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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The impact of workplace bullying on employees' work withdrawal behavior and the significance of psychological safety in China's multi-ethnic regions

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ABSTRACT

In China's multi-ethnic regions, the phenomenon of workplace bullying can be compared to a mental shackle, which inhibits the work enthusiasm of the bullied, makes the bullied feel depressed, frustrated, and other negative feelings, and makes many employees miserable. This study aimed to develop a correlation between workplace bullying, employees' work withdrawal behavior, and psychological safety in China's multi-ethnic regions. The data collection for this study primarily involved gathering information. through questionnaires from 357 employees within 42 Yunnan-listed enterprises in China's multi-ethnic regions. All statistical data, including frequency, proportion, average, and variability measures, were analyzed using a software tool designed to process statistical information. The finding indicated there exists a direct correlation amongst workplace bullying and employees' work withdrawal behavior in China's multi-ethnic regions. Incorporating psychological safety into the model, subsequent mediation effect testing reveals that there is a partial mediating role of psychological safety in the correlation among workplace bullying and employees' work withdrawal behavior. This research contributes to the existing theoretical investigation on the correlation among workplace bullying, employees' work withdrawal behavior, and their psychological safety in China's multi-ethnic regions. Additionally, it explores how psychological safety can mediate these effects. Furthermore, this study offers valuable insights for enterprises operating in China's multi-ethnic regions by providing practical strategies for human resource management and conflict reduction within organizations.

Keywords: workplace bullying; employees' work withdrawal behavior; psychological safety; China's multi-ethnic regions

1. Introduction

Workplace bullying has been confirmed by multiple credible studies and is present in almost every organization in the world[1]. It is considered a major social stress with severe consequences for employees' mental health[2, 3] and organizational productivity[4, 5].

In the last twenty-five years, there has been an increasing concern in management research regarding workplace bullying[6-8]. Bullying poses a significant challenge not only to companies but also to the well-being of employees and their respective organizations. Research conducted earlier has shown that the

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occurrence rate of physical aggression in workplace bullying stands at 21%, and the prevalence of psychological hostility is 79%[9]. Workplace bullying enhances employees' work withdrawal behavior[10]. Hence, it becomes imperative for both organizations and supervisors to address the grave issue of "workplace bullying." Companies have the obligation and, more importantly, the responsibility to create healthy and favorable working conditions for their staff and stop workplace bullying from its root causes.

It should be highlighted that employee engagement is negatively impacted by workplace bullying as well.[11]. According to research findings, approximately one-third of workers have experienced tardiness or early departure, around 31% have purposefully decreased their productivity levels, and over half have intentionally postponed taking their scheduled time off[12]. In China, numerous academics have also encountered comparable issues as those observed internationally[13, 14]. For example, in some Chinese enterprises, due to the lack of adequate understanding and attention of managers to organizational management, coupled with some personal factors of employees, most employees have severe work withdrawal behavior[15]. These severe work withdrawal behaviors not only impact employees' work efficiency but also destroy the formation of health and a good working environment. In the foreseeable future, it will also cause harmful effects on new employees and bring unpredictable losses to the whole enterprise.

Because workplace bullying can cause serious harm to individuals and their work performance[16], it has emerged as a prominent subject of societal concern. It has been increasingly incorporated into the realm of research on employees' work withdrawal behavior and turnover, which is regarded as a primary factor contributing to negative behavior among employees[17]. To a considerable degree, workplace bullying undermines the victims' motivation for work, resulting in negative emotions such as feelings of frustration and potentially leading to depressive symptoms. This subsequently leads to a notable decrease in their dedication to the organization, active involvement in tasks, and supportiveness while exhibiting unfavorable behaviors like disengagement from work and frequent job changes[18]. While it has been established in prior research that workplace bullying can result in significant psychological issues for those affected, the majority of studies have predominantly concentrated on the western setting[1, 19]. Despite some scholars having conducted research on workplace bullying and its influence on employees' negative behaviors in the Chinese context, previous studies in China have primarily focused on regions dominated by the Han Chinese ethnic group. Limited attention has been given to multi-ethnic areas such as Yunnan, which is known for its high diversity of ethnic groups. Therefore, it is crucial to gather more data on workplace bullying in these multi-ethnic regions to facilitate targeted interventions[20, 21].

