

UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE BULLYING AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN TERTIARY HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF JOB ALIENATION

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of workplace bullying on employee performance in tertiary healthcare institutions in Nigeria with the mediating role of job alienation. The study is anchored on the Conservation of Resources Theory. A quantitative research design was adopted in particular survey and cross-sectional research designs, and data were collected from tertiary healthcare workers in Zamfara and Kaduna States through an online questionnaire. Judgmental and snowball sampling techniques were employed to reach respondents across different professional categories, and out of the questionnaires distributed, 239 were correctly filled and returned, forming the basis for analysis. The results revealed that workplace bullying and job alienation had a significantly negative effect on employee performance. Furthermore, job alienation partially mediated the relationship between workplace bullying and employee performance. The study recommended that management should enforce the Employee Discrimination Act to punish erring employees to serve as deterrent to others ensuring a workplace free of bullying

Keywords: workplace bullying; employee performance; job alienation; conservation of resources theory.

JEL Codes: M30, M31, M37

Introduction

The healthcare sector, particularly tertiary healthcare institutions, represents a critical pillar of Nigeria's socio-economic development, as it is central to human capital development, disease management, and overall national productivity. Tertiary healthcare

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institutions provide specialized medical services, advanced diagnostics, research, and training of healthcare professionals, thereby strengthening the entire health system (Ogunleye et al., 2022). Through effective service delivery, these institutions contribute to improved population health outcomes, reduced mortality, and enhanced quality of life, which are essential for sustainable economic growth (Cerf, 2023). However, the effectiveness and efficiency of tertiary healthcare institutions are largely dependent on the performance, commitment, and psychological well-being of their employees, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and allied health professionals (Aluko, 2023). Healthcare employees are responsible for direct patient care, clinical decision-making, and administrative coordination, making their performance indispensable to patient safety and service quality (Ogunleye et al., 2022).

Despite the strategic importance of healthcare workers, evidence suggests that many employees in Nigeria's healthcare sector work under adverse psychosocial conditions. One of the most pervasive of these conditions is workplace bullying, which involves repeated exposure to negative acts such as intimidation, verbal abuse, humiliation, social exclusion, and misuse of power (Okikiola and Ruth, 2022). In hierarchical and high-pressure environments such as tertiary hospitals, bullying behaviours may be normalized or overlooked, thereby increasing employees' vulnerability (Cerf, 2023). Studies have shown that workplace bullying is associated with reduced job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, and declining job performance among healthcare workers (Alam et al., 2025; Olanipekun & Ikechukwu, 2022; Pradhan & Joshi, 2019.). In Nigeria, where healthcare systems are already strained by inadequate funding, staff shortages, and high patient loads, the presence of bullying further undermines employee effectiveness and organizational outcomes (Onwuakagba, et al., 2025; Afolaranmi, et al., 2022).

Employee performance in healthcare settings is particularly sensitive to psychosocial stressors because healthcare work demands sustained attention, emotional labour, teamwork, and ethical responsibility. When healthcare workers are subjected to bullying, their ability to concentrate, collaborate, and deliver quality care may be significantly impaired (Afolaranmi, et al., 2022). Beyond its direct effect on performance, workplace bullying may also trigger deeper psychological reactions that weaken employees' connection to their work. One such reaction is job alienation, characterized by feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement from one's job role (Erdem, 2021; Ojeleye, Bakare, Umar, & Ojeleye, 2021). In tertiary healthcare institutions, persistent exposure to bullying can erode employees' sense of professional identity and purpose, leading them to emotionally withdraw from their work and organization.

Empirical evidence showed that workplace bullying is linked to job alienation (Hazratian, Mohajeran & Ghalavandi, 2021) and job alienation to poor employee performance (Al-khazrajy, 2025; Aslan, 2025 & Nodehi, 2020). Alienated healthcare workers may comply minimally with job requirements, show reduced initiative, and disengage from patient-centred care, thereby compromising service quality and organizational effectiveness. However, despite growing global interest in workplace bullying and employee outcomes, limited empirical attention has been paid to the psychological mechanisms through which bullying affects performance in Nigeria's tertiary healthcare sector. In particular, the mediating role of job alienation remains underexplored, especially within the Nigerian context where cultural norms, power distance, and institutional rigidities may intensify both bullying experiences and alienation responses.

