

The Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Depression: The Roles of Psychological Safety and Supervisor and Co-worker Compassion

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Employee well-being, along with its associated barriers and improvement strategies, has become an escalating concern for researchers and organizations worldwide. This study examined the mechanism behind workplace bullying and depression, exploring the role of psychological safety as a mediating factor. Additionally, we investigated the potential impact of organizational compassion, distinguishing between supervisor and co-worker compassion, as a means of supporting employees subjected to workplace bullying. Based on an analysis of 392 online survey responses from full-time employees in South Korea, our findings demonstrate that workplace bullying undermines psychological safety, resulting in increased depression rates among employees. As anticipated, supervisor compassion mitigated the adverse effect of workplace bullying, whereas co-worker compassion did not exhibit the same moderating effect. These results emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive and compassionate work environment led by supervisors to lessen the strain on employee well-being. Theoretical and practical implications, along with directions for future research, are discussed.

Keywords : workplace bullying, psychological safety, supervisor compassion, co-worker compassion, depression

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Introduction

Affective disorders, such as depression and anxiety, are currently one of the biggest burdens for both individuals and organizations worldwide. Major depressive disorder is considered the most prevalent and representative type of depression (Bromet et al., 2011; Vigo et al., 2016) currently affecting more than 264 million people worldwide (WHO, 2021), having become the leading cause of disability (Vigo et al., 2016). Depression often impacts individuals from the very beginning of their careers throughout their entire lifetime, posing a severe risk for job loss and voluntary turnover (Bender & Farvolden, 2008). Past research related to depression in the workplace has mainly focused on identifying various antecedents and conditions which contribute towards the acceleration or the onset of the illness. Out of the contributing workplace factors, chronic work stress, feelings of powerlessness, and social isolation have been repeatedly linked to the development of depression (Verkuil et al., 2015).

Among variables related to relationships at work, social isolation, interpersonal conflict, and victimization are commonly cited as primary sources of chronic job stress and potential causes of depression. Workplace bullying (WB), a serious and growing issue worldwide, including South Korea, has consistently been linked to declines in employee's physical and mental health, contributing to an increased risk of

developing depressive disorders (Boudrias et al., 2021). Recent surveys in South Korea indicate that nearly 30% of individuals experience bullying at work at least once in their careers (Kyung-don, 2022). To gain a deeper understanding of the development of depression in the local workplaces, this study examined the mechanisms through which WB may contribute to the onset or worsening of employee depression, focusing on the potential mediating role of psychological safety (PS). Furthermore, we sought to identify organizational factors that could mitigate the negative effects of WB on employee well-being and inform new intervention and coaching strategies. Specifically, we investigated the role of organizational compassion (OC) as a potential moderating factor that weakens the impact of WB on employee depressive symptoms.

A large number of studies have highlighted WB's significant negative effect on employees' mental health. Nielsen and Einarsen's (2018) meta-analysis outlined its long-term consequences, including suicidal thoughts, headaches, chronic pain, work-related strain, job insecurity, increased intention to leave, more frequent sickness absences, and a higher likelihood of receiving disability pensions—all of which are common symptoms of depression. In addition, Lo Presti et al. (2019) reported that exposure to WB leads to serious psychological/psychiatric impairment through anxiety and depression even among victims without a significant psychiatric

history, making it crucial to address the two variables' connection. Despite an extensive focus on WB's predictors and outcomes, researchers have noted that most studies primarily examined direct relationships between variables (e.g., Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; 2018) while overlooking potential mediating factors. Nielsen and Einarsen (2018) encouraged researchers to delve more deeply into mediation models that identify and clarify the underlying mechanisms between WB and its impact on its victims.

In this study, we selected psychological safety (PS) as a potential mediating variable. PS has been linked to employee well-being in earlier research, with studies demonstrating that sufficient levels of PS can lead to increased innovation, information sharing, individual and team growth, team cohesion, trust, and enhanced mental health (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Generally, individuals who feel secure in their work environment are less worried about potential negative consequences stemming from self-expression and conflict, even in the face of negative experiences (Kahn, 1990). However, insufficient or low perception of PS may contribute to employee emotional exhaustion, resulting in issues such as burnout and depression (Idris et al., 2014; Nahrgang et al., 2011).

To date, the role of PS as a mediator in the relationship between WB and depression has not been thoroughly researched warranting further study. Previous mediated models related to WB

and well-being have primarily focused on psychological safety climate (PSC), which shares similarities with PS but is a separate construct (e.g., Bond et al., 2010; Nguyen et al., 2017). PS is viewed as an individual-level perception, reflecting an employee's emotional and cognitive state in the workplace. Conversely, PSC refers to the collective perception within an organization or workgroup concerning the extent to which psychological safety is supported and valued (Kahn, 1990). PSC adopts a broader perspective, considering the shared beliefs and perceptions of employees, whereas PS focuses on the individual. In this study, we included only individual-level variables thus selecting PS as a better suited mediating variable in the relationship between WB and depression.

In recent years, researchers have placed greater emphasis on fostering emotional support in the workplace, such as kindness, empathy, and compassion (Uddin et al., 2023). Organizational compassion (OC) has emerged as a promising approach for enhancing employee well-being and performance (Farr-Wharton et al., 2023). OC provides numerous advantages, including increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance, while reducing workplace incivility (Dutton et al., 2014; Grant et al., 2008; Lilius et al., 2008; Ko & Choi, 2019; Hu et al. 2018). In the context of this study, OC may support WB victims through manifesting as general emotional support, work flexibility, or material goods.

