

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2019-05-06

Deposited version:

Post-print

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Arenas, A., Leon-Perez, J. M., Munduate, L. & Medina, F. J. (2015). Workplace bullying and interpersonal conflicts: the moderation effect of supervisor's power. *Revista de Psicología Social*. 30 (2), 295-322

Further information on publisher's website:

[10.1080/21711976.2015.1016753](https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21711976.2015.1016753)

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Arenas, A., Leon-Perez, J. M., Munduate, L. & Medina, F. J. (2015). Workplace bullying and interpersonal conflicts: the moderation effect of supervisor's power. *Revista de Psicología Social*. 30 (2), 295-322, which has been published in final form at <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21711976.2015.1016753>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

**Workplace Bullying and Interpersonal Conflicts:
The moderation effect of Supervisor's Power**

Alicia Arenas^{1*}, Jose M. Leon-Perez², Lourdes Munduate¹ & Francisco J. Medina¹

¹*Department of Social Psychology, Universidad de Sevilla*

²*Business Research Unit, ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa*

*Corresponding author: Alicia Arenas. Department of Social Psychology. Faculty of Psychology. Universidad de Sevilla. Camilo J. Cela, s/n. 41018 Sevilla, España. Email: aarenas@us.es

Acknowledgements: This study was partially funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science (PSI 2011/29256) and by the Occupational Health and Safety Department of the Andalusia Government.

To be published in: *Revista de Psicología Social / International Journal of Social Psychology*

http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rrps20#.U70nqZR_t_A

This article may not exactly replicate the final version published in the journal. It is not the copy of record.

Publisher copyright and source must be acknowledged

Abstract

Workplace bullying is considered the final stage of a prolonged conflict where there is a power imbalance between the affected parties and where emotional and relational problems exist. Thus, this study aims to explore the role of perceptions of supervisor's power bases on the relationship of conflict and bullying at work. A cross-sectional survey study was conducted ($N = 211$). Results support a moderated-mediation model in which relationship conflict mediates the association between task conflict and workplace bullying, suggesting a conflict escalation process in bullying situations. In addition, establishing personal power bases seems to reduce the intensity of the link between task conflict and relationship conflict and, in turn, workplace bullying, whereas establishing positional power bases was not related to this association. Practical implications for bullying prevention are discussed.

Keywords: power bases, task conflict, relationship conflict, interpersonal conflicts, workplace bullying

Resumen

Título: Acoso psicológico en el trabajo y conflictos interpersonales: El papel moderador de las bases de poder del supervisor

El acoso laboral ha sido considerado como la fase final de un conflicto prolongado en el tiempo donde hay un desequilibrio de poder entre las partes implicadas y existen problemas de carácter emocional. Este estudio trata de explorar el rol que las percepciones que los trabajadores tienen de las bases de poder que ostenta su supervisor pueden tener en la relación entre los conflictos interpersonales y los casos de acoso laboral. Se llevó a cabo un estudio transversal mediante cuestionario ($N= 211$). Los resultados apoyan un modelo de mediación moderada en el que el conflicto de relaciones estaría mediando la relación entre el conflicto de tarea y el acoso, lo que sugiere un posible proceso de escalamiento de los conflictos en situaciones de acoso. Además, ostentar bases de poder personal ayudaría a reducir la asociación entre conflictos y acoso, mientras que ostentar bases de poder relacionadas con la posición o estatus jerárquico no estaría relacionado con dicha asociación. Finalmente, se discuten las implicaciones de estos resultados para desarrollar estrategias de intervención frente al acoso.

Palabras clave: bases de poder, conflicto de tarea, conflicto de relaciones, conflictos interpersonales, acoso laboral

Introduction

Workplace bullying has gained relevance in social and research terms since the early work of Heinz Leymann in the 1980s. This author considered workplace bullying as the result of a conflict escalation process in which, after some failed attempts to cope with conflict, “one individual (seldom more) is attacked by one or more (seldom more than four) individuals almost on a daily basis and for periods of many months, bringing the person into an almost helpless position with potentially high risk of expulsion” (Leymann, 1996: p. 168).

In line with this definition, and contrary to previous research that has mainly focused on enumerating organizational antecedents that may create optimal conditions for bullying emergence, we applied the lens of interpersonal conflict to explore workplace bullying in this study. Furthermore, recent studies have pointed out that the relationship between working conditions and workplace bullying is limited (Baillien, Rodríguez-Muñoz, De Witte, Notelaers & Moreno-Jiménez, 2011) or even spurious (Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2010). Thus, several authors have stated the necessity of considering an interpersonal conflict approach to explore the underlying mechanisms of workplace bullying (e.g., Baillien, Neyens, De Witte & De Cuyper, 2009; Baillien, Bollen, Euwema & De Witte, 2013; Keashly & Nowell, 2011; León-Pérez, Notelaers, Arenas, Medina & Munduate, 2013; Neuman & Baron, 2011; Van de Vliert, 2010).

The aim of this paper is to explore the association between workplace bullying and interpersonal conflicts in order to elucidate a possible conflict escalation in bullying emergence. In doing so, especial emphasis will be given to a crucial factor that might affect the association between conflict and bullying at work, such as the perception of the power bases used by the supervisors. Indeed, our results may have important implications for planning preventive and intervention measures to deal with this phenomenon.

Workplace Bullying as a Conflict-linked phenomenon

According to Zapf and Einarsen (2005), conflict theory may be useful to understand why bullying occurs and why it has such negative consequences for both individuals and the organization as a whole. Indeed, several authors have argued that an interpersonal conflict, when is not well-managed, can escalate to a situation in which one of the parties is systematically exposed to bullying behaviours, leading him/her to a clear situation of inferiority in relation to the other party (e.g., Leymann, 1996; Zapf & Gross, 2001). Similarly, findings from case studies

and qualitative data have supported that workplace bullying is triggered by an unresolved interpersonal conflict at work (Baillien et al., 2009; Leymann, 1996; Matthiesen, Aasen, Holst, Wie & Einarsen, 2003). Thus, some authors have proposed that highly intense and long-lasting conflicts lead to negative behaviours and emotional responses that can be interpreted as workplace bullying (Ayoko, Callan & Härtel, 2003).