Based on this identified gap, the present study examines the effect of workplace bullying on employee performance in tertiary healthcare institutions in Nigeria, with specific emphasis on the mediating role of job alienation. By integrating these constructs, the study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of how bullying translates into performance deficits, thereby offering evidence-based insights for healthcare administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders committed to improving employee well-being and performance in Nigeria's tertiary healthcare system.

Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

This section reviews the related literature on employee performance, workplace bullying, job alienation, empirical review and theoretical framework.

Concept of Employee Performance

Employee performance has been widely conceptualized in management and organizational behaviour literature as the extent to which an employee successfully carries out job-related tasks and responsibilities in line with organizational goals. Gravina, Nastasi and Austin (2021) defined it as observable behaviours relevant to organizational objectives that can be measured in terms of proficiency, efficiency, and effectiveness in task execution. Similarly, Çalışkan and Koroğlu (2022) viewed employee performance as a multidimensional construct comprising task performance and contextual performance, emphasizing not only core job duties but also behaviours that support the social and psychological work environment. According to Hajiali et al. (2022), it reflects how well individuals apply their skills, knowledge, and competencies to achieve expected work outcomes within a specified period. Celik et al. (2023) described employee performance as a set of behaviours and actions under the employee's control that

contribute to organizational goals, highlighting its behavioural rather than outcome-based nature. In a related perspective, Muchiri (2022) opined that it is the degree to which employees effectively manage work demands, adapt to changing job requirements, and sustain productivity over time. Saidin, Wan, Halim and Solihah (2024) conceptualized employee performance as the cumulative value of an employee's contributions to organizational effectiveness, incorporating quality of work, productivity, and interpersonal effectiveness. Aguilera, De Massis, Fini and Vismara (2019) explained it as the measurable results and behaviours associated with achieving work objectives, shaped by individual effort, motivation, and the work environment. Ultimately, these definitions portray employee performance as a dynamic multidimensional construct encompassing task execution, behavioural contributions, adaptability, and the effective use of individual capabilities to support organizational success.

Concept of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying has been conceptualized by scholars as a persistent and systematic pattern of negative behaviours directed at an employee, which creates a hostile and harmful work environment. Misra and Sharma (2022) viewed workplace bullying as repeated exposure to negative acts such as harassment, social exclusion, or verbal abuse, in which the target finds it difficult to defend themselves due to a power imbalance. Similarly, Popa (2025), described it as psychological terror involving frequent and long-term hostile behaviours aimed at humiliating, isolating, or undermining an individual at work. According to Vijayakumar and Rajagopal (2024), workplace bullying refers to a situation in which one or more individuals are subjected to abusive conduct that threatens their dignity, well-being, and professional competence. Parker (2022), viewed it as repeated, health-harming mistreatment manifested through verbal abuse, offensive conduct, and deliberate work sabotage. Okikiola and Ruth (2022) conceptualized it as a social process embedded within organizational structures, where power asymmetries and enabling conditions allow aggressive behaviours to persist over time. Okolie (2021) noted that workplace bullying is a form of interpersonal mistreatment characterized by persistence, escalation, and the victim's perceived inability to stop the negative acts. More recently, Gaur and Sinha (2025), described it as a chronic workplace stressor involving systematic mistreatment that erodes employees' psychological health, work attitudes, and performance. Collectively, these definitions emphasized that workplace bullying is not a single incident but a sustained pattern of hostile behaviours rooted in power imbalance, with serious consequences for employees and organizations.

Concept of Job Alienation

Job alienation also known as job estrangement has been described in scholarly literature as a psychological state in which employees experience a sense of disconnection, powerlessness, and loss of meaning in relation to their work. Ojobu (2024) conceptualized job alienation as a multidimensional construct encompassing powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement, reflecting an individual's separation from the work process and its outcomes. Ghaleb (2024) perceived it as a condition in which workers feel little control over their tasks and perceive their work as monotonous and lacking intrinsic value. It represents a cognitive state of psychological detachment from one's job, arising when work fails to satisfy important personal needs or expectations (Ojeleye et al., 2021). Mehta (2022) described it as an employee's perception of being emotionally and psychologically distanced from work roles, coworkers, and organizational goals. Aslan (2025) viewed job alienation as a negative work attitude characterized by disengagement, reduced involvement, and a weakened sense of purpose at work. Elshaer, Azazz, Mansour and Fayyad (2025) described job alienation as the extent to which employees feel disconnected from the content of their work and perceive limited autonomy, recognition, and significance in their roles. According to Salloukh, Younis, Al-mousawi and Zeid (2025) it is a chronic psychological condition in which employees experience diminished identification with their work, leading to withdrawal behaviours and impaired performance. These definitions collectively, present job alienation as a complex psychological phenomenon marked by detachment, loss of control, and reduced work meaning, with significant implications for employee attitudes and performance.