These not only aid directly but also serve as an indication of broader concern from supervisors and colleagues (Lilius et al., 2008). Compassion extends beyond mere emotional support and involves actively seeking solutions (Dutton et al., 2006), potentially making it more effective when addressing WB compared to other forms of support (Dutton et al., 2006; Ko & Choi, 2019). We anticipated that employees experiencing compassionate support would be less affected by WB in terms of its effect on PS. As a result, this study investigated OC as a moderating variable proposed to reduce WB's impact on depression, mediated through PS.

Unlike most previous research measuring OC as a single variable, our study investigated the difference between supervisor compassion (SC) and co-worker compassion (CC). Past literature suggests that differing dynamics and power structures within workplace relationships impact the effects of support (e.g., Harrel et al., 2021). While leaders and co-workers can both exhibit OC, their methods of expression and the impact of their actions may vary due to their dissimilar responsibilities, power, and accountability (Shuck et al., 2016). We therefore separated OC into SC and CC to examine their distinct moderating effects on the relationship between WB and depression, via PS. Ultimately, our study aimed to better understand PS's role as a potential factor in the mechanism behind WB victims depression symptoms as well as identify ways to offset this relationship.

Theoretical Background

Workplace Bullying and Depression

Depression is a highly prevalent mood disorder most commonly manifesting through persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and disinterest in daily activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In extreme cases, it can lead to suicidal thoughts, with depressed individuals being twenty times more likely to die by suicide than the general population (Chesney et al., 2014). The causes of depression are complex, involving biological, environmental, and psychological factors (National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). Workplace conditions such as heavy workloads, long hours (Stansfeld & Candy, 2006), lack of support and control (Karasek, 1979), organizational instability, and work-life imbalance (Demerouti et al., 2011) can also trigger depression. Poor interpersonal relationships and WB are additional factors involved (Nielsen et al., 2010). In this study, we adopted Sansone and Sansone's (2015) definition of WB as "a recurring engagement in abusive behaviors that negatively affect both the targeted individual and the organization, typically involving intimidation, degradation, and humiliation" (p.33).

Numerous theoretical models have been proposed to explain the relationship between WB and depression. Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) developed a comprehensive model integrating the

Transactional Stress Theory (TST; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Affective Events Theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), and Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress (CATS; Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). This model suggested that evaluative cognitive processes are vital in determining WB's impact and help explain why many, but not all, WB victims experience depression. TST (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) focuses mainly on individuals' evaluation and coping with stressors by assessing their significance and available resources, AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) outlines how emotions triggered by workplace events influence job-related outcomes and employee well-being, and CATS (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004) emphasizes the role of cognitive processes in stress-related relationships, particularly how individuals' thought patterns can activate physiological stress responses that affect well-being.

The combined model by Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) then outlined how the perceived threat level of WB and its impact severity are primarily tied to one's perception of available personal resources to cope with WB. When resources are scarce, WB is more likely to be considered unmanageable, resulting in negative affective states of helplessness, anxiety, and fear (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Chronic exposure to such intense emotional distress and physiological changes has been shown to lead to depression (Boudrias et al., 2021). The associated chronic stress also manifests as a physiological response

in the body, with an increase in stress hormone cortisol's production, which has been linked to depression in previous studies (Kivimäki et al., 2003).

The complexity of assessing WB's impact for the victim lies in its nature inherently involving significant power imbalance and limited control or solutions without external help. Research shows that WB sparks an energy-draining process and fosters withdrawal behaviors at work (Livne & Goussinsky, 2016; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Consequently, it disrupts victims' fundamental psychological and relational needs, pushing them away from potential support and resource retention while causing significant psychological, emotional, and physical distress (Aquino & Thau, 2009). This often results in social isolation and a perceived lack of support, exacerbating feelings of loneliness, despair, and hopelessness, which can lead to the onset or worsening of depression (Mustaq et al., 2014).

H1. Workplace bullying is positively related to depression.

The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety

PS refers to employees' perceptions of interpersonal risks, comfort, and security in their workplace (Edmondson, 2003). Previous research has identified PS as a predictor of employee

performance (Mogård et al., 2022), individual and team organizational learning (Carmeli et al., 2010), and achievement (Carmeli et al., 2012; Schaubroeck et al., 2011). Conversely, a lack or low perception of PS leads not only to lower performance (Edmondson, 2018), but also to reduced creativity, innovation, and individual well-being (Kahn, 1990). Meta-analyses synthesizing past PS-related research have suggested that most studies have focused mainly on performance and team-related outcomes, with significantly less attention given to individual employee well-being (Grailey et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2017). This study thus aimed to build upon previous findings by focusing on well-being outcomes, examining whether PS can explain the mechanism behind the positive relationship between WB and depression.

The relationship between WB and PS can primarily be explained by WB's role in undermining interpersonal trust and relationship quality. Since PS perception develops gradually through long-term interactions among organizational members, it relies heavily on respect and trust between employees (Koopmann et al., 2016). When WB occurs, a psychological contract of trust and fairness is broken (Kakarika et al., 2017). Particularly when bullying is persistent and unresolved, it sends a message to both the victim and witnesses that the organization is untrustworthy and unsupportive, eroding the foundation of employee PS perception (Edmondson, 2003). Although

many other workplace experiences also influence trust and general safety perceptions, severe and repeated interpersonal conflicts such as WB tend to be the strongest and most consistent undermining factors of overall workplace relationship quality. Through evoking feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction, and low self-esteem (Nguyen et al., 2017), we thus expected that WB would diminish employee perception of PS.