At the same time, workplace bullying has witnessed a substantial increase in occurrence since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. Despite the declaration made by the World Health Organization on May 9, 2023, stating that "The global public health emergency status of COVID-19 outbreak has been lifted," several companies persist in encountering considerable obstacles and shouldering substantial burdens as they strive for their survival[22]. The limited availability of resources may result in a decline in personal self-regulation, thereby elevating the prevalence of workplace bullying[14]. The rise in employees' anxiety is a result of the uncertain external environment caused by the significant decrease in economic earnings and challenges in finding new job opportunities, emphasizing the significance of ensuring psychological safety[23].

As mentioned earlier, the researcher aims to investigate the correlation among workplace bullying and employees' work withdrawal behavior as well as their perception of psychological safety in China's regions with diverse ethnicities, because organizations and managers must recognize and address the serious problem of workplace bullying. And more importantly, Companies have an obligation and a responsibility to create

healthy and good working conditions for their employees and eliminate workplace bullying at its root. This research incorporates the fundamental theoretical foundations of this research, namely the Affective Events Theory (AET) and the Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT), in order to workplace bullying concern increasingly with the global issues. Workplace bullying has an impact on the well-being, both mentally and physically, of staff members and leads to various negative work behaviors, such as work withdrawal behavior, which seriously harms the interests of the organization. In the specific cultural background of China's multi-ethnic areas, the influence caused by workplace bullying on employee behavior is more complex and significant. The benefit of this study lies in the research regarding the connection among workplace bullying, employees' work withdrawal behavior and psychological safety to find and promote the methods that can help and support all enterprises in China's multi-ethnic areas to effectively conduct human resource management and reduce internal conflicts.

2. Literature review

2.1. Workplace bullying

Research findings show workplace bullying impacts over 15% of the global workforce[24]. Although bullying rates are allegedly exhibiting elevated levels in the domains of social and health, public administrators, and the field of education (i.e., in the public sector)[25], according to research, it has been found that a wide range of organizations also exhibit this characteristic[26, 27]. Workplace bullying is characterized by enduring exposure to recurrent adverse actions, leading individuals to perceive themselves as incapable of effectively countering such behaviors[28]. Workplace bullying manifests itself in different ways that precedents include people (i.e., rumors and the act of isolating individuals from social circles), work (i.e., withholding information, receiving tasks that are not reasonable), and physical intimidation (i.e., yelling, being harassed)[29], additionally, there is an increased prevalence of mental health issues, reduced physical well-being, diminished work efficiency and contentment, as well as instances of suicide[30-32]. A supervisor or co-worker usually commits bullying, which can be reversed against supervisors and employees[10]. Irrespective of the hierarchical position held by both the target and perpetrator, there exists an inequity in power dynamics between the two entities involved in workplace bullying. Victims can feel inferior and believe they cannot defend themselves[28].

2.2. Employees' work withdrawal behavior

March and Simon(1958) brought "withdrawal" in the field of psychological studies psychology into the context of the professional environment to propose employees' work withdrawal behavior at work. Subsequently, many scholars took this as a cornerstone to further explore employees' work withdrawal behavior at work. The research points out that employees' work withdrawal behavior is related to organizational commitment, turnover intention, and other factors[33]. Organizational commitment plays a vital part in exerting an impact on the behavior and demeanor displayed by staff members. In contrast, the mental well-being of employees is reciprocally influenced by their attitude and conduct[34]. Employees' work withdrawal behavior has three significant characteristics: First, this kind of withdrawal behavior comes from employees' subjective conscious choice; Second, the root cause of such behavior is that employees evade existing work tasks and work situations; Finally, employees' work withdrawal behavior is a behavioral sequence composed of various behavioral responses to different degrees[35]. Most definitions of employees' work withdrawal behavior lie in their escape from organizational work and passive inaction. This study adopts the definition of Nauman(2021): Employees' work withdrawal behavior mainly pertains to the negative emotions or behaviors made by individuals to escape from organizational work and leave the organization itself[36].