Workplace bullying and employee performance

Empirical evidence across diverse sectors and national contexts consistently demonstrates that workplace bullying is a significant determinant of employee performance, with predominantly negative outcomes. Alam et al. (2025) using a robust SEM-ANN approach among garment industry workers in Bangladesh, found that workplace bullying significantly and negatively affected job performance, underscoring bullying as a critical productivity-reducing factor in labour-intensive industries. Similarly, Naseer, Safdar, Sami and Javed (2025) reported a negative relationship between workplace bullying and employee productivity in Pakistan's banking sector, with person-related bullying exerting a particularly strong detrimental influence on performance. In the Nigerian context, Olanipekun and Ikechukwu (2022) established that workplace bullying and harassment had a negative and significant effect on academic staff

performance, highlighting the pervasive impact of bullying across professional and educational settings. Likewise, Pradhan and Joshi (2019) found a negative association between workplace bullying and employee performance among hospital workers in Nepal, indicating that bullying undermines effectiveness in healthcare environments where performance is crucial. Although Singh et al. (2025) observed only a weak positive correlation between workplace bullying and job performance in Malaysia's public sector possibly reflecting contextual, cultural, or coping dynamics the overall body of evidence strongly supports the conclusion that workplace bullying generally diminishes employee performance. Collectively, these studies affirm workplace bullying as a harmful organizational stressor that disrupts employee functioning across industries, while also revealing contextual variations that justify further investigation into mediating and moderating mechanisms, particularly within underexplored settings such as Nigeria's tertiary healthcare sector. Hence, the study hypothesized that:

***H1_a*:** Workplace bullying significantly predicts employee performance in tertiary healthcare institutions in Nigeria.

Job alienation and employee performance

Plethora of studies have provided consistent evidence that job alienation exerts a negative and significant effect on employee performance. Al-khazrajy (2025) demonstrated among healthcare employees in Iraq that job alienation significantly reduced job performance, while also showing that ergonomic conditions could buffer this negative effect, underscoring the practical importance of work design. Similarly, Aslan (2025) found that work alienation significantly undermined nurses' job performance in Türkiye, highlighting the vulnerability of healthcare professionals to alienation-related performance decline. In the education sector, Nodehi, (2020) reported that job alienation significantly reduced the performance of high school teachers in Iran, confirming that alienation impairs effectiveness even in non-clinical professional roles. From a financial and governance perspective, Salloukh et al. (2025) revealed that job alienation negatively and significantly affected the financial performance of Lebanese banking institutions, extending the implications of alienation beyond individual outcomes to organizational performance indicators. Earlier evidence from Abdel-Qader (2017) in Jordan's industrial sector further confirmed a statistically significant negative relationship between work alienation and job performance, particularly through reduced autonomy, task variety, and managerial support. Collectively, these studies strongly affirm job alienation as a pervasive organizational problem that consistently diminishes employee and organizational performance across healthcare, education, banking, and industrial settings,

thereby justifying its examination as a critical explanatory mechanism in performance-related research.

H1b: Job alienation significantly predicts employee performance in tertiary healthcare institutions in Nigeria.

Job alienation as a mediator

A plethora of empirical studies have demonstrated the relevance of job alienation as an important mediating mechanism through which different organizational factors influence employee attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. For instance, Erdem (2021) established that alienation from work mediated the relationship between leadership styles and counterproductive work behaviour, showing that democratic leadership reduced counterproductive behaviour partly by lowering employees' feelings of alienation, whereas autocratic leadership intensified alienation and negative behavioural outcomes. Similarly, Ojeleye, Bakare, Umar and Ojeleye (2021) found that job alienation significantly and partially mediated the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and employees' turnover intentions among state-owned hospital workers in Zamfara State, Nigeria, indicating that heightened fear translated into withdrawal intentions largely through employees' psychological detachment from their jobs. Earlier evidence by Sulu, Ceylan and Kaynak (2010) further confirmed the mediating role of work alienation in the relationship between organizational injustice and organizational commitment, as perceptions of injustice fostered alienation, which in turn weakened commitment. In a related study, Ceylan and Sulu (2010) reported that work alienation partially mediated the relationship between procedural injustice and job stress, demonstrating that unfair procedures heightened stress levels through employees' sense of powerlessness and detachment. Collectively, these studies underscore job alienation as a robust psychological mechanism that translates adverse leadership practices, injustice, and environmental stressors into negative employee outcomes, thereby justifying its use as a mediator in organizational research

H2: Job alienation mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and employee performance in tertiary healthcare institutions in Nigeria.