In that sense, Van de Vliert (1984) pointed out that parties in last stages of conflict escalation, or as result of conflicts with high intensity and emotional reactions, deny the other party's human value, thus paving the way for manipulation, retaliation, elimination and destruction. These last stages of conflict escalation are congruent with the conceptualization of workplace bullying as a phenomenon that involves implicit negative feelings, threats to personal identity, and hostile actions such as psychological abuse and social isolation through professional destabilization, discredit and humiliation (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011).

Thus, following Glasl's conflict escalation model (1982), bullying can be conceived as a destructive long-standing conflict, in which a situation that started with disagreements about the content of the workers' tasks and procedures (i.e., task-related conflict) turned to more personal issues in which both parties polarize their positions and differences (i.e., emotional or relationship conflict) and the party with more power tried to destroy the opposite party's reputation and self-esteem (i.e., workplace bullying) (see also Leymann, 1996; Zapf and Gross, 2001).

Furthermore, it seems reasonable to think that the link between conflicts and workplace bullying may depend on the conflict intensity and the negative emotions and hostility that conflict involves. In turn, explaining workplace bullying from a conflict perspective needs to consider the traditional differentiation between *task conflicts* -which refers to conflicts over ideas, tasks and issues related to work such as the distribution of resources, the procedures or guidelines that employees need to follow, or the interpretation of facts-, and *relationship conflicts* –i.e., conflicts about the relation in which personal values or preferences come into play and that, to a certain extent, threaten personal identity or values system- (see Jehn, 1994; Jehn, Chadwick & Thatcher, 1997). Indeed, recent meta-analyses have shown that the nature and consequences of each type of conflict are different: task conflict can have positive effects under certain circumstances, whereas there is consensus about the negative effects of relationship conflict since it usually implies negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, irritability, mistrust,

resentment, frustration, tension, and restlessness (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; De Wit, Greer & Jehn, 2012). Moreover, the possibility of task conflict relating with relationship conflict makes its positive role very limited (Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Thus, when the divergences around the task are frequent or intense, these discussions do not allow the task to be performed and it can derive toward personal issues (Jehn et al., 1997), which, in turn, increase the probability of workplace violence emergence (De Dreu, Van Dierendonck & Dijkstra, 2004). Consequently, we predict that task conflict only will lead to bullying exposition when task conflict is related to relationship conflict.

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between task conflict and workplace bullying will be mediated by relationship conflict.

In addition, conflict researchers' knowledge on how preventing conflict escalation seems one of the main contributions that they can add to bullying domain in order to avoid its detrimental consequences. For that reason, this study explores a variable which has not been analyzed in relation to workplace bullying but it is essential in conflict escalation literature: supervisor's power bases.

Supervisor's Power Bases and Bullying at Work

The concepts of control and power are essential in bullying. As Einarsen et al. (2011) indicate, the key definitional features of workplace bullying are: (a) exposition to repeated or systematic negative acts; (b) during a prolonged period of time; and (c) the existence of power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target that leads the latter to have difficulties in defending him/herself against the negative acts received. Thus, workplace bullying can be considered as an asymmetrical destructive interpersonal conflict where there is a power imbalance between the affected parties and where emotional and relationship problems exist (Keashly & Nowell, 2011; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005).

According to traditional research on power, we can differentiate between two main supervisor's power bases: positional power and personal power (Bass, 1960). The former refers to the existing organizational hierarchy that endows management with the ability to control the behaviour of others and to change the organizational structure and processes. Positional power arises from an individual's formal position and implies the legitimate authority to use rewards

and sanctions (i.e., positional power is based on rewards, coercion and legitimacy). In the case of interpersonal conflict and conflict management, high positional power will promote a competitive approach to deal with interpersonal conflicts (i.e., dominating conflict management style: Rahim, 2011) because they perceive the features and needs of the others to a lesser extent, considering them as instruments for their goals (Argüello, Willis & Carretero-Dios, 2012; Galinsky, Magee, Inesi & Gruenfeld, 2006). Thus, conflict management based on positional power bases enhance the association between task-related and relationship conflicts since “a dominating supervisor is likely to use his or her position power to impose his or her will on the subordinates and command their obedience.” (Rahim, 2011, p. 29). Regarding workplace bullying, several studies have demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between bullying and a marked hierarchical structure in the organization where there is a significant power imbalance, and even a common abuse of power (e.g., Hoel, Cooper & Faragher, 2001; Liefoghe & Mackenzie-Davey, 2001). The development of social interaction patterns based on discrimination and abuse of authority lead to a “bullying culture”, in which employees with lower status expect that their superiors conduct negative acts directed towards them through learning and socialization process in professions such as nursing (Hoel, Giga & Davidson, 2007), chefs (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008) or police officers (Segurado et al., 2008). Thus, organizations characterized by an extreme degree of conformity and group pressure, which is often reflected in hierarchical power systems, seem to be particularly prone to bullying practices (Aquino, 2000).

In contrast, personal power refers to the type of relationship established with the other person, where sources of power are connected to particular abilities, skills and experience (i.e., personal power is based on reference and expertise). According to Rahim (2011), using personal power for managing conflicts at work encourages taking the perspective of others and problem solving (i.e., constructive conflict management), which decreases conflict intensity (i.e., the association between task-related and relationship conflict: Doucet, Poitras & Chenevert, 2009; Medina, Munduate & Guerra, 2008; Peiró & Meliá, 2003). In addition, although there is evidence that the high use of personal power in the organization leads to a decrease in conflict at work, to the authors’ knowledge, no previous studies have explored the role of supervisor’s personal power bases on workplace bullying.

Based on these findings and assumptions, we could expect that the relationship between conflict and bullying may differ depending on the power bases established in the organization.

(i.e., moderated-mediation model, see Figure 1): the association between task conflict and workplace bullying through relationship conflict is more likely in organizations where supervisors' power is based on their hierarchical positions rather than on their personal power.

