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Constructs of Coping for Adult Victims of Bullying

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Gillian Harris-Dale

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Constructs of Coping for Adult Victims of Bullying

by

Gillian Harris-Dale

MA, Walden University, 2009

BS, University of Phoenix, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Bullying is a pervasive event that affects individuals in a variety of ways. For example, bullied individuals display an array of psychological and related psychosocial problems associated with victimization. There is a push for a transformation in the bullying paradigm to include the psychological and psychosocial symptomologies of both the perpetrator and victim. This study addressed the lack of qualitative research on coping mechanisms for adult victims of bullying. Due to the pervasive nature of the phenomena, the following was explored: (a) descriptions of bullying as expressed by adult victims, (b) adult victims' coping processes and methods, and (c) adult victims' emotional responses to being bullied. A qualitative phenomenological research approach was applied to understand the lived experiences of this population. The theoretical framework was based on Folkman and Lazarus's transactional model of stress and coping. Eight individuals participated in the study and face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant. Based on the results of interviews and thematic analysis, the majority of participants (34%) reported that job-related demands and coercion such as social exclusion, cyberthreats, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, job-related intimidation, and physical harm were the main forms of bullying experienced. The coping process adopted by 62% of the participants was to remain calm during the bullying incident. However, 62% used retaliatory confrontation as their main coping method. Mental stress was the main emotional response to bullying. The findings of this study can inform the adoption of positive social change policy actions that promote resiliency among bullied adults at the community level and within organizational settings.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, soulmate, and friend Steven James Dale, who has provided unconditional love, support, and encouragement throughout this process. Without his support and unyielding encouragement, I would not have been able to start and end this journey.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my beautiful children Devon Harris, Mickoel Russel, Yasin DeMatas, Hamza DeMatas, Daniel Dale, and Amber Dale, all who endured me forgetting birthdays and other special occasions because of writing and researching. Unfortunately, Yasin did not get to see the finished product, but I know he would be proud of me for finishing what I started.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Reports of bullying and bullying-related incidents continue to saturate the news (Chang, 2017; Doran, 2014; Kaplan, 2014; Kaur, 2017; Pearce, Cross, Monks, Waters, & Falconer, 2011). As individuals develop from childhood to adulthood, the problem of bullying does not always dissipate like other childhood problems (Baugham, 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie, & Namie, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007; Misawa, 2014). Instead, individuals may continue to struggle throughout their lifespan with the phenomenon of bullying (Baugham, 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2007; Misawa, 2014). An individual can experience verbal, physical, or psychological bullying. A person can experience bullying during in-person interactions or technology as in the case of cyberbullying (Chapell et al., 2006; Gofin & Avitzour, 2012; Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003). Cyberbullying contributes to this phenomenon of bullying (Beale & Hall, 2007; Gofin & Avitzour, 2012; Schneider, O'Donnell, & Stueve, 2012). In 2010, 35% of the U.S. workforce reported being bullied, and 30% of American adolescents reported experiencing moderate bullying (Hamburger, Basile, & Vivolo, 2011). Reports of bullying during childhood are more prominent in the media than bullying incidents involving adults. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017), behaviors traditionally considered bullying among school-aged youth often need new attention and strategies to tackle the problem. Bullying causes devastating ripple effects that affect individuals across their lifespan (Homel, 2013; Klomak et al., 2011; Seltzer & Long, 2013; Sourander et al., 1987; Weber, 2015). Besides the bullied individual, other individuals are impacted such as peers, parents, educators, communities,

and the perpetrators. Attempts to understand and eradicate bullying have been ongoing for the past few centuries (Cross, 2016; Duncan, 1999; Kim & Leventhal, 2008; O'Moore & Hillery, 1989; Stephenson & Smith, 1987). Investigating the manner in which adults cope with bullying may contribute to reducing the psychological and related psychosocial problems experienced by adults involved in bullying.

In this chapter, I discuss the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of this study, the research questions, and the theoretical framework. I then describe the nature of the study and define key terms in the study, as well as explain the assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance of this study as well as the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose of this study. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Background

The ability of individuals to cope with adverse situations is beneficial to their psychological well-being, enhances their quality of life, and increases optimism (Carlson, 1997; Ghamrawi, 2013; Rajaei, Khoynezhad, Javanmard, & Abdollahpour, 2016; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013; Seltzer & Long, 2013; Weistein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009). Regardless of an individual's age, the psychological and related psychosocial effects of bullying depend on the bullied individual's ability to cope (Dehue, Bolman, Völlink, & Pouwelse, 2012; Grennan & Woodhams, 2007; Hampel, Manhal, & Hayer, 2009; Lodge & Frydenberg, 2007; Randall, 2003; Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers, & Parris, 2011). The side effects of bullying are similar to those of other violent crimes in that bullying causes short- and long-term damage to those involved in bullying. Some of the potential side effects experienced by bullied individuals throughout their lifespan include sleep

disorders, anxiety, isolation, suicidal and homicidal ideation, and suicidal and homicidal tendencies (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Idsoe, Dyregrov, & Idsoe, 2012; Kim & Leventhal 2008; Menesini, Modena, & Tani, 2009; Rothan, 2011). Scholars have highlighted the significance of healthy coping in combating the undesirable behaviors associated with being bullied (Carlson, 1997; Ghamrawi, 2013; Rajaei, et al., 2016; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013; Seltzer & Long, 2013; Weinstein, et al., 2009). Fewer researchers have questioned the correlation between resiliency and positively combating the adverse side effects of bullying (Ortega et al., 2012). Suicide-related deaths among bullying victims have become such a predominant factor that the term *bullycide* has been coined. Bullycide refers to a bullying-related suicide and is a hybrid of bullying and suicide (Giard, 2006; Wallace, 2011). Bullycide is ranked the second highest cause of death among individuals between ages 15 and 24. Although researchers have not found bullying to be the exclusive reason for suicides among bullied victims, bullying has been shown to be a circumstance that leads to bullycide (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2010; Reynolds, 2011).