2.3. Psychological safety

The notion of psychological safety in the workplace was first introduced by Amy Edmondson, an organizational behavioral scientist, in her 1999 article titled 'Psychological safety and its impact on learning behavior within work teams[37]. Amy Edmondson points out that a workplace with trust leads to better business performance. Workers feel a sense of assurance within their work setting, are not apprehensive about facing repercussions in their jobs, and possess a state of psychological well-being even when they commit errors. Specifically, employees are comfortable being themselves and working in a workplace of psychological safety, where different levels of respect and personal risk-taking are encouraged. The members of the organization respect each other and are accepted. A psychologically safe workplace where employees are encouraged to understand others' perspectives, understand their strengths and weaknesses, support each other, feel confident in making suggestions or ideas, learn together, and progress together. The concept of Lechner(2022) was adopted in this study: Psychological safety refers to the personal conviction that employees in a company can freely voice their opinions and ideas at work without fearing any adverse repercussions.

There is an increasing amount of literature indicating a notable increase in the adverse effects of workplace harassment on employees' mental well-being[2], studies show that people who experience bullying in a professional setting, individuals may be prone to developing diminished self-confidence, burnout, depression and an inability to focus[3]. Therefore, most employees are more inclined to leave an organization or withdraw from work when they are bullied, so as to reduce the psychological damage caused by workplace bullying[38]. In conclusion, workplace bullying in an unhealthy work environment may result in a decrease in the mental health of employees, and prolonged exposure can cause anxiety or depression in employees.

To conclude, with regard to the literature, domestic and foreign academic circles have conducted some meaningful studies on bullying in the workplace, employees' withdrawal behavior at work and psychological safety . Therefore, the aforementioned theoretical findings have also established a robust theoretical basis for this investigation, although there remain certain limitations: although scholars have extensively investigated workplace bullying and its effects on employees' withdrawal from work in Chinese contexts, previous studies on workplace bullying in China have predominantly focused on areas dominated by Han Chinese individuals (China's dominant ethnic group), with little research on China's multi-ethnic regions(Yunnan, located in southwest China, stands out as the Chinese province with the highest diversity of ethnic groups). Furthermore, prior studies have predominantly focused on the negative outcomes associated with workplace bullying, particularly emphasizing direct harmful behaviors such as quitting from the organization, there has been limited investigation into the potential harm caused by employees' withdrawal from work[39].

2.4. Workplace bullying, Employees' work withdrawal behavior and psychological safety

Regulatory focus theory (RFT) states that individuals will adopt a preventive orientation to self-regulation of safety needs. The second is to seek advantages and avoid disadvantages; After an encounter with workplace bullying, employees often adopt superficial compliance and then resort to avoidant or harmful confrontational approaches to resolve the problem (e.g., withdrawing inwards, distancing themselves from the abuser and avoiding direct contact; There is no doubt that workplace bullying compromises the health and stability of the work environment and triggers negative emotional responses from employees[40]. Affective event theory (AET) points out that emotional responses can influence employee behavior in two ways: one way is to directly influence employee behavior, causing employee behavior to withdraw, another method is to influence employees' work attitude and induce psychological withdrawal behavior[41]. AET

indicated that when employees lack psychological security in the work environment, they will subjectively adopt harmful coping styles such as avoidance to deal with this sense of insecurity. In other words, the insecurity caused by workplace bullying will gain more psychological balance through withdrawal behaviors (such as the negative work attitude of doing nothing and coping casually)[42]. Therefore, the greater the degree of workplace bullying, the more likely employees are to exhibit negative behavior and negative psychology.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

In exploring the study theme "the correlation among workplace bullying, employees' work withdrawal behavior and psychological safety in China's multi-ethnic regions", the methodological part of this paper adopts quantitative research methods. Its aim is to achieve predetermined research objectives systematically and scientifically. The following is an academic exposition of the core components of the methodological framework:

3.2. Measurement of variables

1) Independent Variable——Workplace Bullying. To assess workplace bullying, this study utilizes a measurement tool developed by Li Yongxin et al. (2011). The tool is specifically designed for the Chinese work environment and measures 14 items, such as "I am bullied by others," "others ridicule or humiliate me in public," and so on. Using a Likert 5-point scale, the greater the score, the higher the workplace bullying level; 2) Dependent Variable——Employees' Work Withdrawal Behavior. To measure employees' work withdrawal behavior, this study adopts the employee work withdrawal behavior measure developed by Lehman et al. (1992) and measured by 12 items. For example: "I contemplate the idea of nonattendance," "I wander (daydream) during work," and so on. Using the Likert 5-point scale, the employees' work withdrawal level increases in direct proportion to the score; 3) Mediating Variable——Psychological Safety. To measure psychological safety, this study employs the psychological safety scale developed by Li Ning and Yan Jin (2007), which is the most cited in the Chinese context and measured by five items. For example: "I can freely express my ideas," "When I have different opinions, I will not be deliberately difficult," and so on. By employing a 5-point Likert scale, it can be observed that higher scores correspond to increased levels of psychological safety among employees.

