

# Does workplace bullying mediate the relationships between leadership styles and burnout and depression?

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**WORKPLACE BULLYING  
MEDIATOR BETWEEN  
LEADERSHIP STYLES AND  
BURNOUT AND DEPRESSION?**

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## GOAL STUDY

**The goal of this study is to reveal the relations between leadership styles, burnout and depression and the supposed mediation by workplace bullying**

Relevance: Relations between leadership styles on one hand and burn-out and depression on the other hand are already investigated (Tepper, 2000, Neyers et al., 2007), but mediation of workplace bullying is as far as we know hardly investigated.

# DEFINITION BULLYING

There is bullying when someone over time has the feeling that he or she is regularly and repeatedly adversely treated by one or more persons, giving a sense of powerlessness.

*(Notelaers & Einarsen, 2013)*



# WORKPLACE BULLYING: PREVALENCE 1

- Studies of bullying at work report prevalence rates of victimization ranging from 2-37%.
  - This broad range of prevalence is partly attributable to differences in measurement across studies.
  - People report lower prevalence of bullying if there are asked if they have experienced bullying in general (self-labeling method) as opposed to when asked if they have been victims of specific acts of bullying (behavioural experience method)
- 

# WORKPLACE BULLYING: PREVALENCE 2

Combining both methods Nielsen et al. (2010) reported a prevalence of 15% on average and Leon-Perez et al. (2014) reported a prevalence of 8% severe and 12% occasional bullying

In our study we measured workplace bullying with the behavioural experience method (NAQ). The prevalence is 10 %.



# WORKPLACE BULLYING: CONSEQUENCES

The personal consequences for the victims could be severe :

- It predicts psychosomatic and psychological problems, such as sleep problems, depression, anxiety and burnout
  - It enhances loneliness and decreases self-confidence
  - It can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and even to suicide
  - It can lead to job insecurity, risk of turnover and career problems.
- (e.g. Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015)

# DIFFERENT STYLES OF LEADERSHIP

- **Autocratic leadership**  
I'm the boss
- **Laissez-faire leadership**  
The supervisor doesn't interfere very often
- **Transactional leadership**  
The exchange relation is in the foreground
- **Transformational leadership**  
The charismatic leader, the motivator

} Positive correlated with bullying  
(Hoel, 2013; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015)

} Negative correlated  
with bullying (e.g. Neyens et al., 2007;  
Nielsen, 2013)

# HYPOTHESES

**H1. Leadership styles are related with burnout and depression.**

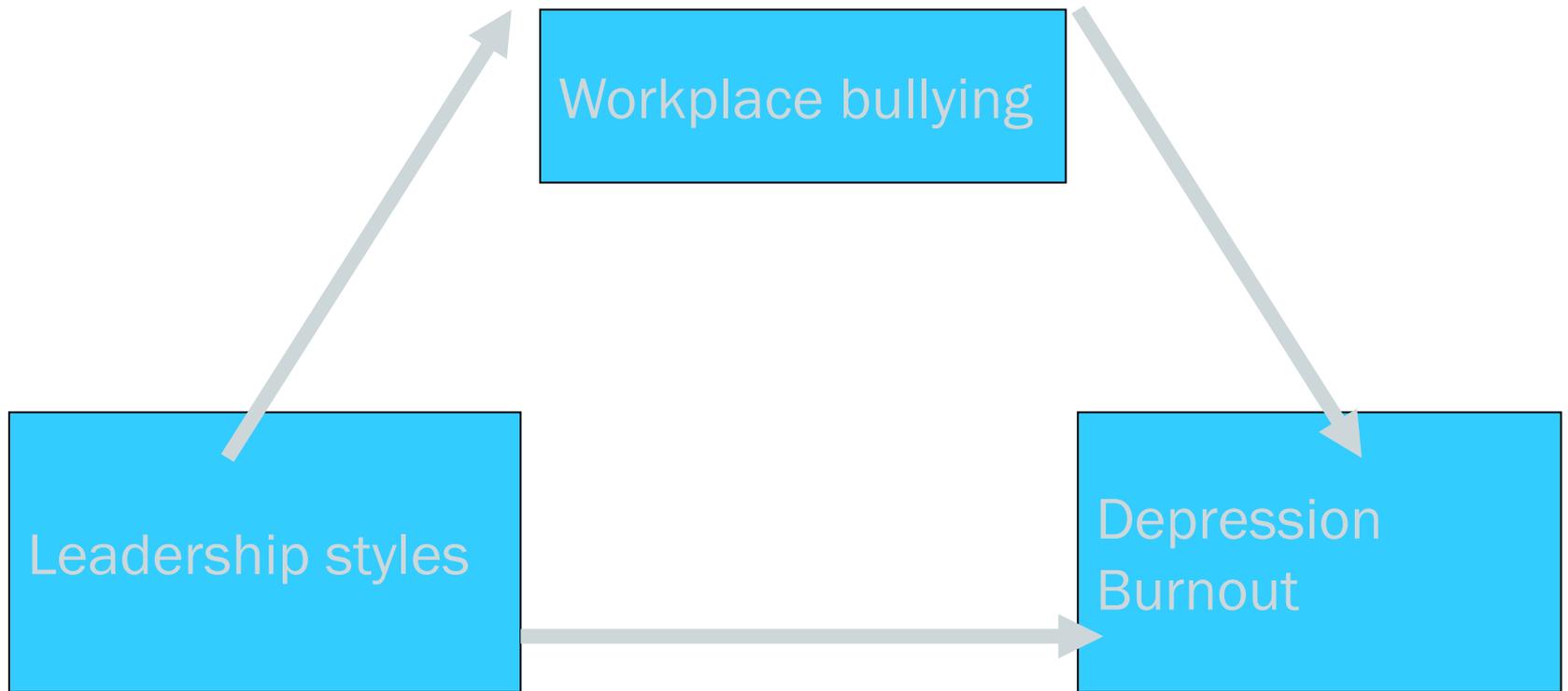
**1a. Higher scores on autocratic and laissez faire leadership styles are positively related with higher scores on burnout and depression**