National statistics on bullying among school-age children are staggering, with approximately 30% of U.S. adolescents reporting experiencing moderate bullying (Hamburger et al., 2011, para 1). Twenty percent of students between ages 12 and 18 detailed having experienced bullying at school, and 15% reported having experienced cyberbullying (“What is Bullying,” 2017). The psychological and related psychosocial effects of bullying vary among bullied victims. Twenty-two percent of surveyed bullying victims reported experiencing cyberbullying, and 18.5% described experiencing more than one isolated bullying event (“What is Cyberbullying,” 2017). Despite the lack of media coverage, bullying is on the rise among the adult population (Chapell et al., 2006;

Homel, 2013; Schnek & Fremouw, 2012; Weber, 2015). Researchers have established that childhood bullies and bullied victims carry forward their childhood roles of perpetrator and victim into their adulthood (Chapell et al., 2004; Dimm, 2016; Seltzer & Long, 2013). These statistics highlight the importance of broadening the research on bullying to include adults ages 19 and older. Despite Lazarus and Folkman's landmark publications on stress and coping (see Folkman, 1980, 1984, 2013; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986; Lazarus, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1987), there is a gap in the research focusing on adult bullied victims and their behavioral and cognitive coping strategies. Therefore, conducting this study to extrapolate the coping mechanisms of adult victims of bullying seems well timed and valid.

Problem Statement

A search of the literature revealed a gap on how adult victims of bullying 19 and older cope with being bullied and underscored not only the prevalence of bullying in both childhood and adulthood, but also the patterns of the long-term effects of bullying into adulthood (Adams & Lawrence, 2011; Allison, Roeger, & Reinfeld-Kirkman, 2009; Boulton, 2013; Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Espelage & Swearer, 2009). According to researchers, the effects of bullying include the association of victim-status to one's general well-being (Wolke & Lereya, 2015) and psychological symptomology and even suicidality (Sigurdson, Wallander & Sund, 2014). Several researchers have amplified the harmful effects of being ill-equipped to manage the adverse side effects of being bullied in their studies (Adams & Lawrence, 2011; Burnes & Pope, 2007; Di Martino, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003; Gini & Pozzoli, 2013; McDougall & Vaillancourt,

2015). Scholars have also emphasized the importance of positive coping and personal well-being (Carlson, 1997; Nar, 2013; Rajael et al., 2016; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013; Seltzer & Long, 2013; Weistein et al., 2009), which highlights the importance of this study

Purpose of the Study

Researchers indicated that some victims of bullying are at risk of depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, social change disorders, and suicide (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010; Juvonen et al., 2003; Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2011). Coping reduces or prevents the harmful risk factors associated with being bullied (Davis et al., 2003; Omizo et al., 2006). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how adult victims of bullying describe bullying, their coping processes and coping methods, and their emotional responses to being bullied.

Research Questions

The research questions for this qualitative phenomenological study were:

Research Question 1: How did the adult victims of bullying describe bullying?

Research Question 2: How did the adult victims of bullying describe their coping processes?

Research Question 3: How did the adult victims of bullying describe their coping methods?

Research Question 4: How did the adult victims of bullying describe their emotional responses to being bullied?

Theoretical Framework

In this study, Folkman and Lazarus' (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping was the theoretical framework for evaluating the coping processes (primary and secondary appraisals) to stressful events in adult victims of bullying. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1987), behavioral responses influence psychological evaluation. In Lazarus and Folkman (1987) theory, primary and secondary appraisals mediate stressful experiences. Primary appraisal is an individuals' perception of the significance of the event, and secondary appraisal is the resources and options available for coping. Thus, experiences associated with bullying differ depending on an individuals' perception of the experience, and this perception facilitates either resiliency or victimization.

Nature of the Study

Because I did not want to use the predetermined results of other research studies (see Creswell, 2013), I chose a qualitative descriptive approach for this study. I explored the experiences of the participants based on their subjective descriptions of the phenomenon of bullying to gain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon. I used the phenomenological approach because phenomenological research focuses on drawing conclusions based upon individuals' perceptions and the interpretations of their experiences with the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). I focused on the shared experiences of adults ages 19 and older who identified as victims of bullying and reported experience with coping with being bullied. In phenomenological research, the researcher's insights and reflections are highlighted by including heuristic inquiry, which, according to Patton (2002) is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the foreground the personal experience and insights of the researcher.

Definitions

The following terms were used in this study:

Adult: Individuals aged 19 years and above.

Bullying: A repeated aggressive behavior involving an imbalance of power carried out by peers intending to cause harm (Wolke & Lereya, 2015, p. 879).

