EMPLOYEES' OWN PERSONALITY MAY INDUCE THEIR VICTIMIZATION AT WORK: EVIDENCE FROM UNIVERSITIES IN LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we relied on victim precipitation theory and examined the role of the employee's personality, from the target perspectives, in their victimization at the workplace in the context of higher education institutions in Pakistan. Personality was hypothesized as a five-factor construct; extraversion, agreeableness, consciousness, neuroticism, and openness. The quantitative data was gathered through a questionnaire survey from the teaching faculty of different public and private sector universities located in Lahore. Results revealed that extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness have a significant negative correlation with workplace victimization. In contrast, neuroticism showed a significant positive association with workplace victimization. Openness to experience was unrelated to victimization in the given context. The theoretical and practical value of these findings has been discussed in this study.

I. INTRODUCTION

Victimization is an emerging social issue in modern workplaces. It is prevalent in almost every organization (Hoel & Cooper, 2000); the most reported sectors include media, social, education, and public administration (Zapf et al., 2003). Bullying-based victimization is a troublesome reality due to its harmful consequences (Machimbarrena et al., 2019). It affects employee well-being and performance (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003) and influences organizational bottom-line. For individuals, workplace victimization leads to headaches, depression, blood pressure, loss of concentration, and low appetite (Amponsah & Annor, 2017). Exposure to bullying may enhance suicidal tendencies in individuals (Balducci et al., 2009). For society, victimization may lead to lower productivity, early retirements, and increased health costs. These adverse outcomes make it imperative to take corrective and preventive measures (Bashir et al., 2014), and therefore important research area to understand its causes across different cultures and contexts. Victimization refers to the incidents of using words or actions by an individual that cause physical or psychological harm to another person at work (Aquino & Thau, 2009). We examined workplace victimization through two intimidating behaviors: incivility and bullying. Bullying is a mild form of victimization and refers to the repeated utterance of hostile, unethical, or demeaning remarks about an individual for an extended and long period (Leymann, 1996). Incivility is low-intensity behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target (Hershcovis, 2011), violating the norms of mutual respect. Uncivil behavior is rude, discourteous, and displays no regard for others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Arshad and Ali, 2016; Ashraf and Ali, 2018; Kaseem et al., 2019; Sajid and Ali, 2018).

The literature explains two hypotheses on antecedents of victimizations, such as the work-environment hypothesis (Salin & Hoel, 2011; Ali, 2018; Ali and Bibi, 2017; Ali and Ahmad, 2014; Ali and Audi, 2016) and the individual disposition hypothesis (Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). Work environmental hypothesis claims that underlying causes of victimization prevail in poorly organized environmental conditions within an organization. The individual disposition hypothesis highlights individual characteristics and traits as potential antecedents of

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victimization. The individual differences in feelings, thoughts, and behaviour can be described by five bipolar dimensions generally labeled as the five-factor personality model. Therefore, we operationalized the Five-Factor personality model from the victim perspective to examine which type of personality puts the individuals at greater risk of being victimized at work. Our findings contribute to the emerging literature on victimization in three ways. It has examined the prevalence of victimization in an applied context of educational institutions, outside business organizations. It has studied the previously less known role of victims' personality in victimization prevailing in teaching faculty of higher educational institutions. This study has included the voice of those who experienced a lower or moderate level of intimidation, called incivility instead of bullying.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion that the personal characteristics of an employee can initiate intimidating behaviors can be explained through victim precipitation theory which argues that the victim may contribute to his or her victimization and, therefore, to its prevention (Fischer et al., 2016). It states that some people initiate particular confrontations or intimidation knowingly or unknowingly by presenting themselves as insecure, unhappy, socially withdrawn, or anxious, eventually becoming victimized by others. Some get victimized by provoking threatening or hostile behaviors. This theory claims that underlying personality characters typically influence how people behave and how they may be treated at the workplace. Personality has been described as an individual's pattern of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). Some individual traits are provocative due to possible weaknesses, such as lack of social skills and inability to cope with aggressive behaviors. It leads another person to become a natural outlet of victimization in the working environment. Research has shown that perpetrators of victimization will target submissive individuals than proactive ones to reduce the risk of being opposed and counterattacked as submissive people rarely retaliate (Aquino & Lamrerts, 2004). It is in line with the theory that assumes the victim's personality to be an essential factor of target selection. Using the Five-factor personality model, Glasø et al. (2007) found a link between personality characteristics and risk of victimization.

