour (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), violence at work, (ILO, 2006) and counterproductive behaviour (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001) that has severe impact or harmful on both individual employee and the organization itself. According workplace bullying institute (2014), "workplace bullying was defined as repeated mistreatment; abusive conduct that is: threatening, humiliating, or intimidating, work sabotage, or verbal abuse" Cooper, Einarsen, and Hoel (2003) defined workplace bullying as a "repeated actions and practices that are directed against one or more workers, that are unwanted by the victim, that may be carried out deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offence and distress, and that may interfere with job performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment" (Cooper et al., 2003). According to survey conducted by workplace bullying institute (WBI, 2015), it was reported that as a result of workplace bullying 30% of American employees were suffering from intrusive thoughts, 77% hypertension, 49% depression, 77% sleeping disorders, 55% panic attacks, and 80% anxiety. In terms of financial loss, workplace bullying cost a Norwegian company \$30,000-100,000 (Leymann, 1990), and Australia \$AUS736,513 as a result of absenteeism, turnover and law suit (Gloor, 2014).

Previous studies also perceived other possible reasons for bullying. These include leadership (Hauge et al., 2011; Johnson, 2009; Laschinger & Fida, 2013; Spence Laschinger, Wong, & Grau,

2012; Trépanier, Fernet, Austin, & Boudrias, 2015), job characteristic ( Budin, Brewer, Chao, & Kovner, 2013; Çevik Akyil, Tan, Saritaş, & Altuntaş, 2012), organizational culture (Budin et al., 2013), work environment (Budin et al., 2013; Trépanier et al., 2015), and personal characteristics such as low competency and powerlessness (Notelaers, 2010; Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2009; Leymann, 1996).

Despite above mentioned empirical studies on the predictors/antecedents of workplace bullying among nurses, literatures shows that few studies have examined the effect of workload and role conflict on workplace bullying. Such neglect is unfortunate, because workload and role has influence on employee decisions to engage in workplace bullying or not (Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte 2011). Furthermore, there are conflicting results among the few previous studies and also the mechanisms or processes through which workload and role conflict influences workplace bullying are not adequately addressed. Therefore, this study will seek to extend the present workplace bullying literature by further investigating how workload and role conflict influence workplace bullying and the mechanism(s) through which this occur among nurses in Nigerian tertiary hospitals.

### 2.0 Literature review

#### 2.1 Issues in Nigeria Health Sectors

In Nigerian context, health sector has been facing serious crises of unruly behaviour (Buhari, 2016) from the Doctors, Nurses, and other health workers within the sector. Regarding the presence of workplace bullying among Nigerian nurses, it has been established that Nigeria nurses are among the victims or those vulnerable to bullying

(Abodunrin, Adeoye, Adeomi, & Akande, 2014; Leymann, 1990; Marziale, 2010; Nigeria Nursing World, 2015). There are reported cases of psychological distress and physiological effects among Nigeria nurses as a result of bullying which impact negatively on the care of patients. Bullying among Nigerian nurses is also associated with burnout which leads to job dissatisfaction, decrease productivity and low morale (Nigeria Nursing World, 2015; Rodwell & Demir, 2012). In addition, a study reported that among Nigeria nurses, 60% of the new nurses leaves their job during their first year as a result of workplace misbehaviour and 78% of all the nurses have been bullied or witnesses bullying (Nigeria Nursing World, 2015).

## 2.2 Empirical studies

Previous studies have examined the relationship between role conflict, workload and nurse turnover intention (Qureshi et al., 2013; Xiaoming, Ma, Chang, & Shieh, 2014), burnout (Daly, Simons, Skinner, & Hattam, 2013; Portoghese, Galletta, Coppola, Finco, & Campagna, 2014; Xiaoming et al., 2014), wellbeing, commitment and job satisfaction (Ahuja, Chudoba, George, Kacmar, & McKnight, 2002; Daly et al., 2013), mental health (Bowling & Beehr, 2006), absenteeism and low performance (Qureshi et al., 2013), anxiety and depression (Caplan & Jones, 1975). As earlier mentioned studies on the relationship between workload, role conflict and workplace bullying have not been given significant attention or understudied particularly in the nursing profession in Nigeria health sector.

Literatures have indicated that employees' exposure to poor job characteristics or stressful work environment such as workload and role conflict may cause feelings of helplessness, negative affection, mental health and tension. Consequently, these may encourage the occurrence of workplace bullying to both the perpetrator and the target (Baillien et al., 2011; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Hershcovis, 2015; Kemp, 2014).

Workload is defined as the amount of work that is being allocated to individual employee to accomplish within a specific period while role conflict refers to contradictory responsibility of individual employee in an organization (Caplan & Jones, 1975; Qureshi et al., 2013).

Furthermore, past studies have suggested that workload is positively related to workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2011; Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994; Yildirim, 2009). In the same vein, literatures also indicate that role conflict is also positively related to workplace bullying (Guy Notelaers, 2010; Hauge et al., 2011; Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994). However, understanding the mechanism and process through which workload and role conflict explains workplace bullying has not been adequately addressed in the literature (Morten Birkeland

Nielsen, Helge hoel, Dieter Zapf, 2015; Neall & Tuckey, 2014). More so, studies also indicate that the relationship between job characteristics and bullying are not direct (Cooper et al., 2003; Trépanier et al., 2015). Therefore, there is need to carry out more studies in this regard particularly in the nursing profession. To fill this gap in the literature, the present study will develop a framework to explain the effects of workload and role conflict on workplace bullying and propose that social support and burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2006) will serve as a moderating/moderating variables in the relationship.