Previous research on the relationship between PS and employee well-being has shown that a low perception of PS is linked to poorer physical and mental health, including a higher likelihood of employee depression (Frazier et al., 2017). Increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation may arise when employees feel unsafe and unsupported, which can contribute to the development or exacerbation of depressive symptoms (Noguchi et al., 2021). Although some studies suggested that PS itself may reduce the risk of becoming a WB victim (Nguyen et al., 2017), high PS perception doesn't completely eliminate interpersonal conflicts. Employees with higher PS levels are simply more likely to feel reassured they have the necessary resources to resolve conflicts more easily without engaging in extensive self-protective behavior (Edmondson, 2003).

The mediating role of PS in the relationship between WB and depression can be further explained through the Safety Signal Theory (SST) (Lohr et al., 2007). SST posits that PS serves as

a safety signal that can potentially decrease job-induced anxiety, indecision, and helplessness - factors previously associated with depression (Lohr et al., 2007). Employees constantly interpret signals in their work environment as either promoting security or insecurity (Law et al., 2011). WB signals hostility and a lack of PS within the workplace and employees experiencing bullying behaviors perceive their work environment as unsafe, characterized by fear, mistrust, and anticipation of further mistreatment. This perception consequently lowers their sense of PS and as a result, we hypothesized that higher WB would diminish victims' sense of PS, which would subsequently be associated with more frequent and severe depression symptoms.

H2. Psychological safety mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and depression.

The Moderating Role of Supervisor and Co-worker Compassion

To explore potential factors that could enhance employees' PS in the face WB, this study examined OC as a moderating factor in the relationship between WB and depression. Dutton et al. (2014) defined OC as an "interpersonal process involving noticing, feeling, sense-making, and acting, which alleviates the suffering of another person" (p.277). While similar to empathy or social support, OC

extends further and involves the allocation of resources to employees in need (Dutton et al., 2006). Overall, OC has been associated with higher levels of employee engagement, improved teamwork, increased work satisfaction, and a reduced likelihood of negative outcomes like depression (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). Both direct recipients and witnesses of compassionate acts may receive benefits, by perceiving their colleagues as caring, warm, and kind (Moon, 2016). This initiates a cycle of positivity resulting in greater positive affect and commitment to the organization, coworkers, and society overall, protecting against emotional exhaustion, burnout, and related depression (Simpson et al., 2015).

Several processes may explain how OC impacts employee well-being when facing WB. First, by offering a listening ear, empathy, and encouragement, compassionate supervisors and colleagues help establish a safe environment for victims to communicate their feelings and experiences (Farr-Wharton et al., 2023). Second, by having their struggles recognized, receiving OC helps victims understand that they are not at fault and that their feelings and concerns are valid. This enables them to more effectively process the event and appraise it as less dangerous (Farr-Wharton et al., 2023). Lastly, OC may enhance victim's resilience perception, boosting one's self-worth and helping develop internal resources to cope with WB (Cousineau et al., 2019). Such mechanisms may safeguard

against a diminished sense of PS and the subsequent onset of depression (Meseguer-de-Pedro et al., 2019).

Another widely recognized framework for explaining how OC can buffer WB's effect on employee mental well-being is the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory states that individuals are motivated to protect and accumulate resources, defined as objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued or serve as a means for goal attainment. According to COR, resource loss leads to strain while resource gain or high resource perception helps buffer against strain due to its impact on victims' appraisal of WB. In this context, we focus on OC as a particularly relevant resource, which by creating conditions that foster a caring environment among employees leads individuals to perceive more job resources needed to cope with WB more effectively (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Law et al., 2011).

Moreover, as WB is a socio-emotional incident, job resources with both material and interpersonal components, like OC may better counteract its negative effect on PS than other forms of support (Rhee et al., 2017). OC encourages interpersonal connections, nurturing a workplace where members feel closer, develop better-quality relationships, and consequently report higher levels of PS and less severe depression (Kark & Carmeli, 2009). Further related to the Safety Signal Theory (SST) (Lohr

et al., 2007), compassionate acts demonstrate care and concern, enhancing employees' sense of security and PS by acting as signal of sufficient support and concern from the workplace (Lilius et al., 2011; Law et al., 2011).

In contrast to previous OC-focused research, our study divided OC into two distinct variables: SC and CC, as past research on related concepts (supervisor and co-worker support) has shown inconsistent results regarding their respective impacts. Genuine care from supervisors creates a more trusting and empathetic environment, fostering a stronger sense of PS (Harrel et al., 2021). Yang et al. (2016) found that supervisor support significantly mitigates job stress-induced depression. However, co-worker support's influence on job stress was minimal. They theorized that since supervisors assign tasks and manage organizational resources, the impact of supervisor support would be notable unlike the modest effect of co-worker support (Yang et al., 2016).