The dimensions of the five-factor personality model are (1) extroversion (Vs. introversion), a personality that depends on building up relations with others; (2) agreeableness, having a pleasing personality; (3) conscientiousness, a reliable personality; (4) Neuroticism (Vs. emotional stability), a personality that enables a person to cope with any tension; and (5) openness, a personality that appreciates the variety of experiences (Leephaijaroen, 2016). These five dimensions are considered biological in origin (McCrae & John, 1992) and are valid across different cultures (Pervin & John, 1999) and known to be closely linked to victimization and aggressive behavior (Machimbarrena et al., 2019). An individual's proneness towards sociability and positive emotions is associated with the level of extroversion. An extrovert is characterized as talkative, assertive, and optimistic, while an introvert tends to be shy, silent, and reserved. Agreeableness is associated with a person's interpersonal behavior and concerns for society. Cooperative, compliant and trustful individuals score high while unfriendly, fault-finding and self-centered people score low on this dimension. Conscientious people have self-discipline, achievement striving, and planning abilities. Responsible and organized people score high, while careless and undependable people score low on dimension. Neuroticism is characterized by the degree of emotional instability and adjustment. Individuals who are highly neurotic tend to be nervous, show less self-esteem, and experience chronic emotions, i.e., anger and frustration. An emotionally stable personality can be described as calm and unemotional with a high tolerance level against adverse stimuli. Finally, openness to experience is concerned with a general preference for unusual thoughts and a wide range of experiences and interests. More curious, intellectual, and less conventional people score high on this dimension (Ellrich & Baier, 2016).

No Relationship Mechanism suggests that victimization has no significant associations with individual characteristics. An individual's personality is neither a predictor nor an outcome of victimization. Assuming that victimization is related to individual traits, the Target-Behaviour Mechanism suggests that individuals with specific dispositions of being annoying or having friendly interactions with others can elicit aggressive behaviors in others. Consequently, victimization is proposed to be caused or eliminated by specific characteristics of the target himself (Bowling & Bheer, 2006). The Negative Perception Mechanism suggests that some individual dispositions are associated with a lower threshold of interpreting what events are harassing. They have a higher risk of labeling some adverse events at the workplace as victimization (Nielsen et al., 2010). In the Reverse Causality Mechanism, individual dispositions and traits are considered outcomes rather than sources of workplace victimization (Glasø et al., 2009).

Specific individual characteristics can elicit harmful aggressive emotions in others, and the individuals who elicit those emotions are more likely to become the victims (Scott & Judge, 2013). In this regard, Bowling et al. (2010) also proposed two mechanisms whereby individual factors contribute to bullying. First is the target

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behavior mechanism, which suggests that individuals with chronically poor self-view may become easy victims for those who enact bullying. The second is the negative perception mechanism, which posits that employees with specific personality characteristics behave in a manner that may induce others to enact harassment towards them. Andersson and Pearson (1999) stated about the process whereby employees find it justified to respond aggressively to co-workers whose behaviors and attitudes are annoying or fall outside the social norms. Many researchers have recognized that some people's personalities are sufficiently provocative that others may respond by intimidating them (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Aquino and Bradfield (2000) concluded that aggressiveness is positively associated with perceived victimization. Glasø et al. (2007), for instance, examined the personality differences between the group of bullied victims and non-bullied and found that victims were more neurotic, less agreeable, and conscientious than those in the non-bullied group.