Coping: A range of behavioral and cognitive strategies individuals use to manage internal and external demands caused by stressful encounters (Folkman et al., 1986).

Stress: A negative response depicted by physiological arousal and adverse effects (Folkman, 2013).

Primary Appraisals: What is at stake, as determined by the victim (Folkman et al., 1986).

Secondary Appraisals: The coping options available to an individual.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions

Because I used the phenomenological research approach, I determined in-person interviews to be the most appropriate method to understand the adult bullied victims' perceptions of bullying, and their coping mechanisms and emotional responses to bullying. My assumptions included: (a) The participants would agree to participate in the in-person interviews and be honest and forthcoming in answering the questions raised, (b) A qualitative phenomenological study was appropriate for data collection, and (c) My biases would not influence the results of this study.

Delimitations

Studies involving human participants may be characterized by complications and delays in several phases of the study, such as accessing the population, the ability of the participants to describe their experiences, and obtaining informed consent. Accessing the population, the ability of the participants to describe their experiences, and obtaining informed consent are essential aspects of research methods, especially phenomenological qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The reliability and validity of self-reports are of concern in phenomenological research studies, owing to the lack of evidence regarding accuracy and stability of the participants' recollections or reports of events. To address this concern, I interviewed participants who had experienced the phenomena, and was willing to share their experience with the phenomena so that the participant data and recollections could be gathered and assessed appropriately.

Limitations

The results of this study were limited to adults ages 19 and older who reported experiencing bully victimization during adulthood. Individuals who experienced bullying before this specified age were not within the scope of my study, and were therefore not included.

Significance

Researchers who have studied how children ages 18 and younger overcome the adversity of bullying have provided significant insights into understanding the phenomenon of bullying (Davis, Watson, Corker, & Shakespeare, 2003; Omizo, Omizo, Gaxa, & Miyose, 2006; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). However, there is a gap in the literature focusing on the coping mechanisms of adult victims of bullying ages 19 and older who

experienced bullying during adulthood. Determining the numerous factors that influence the coping of adult victims of bullying can add new information to the coping and bullying literature (Davis et al., 2003; Omizo et al., 2006).

In this study, I explored the constructs that facilitate coping in adult bullied victims ages 19 and older who experienced bullying during adulthood. According to research, psychosocial, behavioral, and adjustment disorders and academic problems associated with childhood bullying can extend into adulthood (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Adults who experience bullying for the first time are prone to the same adverse psychological and related psychosocial effects as those previously bullied in childhood. However, how these distinct groups cope with bullying may depend on their perceptions of the experience, the available resources, and their skills to manage being bullied.

The knowledge gained from this study can broaden the understanding of the effects of bullying across the lifespan of bullying victims and add to the literature on preventing bullying victimization. Additionally, this research will bring into the forefront the discussions on an understudied segment of bullying by including individuals from outside the school environment. Bullying is a phenomenon that affects individuals across the lifespan. Successfully understanding, reducing, and eradicating the adverse effects of bullying requires conversations that include individuals across their lifespan who experience bullying victimization. This approach will expand the knowledge of the scope of the phenomenon of bullying.

Summary

The phenomenon of bullying, and its consequences, are not isolated to childhood but extend into adulthood. The behaviors traditionally considered bullying among school-aged youth require new attention and strategies for tackling in adults. Bullying and victimization behaviors are complex because of the involvement of multiple participants and influencing factors such as the ability to cope (Hymel & Swearer, 2015, p. 294), and are areas of relevant theoretical and transactional research. A qualitative descriptive paradigm was used in this study, as well as data collection methods to explore the coping mechanisms and coping strategies employed by individuals in response to bullying as described by the adult victims.

In this chapter, I introduced the topic of bullying and presented the psychological and related psychosocial problems associated with the phenomenon. I discussed the purpose of this study, research questions, and the theoretical framework. I also described the assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and significance of this study.

In Chapter 2, I review the relevant literature and synthesize the most relevant scholarly material to provide reputable sources related to the phenomenon of bullying. I also explain literature search strategy, the theoretical foundation, and how the literature related to the variables explored in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Despite ongoing research about bullying and its effects, individuals continue to struggle with the phenomenon of bullying across their lifespan (Kim & Leventhal, 2008; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Maguire, 2001; O'Moore & Hillery, 1989; Pearce et al., 2011). Studies on childhood bullying involving individuals ages 18 and younger are more prominent than those involving individuals above the age of 18.

Some scholars have identified a correlation between childhood bullying and adult behavior (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Olweus, 1993; Tritt & Duncan 1997). Researchers have shown that the level of psychological and related psychosocial effects caused by bullying depends on the victims' ability to cope regardless of their age (Dehue et al., 2012; Grennan & Woodhams, 2007; Hampel et al., 2009; Lodge & Frydenberg, 2007; Randall, 2003; Tenenbaum et al., 2011).

Bullying affects individuals across their lifespan, and in a variety of settings. However, much of the research on adult victims of bullying primarily focuses on bullying in the workplace. Podsiadly and Gamian-Wilk (2017) investigated bullying among employees and management within organizations. Bullying in this setting appears as a power exchange within the social system of work, in which personalities and/or personality traits are the predictors of victims and/or target status. Researchers have attempted to identify the factors in order to recognize and reduce bullying and the associated violence or harassment (Black, Weinies, & Washington, 2010; Di Martino et al., 2003). Aquino and Thau (2009) as well as Bowling and Beehr (2006) emphasized workplace victims' perspective in their meta-analytic study. The latter two offered

guidance on how to structure studies and methods to elicit pertinent information during the interview process.