Hypothesis 2: Supervisors' positional power bases will increase the mediating effect of relationship conflict on the association between task conflict and workplace bullying (2a), whereas personal power bases will buffer such mediating effect (2b).

--Please insert Figure 1 here--

Method

Participants

Participants that took part in this study come from a convenient sample of two different companies in Andalusia (Spain). From the 300 questionnaires distributed, 217 were returned; however, after eliminating six incomplete questionnaires, we obtained 211 valid responses (*r.r.* = 70.3%). Regarding the organizations, 53.6% of the participants worked in a medium-size manufacturing company and the remained 47.4% in an eldercare organization. Considering the sensitivity of the topic, and to improve participation and ensure anonymity, we only collected demographic data about gender (52.2% male *vs.* 47.8% female) and hierarchical position (88% blue-collar employees *vs.* 12% supervisors and managers).

Procedure

After approaching the managers of the companies and explaining the overall goal of the study (assessing psychosocial risk factors at work), participants were arranged to meet by their supervisors in their own workplace. Researchers introduced the study to participants as an assessment of psychosocial risk factors in their organization, thereby avoiding any bias in the selection of participants related to their experience or opinions concerning workplace bullying. Researchers then handed out the survey packages which included a cover letter, a self-report questionnaire, and an unmarked envelope. The cover letter described the purpose of the study, emphasizing voluntariness, anonymity, and confidentiality of responses. In each survey session, a return box was installed, where participants were asked to deposit the completed questionnaires in the unmarked envelopes. Researchers collected them at the end of each survey session.

Measures

Workplace bullying was measured using the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R: Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009), which was translated into Spanish by using a standard back-translation procedure. This questionnaire consists of 22 specific negative behaviours measuring exposure to bullying within the last six months (e.g., negative rumours about your private life; being withheld information). Participants scored the frequency of each negative act according to the following response categories: 1-Never, 2-Now and then, 3-Monthly, 4-Weekly, and 5-Daily.

Task conflict and *Relationship conflict* were measured with the scale of interpersonal conflict used by Friedman et al. (2000) validated into Spanish (Benitez, Leon-Perez, Ramirez-Marin, Medina & Munduate, 2012). The first four items on this scale refer to the amount of conflict experienced by a person regarding decisions to make or the way to perform the tasks (e.g., “To what extent are there opposite points of view about the task to perform?”). The remained five items refer to conflicts generated by interpersonal relationships of personal nature (e.g., “How often do you experience hostility at work?”). Participants were asked to answer on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1: ‘none’ to 5: ‘a lot’.

Supervisor’s Positional and Personal Power was measured using the Leader Power Inventory (Rahim, 1988). It has 29 items measuring, on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1: ‘totally disagree’ to 5: ‘totally agree’), the perception of participants about their supervisor’ sources of power: (a) positional power (17 items; e.g., “My superior can take disciplinary action against me because of insubordination”; “My superior can recommend me for a merit recognition if my performance is especially good”), and (b) personal power (12 items; e.g., “My superior has considerable professional experience to draw from to help me do my work”; “My superior is the type of person I enjoy working with”).

Results

First, as can be seen in the diagonal of Table 1 between parentheses, the internal consistency of each questionnaire used in this study was addressed. Means, standard deviations and correlations among the main variables in this study are also provided in such table.

--Please insert Table 1 here--

Then, we conducted a multiple linear regression analyses using a SPSS macro (see Hayes, 2013) to test our hypotheses. Once established that the degree to which employees perceive relationship conflict mediates the effect of task conflict on workplace bullying (model 4: Hayes, 2013), we hypothesized that this mediating effect responsible for the effect of task conflict on workplace bullying depends on the supervisor's power bases used (model 58: Hayes, 2013). This macro allows computing path analysis-based that combines moderation and mediation analysis or conditional indirect effects (Preacher, Rucker & Hayes, 2007). In addition, this computational tool bootstrappes resampling results for the specific conditional indirect effects through the Bias Corrected and Accelerated (BCa) estimates and 95% confidence intervals. This technique outperforms the normal theory Sobel tests since Type I error is less likely (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Regarding the mediating effect of relationship conflict, our results revealed that task conflict was positively associated with relationship conflict (path a , $p < .001$) and relationship conflict was positively associated with workplace bullying (path b , $p < .001$). In addition, task conflict was positively associated with workplace bullying (path c or total effect, $p < .001$); however, when relationship conflict was included as mediator, the association between task conflict and workplace bullying became non-significant (path c' or direct effect). Moreover, the resampling procedure (5000 bootstrap samples), via the Bias Corrected and Accelerated (BCa) estimates and 95% confidence intervals, indicated a significant indirect effect since the BCa 95% confidence interval does not include zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Therefore, results indicated a total mediation effect of relationship conflict on the relationship between task conflict and workplace bullying (indirect effect, $p < .001$; 95% BCa CI of 0.02 to 0.08), supporting our hypothesis 1. This mediation model explained 16% of the workplace bullying variance ($F(2,207) = 20.24$, $p < .001$;).

--Please insert Figure 2 here--

Then, we conducted two different moderated-mediation analyses, one per each supervisor's power bases as moderator of the first (path task conflict – relationship conflict) and second (path relationship conflict – workplace bullying) stages of the mediating effect of relationship on task conflict and workplace bullying (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Hence, in the first analysis we introduced positional (or formal) power bases as moderator.

Considering the first stage of the mediating effect, our results revealed a main effect of task conflict ($B = .36, p < .001$) and positional power bases ($B = -.32, p < .001$) on relationship conflict; however, the interaction effect of task conflict and positional power on relationship conflict was not significant ($B = -.17, p = .16$). Similarly, considering the second stage of the mediating effect, results indicated main effects of relationship conflict ($B = .13, p < .001$) and marginal effect of task conflict ($B = .05, p = .07$), but not positional power ($B = .02, p = .61$) on workplace bullying. In addition, the interaction effect of relationship conflict and positional power on workplace bullying was also not significant ($B = .05, p = .19$). Thus, results did not support our hypothesis 2a. This moderated-mediation model explained 17% of the workplace bullying variance ($F(4,203) = 10.47, p < .001$).