3.3. Research population and sample size

The demographic composition of the study participants was the employees of listed enterprises in Yunnan Province (the region with the largest number of ethnic minorities in China). Based on the Yunnan Provincial Yearbook 2023 published by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the number of listed companies in Yunnan Province for the year 2023 amounts to 42, of which 33 are in Kunming, two are in Qujing, Yuxi, Wenshan, Diqing, Lincang, Lijiang, Baoshan, and Dali each have 1. The 42 listed enterprises in Yunnan Province had a total market value of 939.5 billion yuan in 2023 and more than 230,000 employees as shown in **Table 1**. The proportionate stratified random sampling method is quick to operate and ensures that each individual sampled is representative of the total sample. The recommended observation-to-variable ratio is at least 5:1, although ratios of 15:1 or even 20:1 are more desirable[43]. This research consists of 10 parameters, so the sample size at least is N=20*10=200. In the present research, we ended up with 357 valid questionnaires.

Table 1. Listed enterprises in Yunnan Province (Cont.).

No	District	Enterprise name	Number of employees	Listed exchange
1	Kunming	Yunnan Baiyao Group Co.,Ltd.	8781	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
2	Kunming	5i5j Holding Group Co., Ltd.	33820	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
3	Kunming	Myhome Real Estate Development Group Co., Ltd.	1070	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
4	Kunming	Yunnan Aluminium Co., Ltd.	10477	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
5	Kunming	Yunnan Copper Co., Ltd.	9041	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
6	Kunming	Kunming Yunnei Power Co.,Ltd.	2604	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
7	Kunming	Yunnan Nantian Electronics Information Co., Ltd	8050	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
8	Kunming	Yunnan Tin Co., Ltd.	15473	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
9	Kunming	Yunnan Energy Investment Co., Ltd.	2272	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
10	Kunming	Yunnan Tourism Co., Ltd.	1757	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
11	Kunming	YCIC Eco-Technology Co., Ltd.	638	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
12	Kunming	Jianshe Industry Group (Yunnan) Co., Ltd.	4529	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
13	Kunming	Yixintang Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd.	33176	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
14	Kunming	Kunming Longjin Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd.	262	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
15	Kunming	Walvax Biotechnology Co., Ltd.	2249	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
16	Kunming	Kunming Chuan Jin Nuo Chemical Co., Ltd.	2107	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
17	Kunming	Quakesafe Technologies Co., Ltd.	917	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
18	Kunming	Yunnan Botanee Biotechnology Group Co.LTD	3053	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
19	Kunming	Ksec Intelligent Technology Co., Ltd.	2000	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
20	Kunming	Huaneng Lancang River Hydropower Inc.	3705	Shanghai Stock Exchange
21	Kunming	Yunnan Yuntianhua Co.,Ltd.	11356	Shanghai Stock Exchange
22	Kunming	Yunnan Metropolitan Real Estate Development Co.Ltd.	26000	Shanghai Stock Exchange
23	Kunming	Yunnan Jinggu Forestry Co., Ltd.	297	Shanghai Stock Exchange
24	Kunming	The Pacific Securities Co., Ltd.	1700	Shanghai Stock Exchange
25	Kunming	JZJ Chain Drugstore Corporation	7000	Shanghai Stock Exchange
26	Kunming	Sino-Platinum Metals Co., Ltd.	1732	Shanghai Stock Exchange
27	Kunming	Yunnan Yunwei Company Limited	132	Shanghai Stock Exchange
28	Kunming	Yunnan Coal & Energy Co., Ltd.	1894	Shanghai Stock Exchange
29	Kunming	KPC Pharmaceuticals, Inc.	5322	Shanghai Stock Exchange
30	Kunming	Hongta Securities Co., Ltd.	1300	Shanghai Stock Exchange
31	Kunming	Yunnan Shennong Agricultural Industry Group Co., Ltd.	1600	Shanghai Stock Exchange
32	Kunming	Kunming Hendra Science And Technology Co., Ltd.	350	Beijing Stock Exchange
33	Kunming	Yunnan Biovalley Pharmaceutical Co.,ltd.	600	Beijing Stock Exchange
34	Qujing	Yunnan luoping Zinc&Electricity Co., Ltd.	1820	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
35	Qujing	Yunnan Chihong Zinc & Germanium Co., Ltd.	7772	Shanghai Stock Exchange