Another large subsection of research pertains to the relationships between bullying, work environment, and victims' responses to stress (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Burnes & Pope, 2007; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub 1989; Cohen, Evans, Stokols & Krantz, 2013). Conway, Clausen, Hansen, and Hogh (2016) focused on the effects of workplace stress on the targeted bullied individuals, whereas Coyne et al. (2017) refined the picture of bullying in adult culture with their inclusion of bystander research. According to Coyne et al. (2017), viewing the bully only in the context of the victim is too linear an approach. Therefore, the researchers described, measured, and evaluated the relationships among co-workers and how they interacted in an environment characterized by bullying. Harvey, Heames, Richey, and Leonard (2006) found similarities between childhood and adult bullying practices and their harmful effects. Researchers have highlighted the complex nature of bullying, coping, and stress in adult lives and reported on the responses of the traumatized workers based on the types of bullying experienced by them in the workplace (Lutgen-Sandvick, 2008; Lutgen-Sandvick & Tracy (2012). The scholars provided a managerial analysis of organizational power relationships rather than a psychological analysis.

Individuals who cope with problems in a healthy manner are less likely to engage in undesirable behaviors. Such individuals also benefit from psychological well-being, enhanced quality of life, and optimism (Carlson, 1997; Ghamrawi, 2013; Rajael et al., 2016; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013; Seltzer & Long, 2013; Weistein et al., 2009). Therefore,

the purpose of this study was to explore and understand the constructs employed by adult victims of bullying to facilitate coping.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that behaviors traditionally associated with bullying among school-aged youth often requires new attention and strategies in young adults (“Other Types of Aggressive Behavior,” 2017). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore and understand the coping mechanisms employed by adult victims of bullying.

Literature Search Strategy

After conducting a brief review of the key concepts, definitions, research shifts, and scientific interests to identify the research problem, a I developed a search strategy to locate, assess, and synthesize the most relevant scholarly material. The purpose of the literature search was to gain and learn from the most reputable sources while maintaining the subject focus. The primary strategy was to gather, from the available and rigorous search engines, at least 100 sources, using delimiters such as the year of publication and most relevant search terms.

I conducted my search for research publications in the following electronic databases: EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, SocINDEX, PsycARTICLES, PubMed Academic Search Premier/Complete, Medline, Science Direct, CINAHL, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The search process involved the use of essential search terms and a combination of search terms in each of the databases. These search terms and phrases included the following: *adult bullying, the effects of bullying, the prevalence of adult bullying, bullying statistics, adult bullying statistics, coping, coping behavior, adult coping, coping with bullying, bullying and coping, coping personality characteristics,*

stress and coping model, psychological constructs, effects of bullying, adulthood, victimization, and bullying victims. Because the use of these terms and phrases yielded thousands of articles, I revisited the databases and search engines to narrow the search to identify articles most relevant to *coping, primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and transactional model and appraisal.* These added search terms resulted in more manageable returns of publications related to the content and theoretical interest areas of this study.

I limited search results to include publications from the last 10 years and then repeated my search from 1960 to the present to find the primary literature to support the theoretical foundation of the study. All searches were conducted for English publications. No limits were placed on the format (e.g., abstract-only or full text only). I selected “peer reviewed” if a search engine or database allowed for the search of peer-reviewed articles. My search did not yield any unpublished dissertations and conference proceedings.

Research in the field of psychology overlaps with that of neurobiology, education, and sociology. Therefore, I believed it was important to include studies from the fields of psychology and psychiatry. Some neurobiological papers were also included in this literature review. The My search of the literature for this study was focused less on the causes of bullying and more on the effects of bullying on the victims, as indicated by behavioral responses and the constructs developed by or evident in the victims. Special attention was also placed on adult victims despite the numerous available publications pertaining to people under the age of 18.

Several relevant qualitative-phenomenological studies were identified. Through the literature review, an understanding of the current research on the constructs

developed and employed by adult victims of bullying was gained. Additionally, many studies featured highly detailed variables such as coping, and stress that could be considered for integration into this research study (Lereya, Copeland, Costello, & Wolke, 2015; Luria & Torjman, 2009; McGrath, Jones, & Hastings, 2010; Salin, 2001; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed in this study was based on Lazarus and Folkman (1986) transactional theory of stress and coping. This theory was used to evaluate the processes of individual coping (primary and secondary appraisals) in response to stressful events, as exhibited by adults who were bullied.

Folkman et al. (1986) extended the ground-breaking research of Folkman and Lazarus (1987) by developing a research design with the purpose of studying the relative stability in participants' appraisals and coping processes across a diverse set of encounters. The researchers sought to learn how these processes influence the adaptation conditions outside the attributes of personality. Folkman et al. (1986) concentrated on how the relationship between appraisal and coping was "aggregated across stressful encounters as well as indicators of long-term adaptation status" (p. 572). The research questions in this study were based on these nuances.