**1b. Higher scores on transactional and transformational leadership styles are positively related with lower scores of burnout and depression**

**H2 The relationships between leadership styles and burnout and depression are mediated by workplace bullying**



Figure 1. MEDIATION MODEL



# METHOD

## Questionnaires

- **Leadership styles**  
Questionnaire on Charismatic Leadership in Organizations (CLIO,  $\alpha = .90$ )
  - **Bullying:**  
Dutch version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-NL,  $\alpha = .87$ )
  - **Depression**  
Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS,  $\alpha = .95$ )
  - **Burn-out**  
Utrecht Burn-out Scale (UBOS,  $\alpha = .74$ )
- 

# METHOD: POPULATION

Cross-sectional survey amongst 580 employees of a Dutch large industrial organization. Response was 223 (response rate 38 %, 77 % men, 23 % women)

Type of function.

	production	maintenance	staff	management
Women	2.0%	2.0%	76.4%	19.6%
Men	13.4%	22.6%	39.0%	25.0%

90 % of the respondents work fulltime, the part-timers are mostly female.

# RESULTS: DESCRIPTIVES

- 10.4% of the respondents have been bullied
- 12.3% of the respondents reported depressive complaints
- 10.5% of the respondents reported burnout-complaints

# RESULTS: DESCRIPTIVES

We found all the described styles of leadership in the company

1. Transactional leadershipstyle	M = 5.14	Sd = 1.24	(3.90 – 6.38)
2. Transformational leadershipstyle	M = 5.01	Sd = 1.23	(3.78 – 6.24)
3. Autocratic leadershipstyle	M = 4.38	Sd = .84	(3.54 – 5.22)
4. Laissez-faire leadershipstyle	M = 3.79	Sd = 1.16	(2.63 – 4.95)

*The differences are significant,  $p < .000$  (measured with a 7-points Likert scale)*

# RESULTS: REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The data have been analysed with hiërarchical regression analysis.

Hypotheses 1.1 was not confirmed: *autocratic and laissez faire leadership* styles did not relate positively with higher scores on burnout and depression. There was no relation between *autocratic leadership* and *burnout* and *depression* and a negative relation instead of the expected positive relation between *laissez faire leadership* and *depression*

Hypothese 1.2 was partly confirmed: transactional leadership style related negatively with both depression and burnout and transformational leadership only with depression.

# RESULTS: MEDIATION

**Between workplace bullying and depression and burnout positive relations were found. But mediation could be shown only for the transactional leadership style, both for the relation with depression and burnout**

**(Sobel test statistic revealed significant mediating effects for depression  $z = -3.607$ ,  $SE = .030$ ,  $p = <.001$  and for burnout  $z = -3.605$ ,  $SE .069$ ,  $p = <.001$ )**

**Transactional leadership style is related to less bullying and lower grades of depression and burnout.**

**TABLE 1. REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH DEPRESSION AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Variabelen	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
<b>Step 1</b>	.031*	
<b>Type of function</b>		-.176*
<b>Step 2</b>	.140**	
<b>Autocratic style</b>		.084
<b>Laissez faire style</b>		-.154*
<b>Transactional style</b>		<b>-.331*</b>
<b>Transformational style</b>		-.066
<b>Step 3</b>	.175**	
<b>Autocratic style</b>		-.014
<b>Laissez faire style</b>		-.134*
<b>Transactional style</b>		<b>-.059</b>
<b>Transformational style</b>		-.086
<b>Workplacebullying</b>		.492**
<b>Total R<sup>2</sup></b>	.346	

TABLE 2. REGRESSION ANALYSIS WITH BURNOUT AS DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Variables	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
Step 1	.007	
Type of function		-.086
Step 2	.120	
Autocratic style		.079
Laissez-faire style		-.006
Transactional style		-.335*
Transformational style		-.017
Step 3	.183	
Autocratic style		-.022
Laissez-faire style		.016
Transactional style		-.059
Transformational style		-.036
Workplacebullying		.502**
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.310	

# DISCUSSION

## **Mediation is only shown for transactional leadership**

Possible explanations: according to this style the relation between employer and employee is a very clear relation, with well described rules, based on exchange. Perhaps those type of relations minimize the risk of being bullied and getting health problems.

The other leadership styles are more concerned with social aspects of the relation employer- employee.



# DISCUSSION: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Data are gathered in a more hierarchical organized, industrial organization.

A limitation is that transactional leadership possibly fits more into a hierarchical organisation culture than other leadership styles. This limits the generalization of the data

A major strength is that mediation of workplacebullying between leaderships styles and burnout and depression is shown for at least one leadership style in a representative sample of the employees of this organisation



# QUESTIONS?

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