Finally, in the case of personal power bases as moderator, our results revealed a main effect of task conflict ($B = .29, p < .001$) and personal power ($B = -.34, p < .001$) on relationship conflict; the interaction effect of task conflict and personal power was also significant ($B = -.17, p < .05; F(3,204) = 17.59, p < .001; R^2 = .205$; see Figure 3). In addition, there was a main effect of relationship conflict ($B = .10, p < .001$) and personal power ($B = -.08, p < .01$) on workplace bullying, but the main effect of task conflict was not significant. Moreover, the interaction effect of relationship conflict and personal power on workplace bullying was marginal ($B = -.04, p = .08$; see Figure 4). Thus, results supported our hypothesis 2b. This moderated-mediation model explained 21% of the workplace bullying variance ($F(4,203) = 13.43, p < .001; R^2 = .209$).

--Please insert Figure 3 here--

--Please insert Figure 4 here--

Discussion

According to Van de Vliert's (2010) suggestion that conflict researchers can help to better understand workplace bullying, this study aims at broadening our understanding of workplace bullying as linked to interpersonal conflicts at work. In that sense, results support a moderated-mediation model in which relationship conflict mediates the association between task conflict and workplace bullying, indicating a possible conflict escalation process in bullying situations. These results agree with previous findings on conflict literature about the negative effects of relationship conflicts within the workplace. For example, relationship conflict has been associated to negative emotional reactions and to increased behaviours of mutual hostility that

are part of conflict escalation (Benitez, Medina & Munduate, 2012; De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; De Witt et al., 2012). Similarly, although the lack of studies that have applied the lens of conflict to study workplace bullying, several researchers have considered bullying as a phenomenon triggered by a critical incident or interpersonal conflict at work that escalates to more destructive levels in which one party receives bullying behaviours in a frequent and systematic way (e.g., Baillien et al., 2009; Einarsen et al., 2011; León-Pérez et al., 2013; Leymann, 1996; Matthiesen et al., 2003).

In addition, taking into account that workplace bullying in Spain is more often a top-down process from superiors to their subordinates (Moreno-Jimenez, Rodriguez-Muñoz, Garrosa, & Morante, 2005), we explored the role of supervisor's power bases on the association between interpersonal conflicts and workplace bullying. Indeed, supervisors are usually directly involved in workplace conflicts between subordinates (Doucet et al., 2009) and their ability to resolve such conflicts have been related to workplace bullying perceptions (O'Moore et al., 1998). Thus, power is crucial to ensure group coordination, problem solving or achieving collective goals; however, abusive power is related to negative effects for both workers and organizations as a whole (Rodríguez-Bailón & Willis, 2012; Tepper et al., 2009). In our case, our results suggested that positional power (i.e., power based on the formal hierarchy established in the organization) is negatively related to relationship conflict. Thus, contrary to our assumptions, using positional power based on the supervisors' legitimacy seems to be associated with less relationship conflict levels. Moreover, although positional power has been associated to marked hierarchical structures characterized by an authoritarian leadership style in which negative acts and abusive supervision is more likely (e.g., Hoel, Glassø, Hetland, Cooper & Einarsen, 2010; Restubog, Scott & Zagenczyk, 2011; Tepper et al., 2009), our results revealed that there was no association between positional power and workplace bullying. In Spain, where power distance is relatively high, legitimate hierarchical behaviours from the leader involving a reduction of conflicts at the workplace may be well-accepted by subordinates. The influence on role clarity and uncertainty reduction in these cases may prevent conflicts from growing in intensity.

Different methodological and theoretical issues may help explaining these results. First, Hoel et al. (2007) argued that workers expect receiving negative acts from their superiors in high marked hierarchical organizations, such as those from healthcare and manufacturing sectors, in which social interaction patterns based on abuse of authority exist. Thus, considering that the

sector of the participating companies can influence the perceptions about conflict and bullying at work, it is possible that workers in our sample might report being exposed to less workplace bullying because they perceive negative acts as normal. On the other hand, complementarily to the supervisors' power bases, the established conflict management procedures and the existing social climate in the group can also affect the emergence and perception of conflict and bullying at work (e.g., Benítez et al., 2012; Bond, Tuckey, & Dollard, 2012; Medina et al., 2008; Muñoz, Guerra, Barón, & Munduate, 2006). Further research should explore the role of social climate and conflict management because it is possible than the lack of association between positional power bases and both conflict and bullying can be explained by a supportive social climate (Muñoz et al., 2006) or a cooperative conflict resolution (Benítez et al., 2012).

Regarding the use of personal power bases, it was associated with lower levels of relationship conflict and lower exposition to bullying behaviours. Moreover, establishing personal power bases buffers both the association task conflict-relationship conflict and the association relationship conflict-workplace bullying, suggesting that this kind of power based on abilities and experience in which people trust in may prevent conflict escalation at work. This result is in line with previous findings on conflict, leadership and bullying. For example, considering that personal power is rooted in trust, conflict researchers have pointed out that high level of trust between workers can prevent that any discrepancies arising from work will be interpreted as personal matters (Coleman & Voronov, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Moreover, Medina et al. (2008) found that using personal power allowed conflict to decrease in a sample of 401 Spanish employees working in social service organizations. Similarly, previous findings have suggested that leader's behaviours and practices involving personal power bases (e.g., emotional support, inspiration and communication of vision) are related to reduced bullying behaviours at individual (Ayoko & Callan, 2010) and department levels (Hauge et al., 2011). In that sense, our results highlight the importance for supervisors of adopting personal power bases to reduce conflict escalation and possible subsequent bullying situations. Thus, developing environments in which employees perceive a high use of personal power (i.e., a good leader-member relationship based on personal and expert practices exists) may be a protector element from workplace bullying.