Research based on the transactional theory is dynamic, reciprocal, and bidirectional (Folkman et al., 1986). According to this theory, individuals experience stress when they perceive they do not have the necessary skills and/or resources to cope with stressful events. A critical part of this theory is the view that the processes of cognitive appraisal and coping are the intermediaries of the outcomes of perceived

stressful events for the individuals who have the experience. Applied to the phenomenon of bullying, the experience of bullying differs depending on the victims' perception of being bullied. This perception facilitates resiliency, victimization, or other responses. My research relied on the stress and coping theory further developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1984, 1986). Lazarus and Folkman (1987) refined and shaped the research on the transactional theory. The authors' work crystallized the essential tenets of transactional empirical research and theory based on the dynamic interplay, antecedents, and outcomes of the individual environmental relationships. The authors identified the following topics to be addressed by their research: "theory and measures of appraisal, functional and dysfunctional coping, causal interference, and microanalytic versus macro-analytic research strategy" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987, p. 141). Given the emphasis on the dynamic relational nature of coping and the structure of the study, the authors' research laid the foundation for the theory, and it was essential to this study.

Burt et al. (2008) also studied the dynamic nature of coping, social competence, and transactional theory. The researchers analyzed the associations among internalizing, externalizing, and social competence, employing a nested-structural-equations and testing the interconnections among the broad multi-informant constructs across 4 developmental periods, utilizing a sample of 205 children. The children were assessed at age 12 and then reassessed after 7, 10, and 20 years. Burt et al. (2008) findings are directly relevant to this study because they reported robust negative paths from social competence to internalizing problems from childhood into adolescence and from emerging adulthood into young adulthood. The results consisted of quantified data and information on the transactional effects and interactions between competence and the symptoms.

Explanation of Important Terms

The following section includes an explanation of the key terms used in this study

Bullying. Bullying involves an imbalance of power in which the aggressor intentionally harms another person repeatedly over some time (Wolke & Lereva, 2015). Direct bullying includes physical and/or verbal acts of aggression towards an individual, while indirect bullying involves social exclusion (Frisen, Holmqvist & Oscaarson, 2008; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2010; Wolke & Lerya, 2015).

Stress. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) defined stress as an event that occurs when individuals appraise the personal relationship between them and their environment as taxing or exceeding their resource to cope within the environment. This definition serves as the foundation of stress and coping theory, and, for the purposes of this study, provided the structure to understand stress processes and its relation to psychological health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Appraisal and coping are not only critical to the transactional theory of stress and coping, but also function as the mediators within the person-environment-encounter.

Coping. Coping can be defined, described, and measured through the 66-item Ways of Coping checklist (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Folkman et al., 1986). Through the checklist, coping is viewed as a range of behavioral and managing strategies that individuals use to manage the internal and external demands in a stressful encounter (Folkman et al., 1986). For this study, stress was defined as a stimulus or a response characterized by physiological arousal and negative effects such as anxiety.

Folkman (1986) early research focused on providing an evaluation of coping from the individuals' perspective during a stressful encounter or event. The conceptual

frameworks were further developed in Folkman et al. (1986) work, in which they reported on an intra-individual approach concerning individual coping processes and functional relationships of coping variables. The research emphasized coping “as a factor in psychological and somatic health outcomes” (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 992). Notably, this research included the variables that showed the relationship of coping processes to the outcomes of stress-related encounters.

Key concepts that emerged in Folkman et al. study (1986) were primary appraisals (what is at stake) and secondary appraisals as coping options. In addition to the types of coping mechanism that humans display and rely on, the resulting data demonstrated that “coping was strongly related to cognitive appraisal” (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 992). Despite their finding, primary and secondary appraisals still present as an area of research that needs further investigation.

The psychological research on stress supports that coping has at least two primary functions: (a) to regulate stressful emotions, and (b) to alter problematic stressful person environment encounters/situations (Folkman et al., 1986). Within the context of the adult world of work, coping reflects employees’ ever-changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to handle organizational demands that are taxing or exceed their resources (Mackey & Perrewe, 2014). Coping is not a discrete event. Instead, it takes place in contexts and within complex processes, including self-regulation (Gottlieb, 2013; Ireland & Archer, 2002; Karatuna, 2015; Kobasa, 1979). Mackey and Perrewe (2014) emphasized the need to avoid oversimplifying coping behaviors as maladaptive or positive because the context varies in addition to an individuals’ appraisal of threats (p. 266-267).

A related concept in the coping research is antecedent variables. Antecedent variables include “personal traits of mastery, interpersonal trust, self-esteem, values, commitments, and religious variables” (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 573). Pearlin (1978) referred to mastery as a coping skill that helps individuals modulate the stress encounter and created a scale to measure mastery. The Pearlin scale can serve as a measurement of research subjects’ gauges regarding “one’s life chances as being under one’s own control” rather than being “fatalistically determined” (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 573).

Adaptational status is another critical concept inherent to research on victimization, coping, stress, and appraisals. Adaptational status refers to outcome variables that stretch beyond psychosocial symptoms and health status. Folkman et al. (1986) showed the relationship between a number of these variables in the results of their study. The participants were evaluated for psychological symptomology through the administration of Derogatis, Lipman, Covi, Rickels, and Uhlenlith (1970) 58-item scale in the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL). The scales that were correlated to the HSCL, including the Center for Epidemiologic Studies’ Depression scale (CES-D), (Radloff, 1977) were used to correlate the symptoms and health variables.