Research focused solely on SC has further shown that by promoting mutual understanding, empathy, and support among team members, supervisors help create compassionate teams (Carmeli et al., 2010). These teams in turn tend to exhibit higher levels of PS and significantly reduced job stress (Carmeli et al., 2010; West & Markiewicz, 2016). A 2022 survey of full-time workers in Australia, the UK, and the US, further reported that SC significantly influences overall employee happiness and is correlated

with increased job satisfaction, morale, loyalty, engagement, and productivity (UNSW, 2022). In turn, more satisfaction with one's work promoted through SC has been linked to decreased depression (Liu et al., 2023).

Moreover, given that supervisors hold higher-ranking positions with substantial influence, their behavior at work becomes a key signaling factor shaping their subordinates' expectations about the available workplace support, shaping their perceptions of the workplace culture (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). In cases of WB, the supervisor's overall workplace conduct and their past responses to similar incidents are likely to influence how WB victims assess the severity of the situation based on their expectations regarding the company's response, and their options for protecting their well-being. Considering the significant impact of supervisors' behavior, we hypothesized that higher SC would moderate the relationship between WB and PS perception.

On the other hand, we predicted that CC would not be a significant moderator based on the inconsistent prior research findings. Unlike SC which may involve structural changes in work scope or responsibilities, CC and co-worker support are typically limited to emotional support, empathy, and everyday task assistance (Lilius et al., 2011). Consistent with our prediction, Nielsen et al. (2020) found that supervisor support moderated the indirect link between WB and sickness absence through

WB-induced mental distress for both male and female employees. However, co-worker support's impact was only limited to female participants. Blomberg and Rosander (2020) also discovered that although co-worker support had a buffering effect in the relationship between WB and employee well-being, this effect relied entirely on perceived supervisor support levels, making co-worker support irrelevant when supervisor support was lower. Therefore, since resources offered through co-worker support are limited and supervisors tend to possess a greater authority and influence over resource allocation crucial for WB victims, SC is likely to be a significant moderator between WB and PS while CC isn't.

H3. Supervisor compassion moderates the negative effect of workplace bullying on psychological safety, such that the negative effect is weaker when supervisor compassion is higher, while co-worker compassion does not.

H4. Supervisor compassion moderates the indirect positive effect of workplace bullying on depression, such that the positive effect is weaker when supervisor compassion is higher, while co-worker compassion does not.

The hypotheses proposed in this study are illustrated in Figure 1.

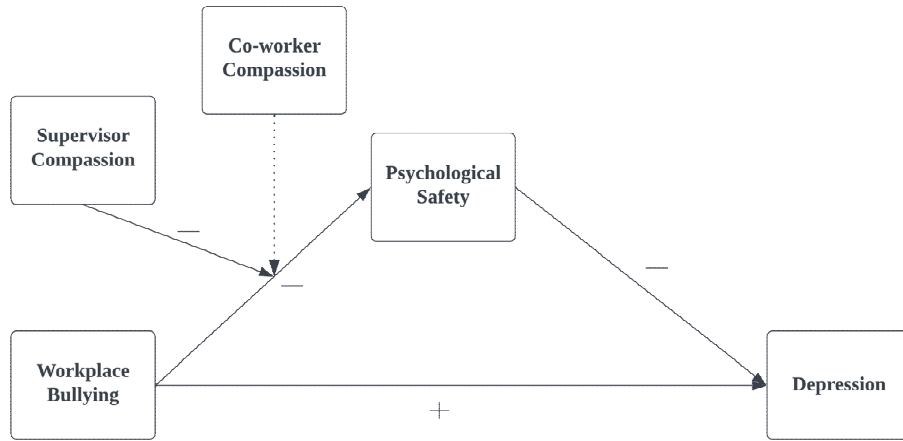


Figure 1. Hypothesized Model

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were recruited using an online data collection platform (Macromill Embrain) and were compensated with points that can be exchanged for a monetary reward (approximately 1500 points = 1500 KRW). Participating in the research was voluntary, anonymous, and respondents were assured that they were free to withdraw if they experienced any psychological or physical discomfort. Given that the target was full-time adult Korean employees, the online survey began with screening questions about age, gender, current employment status (full-time/part-time/self-employed/student), and average weekly working hours. In addition, as this research centered around workplace relationships, we also included screening questions asking respondents to indicate the number of colleagues

working on the same team and whether they mainly work from home or the office. Those who worked alone or mainly from home were then excluded from participating in the study. Those who passed all screening items signed an informed consent and then proceeded to fill out the main questionnaire. The research was conducted following the ethical standards of social research and was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

The study's data were collected from a total sample of 483 individuals. To account for the potential impact of past mental health issues, participants with a previous diagnosis of depression or related mental disorders, or those who had received treatment within the past six months, were excluded from the final analysis. In addition, multivariate outliers were excluded from the final analysis as well. The final sample for analysis thus consisted of 392 participants, after excluding 91 individuals who met the

aforementioned criteria. Out of the final sample, 52% was female and 48% male with a mean age of 45 years ($SD = 13.00$), and the majority held a BA degree (62%). Over half of the participants were married (57.4%), and all worked as full-time employees, with an average tenure of 15.15 years ($SD = 11.43$). The most represented industry was manufacturing (26.5%), followed by other (18.6%), science and technology (13%), and education (10.7%). The majority of our participants held a managing position or below (68%), 26% were in a leading or executive position, and 6% indicated their role as other.