Conservation of Resources Theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory was proposed by Stevan E. Hobfoll in 1989 and later expanded in his subsequent works (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018) to explain how individuals respond to stress and strain in demanding environments. The central assumption of the theory is that people are

motivated to acquire, protect, and retain valuable resources, which may include tangible resources (such as time, money, and physical energy), personal characteristics (such as self-esteem and resilience), social resources (such as support and respect), and condition resources (such as job security and status). According to Hobfoll, stress occurs when these resources are threatened, lost, or when individuals invest resources without adequate returns. Later proponents and contributors to the theory further emphasized the idea of resource loss spirals, in which initial resource depletion makes individuals increasingly vulnerable to further losses, and resource gain cycles, in which access to supportive environments helps individuals recover and build resilience. COR Theory has been widely applied in organizational and occupational research to explain burnout, disengagement, reduced performance, and withdrawal behaviours in high-pressure work settings.

Within the context of this study on workplace bullying and employee performance in Nigeria's tertiary healthcare sector, Conservation of Resources Theory provides a compelling explanatory framework. Workplace bullying represents a persistent threat to healthcare workers' key resources, including emotional energy, professional dignity, social support, and perceived control over work activities. Continuous exposure to bullying behaviours gradually depletes these resources, creating psychological strain and undermining employees' ability to remain engaged and productive. As resources are lost, healthcare workers may experience job alienation, manifesting as emotional withdrawal, powerlessness, and reduced identification with their work, which in turn negatively affects performance. In resource-constrained tertiary healthcare institutions already characterized by staff shortages, heavy workloads, and limited infrastructural support the effects of bullying are likely to be intensified, accelerating resource loss spirals. Thus, COR Theory helps to explain how workplace bullying indirectly reduces employee performance through job alienation, offering a nuanced understanding of stress processes and reinforcing the need for organizational practices that protect employees' resources and promote supportive work environments in healthcare settings.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research design comprising survey and cross-sectional research designs, and data were collected from tertiary healthcare workers in Zamfara State and Kaduna State, Nigeria, using an online questionnaire distributed via shared electronic links. Judgmental and snowball sampling techniques were employed to reach respondents across different professional categories within tertiary healthcare institutions, and a total of 239 correctly completed questionnaires were returned and used for analysis. The structured instrument measured workplace bullying, job alienation, and

employee performance using validated scales adapted to the healthcare context. Preliminary diagnostic analyses were conducted, including checks for outliers, multicollinearity, normality, and non-response bias, while common method bias was addressed through both procedural and statistical remedies to enhance data credibility. The hypothesised relationships, including the mediating effect of job alienation, were analysed using SmartPLS 4, which is suitable for mediation analysis and complex structural models.

Measures

Validated scale from previous studies were adapted and used in the study; measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (-strongly agree) to 1 (-strongly disagreed). Workplace bullying was measured employing 4-item scale developed by Javed et al. (2023), with reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.853. Sample of item is: "I have been ignored or excluded from group activities at work". Job alienation was assessed using the 10-item work alienation measures of Hirschfeld and Feild (2000), with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 suggesting high internal consistency. A sample of the item is: "I don't enjoy work: I just put in my time to get paid". Lastly, employee performance was conducted using the 10-item short version of the work performance scale developed by Azevedo, Queiroga and Valentin (2021). An example of the item used is "I take initiatives to enhance my performance at work." The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is stated to be 0.91.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data were analysed using a structural equation model specifically smart-pls 4 comprising measurement and structural models.