Folkman et al. (1986) discussed how primary and secondary appraisals are measured in correlation to the catalogs of coping options, explain physical health, and psychological symptoms. Throughout the scholarly literature several terms overlap, such as Luria and Torjman (2009) phrase resources that seem parallel to the use of coping options described by Folkman et al. (1986). Representing an early version of related topics, Kobasa (1979) referred to personal hardiness in a study of stressful life events and personality. Riva and Eck (2016) considered the role of personality, loneliness, and social

exclusion in their research. However, their variables addressed combating and rectifying bullying rather than focusing on primary and secondary appraisals.

Folkman et al. (1986) concisely defined primary appraisal as what is at stake for a subject, and secondary appraisal is the coping options are available to the individual within the stressful encounter. Folkman et al. (1986) showed a meaningful relationship among all the primary appraisal variables with psychological symptoms. However, the secondary appraisal variables with psychological symptoms did not reflect as high a correlative relationship. Folkman et al. (1986) study influenced the formation of this study's methodology, such as in the aspect of variable selection. Additionally, their research sheds light on the need for further research on appraisals in comparison to coping types within a personality.

Gomes, Faria, and Goncalves (2013) stated that an individual's responses to stress are based upon their coping potential and control perceptions. The researchers focused on analyzing the relationship between cognitive appraisal, occupational stress, and burnout. Surveys measuring the level of stress and cognitive appraisal as well as the Maslach Burnout Inventory were administered to a sample of 333 teaching staff at a public university to test the relationship between appraisals, stress, and burnout. A relationship between stress, cognitive appraisal, and burnout was revealed. The researchers concluded that occupational stress and burnout were partially mediated by primary and secondary cognitive appraisals.

Mearns and Cain (2003) found that the individual differences in the coping methods to the demands at work influence the outcome of stressful experience. The researchers investigated the levels of occupational stress and burnout in a sample of 388

public school teachers. Three survey instruments were administered to participants to measure occupational stress, burnout, and strategies used for coping strategies. The authors found disparities between the levels of stress of primary education teachers and secondary education teachers as well as male and female teachers' levels of stress. The researchers identified rational coping behaviors as a contributing factor to how the teachers overcame work-related stresses and burnout, and avoidance was found to be indicative of the higher stress and burnout levels among the teachers.

Gomes, Faria, and Goncalves (2013) examined the hypotheses about the intermediation of cognitive appraisal and stress. The mediating effect also lends significance to the idea that appraisals may serve as a part of a cycle of components. In other words, the mediating effect of cognitive appraisal showed the transactional nature of the exchanges that take place during a coping event. Although this study is designed to measure the cognitive appraisals of adult victims of bullying, Gomes (2013) research was based on the general population, does support the use of primary and secondary appraisals as fundamental concepts relevant to studying coping and stress in adults.

Mackey and Perrewe (2014) noted appraisals could be impacted by hundreds of traits and or other individual differences. To help focus their research, the researchers studied positive and negative affectivity and general self-efficacy and explained how negative affectivity (NA) and positive affectivity (PA) are the focus of their research in the context of primary appraisals. People who display NA, have a tendency toward a negative effect, while those displaying PA shows a tendency toward a positive effect. Additionally, over time PA and NA stabilize.

Mackey and Perrewe (2014) found a correlation between individuals with a higher NA and the tendency to view the world as threatening and noted that self-efficacy or general self-efficacy (GSE) is a representation of individuals' general self-competence. These are essential distinctions, as the same demand can be perceived as threatening by one individual while perceived as a challenge by another. In this regard, the researchers stated that "primary appraisals are based on mental models that represent both the self" (Mackey & Perrewe, 2014, p. 263) and the job or the organization. The use of primary appraisals in the formation of this study design is warranted, given the foundational nature of this aspect of perception.

Aquino and Thau (2009) studied workplace victimization characterized by aggressive acts perpetrated by one or more members of the workplace causing psychological and psychosocial harm to another. The researchers found personality and demographics to be among the predictor variables involved in such type of aggressive behavior at the workplace, while problem-focus and emotion-focus were common strategies. Aquino and Thau (2009) reported that their selection of the study variables was guided by theory, which is a strategy that may be adopted for this study. Furthermore, the authors' concluded that there is a "richness and complexity that makes up the actual appraisal and coping processes" (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 578).

Application of the Phenomenon

The coping mechanisms have been examined in the context of optimism, personality, appraisals, adjustment, and the long-term effects of different coping types. The studies that facilitate the integration of the afore-mentioned topics and extend research are discussed below.

According to Mackey and Perrewe (2014), the foundation of the transactional model of stress suggests that cognitive appraisal and coping mediate the relationship between environmental stressors and job strain. According to their model, an event on the job triggers the cognitive appraisal process to determine if the demand is a threat. If a threat is perceived, a secondary appraisal process will be initiated to determine what if anything can be done to cope.

The emphasis on appraisal and cognition is the heart of the transactional model developed by Lazarus and Folkman, which is still used as the foundation for many empirical research studies today. Mackey and Perrewe (2014) Appraisal, Attribution, Adaptation (AAA) model is described by them as an integrative conceptual aimed to articulate and summarize some intermediate linkages between the appraisal process and coping behaviors (Mackey & Perrewe, 2014). Karasek (1979) focused on job stress but emphasized the nature of employee control as being significant when analyzing the employee responses to stress. For example, according to the theory, if employees have a high control, then they will be stressed when the job demands are low. In comparison, employees with low control will remain passive when the job demands are low. These same employees are under high job strain when low control is coupled with high demands (Mackey & Perrewe, 2014).