Milam et al. (2009) studied individual differences on big five personality traits among targets of workplace incivility, working in retail, health care, food service, education, finance, aerospace, and real estate sectors. The individuals low in agreeableness and high in neuroticism experienced more incivility than their counterparts. The individuals low on agreeableness come across as confrontational, disrespectful, argumentative, and surly. The neurotic individual characterized by nervousness, tension, insecurity, and self-pity may seem innocuous to others and perceived as offensive and uncivil. Both direct and indirect evidence is found that victims' personalities are related to the experience of victimization. Bowling et al. (2010) found that the target's personality was related to supervisor victimization. In their investigation, Balducci et al. (2011), Höfker (2020), and Machimbarrena et al. (2019) also focused on neuroticism. They found that a higher frequency of bullying was reported at higher levels of this disposition. Bashir et al. (2014) examined the role of personality traits of individuals in workplace bullying in telecommunication companies in Islamabad. They showed that individuals with high agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness reported high bullying. Nielsen and Knardahl (2015) found agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness significantly related to victimization. Peluchette et al. (2015) and Peluchette et al. (2015), and Adamopoulou and Koukia (2020) established that extroversion and openness significantly predicted the likelihood of cyber-bullying. The latest research also suggests that the predictive effect of neuroticism on being bullied is significantly positive, while the predictive effect of extroversion and agreeableness is significantly negative on bullying/being bullied (Zhang et al., 2021). Personality and especially traits assumed for provocation are also linked with violent victimization. Ellrich and Baier (2016) found that police officers in Germany scoring high on neuroticism and openness to experience were more likely to be victimized violently. Fischer et al. (2016) explored that personal characteristics independently contribute to the prediction of workplace victimization in the context of local government employees in the Netherland. They found that employees' self-efficacy in conflict management skills is positively associated with experienced aggression in organizations. Extraversion and openness to experience increase the probability of workplace victimization, while agreeableness decreases it (Cawvey et al., 2017). Another study reported that neuroticism is positively associated with exposure to harassment. Extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness showed a negative link, while openness indicated no linkage with harassment (Nielsen et al., 2017). Although most of the studies mentioned above do not precisely examine incivility and bullying, these findings provide a basis to hypothesize the following relationships.

H1: An employees' extraversion personality is significantly associated with his risk of workplace victimization.
H2: An employees' agreeable personality is significantly associated with his risk of workplace victimization.
H3: An employees' conscientious personality is significantly associated with his risk of workplace victimization.
H4: An employee's neurotic personality is significantly associated with his risk of workplace victimization.
H5: An employees' openness personality is significantly associated with his risk of workplace victimization.

Figure 1. Theoretical model
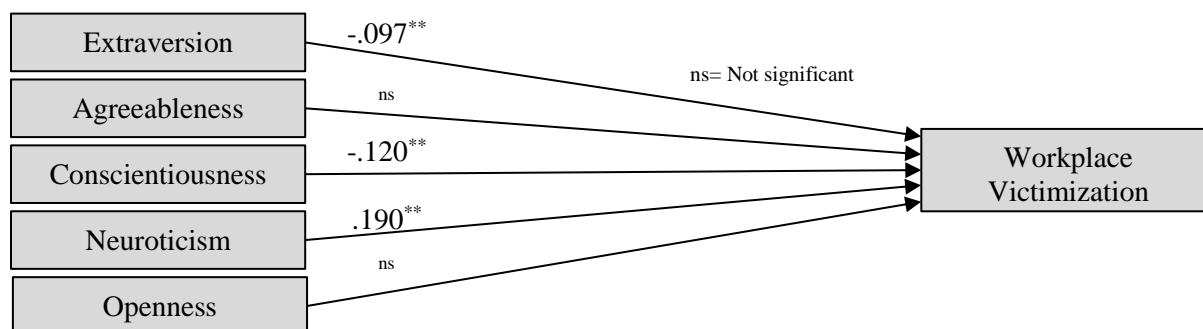
III. METHODOLOGY
We conducted a one-shot survey to collect data using existing measures of study variables. The potential

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participants included the teaching faculty and administrative staff of public and private universities in Lahore. They were informed of the purpose of the study and completed the survey questionnaire voluntarily.

III.I. SAMPLE

The sample (n=313) consisted of male (87%) and female (13%) respondents of our survey. The respondents were younger within 21 – 45 years (73%) and married (83%). They were well educated, holding bachelor's degrees (24%), master's degrees (56%), MS / M.Phil degrees (6%), and doctoral degrees (2%). Most of the participants were working at first-line managerial positions or as lecturers (61%), middle level and Assistant Professors (9%), top management/professors (6%), and non-managerial staff positions (24%).