Measures

Workplace Bullying

To measure employees' workplace bullying (WB) experience twenty-two items from the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) developed by Einarsen et al. (2009) and validated in Korean by Nam et al. (2010) were used. The scale consists of twelve items on person-oriented bullying, seven on work-related bullying, and three on intimidation-related bullying, scored based on their frequency in the past six months using a five-point scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Less than Once a Month, 3 = About Once a Month, 4 = About Once a Week, 5 = Almost Every Day. The survey instruction asked respondents to rate solely based on the relationship with their immediate

supervisor and their team members. An example item from the person oriented-bullying section is: "I have been subjected to derogatory remarks or insults connected with my work.", for work-related bullying: "I have had my opinions ignored.", and for the intimidation-related bullying: "I have been shouted at or the target of a spontaneous anger.". The Cronbach's α was .76.

Depression

To assess cardinal symptoms of depression as described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5), nine items from the Korean version of Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) developed and validated for use in South Korea by Park et al. (2010) were used. Although not specifically designed for use in the workplace setting, the PHQ has been widely used and repeatedly confirmed to be a reliable measure of employee depression and other mental health conditions, providing valuable information for interventions aimed at improving employee well-being and productivity (e.g., Bondar et al., 2022; Rothermund et al., 2017). The nine items were rated on a four-point scale according to their frequency in the past two-weeks, from 0 = Never to 3 = Almost Always. This allowed for a detailed assessment of depressive symptoms limited to the past two weeks, opposed to the period prior to the start of measured workplace bullying experience (past six months). An

example item is “I felt down, depressed, or hopeless.” Cronbach’s α was .81.

Psychological Safety

To measure employee sense of perceived psychological safety (PS) at work we used three items from the Psychological Safety scale by May et al. (2004). The English scale was first edited from the original version to change the reverse scored items to create a unified scale and improve scale’s internal consistency (i.e., “I am afraid to express my opinions at work” to “I am not afraid to express my opinions at work”) and then translated into Korean following the process recommended by Brislin (1970). The three items were scored on a five-point scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree, to 5 = Strongly Agree. Cronbach’s α was .81.

Co-worker and Supervisor Compassion

To measure first supervisor (SC) and then co-worker compassion (CC) twenty-seven items from the original fifty-five item Compassionate Rationalism Leadership Questionnaire (CRLQ) developed by Choi et al. (2017) were used. The original scale is divided into two paradigms - Rationalism and Compassioism - from which sections of the latter were selected. Compassioism section is divided into four sections: Empower Based on Trust, Empathic Consideration, Tolerant Humility, Altruistic Cooperation, from which Empathic Consideration and Altruistic Cooperation were used to measure both SC and

CC, as they most closely represent this study’s conceptualization of OC. The scale was originally developed to measure leader’s own compassion towards subordinates and was thus modified to reflect the rating by the recipient of the compassionate acts instead. An example of item modification is: “I have a conversation with other person, reading his face and fully understanding his emotions.” being changed to: “(My Supervisor) Has a conversation with me, reading my face and fully understanding my emotions.” In the case of CC, an example item would be: “(My Coworkers) Have conversation with me, reading my face and fully understanding my emotions.”. The final fourteen items were scored on a five-point scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree, for both SC and CC. The Cronbach’s α values were .94 and .89, respectively.

Data Analysis

First, using the R program we calculated descriptive statistics and conducted correlation analysis. For hypotheses testing we employed Hayes’ (2017) PROCESS 4.2, using PROCESS Macro model 4 in the case of Hypotheses 1 and 2, and subsequently, we tested the moderation effect presented in Hypothesis 3 through the PROCESS Macro model 1. Finally, we conducted moderated mediation analysis through PROCESS Macro model 7 to verify Hypothesis 4, using a percentile bootstrap estimation approach to

assess the significance of the hypothesized indirect effect.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, correlation, skewness, and kurtosis of all variables used in this study. Correlation analysis revealed statistically significant correlations between all major variables except depression and co-worker compassion (CC). All correlation coefficients ranged from 0 and .483, indicating a lack of multicollinearity issue (Cohen et al., 2003). In order to satisfy the normality criteria, the

absolute value of skewness should be less than two, and the absolute value of kurtosis should be less than 7 (Curran et al., 1996). In our data set, skewness values were between .007 and 1.445, while kurtosis values were between .303 and 1.999, confirming that our data were normally distributed.

The Mediating Effect of Psychological Safety

To examine the direct effect of workplace bullying (WB) on depression and the mediating effect of psychological safety (PS), we employed Model 4 of PROCESS MACRO by Hayes (2017). The findings revealed a significant positive effect of WB on depression ($\beta = .387$,

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Skewness, Kurtosis, and Correlations of the Study Variables ($N = 392$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gender	- ^{***}						
Age	-.013 ^{***}	-					
Workplace Bullying	-.145 ^{***}	-.095 ^{***}	-				
Depression	-.025 ^{***}	-.182 ^{***}	.483 ^{***}	-			
Psychological Safety	-.083 ^{***}	.178 ^{***}	-.279 ^{***}	-.367 ^{***}	-		
Supervisor Compassion	-.042 ^{***}	.168 ^{***}	-.202 ^{***}	-.287 ^{***}	.452 ^{***}	-	
Co-worker Compassion	.016 ^{***}	.009 ^{***}	-.122 ^{***}	-.110 ^{***}	.256 ^{***}	.306 ^{***}	-
Mean	.480	44.798	1.492	.619	3.279	2.980	3.161
Standard Deviation	.500	13.002	.579	.546	.717	.653	.554
Skewness	-.081	-.007	1.445	1.109	-.397	-.438	-.572
Kurtosis	-1.999	-1.356	1.437	1.033	.659	.303	1.267

Note. ^{*} $p < .05$, ^{**} $p < .01$, ^{***} $p < .001$. Gender is coded as 0 = female, 1 = male.