No	District	Enterprise name	Number of employees	Listed exchange
36	Yuxi	Yunnan Energy New Material Co., Ltd.	7458	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
37	Wenshan	China Southern Power Grid Energy Storage Co., Ltd	2089	Shanghai Stock Exchange
38	Diqing	Vats Liquor Chain Store Management Joint Stock Co., Ltd.	2573	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
39	Lincang	Yunnan Lincang Xinyuan Germanium Industry Co.,Ltd	1470	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
40	Lijiang	Lijiang Yulong Tourism Co.,Ltd.	1576	Shenzhen Stock Exchange
41	Baoshan	Yunnan Bowin Technology Industry Co., Ltd.	78	Shanghai Stock Exchange
42	Dali	Dali Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd.	289	Shanghai Stock Exchange

Table 1. *(Continued)*.

3.4. Research instrument

This research tool, which was utilized to gather information from a sample of 357 individuals, consisted of a self-administered survey comprising two sections: 1) basic information section. Individual characteristic variables, such as age, gender, tenure, and so on, were selected that may affect workplace bullying, employees' work withdrawal behavior and psychological safety, and 2) The main body included three scales which are workplace bullying, employees' work withdrawal behavior and psychological safety. The measurement of variables in this article was used the Likert 5-point scale. Research instrument assessment: The examination process involved a panel of five experts who evaluated the content validity of the questionnaire. Typically, an uneven number of specialists is favored to prevent the occurrence of equal opinions[44]. The questions with an Item-Objective Congruency Index (IOC) of 0.5 and higher were chosen using the IOC selection criterion[45]. Subsequently, a preliminary assessment was conducted involving 40 staff members to validate the questionnaire's reliability. Typically, the selection of pre-test participants is contingent upon suitability and convenience, allowing for flexibility in numbers[46]. Taking into account the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test, it has been discovered that the questions demonstrated reliability values between 0.844 and 0.905, exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.7 as stipulated[47]. Hence, the survey was considered dependable and suitable for utilization in gathering data.

3.5. Data analysis

After the collection and organization of data, researchers analyze, filter, and encode the entire dataset for subsequent research. 1)the reliability analysis method, Cronbach's alpha, will be employed for data analysis to demonstrate the project's internal consistency. 2) the data will be analyzed using statistical techniques commonly employed in social science statistical software. The analysis will include examining the frequency distribution, percentage, mean, standard deviation, conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), correlation analysis, Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis, and exploring the potential mediating role of psychological safety within the dataset.

4. Results

4.1. General information of the respondents

Descriptive statistics are utilized during the data screening phase to ensure that the collected data does not have errors and is prepared for intended statistical analyses[48]. In this study, descriptive analysis was conducted on 357 formal sample data, and the outcomes are displayed in **Table 2**. 53.5% of the population consisted of males, while females made up 46.5%, and the tested sample gender slightly more males, which aligns with the social status quo. About the age of employees, the age range of the majority of respondents in

this survey is concentrated among individuals under 36 years old, with a significant proportion falling aged between 26 and 30 years (33.1%) and 31-35 years old (37.3%). About the level of education, a significant proportion consisted of individuals enrolled in junior college (34.7 percent) and college (22.4 percent). In terms of tenure, most employees have less than one year (21%) and 2-4 years (37.3%). In conclusion, although there are more males, the gender distribution is relatively balanced. The age distribution primarily focuses on individuals aged between 26 and 30, with the subsequent age group being 31 to 35. The general pattern indicates a preference for younger and middle-aged individuals. A bachelor's degree is the primary one, followed by a college one. The tenure is mainly 2-4 years, showing a certain degree of career stability. Still, a considerable proportion of personnel have a short tenure (less than one year), and there may be a certain degree of mobility.

Table 2. Description of sample feature distribution.