Next, the Jobs Demand Resources (JD-R) model, developed by Demerouti and Bakker, (2011), described the job demand-resources approach, which was designed to encompass organizational psychology, job strain, job demands, and coping resources. The JD-R model “predicts that job resources will buffer the relationship between

demands and strain and that employees who have resources will be able to cope with work demands” (Mackey & Perrewe, 2014, p. 260).

However, according to Mackey and Perrewe (2014), as the JD-R model is driven theoretically by the conservation of resources (COR) theory, it is viewed as a resource-oriented model that view individuals as continually motivated to retain, protect, and build the resources in order to buffer against the threat of the potential or actual loss of valued resources. According to the researchers, coping behaviors, personal outcomes, and emotions are all subjective cognitive appraisal processes that are initiated by stressful environmental demands.

In this model, the organizational stressors are perceived, resulting in a primary appraisal. Mackey and Perrewe (2014) proposed that the AAA model aligns with the transactional approach, which focuses on how employees subjectively interpret objective environmental conditions. The AAA model is less concerned with organizational antecedents or job performance as the relative positive or negative consequences but is more concerned with the complex nature of appraisal mechanisms. According to Mackey and Perrewe (2014), the JD-R model, COR theory, AAA model, and transactional model all acknowledge individual cognition, appraisal, and resources. This current study instead prioritizes the developmental and internal factors involved in coping. As Mackey and Perrewe (2014) research was published only four years ago, it represents the current research concerns highly relevant to this study.

Through a meta-analysis, Gini and Pozzoli (2013), demonstrated the relationship between being bullied in childhood and experiencing psychosomatic problems, adjustment issues and coping in adulthood in their work that included six longitudinal

studies on making associations between peer victimization and psychosomatic complaints in the school-aged population (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013). Through an online database research conducted in 2012, the authors located 119 unduplicated studies of which 30 were included in their final research. The results of the study by Gini and Pozzoli (2013) showed that bullied children and adolescents have a significantly higher risk for psychosomatic problems than their non-bullied peers, which highlights the relevance of this study that examines the coping mechanism of adult victims of bullying in relation to their psychological well-being.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

The literature search yielded many publications within the broad scope of the subjects of stress and coping. However, in this section I evaluated and synthesized the most pertinent aspects of the research.

According to Hamilton, Newman, Delville, and Delville (2008) peer victimization manifested through bullying is a chronic social stressor and, in some cases, affects the immediate health and well-being of employees. Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) main research interest within the field of workplace aggression and coping was the bullied victims' identification of their responses to the stressful events. The narratives of 20 workers were recorded and revealed that at least 7 methods of coping such as stabilizing, sense-making, reconciling, repairing, grieving and restructuring were in action (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). The researcher used a comparative analysis of the narratives, which yielded results through self-report. Although the focus of the research is on the effects of trauma at work, it supports the use of the employees' self-reports to measure coping processes. The

report did not include information concerning variables such as gender, the level of education, or the role at work.

Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) contributed to the research on bullying at work, although it was more of a business communication paper rather than a psychological analysis research. However, the subsection on how employees respond is reflective of the current interest in coping behavior in stressful encounters.

Chang (1998) utilized the transactional theory of coping and stress in his influential study on the primary and secondary appraisals of adult-victims when in the proximity of a stressors. The purpose of the study was to consider the potential influence of appraisals in the stress and coping process (Chang, 1998), as described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Notably, the research, compiled through comparative analysis, showed the optimists and pessimists in a cohort of college students differed significantly in their secondary (but not primary) appraisal, coping, and adjustment. The researcher was interested in personality as well as coping processes and how the related variables interacted. The author emphasized the significance of appraisal research to the field. The results of Chang (1998) suggested that dispositional optimism and appraisals can be measured and evaluated for the variables related to this study.

Agervold and Mikkelsen (2004) investigated the organizational settings that encourage workplace bullying. The research team investigated whether the bullied employees reported higher levels of stress than non-bullied employees and found that the employees who reported being bullied at work significantly showed more symptoms of psychological stress and mental fatigue than non-bullied employees. Their study showed the variables of bullying at work and the perception of bullying are stressful and

correlated. Other studies have also been undertaken on the topics of behavioral health, stress, and employment culture (Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2002; Hogh & Dofradottir, 2001; Hogh, Henriksson & Burr, 2005).

Rayner, Hoel, and Cooper (2001) as well as Salin (2003) explored why adult bullying occurs at the workplace. The latter posited that organizational politics necessitated the use of strategies that established or supported significant power gains by the perpetrators. The authors' focus provided an organizational and systems view on a theory about why bullying occurs. Earlier research such by Kobasa (1979) has helped formulate the place of personality within coping research and personal coping resources as a function of personality. Wheaton (1983) study was based on the broad ideas about coping and attempted to investigate the specific processes and methods.