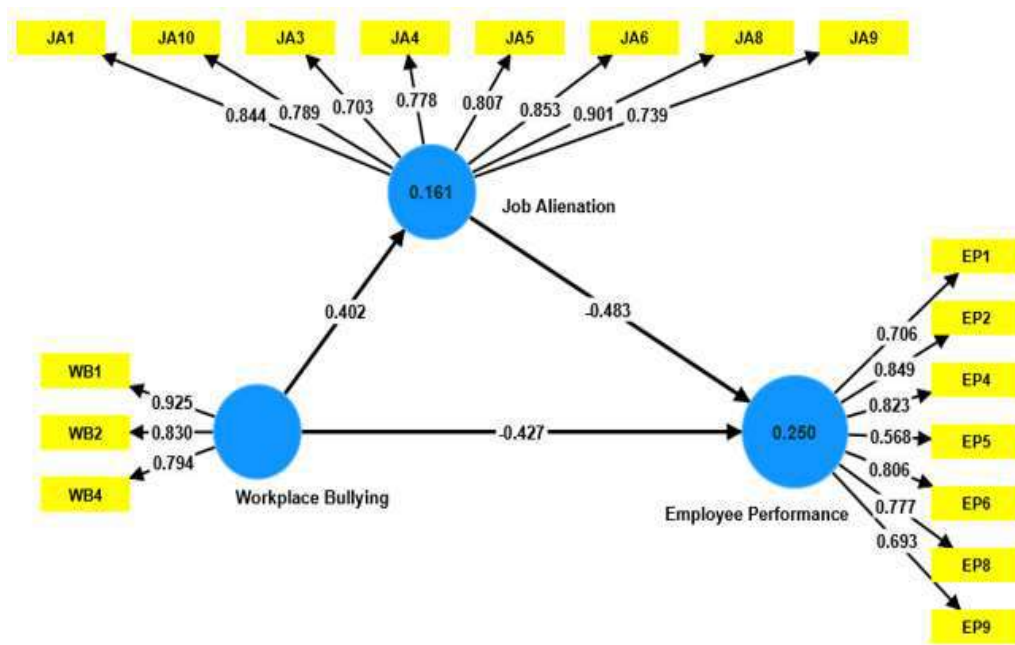
Assessment of Measurement Model

The measurement model was carried out to assess the outer loadings, reliability and validity of the exogenous and endogenous variable. Hair et al. (2022), recommended the retaining outer loading ≥ 0.7 and eliminating loading below. However, owing to the practicability of attaining loading < 0.7 , Hair et al. (2022), suggested the retaining loadings of $0.4 \geq 0.6$ depending on the loading benchmark's influence on convergent validity and construct reliability. Meanwhile, Hulland (1999) recommended the retention of outer loadings ≥ 0.5 . Hence, following Hulland's (1999), the study retained outer loadings of ≥ 0.5 . In accordance with the recommendation, the outer loadings EP3, EP7, EP10, JA2, JA7, and WB3 were discarded because their loadings were below the 0.5

threshold. The convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted. Fornell and Larcker (1981) argued that an AVE score of 0.5 or above indicates the convergent validity of a study's construct. In Table 1 below, the AVE values for the constructs are all > 0.5 threshold. Hence, the convergent validity is confirmed. Meanwhile, the reliability of the constructs was considered using Cronbach's alpha and convergent validity. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) posited that for a construct to be considered reliable, Cronbach's alpha should be > 0.7 . A similar threshold is also employed for convergent validity. Table 1 below, the Cronbach's alpha and convergent validity are all > 0.7 benchmark. Thus, the study's constructs are consistent. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) which explains the variance in the endogenous variable is 0.25 (25%). According to Hair et al. (2022), the coefficient of determination is small.

Measurement Model

Figure no. 1 Pictorial display of Measurement Model



Source: Authors' Systemisation of Smart-pls output, 2026

Table no 1: Outer Loadings, Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Decision
Employee Performance	EP1	0.706	0.871	0.900	0.565	Accepted
	EP2	0.849				
	EP4	0.823				
	EP5	0.568				
	EP6	0.806				
	EP8	0.777				
	EP9	0.693				
	JA1	0.844				
	JA10	0.789				
Job Alienation	JA3	0.703	0.923	0.936	0.646	Accepted
	JA4	0.778				
	JA5	0.807				
	JA6	0.853				
	JA8	0.901				
	JA9	0.739				
	WB1	0.925				
	WB2	0.830				
Workplace Bullying	WB4	0.794				

Source: Authors Systemization of Smart-PLS output, 2026

The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio was used to assess the discriminant validity of the components. Henseler et al. (2015) endorsed the HTMT ratio since the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and cross-loading fail to identify a deficiency in discriminant validity among conceptions with loadings between 0.65 and 0.85. Concurrently, researchers have proposed two standards (Kline, 2011; Henseler et al., 2015). Kline (2011) offered a stringent criterion of <0.85 for conceptually unique constructs, whereas Henseler et al. (2015) recommended a more lenient threshold of <0.90 for conceptually equivalent constructs. Consequently, given that the research constructs namely employee performance, workplace bullying and job alienation are conceptually unique, a threshold of less than 0.85 was used. Consequently, since the correlations across constructs are below 0.85, divergent validity is thus affirmed (See: Table 2 below).