Limitations and further studies

The above interpretations need caution since our study is not exempt of limitations. The main limitation of the present study is that it relies on cross-sectional self-report data. Cross-sectional quantitative methodology provides data about correlation among different factors, but it does not allow us to make causal inferences. In that sense, despite theoretical models on bullying as well as qualitative studies have considered conflict as an antecedent of bullying (e.g., Baillien et al., 2009; Leymann, 1996; Matthiesen et al., 2003), we could not rule out alternatives explanations and establish whether (a) relationship conflict is an antecedent or a consequence of workplace bullying, or (b) reporting supervisors having certain power bases is influenced by experiencing negative behaviours. In this regard, further studies are needed to test similar hypotheses using longitudinal approaches in order to identify the dynamic process of escalation of organizational conflicts. Moreover, according to bullying definitions, the power imbalance between confronting parts is crucial in the development of bullying situations. Thus, further studies should also directly explore the role of employees' power bases and conflict management styles on conflict escalation rather than focusing on their supervisors' power (e.g., Baillien et al., 2013). In a similar vein, we do not consider the cases where supervisor could be also the bullying perpetrator. Given that top-down workplace bullying (from supervisors to subordinates) is more likely in the Spanish context (e. g., Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2012), future research should therefore explore which power bases employ bully supervisors (vs. non-bully supervisors).

Finally, Stouten et al. (2010) argue that positive leadership styles foster employees' prosocial behaviour and ethical conduct, which, in turn, may difficult bullying emergence. In that sense, in contrast to the existing literature that relates negative leadership styles and workplace bullying (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2007; Rodríguez-Muñoz, Gil & Moreno-Jiménez, 2012), an interesting venue for research derived from our results may be exploring the role of positive leadership styles (i.e., personal power bases as key practices and behaviours of positive leaders) on conflict management and bullying prevention (e.g., Ceja et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The present study makes a contribution in the theoretical and practical integration of issues traditionally studied separately: interpersonal conflict and workplace bullying. Although some limitations, our findings suggest a conflict escalation process from task conflict to

workplace bullying through relationship conflict. In such process, supervisor's power bases seem to play a pivotal role, suggesting the necessity of promoting supervisors' behaviours and values based on using personal power strategies and focusing on capacities, skills and knowledge of the organizational members in order to create a favourable atmosphere to decrease relationship conflicts and prevent bullying behaviours. Moreover, according to our results, it seems that implementing conflict management procedures within organizations can help to prevent workplace bullying –in which managers and supervisors should play an active role (Leon-Perez, Arenas & Butts, 2012).

References

- Aquino, K. (2000). Structural and individual determinants of workplace victimization: The effects of hierarchical status and conflict management style. *Journal of Management*, 26, 171-193. Doi: 10.1177/014920630002600201
- Argüello, C., Willis, G. B. & Carretero-Dios, H. (2012). The effects of social power and disparagement humor on the evaluations of subordinates. *Revista de Psicología Social*, 27, 323-336.
- Ayoko, O. B. & Callan, V. J. (2010). Teams' reactions to conflict and teams' task and social outcomes: The moderating role of transformational and emotional leadership. *European Management Journal*, 28, 220-235. Doi: 10.1016/j.emj.2009.07.001
- Ayoko, O. B., Callan, V. J. & Hartel, C. E. J. (2003). Workplace conflict, bullying, and counterproductive behaviours. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 11, 283-301. Doi: 10.1108/eb028976
- Baillien, E., Bollen, K., Euwema, M. & De Witte, H. (2013). Conflicts and conflict management styles as precursors of workplace bullying: A two-wave longitudinal study. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Doi: 10.1080/1359432X.2012.752899
- Baillien, E., Neyens, I., De Witte, H. & De Cuyper, N. (2009). A qualitative study on the development of workplace bullying: Towards a three way model. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 19, 1-16. Doi: 10.1002/casp.977
- Baillien, E., Rodríguez-Muñoz, A., De Witte, H., Notelaers, G. & Moreno-Jiménez, B. (2011). The Demand-Control model and target's reports of bullying at work: A test within Spanish and Belgian blue-collar workers. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 20, 157-177.
- Baron, R. M. & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182. Doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.51.6.1173
- Bass, B. M. (1960). *Leadership, psychology and organizational behaviour*. New York: Harper.
- Benítez, M., Leon-Perez, J. M., Ramirez-Marín, J. Y., Medina, F. J. & Munduate, L. (2012). Validation of the interpersonal conflict at work questionnaire among Spanish employees. *Estudios de Psicología*, 33, 263-275. WOS: 000310762700002

- Benitez, M., Medina, F. J. & Munduate, L (2012). The management of relationship conflicts in service organizations. *Anales de Psicología*, 28, 139-149.
- Bloisi, W. & Hoel, H. (2008). Abusive work practices and bullying among chefs: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27, 649-656. Doi: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2007.09.001
- Bond, S. A., Tuckey, M. R. & Dollard, M. F. (2010). Psychosocial safety climate, workplace bullying, and symptoms of posttraumatic stress. *Organization Development Journal*, 28, 37-56.
- Ceja, L., Escartín, J. & Rodríguez-Carballeira, A. (2012). Organisational contexts that foster positive behaviour and well-being: A comparison between family-owned firms and non-family businesses. *Revista de Psicología Social*, 27, 69-84.
- Coleman, P. T. & Voronov, M. (2003). Power in groups and organizations. In M. West, D. Tjosvold & K. G. Smith (Eds.), *The International Handbook of Organizational Teamwork and Cooperative Working* (pp. 229-254). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- De Dreu, C. K. W. & Van Vianen, A. E. M. (2001). Managing relationship conflict and the effectiveness of organizational teams. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 22, 309-328. Doi: 10.1002/job.71
- De Dreu, C. K. W., Van Dierendonck, D. & Dijkstra, M. T. M. (2004). Conflict at work and individual well-being. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 15, 6-26. Doi: 10.1108/eb022905
- De Dreu, C. K. W. & Weingart, L. R. (2003). Task versus relationship conflict. A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 741-749. Doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.88.4.741
- De Wit, F., Greer, L. L. & Jehn, K. A. (2012). The paradox of intragroup conflict: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97, 360-390. Doi: 10.1037/a0024844
- Doucet, O., Poitras, J. & Chenevert, D. (2009). The impacts of leadership on workplace conflicts. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 20, 340-354. Doi: 10.1108/10444060910991057
- Edwards, J. R. & Lambert, L.S. (2007). Methods for integrating moderation and mediation: A general analytical framework using moderated path analysis. *Psychological Methods*, 12, 1-22.