	Options	frequency	percent	Cumulative percentage
Sex	male	191	53.5	53.5
	female	166	46.5	100
Age	≤25	56	15.7	15.7
	26-30	124	34.7	50.4
	31-35	80	22.4	72.8
	36-40	61	17.1	89.9
	≥41	36	10.1	100
Education	Under Junior college	30	8.4	8.4
	Junior college	94	26.3	34.7
	undergraduate	129	36.1	70.9
	Master	78	21.8	92.7
	Doctor's degree or above	26	7.3	100
Tenure (year)	＜1	75	21.0	21.0
	2-4	133	37.3	58.3
	5-7	54	15.1	73.4
	8-10	31	8.7	92.1
	Ten above	64	17.9	100

4.2. Reliability analysis

In this study, the main factors were evaluated using measurement tools. Hence, it is imperative to scrutinize the data's reliability to ascertain the importance of subsequent analysis. At the beginning, we conducted a reliability evaluation using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal coherence of each dimension[49]. The reliability of a test increases as the Cronbach coefficient approaches 1, indicating a higher level of consistency. The reliability analysis results pertaining to this research are in **Table 3**. The internal coherence of the scales utilized in the present investigation, namely workplace bullying, employees' work withdrawal behavior, psychological safety, and social support, is demonstrated by reliability coefficients falling within the range of 0.8-1.

Table 3. Test results of scale reliability analysis.

Variables	Alpha value
Workplace Bullying	0.912
Employee's Work Withdrawal Behavior	0.903
Psychological Safety	0.847

4.3. Validity analysis

4.3.1. Scale CFA model fit test

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) refers to the process of conducting a confirmatory assessment by evaluating the proposed structural relationship hypothesis put forth by the researcher[50]. Based on the test for the fitness of the model results presented in **Table 4**, it can be observed that the CMIN/DF ratio (Chi-square degree of freedom) is within the range of 1-3, specifically at 1.177. Additionally, the RMSEA value (root mean square error) falls beneath the surface acceptable threshold of 0.08, measuring at a favorable level of 0.021. In addition, the IFT, TLI, and CFI test results all indicated a strong fit with values of 0.9 or above. As a result, the comprehensive analysis findings of this study suggest that the scale CFA model utilized in this research demonstrates a robust level of compatibility.

Table 4. Model fitting of structural models.

Model fitting	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	IFT	TAG	CFI
Fitting result	1.177	0.021	0.986	0.982	0.985
Criteria standard	＜3	＜0.05	＞0.9	＞0.9	＞0.9

4.3.2. Convergence validity and combination reliability test of each dimension of the scale

Considering that the CFA model of the scale utilized in this study exhibits a satisfactory fit, it is crucial to carry out supplementary evaluations. The coherence within and converging validity of each factor included in the measurement tool The evaluation of the data was conducted utilizing measures such as average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). The well-established CFA model is utilized to compute the standardized factor load for each measurement item in its respective dimension. Afterwards, the AVE and CR calculation formula is utilized to ascertain the convergence validity value and combination reliability value for each maintenance. In line with the established criteria, it is recommended that a satisfactory degree of convergence validity and combination reliability can be attained when the AVE value reaches at least 0.5, while ensuring that the CR value exceeds 0.7[51]. According to the analysis presented in **Table 5**, the test conducted to evaluate the scale's accuracy indicates that all dimensions have satisfactory convergence validity and combination reliability. This is evident from AVE values exceeding 0.5 (0.572, 0.536 and 0.524) and CR values surpassing 0.7 (0.949, 0.933 and 0.847) for each dimension, respectively.

Table 5. Convergence validity and combination reliability test for each dimension of the scale.

Variable	AVE	CR
Workplace bullying	0.572	0.949
Employee’s work withdrawal behavior	0.536	0.933
Psychological safety	0.526	0.847

4.3.3. Differential validity test of each dimension of the scale

Drawing from the results presented in **Table 6**, the support for discriminant validity is indicated by the standardized correlation coefficients being lower than the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) values for each respective entity in all pairwise comparisons of each dimension[52]. This indicates a robust discriminant validity across all dimensions.

Table 6. Discriminant validity test results of each dimension of the scale.