Table no 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio of Correlations Discriminant Validity

Constructs	Employee Performance	Job Alienation	Workplace Bullying
Employee Performance			
Job Alienation	0.476		
Workplace Bullying	0.413	0.510	

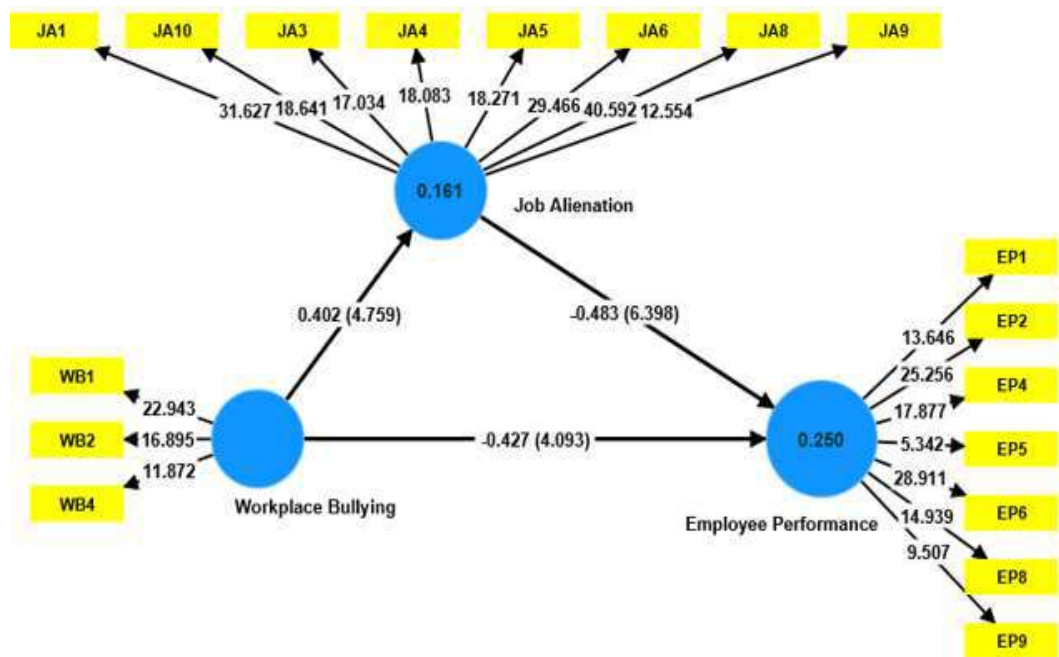
Source: Authors Systemisation of Smart-PLS output, 2026

Assessment of Structural Model

The structural model was conducted to analyse the direct and the hypothesised relationship between job alienation, workplace bullying and employee performance.

Structural Model

Figure no. 2 Pictorial display of Structural Model



Source: Authors Systemisation of Smart-pls output, 2026

Table no 3: Hypothesised Relationship

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values	Confidence Interval		Decision
						2.50%	97.50%	
H1_a	Workplace Bullying -> Employee Performance	-0.427	0.104	4.093	0.000			Supported
H1_b	Job Alienation -> Employee Performance	-0.483	0.076	6.398	0.000			Supported
H2	Workplace Bullying -> Job Alienation -> Employee Performance	-0.194	0.053	3.631	0.000	-0.083	-0.382	Supported
$Q^2 = 0.127$								

Source: Authors Systemisation of Smart-PLS output, 2026

The results of the structural model in Table 4 indicate that workplace bullying has a significant negative effect on employee performance ($\beta = -0.427$, $T = 4.093$, $p < 0.000$), indicating that healthcare workers who experience bullying are less likely to perform effectively in their roles. Thus, H1a is there by supported. Similarly, job alienation was found to have a significant negative effect on employee performance ($\beta = -0.483$, $T = 6.398$, $p < 0.000$), suggesting that employees who feel psychologically detached, powerless, or disconnected from their work exhibit reduced performance levels. Hence, H1b is also rejected. These findings imply that both workplace bullying and job alienation independently undermine employee performance in tertiary healthcare institutions.

The mediation analysis (H2) further demonstrated that job alienation significantly mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and employee performance ($\beta = -0.194$, $T = 3.631$, $p < 0.000$, 95% CI $[-0.382, -0.083]$). This indicates that workplace bullying indirectly reduces employee performance by increasing employees' feelings of alienation from their jobs. However, because the direct effect of workplace bullying on employee performance (H1a) remains significant alongside the indirect effect, job alienation serves as a partial mediator rather than a full mediator in this relationship.