- Einarsen, S., Aasland, M. S. & Skogstad, A. (2007). Destructive leadership behaviour: A definition and conceptual model. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, 207–216. Doi: 10.1016/j.lequa.2007.03.002
- Einarsen, S., Hoel, H. & Notelaers, G. (2009). Measuring exposure to bullying and harassment at work: Validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised. *Work and Stress*, 23, 24-44. Doi: 10.1080/02678370902815673
- Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Zapf, D. & Cooper, C. L. (2011). The concept of bullying and harassment at work: The European tradition. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd Ed., pp. 3-40). London: CRC Press.
- Friedman, R. A., Tidd, S. T., Currall, S. C. & Tsai, J. C. (2000). What goes around comes around: The impact of personal conflict style on work conflict and stress. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 11, 32-55.
- Galinsky, A. D., Magee, J. C., Inesis, M. E. & Gruenfeld, D. H. (2006). Power and perspective not taken. *Psychological Science*, 17, 1068-1074.
- Glasl, F. (1982). The process of conflict escalation and roles of third parties. In G. B. J. Bomers & R. Peterson (Eds.), *Conflict management and industrial relations* (pp. 119–140). Boston, MA: Kluwer-Nijhoff.
- Hauge, L. J., Skogstad, A. & Einarsen, S. (2010). The relative impact of workplace bullying as a social stressor at work. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 51, 426-433. Doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9450.2010.00813.x
- Hauge, L. J., Einarsen, S., Knardahl, S., Lau, B., Notelaers, G. & Skogstad, A. (2011). Leadership and role stressors as departmental level predictors of workplace bullying. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 18, 305-323. Doi: 10.1037/a0025396.
- Hoel, H., Cooper, C. L. & Faragher, B. (2001). The experience of bullying in Great Britain: The impact of organizational status. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10, 443-466.
- Hoel, H., Giga, S. I. & Davidson, M. J. (2007). Expectations and realities of student nurses' experiences of negative behaviour and bullying in clinical placement and the influences of socialization processes. *Health Services Management Research*, 20, 270-278. Doi: 10.1258/095148407782219049

- Hoel, H., Glasø, L., Hetland, J., Cooper, C. L. & Einarsen, S. (2010). Leadership styles as predictors of self-reported and observed workplace bullying. *British Journal of Management*, 21, 453-468. Doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8551.2009.00664.x
- Jehn, K. A. (1994). Enhancing effectiveness: An investigation of advantages and disadvantages of value-based intragroup conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 5, 223-238. Doi: 10.1108/eb022744.
- Jehn, K. A., Chadwick, C. & Thatcher, S. (1997). To agree or not to agree: The effects of value congruence, member diversity and conflict on workgroup outcomes. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 8, 287-305.
- Keashly, L. & Nowell, B. L. (2011). Conflict, conflict resolution, and bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd Ed., pp. 423-446). London: CRC Press.
- León-Pérez, J.M., Arenas, A. & Butts, T. (2012). Effectiveness of a conflict management intervention to prevent workplace bullying. In N. Tehrani (Ed.), *Workplace bullying: symptoms and solutions* (pp. 230-243). London: Routledge Press.
- León-Pérez, J.M., Notelaers, G., Arenas, A., Munduate, L., & Medina, F.J. (2013). Identifying Victims of Workplace Bullying by Integrating Traditional Estimation Approaches into a Latent Class Cluster Model. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, in press.
- Leymann, H. (1996). The content and development of bullying at work. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5, 165-184.
- Liefoghe, A. P. D. & Mackenzie-Davey, K. (2001). Accounts of workplace bullying: The role of the organization. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10, 375-392.
- Matthiesen, S. B., Aasen, E., Holst, G., Wie, K. & Einarsen, S. (2003). The escalation of conflict: A case study of bullying at work. *International Journal of Management and Decision Making*, 4, 96-112.
- Medina, F. J., Munduate, L. & Guerra, J. M. (2008). Power and conflict in cooperative and competitive contexts. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 17, 23-45.