$p < .001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. In addition, we found a significant negative effect of WB on PS ($\beta = -.350, p < .001$) and a significant negative effect of PS on depression ($\beta = -.178, p < .001$). Since the results of the percentile bootstrap estimation analysis with 95% confidence intervals did not contain a zero between the lower (LLCI) and the upper (ULCI) limit, the indirect effect of WB on depression, mediated by PS, was statistically significant (effect = 0.62, 95% CI [.031, .100]). As such, Hypothesis 2 was also supported.

The Moderating Effects of Supervisor and Co-worker Compassion

To test the moderating effect of supervisor

compassion (SC) and co-worker compassion (CC) we used PROCESS MACRO Model 7 by Hayes (2017), performing bootstrapping with 5000 samples and mean-centering of WB and SC and CC for easier interpretability. In addition, we added age and gender as covariates. The results, shown in Table 2, revealed that the negative effect of WB on PS was moderated by the level of SC ($\beta = .217, t = 2.191, p < .05$). Specifically, as shown in Figure 2, when SC was low (-1SD), PS decreased as WB level increased ($\beta = -.367, t = -4.828, p < .001$). At a mean level of SC, the negative effect of WB on PS was weaker than when SC was low ($\beta = -.232, t = -4.077, p < .001$). On the other hand, when SC increased (+1SD), the negative effect of WB on PS was no longer significant

Table 2. The Moderated Mediation Effect of Supervisor Compassion

Variables	DV = Psychological Safety					
	B	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI	R ²
(constant)	3.298	.151	21.825***	3.001	3.595	.268**
age	.004	.0024	1.940	-.001	.010	
gender	.1414	.0633	2.234**	.017	.266	
Workplace Bullying (A)	-.236	.057	-4.180***	-.347	-.125	
Supervisor Compassion (B)	.453	.051	8.948***	.354	.553	
A x B	.217	.099	2.191***	.022	.412	
Variables	DV = Depression					
	B	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI	R ²
(constant)	1.371	.156	8.797***	1.065	1.678	.302***
age	-.004	.002	-2.35***	-.008	-.001	
gender	-.015	.047	-.309	-.108	.078	
Workplace Bullying	.387	.042	9.121***	.304	.470	
Psychological Safety	-.178	.034	-5.168***	-.246	-.110	

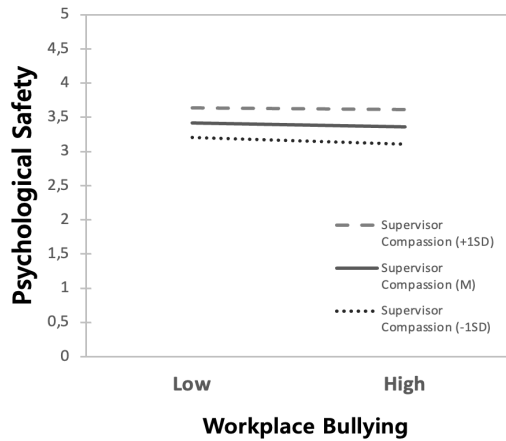


Figure 2. The Moderating Effect of Supervisor Compassion on the Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Psychological Safety

($\beta = -.096, t = -1.049, p > .05$). Through the same PROCESS MACRO Model 7, we examined the moderating effect of CC. Our results reveal that unlike in the case of SC, according to the level of CC, the negative effect of WB on PS was not statistically significant ($\beta = .032, t = .121, p > .05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Next, we examined the moderated mediation effects of SC and CC to see how the magnitude of the mediation effect of PS varies according to the level of SC and CC. As shown in Table 3, the moderated mediation effect of SC was found to be statistically significant as the 95% confidence intervals did not contained zero between the upper and lower limits (effect = $-.039, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.077, -.001]$). When SC was low (-1SD), the indirect negative effect of WB on depression mediated by PS was strengthened. When SC was high (+1SD), the indirect negative effect of WB on depression mediated through PS was no longer statistically significant. On the other hand, the moderated mediation effect of CC was not found to be statistically significant as the 95% confidence intervals contained zero between the upper and lower limits (effect = $-.006, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.050, .045]$). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was also supported.

Table 3. The Conditional Indirect Effects at Levels of Supervisor Compassion

Supervisor Compassion		Effect	SE	95% C.I.	
				LLCI	ULCI
M-1SD	-.605	.065	.021	.028	.110
M	.020	.041	.013	.019	.069
M+1SD	.645	.017	-.014	-.007	.049
Moderated Mediation (indirect) Index		Index(ω)	SE	95% C.I.	
				LLCI	ULCI
		-.039	.020	-.077	-.001

Note. Effect: Mediation (indirect) effect size, ω : Moderated mediation (indirect) index (Hayes, 2017).

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the mechanism behind the positive relationship between workplace bullying (WB) and depression, focusing on the mediating role of psychological safety (PS) and the moderating roles of supervisor compassion (SC) and co-worker compassion (CC). Based on the data obtained via an online survey of South Korean office workers, our findings indicate that WB's role in increasing depressive symptoms can be partially attributed to its negative effect on PS. Furthermore, SC was observed to weaken the negative association between WB and PS, building on prior research that highlights the importance of compassion in the workplace. Since CC's effect was not significant across all levels, our research also suggests that the impact of organizational compassion (OC) may vary depending on who displays it.