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants (n = 313)

Characteristic	Description	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	277	88.5
	Female	36	11.5
Age	Not mentioned	3	1.0
	21-25 Years	4	1.3
	26-30 Years	41	13.1
	31-35 Years	82	26.2
	36-40 Years	56	17.9
	41-45 Years	43	13.7
	46-50 Years	32	10.2
	51-55 Years	34	10.9
	56-60 Years	11	3.5
	> 60 Years	7	2.2
Marital status	Not mentioned	7	2.2
	Single	38	12.1
	Married	260	83.1
	Separated	4	1.3
	Divorced	1	.3
	Widowed	3	1.0
Education	Matric	8	2.6
	Intermediate	31	9.9
	Bachelor	74	23.6
	Master	175	55.9
	MS / M.Phil	18	5.8
	Doctorate	7	2.2
Position	Non-Supervisory Staff	28	8.9
	Supervisory Staff	48	15.3
	First Line Managers / Lecturers	190	60.7
	Middle Managers / Assistant Professors	29	9.3
	Top Management / Professors	18	5.8

III.II. MEASURES

Personality. The 10-item version of the Big Five Inventory (BF-10) developed by Rammstedt and John (2007) was used to assess these personality traits: extroversion, agreeableness, consciousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. The sample items for each dimension are extroversion: I see myself as someone outgoing and sociable), agreeable: I see myself as someone who is generally trusting), consciousness: I see myself as someone who does a thorough job), neurotic: I see myself as someone who easily gets nervous) and openness: I see myself as someone who has an active imagination). The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 2=strongly agree. Our results confirmed the reliability of these measurements.

Workplace Victimization. In this study, workplace victimization was captured as bullying and incivility at work. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they had been exposed to different victimization incidents. Bullying was measured using 19 items of the Negative Act Questionnaire-Revised version established by Einarsen et al. (2009), such as "Someone Raised their voice while speaking to you". Incivility was measured with 20 items from an uncivil workplace behavior questionnaire developed by Martin and Hine (2005), such as

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"Someone withholding information which affects your performance". The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale for bullying: 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=now & then, 4=once in a week, 5=daily for bullying, and incivility: 1=never, 2= sometimes, 3=don't know, 4=often, 5=always.

IV. RESULTS
IV.I. RELIABILITY, VALIDITY, AND CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

Table 2 shows the reliability of all scales used in this study as Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found acceptable, being higher than 0.700 (Falk & Savalei, 2011). All inter-item and corrected item-total correlations were acceptable, above .300 (Rattray & Jones, 2007). Participants' responses on various scales items were computed to obtain mean scores for their respective constructs. Correlation shown in Table 3 indicate that workplace victimization has a significantly negative correlation with extraversion (r = -.135, p<.05), agreeableness (r=-.132, p<.05), conscientiousness (r=-.174, p<.05). It revealed a significant positive correlation with neuroticism (r=.186, p<.05) and not related to openness (r=-.072, ns).

Table 2. Reliability and validity

Variables	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Workplace victimization	39	3.17	.40	.852
Extraversion	2	3.48	.75	.744
Agreeableness	2	3.25	.68	.785
Conscientiousness	2	3.17	.75	.862
Neuroticism	2	3.35	.74	.792
Openness	2	3.53	.77	.823

Table 3. Correlation matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Workplace victimization	1					
Extraversion	-.135*	1				
Agreeableness	-.132*	.557**	1			
Conscientiousness	-.174**	3.474**	.629**	1		
Neuroticism	.186**	.431**	.393**	.385**	1	
Openness	-.072	.465**	.400**	.374**	.404**	1

**p<0.01, *p<0.05

IV.II. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The workplace victimization was stepwise regressed on big five personality factors as independent variables. Results satisfied the key assumptions of independence of observations, no multicollinearity, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity (Hoffmann, 2010). The independence of observations was evaluated using the Durbin-Watson test ($0 \leq d \leq 4$). Normal P-P plots of standardized residuals indicated linearity of data used. The skewness and kurtosis values and histograms, and normal P-P plots for all models satisfied the normality assumption. Values of Tolerance < .2, Variation Inflation Factor > 4 and Condition Index > 30 satisfied that multicollinearity does not exist in all models. A Scatter plot of standardized residuals (Y-axis) and standardized predicted values of regression (X-axis) was examined, which showed a symmetrical distribution of residuals around zero and satisfied homoscedasticity.