	Workplace bullying	Employee's work withdrawal behavior	Psychological safety
Workplace bullying	0.572		
Employee's work withdrawal behavior	0.442	0.536	
Psychological safety	-0.489	-0.525	0.524
The square root of the AVE value	0.756	0.732	0.724

4.4. Correlation analysis

Correlation Analysis indicates that low correlation is different variables, indicating an apparent discriminant validity among constructs[53]. So, the items should not interrelate[54]. The Pearson correlation coefficient is useful for quantifying the degree of linear association between two variables. **Table 7** displays the link among Workplace Bullying and employees' work withdrawal behavior. Specifically, the correlation coefficient between WB and EW is 0.415, revealing a noteworthy and positive correlation with statistical significance at a level of 0.01.

Table 7. Pearson correlation analysis results were obtained for each dimension.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	WB	EW	PS
Workplace bullying	2.249	0.934	1		
Employee's work withdrawal behavior	2.123	0.864	0.415**	1	
Psychological safety	3.867	0.925	-0.437**	-0.463**	1
		* p<0.05 ** p<0.01			

4.5. Structural equation model

4.5.1. SEM model fit test

As indicated in **Table 8**, the CMIN/DF value is below the threshold of 3 at 1.144, while the RMSEA value is below the recommended level of 0.08 at 0.019. Moreover, all indicators, including IFT, TLI, and CFI, exceed the minimum requirement of 0.9, suggesting a favorable overall model fit.

Table 8. Model fitting of structural models.

Model fitting	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	IFT	TAG	CFI
Fitting result	1.144	0.019	0.991	0.982	0.995
Criteria standard	＜3	＜0.05	＞0.9	＞0.9	＞0.9

4.5.2. Test results of SEM model path relation

We analyze the model path once the fitting index analysis confirms the structural equation model's validity. We then utilize advanced statistical analysis techniques to test the hypothesis relationship in our research model. The outcomes derived from the specific hypothesis test can be found in **Table 9**. The calculated standardized path coefficient for the correlation among workplace bullying and employees' work

withdrawal behavior is found to be 0.244 (C.R.=4.357, p<0.05). This suggests a significant positive effect caused by workplace bullying on employees' work withdrawal behavior. The standardized path coefficient of workplace bullying on psychological safety was -0.489(C.R.=-8.453,p<0.05), indicating the possibility that workplace bullying significantly negatively affects psychological security. The standardized path coefficient of psychological safety on employees' work withdrawal behavior was found to be -0.406 (C.R.=-6.446, p<0.05), suggesting a significant inverse impact of psychological safety on employees' withdrawal behavior.

Table 9. Structural equation model path testing.

path			C.R.	P	Standard path coefficient
Employee's work withdrawal behavior	<---	Workplace bullying	4.357	***	0.244
Psychological safety	<---	Workplace bullying	-8.453	***	-0.489
Employee's work withdrawal behavior	<---	Psychological safety	-6.446	***	-0.406

*Note：***<0.001*

4.6. Analysis of the mediating role of psychological safety

This research examines the influence of workplace harassment on the sense of psychological safety, treating it as a variable that stands alone. The findings displayed in **Table 10** offer substantiation for this examination. It has the potential to be inferred that psychological safety partially mediates the link among workplace bullying and employees' tendency to withdraw from work. This implies that there is a combined effect (0.385) comprising a direct impact (0.244) and an indirect influence (0.141). For the mediating pathway from workplace bullying to psychological safety and, subsequently, employees' work withdrawal behavior, the estimated effect size is 0.141 with a 95% confidence interval that does not encompass zero, suggesting the presence of this mediated relationship[55].

Table 10. Analysis results of the mediating role of psychological safety.

item	significance	Effect	95% CI		z /t	p	conclusion
			floor	Upper			
Workplace bullying =>Psychological safety =>Employee's work withdrawal behavior	Indirect effect	0.141	0.092	0.220	4.333	0.000	Partial mediation
Workplace bullying =>Employee's work withdrawal behavior	Direct effect	0.244	0.158	0.330	5.557	0.000	
Workplace bullying =>Employee's work withdrawal behavior	Total effect	0.385	0.302	0.466	9.165	0.000	

5. Discussion

In this study, employees of listed enterprises in Yunnan Province, a multi-ethnic region in China, are taken as the paper objects to explore the profound influence of workplace bullying on employees' work withdrawal behavior. By means of the quantitative analysis of structural equation model (SEM), this study not only reveals the direct influence of workplace bullying on employees' work withdrawal behavior, as well as further discusses the crucial intermediary function performed by psychological safety in this process. This analytical framework helps companies better understand how workplace bullying influences employees' withdrawal behavior through psychological safety in a specific cultural context.