Theoretical Implications

Our study confirmed the previously established positive relationship between WB and depression (Liang-Chih et al., 2020; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010) and provides several additional theoretical implications. Firstly, our results demonstrated a direct negative association between WB and PS, and between PS and depression. This suggests that these two relationships may explain WB's impact on depression. Previous research has

identified various consequences of a low PS workplace, including reduced work engagement, job satisfaction, and increased absenteeism (Newman et al., 2017; Vessey et al., 2010). Our study expands upon this knowledge by establishing depression as another significant outcome that can be explained through the mediating role of PS, deepening our understanding of WB's effect on employee well-being.

Secondly, our study examined the role of OC as a factor preventing the decrease of PS for WB victims. Prior research has emphasized the importance of early-stage interventions, such as proper conflict management or individual and team coaching, to not only reduce the impact of WB on employee well-being but also to prevent its further escalation (Hamre et al., 2022). Our findings support the positive role of SC, which moderated the relationship between WB and depression, mediated by PS. When considering COR and SST, the effect of SC can be explained through its role in protecting employee job resources and signaling their existence, thus allowing victims to perceive WB as less threatening, inhibiting emotional distress and resource depletion. In addition, based on prior compassion literature findings, when perceiving their supervisors as helpful and compassionate, employees feel more safe and supported, and thus are able to more effectively deal with WB-induced stress, preventing the decrease of their PS and the number and severity of their

depression symptoms (Dutton et al., 2006; Lilius et al., 2008). Coaches often use positive psychology techniques to help clients cultivate positive emotions and develop coping strategies for managing depressive symptoms. Techniques promoting compassion can be considered an useful addition to the scope of focus of coaching interventions, whether to be employed by coaches of supervisors or supervisors themselves.

Moreover, as the moderating role of CC was not significant across all of its levels, our findings speak to the difference between compassion shown by supervisors and co-workers. Previous research has commonly treated supervisor and co-worker support as two separate constructs (Yang et al., 2016) but this has not been the case in majority of the OC related research. However, as our study did not investigate the nature of the difference between SC and CC, we are unable to fully describe why and how compassion differs based on the provider, a point discussed further in the limitations section.

Practical Implications

Our study offers several implications for the future of organizational interventions and coaching practices. Negative experiences like WB can lead to decreased individual well-being, motivation, productivity, and commitment to the company (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011). Therefore, preventive strategies against WB, would be the

ideal approach in combating the rise of depression and other mental health issues. However, despite significant investment in such efforts, completely eradicating WB globally is an unlikely outcome, emphasizing the role of post-WB interventions. In cases where WB could not have been prevented, our study findings highlight the significant role of PS and propose SC and related coaching techniques as an alternative intervention to elevate employee PS and thus their well-being.

Next, integrating compassion into coaching programs can enhance one's ability to be compassionate not only towards others, but also towards oneself, thereby increasing resilience and empathy (Chan et al., 2022). Hence, we recommend future coaching practitioners to incorporate both compassionate support and self-compassion into their practice. For example, Lanaj et al. (2022) found that leaders who practice self-compassion are more likely to offer psychological support to their subordinates, contributing to better well-being. Interventions and coaching approaches that promote self-compassion among leaders can thus improve other employee mental well-being as well.

In addition, the contagious aspect of compassion, which has been observed in the workplace, offers further implications for practice. Individual acts of SC can directly support employees in need but may also trigger a transformation towards a more compassionate organization as a whole. Madden et al. (2012)

explained how localized acts of compassion by individual supervisors can result in a coordinated response effort that shapes supervisor role expectations and organizational culture. In turn, when compassion serves as a guiding principle for supervisors, it influences the actions of other employees as well (Plowman et al., 2007). Compassionate assistance for distressed employees then creates a compassionate organizational climate, which has been shown to prevent future instances of work-related stress, increase perceived social support and PS, and ultimately reduce the risk of depression caused by work-related stress (Huppert, 2017; Zhang et al., 2018).

Building onto this contagion effect, we suggest several coaching practices and that employee training methods to encourage supervisors to incorporate compassion into their role expectations. Methods such as compassion and interpersonal skills training, as well as performance reviews emphasizing leaders' interpersonal skills can be effective strategies at improving all employees' well-being. This in turn can translate to organizational benefits in the form of reduced sick leave and absenteeism, increased morale, resilience, job satisfaction, employee performance, and employee retention (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014; Madden et al., 2012; Simpson et al., 2019).

Besides practices that increase compassion and indirectly help reduce depression via a heightened perception of PS, we also recommend implementing interventions and coaching

strategies that directly focus on enhancing PS. Previous research indicates that positive workplace practices, such as written agreements, strong management, and clear communication are crucial in fostering a favorable employee environment and subsequently increase employee PS (e.g., Daniel, 2003). Implementing written agreements helps establish clear expectations and guidelines for both employees and management, fostering transparency and preventing misunderstandings and conflicts. Strong management involves effectively communicating with employees, providing guidance and support, fostering a positive work culture, and addressing any concerns or issues promptly, enhancing their morale and job satisfaction. Lastly, open and clear communication in the workplace involves not only management communicating with employees but also encouraging employees to share their ideas, concerns, and feedback with each other, fostering a sense of trust and creating a positive and cooperative work environment (Daniel, 2003).