Table 4. Model summary of regression between personality traits and victimization

Model	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Std. Error	ΔR^2	ΔF	df1	df2	Sig.	Durbin Watson
1	.186[a]	.035	.032	.40015	.035	11.201	1	311	.001	
2	.325[b]	.106	.100	.38575	.071	24.644	1	310	.000	
3	.359[c]	.129	.120	.38145	.023	8.042	1	309	.005	1.377

a. Predictors: (Constant), neuroticism

b. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism, Conscientiousness

c. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Extraversion

d. Dependent Variable: Workplace Victimization

Stepwise regression produced three regression models. Results revealed that agreeableness and openness are unrelated to victimization at work. In model 1, neuroticism explained 3.5% variance (ΔR^2=.035, F (1, 311) = 11.201, p<.05) in workplace victimization with 10% (β=.103, p<.05) additional per unit change in workplace

victimization. In model 2, neuroticism and conscientiousness explained 10% variance (ΔR^2=.106, F (2, 310) =18.348, p<.05) in workplace victimization. Further, one-unit change in neuroticism predicted 16% positive change (β=.164, p<.05), and conscientiousness predicted 15% additional negative change (β=-.155, p<.05) in the workplace victimization. In model 3, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and extraversion explained 13% variance (ΔR^2 = .129, F (3, 309) = 15.191, p<.05) in workplace victimization and that one-unit further change in neuroticism predicted 19% positive change (β=.193, p<.05), conscientiousness predicted 12% negative change (β=-.120, p<.05), and extraversion predicted 9.7% negative change in workplace victimization. Results of model summary and regression coefficients are shown in Table 4 and 5, respectively.

Table 5. Regression coefficients of the relationship between personality factors and victimization

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.824	.105		26.794	.000		
	Neuroticism	.103	.031	.186	3.347	.001	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)	3.109	.117		26.633	.000		
	Neuroticism	.164	.032	.298	5.115	.000	.852	1.174
	Conscientiousness	-.155	.031	-.289	-4.964	.000	.852	1.174
3	(Constant)	3.239	.124		26.085	.000		
	Neuroticism	.193	.033	.350	5.793	.000	.772	1.295
	Conscientiousness	-.120	.033	-.224	-3.616	.000	.735	1.360
	Extraversion	-.097	.034	-.180	-2.836	.005	.703	1.423

a. Dependent Variable: Workplace Victimization

Excluded variables: Agreeableness, Openness to Experience

Model Summaries:

1. R = .186, R2 = .035, Adj. R2 = .032, ΔR2 = .035, S.E. = .400, F (1, 311) = 11.201, p<.05

2. R = .325, R2 = .106, Adj. R2 = .100, ΔR2 = .106, S.E. = .385, F (2, 310) = 18.348, p<.05

3. R = .359, R2 = .129, Adj. R2 = .120, ΔR2 = .129, S.E. = .381, F (3, 309) = 15.191, p<.05

Regression Equation:

Worplace Victimization

$$= 3.239 + .193(\text{Neuroticism}) - .120(\text{Conscientiousness}) - .097(\text{Extraversion}) + \varepsilon$$

V. DISCUSSION

This study examined the effect of employees' personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience, on their victimization at work. Neuroticism showed a positive association, while extraversion and conscientiousness personalities negatively correlated with workplace victimization. Agreeableness and openness to experience were insignificant in the proposed regression model.