- Muñoz, H., Guerra, J. M., Baron, M. & Munduate, L. (2006). El acoso psicológico desde una perspectiva organizacional. Papel del clima organizacional y los procesos de cambio. *Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones*, 22, 347-362.
- Neuman, J. H. & Baron, R. A. (2011). Social antecedents of bullying: A social interactionist perspective. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd Ed., pp. 201-226). London: CRC Press.
- O'Moore, M., Seigne, E., McGuire, L. & Smith, M. (1998). Victims of bullying at work in Ireland. *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety – Australia and New Zealand*, 14, 569–574.
- Peiró, J. M. & Meliá, J. L. (2003). Formal and informal interpersonal power in organizations: Testing a bi-factorial model of power in role-sets. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 52, 14-35. Doi: 10.1111/1464-0597.00121
- Preacher, K. J. & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavioral Research Methods*, 40, 879-891. Doi: 10.3758/BRM.40.3.879
- Preacher, K. J., Rucker, D. D. & Hayes, A. F. (2007). Assessing moderated mediation hypotheses: Theory, methods, and prescriptions. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 42, 185-227.
- Rahim, M. A. (1983). A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict. *Academy of Management Journal*, 26, 368-376. Doi: 10.2307/255985
- Rahim, M. A. (1988). The development of a leader power inventory. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 23, 491-502.
- Rahim, M. A. (2011). *Managing conflict in organizations* (4th Ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Raver, J. & Barling J. (2008). Workplace aggression and conflict: Constructs, commonalities, and challenges for future inquiry. In C. K. W. De Dreu & M. J. Gelfand (Eds.), *The psychology of conflict and conflict management in organizations* (pp. 211-244). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Restubog, S. L. D., Scott, K. D. & Zagenczyk, T. J. (2011). When distress hits home: The effects of contextual factors and psychological distress in predicting employee responses to abusive supervision. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 96*, 713-729.
- Rodríguez-Bailón, R. & Willis, G. B. (2012). Power: Its Social Psychology. *Revista de Psicología Social, 27*, 287-292.
- Rodríguez-Muñoz, A., Gil, F. & Moreno-Jiménez, B. (2012). Factores organizacionales y acoso psicológico en el trabajo: el papel moderador del liderazgo “laissez-faire”. *Revista de Psicología Social, 27*, 221-231.
- Segurado, A., Agulló, E., Rodríguez-Suárez, J., Agulló, M. S., Boada, J. & Medina-Centeno, R. (2008). Interpersonal relations as a source of risk of mobbing in the Local Police. *Psicothema, 20*, 739-744.
- Stouten, J., Baillien, E., Van den Broeck, A., Camps, J., De Witte, H. & Euwema, M. (2010). Discouraging bullying: The role of ethical leadership and its effects on the work environment. *Journal of Business Ethics, 95*, 17-27.
- Tepper, B. J., Carr, J. C., Breaux, D. M., Geider, S., Hu, C. & Hua, W. (2009). Abusive supervision, intentions to quit, and employees' workplace deviance: A power/dependence analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 109*, 156–167. Doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2009.03.004
- Van de Vliert, E. (1984). Conflict-prevention and escalation. In P. J. D. Drenth, H. K. Thierry, P. J. Willems & C. J. de Wolf (Eds.), *Handbook of work and organizational psychology* (521-551). London: John Wiley.
- Van de Vliert, E. (2010). Moving bullies and victims up on conflict-researchers' waiting lists. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research, 3*, 87-90. Doi: 10.1111/j.1750-4716.2010.00055.x
- Yang, J. & Mossholder, K.W. (2004). Decoupling task and relationship conflict: the role of intragroup emotional processing. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 25*, 589-605. Doi: 10.1002/job.258
- Zapf, D. & Einarsen, S. E. (2005). Mobbing at work. Escalated conflicts in organizations. In S. Fox & P. E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive workplace behavior: Investigations of actors and targets* (pp. 237-270). Washington: American Psychological Association.

Zapf, D. & Gross, C. (2001). Conflict escalation and coping with workplace bullying: A replication and extension. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10, 497-522.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the main variables in the study (N = 211).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. NAQ	1.27	0.33	(.89)				
2. Task Conf.	2.79	0.77	.24**	(.70)			
3. Relat. Conf.	2.46	0.95	.41**	.31**	(.86)		
4. Superv PoP	3.06	0.66	-.08	-.12	-.25**	(.79)	
5. Superv. PeP	3.31	0.81	-.34**	-.24**	-.37**	.50**	(.69)

Note: Task Conf. = task conflict; Relat. Conf. = relationship conflict; Superv. PoP = supervisor positional power bases; Superv. PeP = supervisor personal power bases; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. The internal consistency of each scale appears in the diagonal between parentheses (Cronbach's alpha).

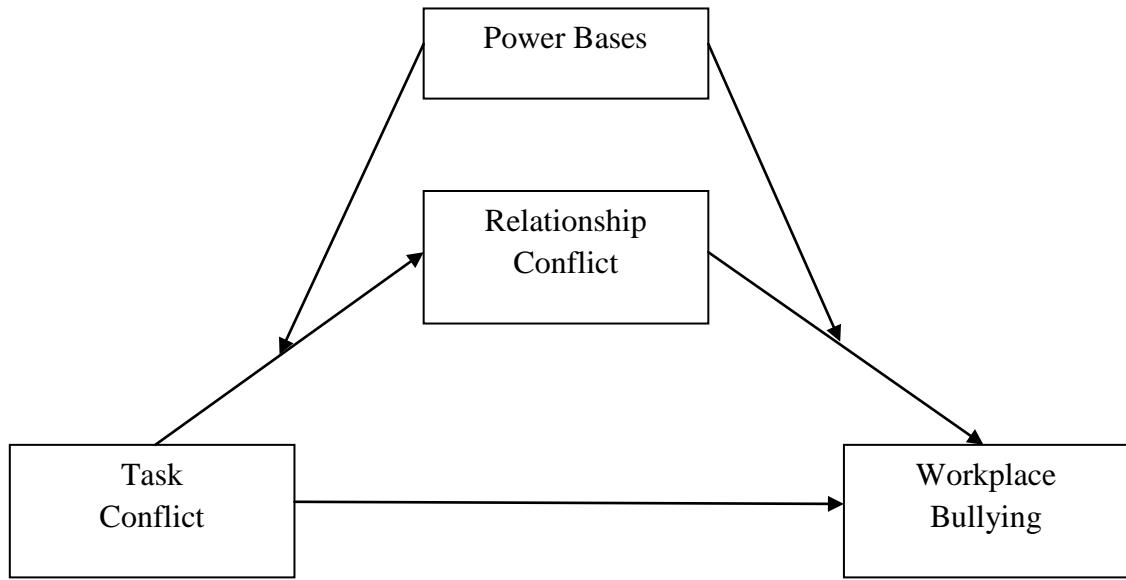


Figure 1. Theoretical model tested in this study.