In addition, the Q^2 value of 0.127 indicates the model's predictive relevance. Based on Cohen's (1988) benchmarks, Q^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large predictive relevance, respectively. The obtained Q^2 value falls slightly below the medium threshold, suggesting that the model demonstrates limited predictive

capacity for explaining variations in employee performance among tertiary healthcare workers in Nigeria. This supports the adequacy and practical usefulness of the proposed model in explaining performance outcomes within the study context.

Discussions

Workplace bullying has consistently shown to exert a negative and significant effect on employee performance by undermining employees' psychological, emotional, and cognitive resources needed for effective work functioning. This is consistent with previous studies of Alam et al. (2025), Naseer et al. (2025), Olanipekun & Ikechukwu (2022), Pradhan & Joshi (2019). Persistent exposure to bullying behaviours such as intimidation, verbal abuse, humiliation, and social exclusion creates a hostile work environment that elevates stress levels and distracts employees from core job tasks, thereby reducing efficiency and accuracy (Olanipekun & Ikechukwu, 2022). As employees expend considerable energy coping with fear, anxiety, and emotional distress, their ability to concentrate, make sound decisions, and maintain productivity diminishes, leading to observable declines in performance (Pradhan & Joshi, 2019). Empirical studies further indicate that bullied employees are more likely to display withdrawal behaviours, reduced commitment, and minimal role compliance, all of which negatively affect individual and organizational outcomes (Alam et al., 2025). In high-demand sectors such as healthcare, where teamwork, attention to detail, and emotional labour are essential, the performance consequences of bullying are even more pronounced, as strained interpersonal relationships and loss of trust disrupt collaboration and service quality. Moreover, workplace bullying weakens employees' motivation and sense of professional identity, increasing the likelihood of errors, absenteeism, and reduced service delivery (Naseer et al., 2025). Ultimately, the significant negative relationship between workplace bullying and employee performance highlights bullying as a critical organizational stressor that erodes employees' functional capacity and underscores the need for proactive managerial interventions to safeguard performance and workplace well-being.

Job alienation was found to have a negative and significant effect on employee performance by weakening employees' psychological attachment, motivation, and sense of purpose at work. This is in tandem with previous studies of Al-khazrajy (2025), Aslan (2025), Nodehi (2020), Salloukh et al. (2025). When employees experience feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement, they become emotionally detached from their job roles, which reduces their willingness to invest effort and initiative in work tasks (Al-khazrajy, 2025). Alienated employees are more likely to engage in surface-level compliance rather than genuine commitment, resulting in lower productivity, reduced work quality, and diminished problem-solving capacity (Nodehi,

2020). Empirical evidence suggests that job alienation impairs concentration and intrinsic motivation, making it difficult for employees to sustain performance, especially in complex and demanding work environments (Aslan, 2025; Nodehi, 2020). In sectors such as healthcare, where performance relies heavily on emotional engagement, collaboration, and professional responsibility, alienation can translate into poorer service delivery, increased errors, and weakened teamwork. Moreover, job alienation often encourages withdrawal behaviours such as absenteeism, lateness, and reduced discretionary effort, all of which further undermine performance outcomes (Salloukh et al., 2025). Overall, the significant negative relationship between job alienation and employee performance underscores alienation as a critical psychological condition that erodes employees' capacity to perform effectively and highlights the importance of fostering meaningful, inclusive, and empowering work environments.

The finding showed that job alienation partially mediated the relationship between workplace bullying and employee performance indicating that bullying affects performance both directly and indirectly through employees' job estrangement. This result suggests that while workplace bullying independently undermines performance by creating stress, fear, and disruption, it also triggers feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and emotional withdrawal that further weaken employees' capacity to perform effectively. Exposure to repeated bullying behaviours gradually erodes employees' sense of belonging and professional identity, leading them to become estranged from their roles, which in turn reduces motivation, commitment, and discretionary effort. In high-pressure work environments like healthcare, this mediating process is particularly salient, as estranged employees may disengage emotionally while still remaining physically present, resulting in minimal compliance rather than optimal performance.