Only neuroticism was found to be significantly positively associated with victimization. This positive relationship suggests that employees who are prone to victimization in university are emotionally unstable and anxious. These findings are consistent with many earlier studies, such as Amponsah-Tawiah and Annor (2017) and Zhang et al. (2021). They found that neurotic individuals are more likely to experience bullying; they are emotionally insecure. Neuroticism has emerged as the strongest and consistent correlate of workplace victimization (Balducci et al., 2011; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Ellrich & Baier, 2016; Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015; Nielsen et al., 2017). These researchers also claimed that because of their essentially pessimistic nature, neurotic employees experience more harassment events than other individuals. Building on the negative perception mechanism and target behavior mechanism, they explained that public perception towards emotionally insecure and nervous behaviors might be built as bothersome and annoying, making a neurotic individual a provocative and easy target of harassment. Hawker and Boulton (2000) also revealed that neurotic characteristics of employees such as physical weakness and low self-esteem place them at a disadvantage when it comes to workplace victimization.

The negative relationship between extraversion and workplace victimization exists because less extroverted people tend to be shy, humble, and reserved (Abdullah & Marican, 2016); shyness is positively linked with aggression (Zhao et al., 2020). Due to the very unobtrusive nature of these employees, they are considered an easy target of harassment as perpetrators have less or no fear of retaliation. It is also consistent with some previous research (Peluchette et al., 2015), which found that those low on extroversion are less sociable and share fewer personal feelings with a broader range of people. Compared to those high on extroversion, these people have less friend circle making them weaker and prone to negative behaviors by others. Nielsen et al. (2017) explained that extroversion negatively correlates with victimization. Ellrich and Baier (2016) explained that people who tend to open less are more likely to be assaulted. They appear to be more tolerant of victimization threats, thus creating a greater possibility of attack.

Conscientiousness has also come out to be negatively significantly associated with workplace victimization. People high on consciousness show greater motivation and goal-directed behaviors in the workplace. The negative relationship can be explained by the fact that low conscious employees do not deliver their work on time and as per set standards and are subjected to close monitoring of leaders and sometimes to ill-treatments also (Nielsen et al., 2017; Peluchette et al., 2015; Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015).

Although excluded in the stepwise regression model, agreeableness negatively correlated with victimization. This relationship seems contradictory to some previous research suggesting a positive relationship between the two (Scott & Judge, 2013). In our research, individuals high in agreeableness appear less likely to be victimized by others. Not only because they appear loyal and perpetrators tend to see good in them but also because in case of any ill-treatment, they also tend to see good in others and are less likely to be affected by the perpetrator's oversight (Naimon et al., 2013). Individuals who are high in agreeableness are generally perceived with a higher degree of well-being than less agreeable individuals who are thought to be skeptical and mistrustful. Less agreeable individuals are more likely to see workplace victimization (Milam et al., 2009; Nielsen et al., 2017). Openness to experience turned to be unrelated to victimization in this study. The potential explanation for this is that the university staff in this research was probably experienced and mature enough to manage this personality trait well and not invite or initiate aggressive behaviors. These people may have gone through challenging moments at the job, which has stabilized their emotional consensus against victimization (Eswaran et al., 2011). Further, due to fundamental attribution error, perpetrators may have overstated some dispositional characteristics of victims while understating the other simultaneously (Nielsen and Knardahl, 2015). Research design and methodological issues can also be considered while explaining the weak relationship between personality traits and victimization.

VI. CONCLUSION

Extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism were significantly associated with workplace victimization. A high level of neurotic personality increases the propensity of one's victimization. The low extraversion and conscientiousness also indicate a higher likelihood of victimization at work. These findings have implications for human resource managers in assessing potential employees' personalities during the recruitment process and for the human resource development managers in developing the employee personalities so that the traits related to victimization may be discouraged and vice versa. It will help in preventing harassment events at work. The findings may also help employees avoid certain negative attitudes and unhealthy personality traits to prevent themselves from victimization at work. This study has mainly relied on the victim's perspective and perceptions of being victimized or not. It does not consider the perspective of perpetrators and observers of the victimizing situation. Further research can benefit from a complex methodology than the one used in this study. Mixed method or qualitative methods would provide more robust insights into factors that stimulate workplace victimization. This research did not involve different systems of different universities and their impacts on workplace harassment events. Due to the current transformations of higher education globally, understanding how different systems affect employee workplace experiences will be highly relevant. The research can also be widened to other groups of employees such as salespeople and soldiers to use findings to develop guidelines for victimization reduction in different professions and contexts.

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