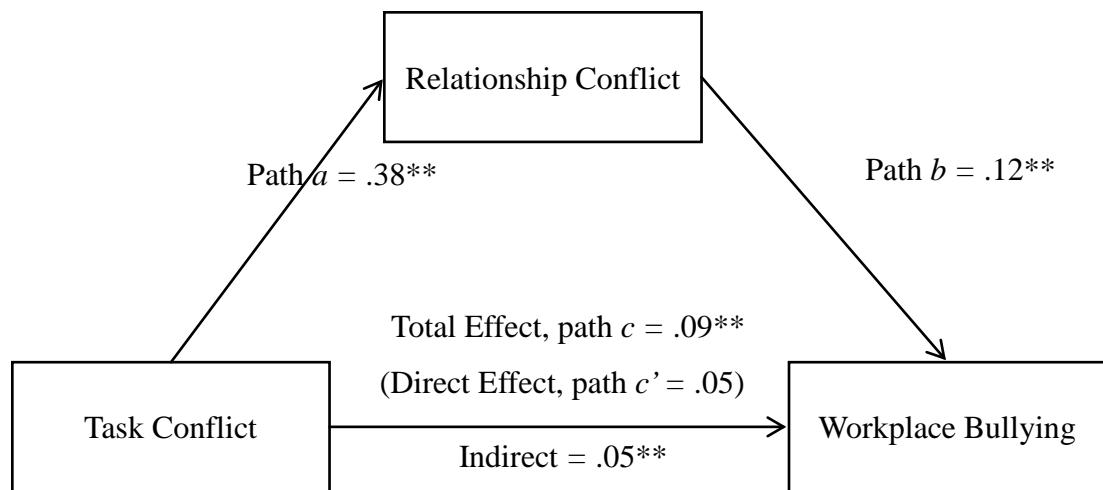


Figure 2. Mediating effect of relationship conflict on the association between task conflict and workplace bullying ($*p < .01$; $^{**}p < .001$).

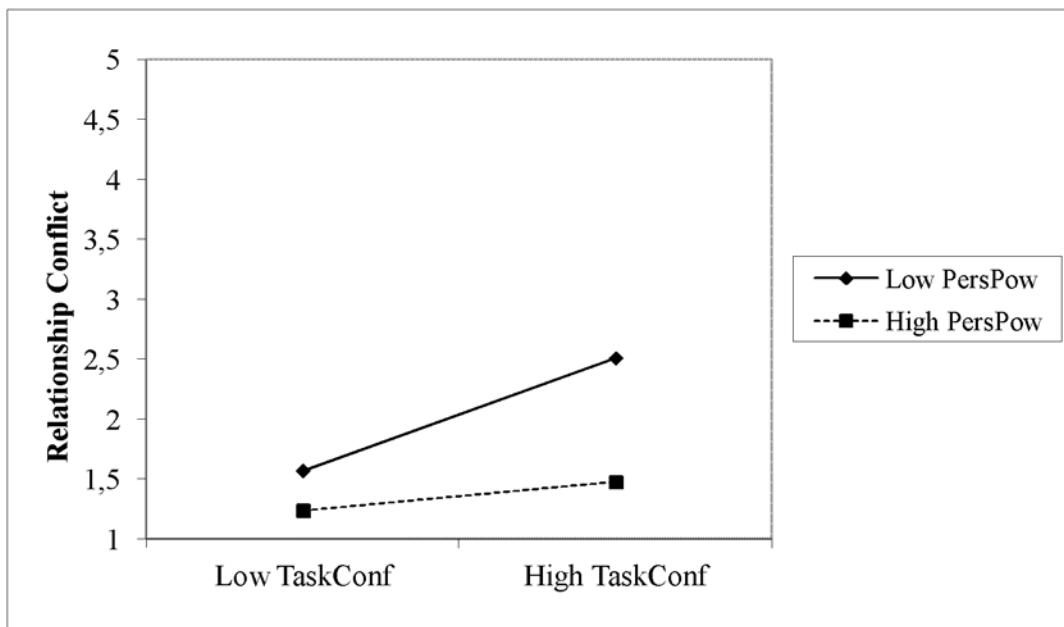


Figure 3. Moderating effect of personal power on the association between task conflict and relationship conflict.

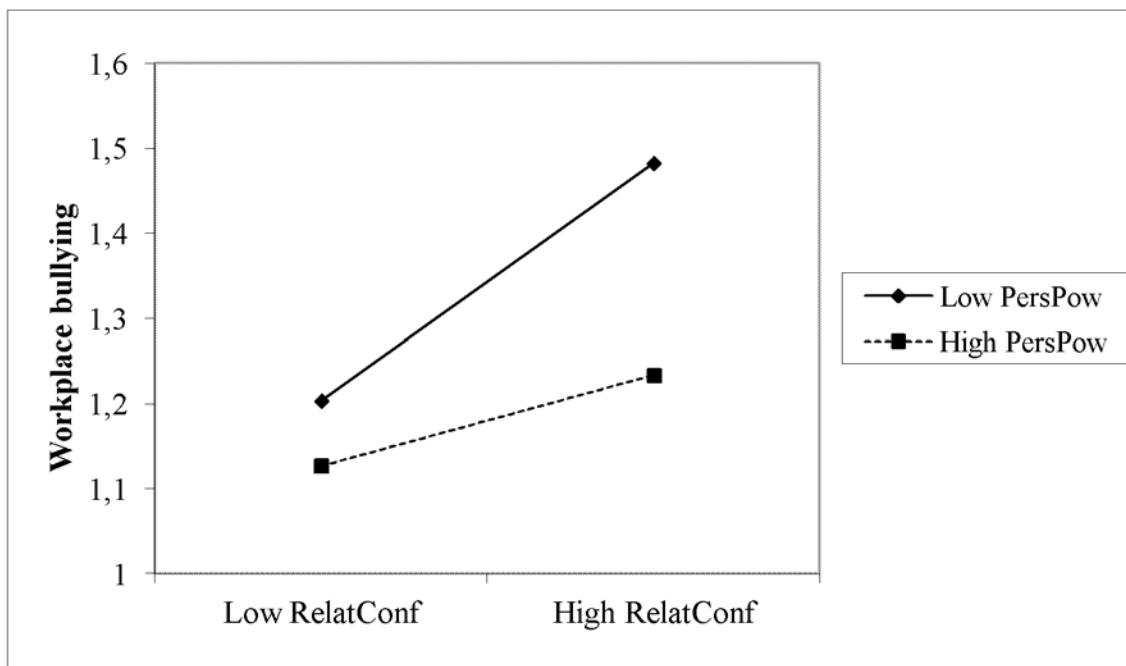


Figure 4. Moderating effect of personal power on the association between relationship conflict and workplace bullying.