The present study also considers burnout as a mediating variable between workload, role conflict, and workplace bullying into the research framework as suggested by (Cooper et al., 2003; Nielsen, Helge, Dieter Zapf, Einarsen, 2015). More so, previous study also suggests that burnout may be among the most important process linking job stressors and workplace bullying (Van den Broeck et al., 2011). The study of Karsavuran and Kaya (2015) among hospital managers revealed that burnout is significantly related to workplace bullying. Maslach and Leiter, (2006) defines burnout as a "psychological state resulting from prolong emotional or psychological stress on the job".

Evidence studies also indicate that there are conflicting results between job characteristics such as workload, role conflict and employee burnout (Aniței, Chraif, & Ioniță, 2015; Xiaoming et al., 2014; Zhou, Yong, & Danling, 2014).

Based on the mixed findings from the previous studies, the present study will incorporate social support as a potential moderator on the influence of workload, role conflict on burnout relationship with bullying. This is in line with (Baron & Kenny, 1986) suggestion that a moderator variable should be incorporated where the relationship between predictors and a criterion variable are found to be unexpectedly weak or inconsistent.. According to (Etzion, 1984) social support is an "informal social network that provides individuals with expressions of emotional concern or empathy, practical assistance, informational support or appraisal". It emphasis is on collaborative solving of problems and sharing information, reassessing situations and seeking advice from a variety of personnel such as colleagues, supervisors and managers.

However, previous studies on the moderating effects of social support on the relationship between work related stressors and burnout also reports mixed results for example, the studies of (Dubreuil, 2009; Etzion, 1984; Smoktunowicz et al., 2015). Based on the conflicting outcomes of these previous studies, the present study would strive to clarify the previous results by arguing the possibility of social support could moderate the

relationship between workload, role conflict, and burnout.

### 3.1 Theoretical support

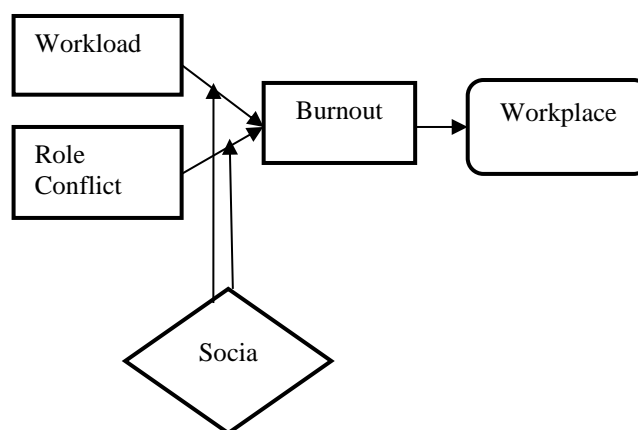
From theoretical point of view, previous studies have adopted several theories to explain different predictors of workplace bullying. Some of the theories that have been used include frustration-attraction theory (Berkowitz, 1989), social interaction theory (Ben-Sira, 1976) positive emotions theory. Despite the relevance of these theories, there is paucity of studies applying job-demand-resource theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and job-demand-control theory (Karasek, 1979). The present study will apply these theories to explain the relationships between the role conflict, workload and workplace bullying among nurses.

The possibility of burnout to be a mediating variable on the relationship between workload, role conflict and workplace bullying can be justified by job demands-control theory (Karasek, 1979). According to this theory, experiences of work stress are most likely occurring in the work situations that is characterized by high psychological demand such as workload, task concentration, pressure, and role conflict and also low job control such as authority and proper utilization of skill. Previous studies also indicate that high demand and low work control are related to low psychological well-being, burnout, low job satisfaction, and distress. Therefore, this indicates that employee with high job demand and low control will be exhausted and engage in bullying. Thus the mediating potentiality of burnout on the workplace bullying is likely.

Furthermore, the possibility of social support to moderate the interactions between workload, role conflict, and burnout can better be justify by job-demands-resource theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) assumption here is that various job characteristic such as job demand or job resources may have influence on the job related well-being (Van den Broeck et al., 2011). Bakker and Demerouti (2007), asserts that job demands are those job related factors such as workload and role conflicts that influences personal capacity, and strain employee such as burnout. It is also associated with psychological and physiological loss. Job resources on the other hand are those parts of the job environment that reduces job demand, achieving goals, and stimulating individual growth and development. This indicates that job resources

can buffer the negative impact of job-demands in such a way that employees feeling or experiencing high job demand may feel less strain or burnout if there are adequate job resources. Job resources also enhance engagement and motivation of the employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Thus social support can moderate the relationship between workload and role conflict on burnout.

Considering the above empirical literatures, a proposed research framework for this paper illustrating the moderating and mediating role of social support and burnout on the influence of workload and role conflict on workplace bullying as depicted in Figure 1. The paper indicate that the extent to which workload and role conflict influences burnout depend on the level of social support and same to burnout and workplace bullying.



**Figure 1:** The Influence of Workload and Role Conflict on Bullying: the role of Social Support and Burnout.

### 4.1 Conclusion

Based on the theoretical and empirical literature discussed above this paper has proposed the moderating and mediating role of social support and burnout on the relationship between workload, role conflict and workplace bullying as in figure one above. If the proposed model is validated, the result will provide a very relevant insight to the management of the health sector, particularly nursing and also practitioners into the role of social support and burnout on workplace bullying among the health worker in the hospital by applying adequate support and job control to ameliorate the impact of the stressors. The findings of the model will also reveal measures to be taken in controlling workplace bullying in organizations.

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