First, this study verifies that workplace bullying can significantly improve employees' work withdrawal behavior in multi-ethnic areas of China. Put simply, as the level increases workplace bullying suffered by employees, the higher the level of work withdrawal behavior at work. This finding is consistent with that of Shin Y and Guo G et al.[56-59]. They point out that workplace bullying results in employees' work withdrawal behavior. Faced with the issue of workplace bullying, most victims will bring their negative attitude and pessimistic emotions to work, resulting in unstable psychological security and work withdrawal behavior. Employees no longer actively look for possible solutions, and then choose to escape to avoid more infringements on their interests. Especially in the multi-ethnic areas of China, where the special cultural background aggravates the impact of workplace bullying on employees' work withdrawal behavior.

Secondly, this research further validated the intermediary function of psychological safety between workplace bullying and employees' job withdrawal behavior. This outcome aligns with the findings of Ajmal et al[60]. This research shows that when employees perceive workplace bullying, their psychological safety will be negatively affected, and employees with an elevated degree of psychological safety can better cope with the adverse impacts of workplace bullying. Such a high level of psychological safety plays a key role in reducing employees' work withdrawal behavior at work, indicating that psychological safety is a factor that cannot be ignored in workplace bullying.

Through empirical analysis, this study not only validates the significant promotion effect of workplace bullying on employees' work withdrawal behavior, but also further reveals the important mediating role played by psychological safety in this process. This provides important theoretical support and practical enlightenment for the practice management of enterprises in multi-ethnic areas in China.

6. Conclusion

Through an empirical analysis of the influence caused by workplace bullying on employees' work withdrawal behavior of employees in listed enterprises in multi-ethnic areas of China, this study reveals the intricate connection amidst workplace bullying, psychological safety and employees' work withdrawal behavior. To examine this correlation, we collected a comprehensive dataset of employees of listed companies in ethnic minority areas of China. The objective of this research is to establish a relationship model to examine the impacts caused by workplace bullying on employees' work withdrawal behavior and psychological safety in multi-ethnic areas of China using affective event theory and regulatory focus theory. The findings suggest that workplace bullying significantly contributes to an increase in employees' withdrawal behavior in multi-ethnic areas of China. Psychological safety fulfills a crucial intermediary function in this process. By employing a structural equation model for analysis, this study further verifies that workplace bullying can effectively inhibit employees' work withdrawal behavior by improving their psychological safety.

This study not only provides strong empirical support for the theoretical development of business management, but also provides practical guidance for eliminating workplace bullying and reducing employees' work withdrawal behavior at work. Particularly within the distinctive cultural setting of China's multi-ethnic regions, the research results offer a fresh outlook for comprehending the impact of workplace bullying in different cultural contexts on employees' work withdrawal behavior at work, and emphasize the significance of being attentive to employees' psychological safety in business management.

This study is mainly limited to employees of listed companies in multi-ethnic areas of China, and the sample has regional characteristics, which may not be fully representative of workplace bullying in other regions. In addition, there may be limitations to the questionnaire and cross-sectional design used in this

study. Future studies can adopt longitudinal design or multivariate methods, combined with experimental studies or qualitative studies, to further authenticate and expand upon the findings of this research.

Potential future investigations may further explore the influence of different cultural backgrounds on workplace bullying and employees' work withdrawal behavior. Cross-cultural comparative studies will provide a broader perspective for understanding this relationship. In addition, the study can also explore more mediating factors. In the future, longitudinal studies can be conducted to analyze the continuous influence caused by workplace bullying on employees' work withdrawal behavior in different periods, so as to verify the long-term applicability of the conclusions of this study in the long run.

Author Contribution

Jingjing Luo wrote the paper as a whole, and analyzed the data, Anan Pongtornkulpanich reviewed the overall logical framework, and all authors have read and agree to the published version of the manuscript.

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This scholarly article has been authored by a postgraduate student enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy program in management at Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth International Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies (CBIS), Rajamangala University of Technology, Tawan-OK, Thailand. The researcher expresses gratitude towards all the referenced experts for their valuable contributions to this study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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