Implications

Theoretically, the findings reinforce the explanatory strength of the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory by demonstrating how workplace bullying operates as a chronic stressor that depletes employees' valuable psychological and social resources, ultimately impairing performance. The partial mediating role of job alienation aligns with COR's resource loss spiral, showing that sustained bullying erodes employees' sense of control, meaning, and professional identity, which accelerates withdrawal and performance decline. By empirically linking workplace bullying, job alienation, and employee performance within a tertiary healthcare context, the study extends the application of COR Theory to understudied environments and highlights job alienation as a critical mechanism through which resource loss translates into negative work outcomes.

Practically, the findings underscore the need for healthcare administrators and managers to proactively address workplace bullying as a performance-related issue rather than merely an interpersonal problem. Management should implement clear anti-bullying frameworks, promote supportive leadership behaviours, and strengthen reporting and grievance mechanisms to protect employees' psychological resources. Additionally, interventions such as counselling services, peer support systems, and job redesign initiatives can help reduce feelings of alienation by restoring employees' sense of purpose, autonomy, and belonging, thereby enhancing performance and service quality in tertiary healthcare institutions.

From a policy standpoint, the study highlights the importance of institutional and sector-wide regulations that safeguard healthcare workers from psychosocial hazards. Policymakers and regulatory bodies should enforce workplace policies that explicitly prohibit bullying, mandate employee well-being programs, and integrate psychosocial risk management into healthcare accreditation standards. At a broader level, government investment in workforce development, staffing adequacy, and supportive work environments can help reduce systemic stressors that enable bullying and alienation, ultimately strengthening employee performance and the overall effectiveness of Nigeria's tertiary healthcare system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Workplace bullying is a critical psychosocial challenge that significantly undermines employee performance in Nigeria's tertiary healthcare institutions, both directly and indirectly through job alienation. The findings demonstrate that persistent exposure to bullying behaviours erodes healthcare workers' psychological resources, fosters feelings of powerlessness and detachment, and weakens their connection to their work, which ultimately impairs performance. The partial mediating role of job alienation highlights that while bullying independently diminishes performance, its detrimental impact is further intensified when employees become psychologically disengaged from their roles. Grounded in Conservation of Resources Theory, the study underscores how sustained resource loss in hostile work environments leads to reduced effectiveness among healthcare professionals. Overall, the study emphasizes the urgent need for healthcare administrators and policymakers to address workplace bullying and job alienation through supportive leadership, protective policies, and employee-centered interventions to enhance performance and ensure the delivery of quality healthcare services in Nigeria.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Management of tertiary healthcare institutions should establish and strictly enforce comprehensive anti-bullying policies, including clear definitions of unacceptable behaviours, confidential reporting channels, and prompt disciplinary procedures. This will help reduce workplace bullying and protect employees' psychological resources, thereby improving performance.

- Healthcare administrators should introduce employee-support initiatives such as counselling services, mentoring programs, participatory decision-making, and job enrichment practices to restore employees' sense of meaning, autonomy, and belonging. Reducing job alienation will weaken the negative pathway through which bullying affects performance.

- Hospital leaders and supervisors should receive regular training on ethical leadership, conflict management, and supportive supervision, while regulatory bodies should monitor compliance with workplace well-being standards. Strengthening leadership capacity will help create a supportive work climate that discourages bullying, minimizes alienation, and enhances employee performance.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

This study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use of judgmental and snowball sampling techniques limits the generalizability of the results, as the respondents were selected based on accessibility and referral rather than random selection, which may introduce selection bias. Second, data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which may be susceptible to common-method bias, social desirability bias, and respondents' subjective perceptions, despite the procedural and statistical remedies applied. Third, the scope of the study was geographically limited to tertiary healthcare workers in Zamfara and Kaduna States, which may not fully capture the experiences of healthcare employees in other regions of Nigeria with different institutional structures, cultural dynamics, or security conditions. Lastly, the study examined only job alienation as a mediating variable, thereby providing a focused but limited explanation of the psychological mechanisms through which workplace bullying influences employee performance.

Future research should address these limitations to deepen the understanding of workplace bullying and its effect on employee outcomes in healthcare settings. Scholars are encouraged to adopt probability sampling techniques and to expand the study to other states or conduct nationwide or cross-sectoral studies to enhance generalizability. Longitudinal or mixed-method approaches could also be employed to reduce the limitations associated with cross-sectional self-report data and to capture changes in employee experiences over time. Furthermore, future studies should explore additional

mediating variables such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, work disengagement, and insomnia to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the pathways linking workplace bullying to employee performance. Examining multiple mediators simultaneously or testing moderated mediation models would offer richer theoretical and practical insights into managing psychosocial risks in healthcare organizations.

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