Further strategies aimed to more specifically target employee well-being management may include providing comprehensive employee training that features education on safeguarding one's well-being, establishing precise guidelines regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior at work, and setting up protocols to address issues not limited to WB (Kwan et al., 2016). By doing so, organizations can cultivate trust among their employees, ensuring them that their

concerns will be addressed appropriately and consequently elevate their perceived PS.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study offers several important findings, some limitations and further directions for future research are worth noting. As a cross-sectional study, our research is limited by the time frame in which all variables were measured and does not provide sufficient grounds for establishing cause-and-effect relationships. Future studies should attempt to verify our proposed model through longitudinal design which would also be able to assess the developmental trajectory of depression with PS in more detail.

In addition, to measure both SC and CC we adapted a section of a larger scale originally used to assess compassion as rated by the provider. To date, most OC studies have mainly relied on the Experienced Compassion at Work Scale (Lilius et al., 2008), which consists of only three items. While the authors argued for a broad assessment of compassion to account for its subjective nature, this approach may limit the objective measurement of OC's effects. As our study reveals that the impact of OC may vary depending on one's position within the company, we suggest that researchers attempt to devise a new unified measure to assess compassion received at work, which can be tailored either to supervisors or co-workers, to enable a more

specific and objective evaluation of OC.

Moreover, this study did not directly assess why and how do SC and CC differ. Yet, based on prior literature we would like to offer several factors potentially related to the lack of CC's moderating effect. First of all, our study specifically asked respondents to consider their direct team members when reporting their experiences of WB, which increases the likelihood of closest co-workers being the perpetrators. Research by Coyne et al. (2004) has shown that peer isolation and exclusion within one's team are indeed the most common forms of WB. Consequently, individuals who are ostracized within their group of co-workers are less likely to receive compassionate support from them. Or as co-workers are perceived as part of the perpetrator's group, their attempts at compassionate support may be perceived as less sincere, thus reducing the likelihood of significant moderating effect of CC in the relationship between WB and PS. However, since our study did not differentiate between supervisor and co-worker bullying, further research is needed to explore this issue.

Additionally, the conceptualization of WB in this research could be another factor related to the lack of CC. We utilized the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) by Einarsen et al. (2009), which categorizes WB based on the bullying's behavioral nature differentiating between person-oriented bullying, work-related bullying, and intimidation-related bullying but

not accounting for the perpetrator's position within the organization. Given that respondents were instructed to answer based on the relationship with all of their team members, we did not gather information about the perpetrator's rank in relation to the respondent. It's possible that the moderating influence of SC and CC is contingent on whether the perpetrator is a supervisor, coworker, or a combination of both. Future studies should delve into the potential effect of the position of the perpetrators within the company in relation to the victim (i.e., their respective position and power) as well as their relationship with the victims (i.e., team members vs. non-members) on the effectiveness of OC.

Moreover, as suggested in the prior sections, supervisors, due to their authority and influence, are generally better positioned to address and intervene in cases of WB. Past research suggests that while co-workers can often be more effective at providing emotional assistance, they have limited ability to instigate dramatic changes in the organizational system (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). On the other hand, supervisors possess greater ability to hold the perpetrator accountable and provide resources to the victim, such as monetary compensation, adjustments to work hours, or to implement practices to prevent further bullying (Sigursteinsdottir & Karlsdottir, 2022). In line with these specific features of SC, our study supports the superior role of SC for WB victims. Nevertheless, it is

important not to overlook the significance of CC in future research and future studies should aim to gain a deeper understanding of the differences between CC and SC, as well as identify the conditions under which CC may become an effective source of workplace support.

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직장 내 괴롭힘과 우울증의 관계: 심리적 안전감과 상사와 동료의 컴패션의 역할

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전세계적으로 구성원의 웰빙에 대한 관심이 높아지면서, 특히, 부정적인 조직경험으로 인해 발생하는 우울증과 같은 어려움은 구성원과 조직 모두에게 가장 큰 부담 중 하나이다. 본 연구는 심리적 안전감의 매개 역할을 탐구함으로써 직장 내 괴롭힘과 우울증을 연결하는 메커니즘을 조사하였다. 또한 직장 내 괴롭힘의 부정적 영향을 완충해 주는 요인으로 직장 내 컴패션, 특히 상사와 동료의 컴패션의 조절효과를 검증하였다. 한국 직장인 392명을 온라인 설문조사 한 결과, 심리적 안전감이 직장 내 괴롭힘과 우울증의 관계를 매개하는 것으로 나타났다. 이를 통해 직장 내 괴롭힘이 심리적 안전감을 감소시키고 그에 따라 직장인들의 우울증을 증가시킨다는 점이 밝혀졌다. 예상대로, 상사의 컴패션이 직장 내 괴롭힘의 부정적 영향을 조절하는 것으로 나타났다. 반면, 동료의 컴패션은 이러한 조절 효과를 나타내지 않았다. 이 결과는 직원의 부담과 심리적 건강을 위해 상사가 부하에게 공감해주고 배려해주는 직장 환경의 중요성과 코칭의 필요성을 강조한다. 끝으로 본 연구의 이론적 및 실용적 함의, 한계점 및 향후 연구방향이 논의되었다.

주요어 : 직장 내 괴롭힘, 심리적 안전감, 상사의 컴패션, 동료의 컴패션, 우울증