Mackey and Perrewe (2014) provided an example of a recent psychological study on coping, appraisals, and attributions. The authors presented a model devoted to an integrative conceptualization of workplace stress, designed to “account for numerous complexities that employees experience when cognitively evaluating organizational demands” (p. 258) and related the appraisals they make. The researchers noted that employee stress responses can be improved upon after further research attention is given to self-regulation. Although Mackey and Perrewe (2014) credited Folkman and Lazarus (1990) with developing the transactional model, they put forth a conceptual model that integrated approaches and expanded upon them, resulting in a “more comprehensive examination of job stress” (p. 259) based on their AAA model of appraisals, attributions, and adaptations.

Rationale for Key Variable

In this study, the variables of being bullied and coping were studied through self-reports. “Variability in coping is at least partially a function of people’s judgments about what is at stake” (Folkman et al., 1986). Recording and evaluating the participants’ perceptions of being bullied and whether they consider bullying to be stressful are relevant to this study. The fundamental research on coping and appraisal supports the use of individual analysis to evaluate stress encounters, processes of coping, and related variables as demonstrated by self-reports (Folkman et al., 1986).

While demands from originations and peers “may reflect both challenging and threatening aspects, it is the appraisal of the demands that really matters” (Mackey & Perrewe, 2014). Even though stress at work can be an opportunity, a challenge, or a threat, it is important to recognize that it is the individual’s appraisal of the challenge or hindrance that determines the response (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Mackey & Perrewe, 2014).

For these reasons, evaluating the variables being bullied and coping in a manner that reflects and relies on self-reports, consistent with this study, was essential. In the next section, studies that are related to these variables are compiled and synthesized.

Studies Related to Variables

Gladstone, Parker, and Malhi (2006) conducted a cross-sectional investigation to examine the relationship between the variables of bullying and depression through structured clinical assessments. The research demonstrated that being bullied in childhood correlated with experiencing comorbid anxiety later in life. This finding was

“compatible with both cross-sectional and prospective studies of child and adolescent samples” (Gladstone, Parker, & Malhi, 2006, p. 201).

Additionally, the researchers reported that a potential etiological significance of early peer victimizations exists for a percentage of adults suffering from depression with comorbid anxiety (Gladstone, Parker, & Malhi, 2006). McCabe, Antony, Summerfeldt, Liss, and Swinson (2003), showed a significant link between the “perceptions of teasing and social phobia” (p. 187) in self-reporting interview participants. The variables in the study were based on the self-reports of early childhood bullying in the form of teasing and the presence of anxiety disorders in adulthood.

Salin (2001) provided a concise study on how to measure various forms of bullying at work. The researcher found that “when provided a definition of bullying, at least 8.8% of the respondents reported that they had been bullied” (Salin, 2001, p. 425) occasionally over the previous year at work. However, the administration of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001) resulted in about 24.1% of the same respondents reporting that “they had been subjected to at least one of the negative acts on a weekly basis” (Salin, 2001, p. 425). Salin (2001) work reflected less about variables and more about methods and data collection. It is significant to structure the interviews designed for this study with the appropriate questions in the context of appropriate and well-designed methods.

Boulton (2013) studied the variables of recollection of being bullied and the presence of “social anxiety, coping and self-blame” (p. 270). The author grouped the studies adults’ recollections of four types of bullying and tested to see whether coping moderated those associations (Boulton, 2013). The study was based on a sample of 582

students over the age of 23 in the United Kingdom. The researcher found that the types of bullying (as noted through recollection) indeed predicted social anxiety. Boulton (2013) helps to justify the focus of my study, as it may help in describing the type of bullying behaviors and it relies on variables similar to that in this study.

Chang (1998), as well as Lazarus and Folkman (1984), built upon the research of Scheier and Carver (1985). Chang (1998) measured optimism and appraisals and their relationship to coping and adjustment. In the study, 726 college students were evaluated, and after correlational analysis, the data showed that stress-related appraisals were associated with optimal coping and adjustment. Comparing optimists and pessimists, Chang (1998) found the two groups to significantly differing in terms of secondary appraisal, coping, and adjustment.

Chang (1998) emphasized dispositional optimism as a variable in the transacting processes of coping and adjustment, which supported his introductory assertion that empirical studies show optimists “are indeed physiologically and physically better adjusted than the more pessimistic counterparts” (Scheier & Carver, 1992, as cited in Chang, 1998, p. 1112).

Relying on Lazarus and Folkman (1984), as well as Lazarus (1966), Chang (1998) noted that appraisals play a significant role in determining an individual’s available coping responses. However, the role and impact of specific appraisals in stressful situations were not found, and Chang (1998) eventually summarized that by modifying their secondary appraisal, pessimists may begin to rely less on disengaged coping strategies (Chang, 1998), which is generally maladaptive.

In 2008, Zellars et al. reported on coping research, and the results were expanded upon the variables of coping at work. The researchers collected data from 230 employees to investigate the correlation between employees' high negative affectivity (NA) caused by physiological strain and levels of job strain. The researchers used electromyography to measure facial muscle tension that was indicative of NA among employees with low levels of psychological strain. The researchers hypothesized NA as being positively related to physiological strain. Concerning perceived control, the employee data showed a relation to job-related efficacy which had a moderating effect produced through skill sets described as political (Zellars et al., 2008). Zellars et al. (2008) noted that political skill (a form of social capital) did buffer several measures of physiological strain, while those individuals who had a general lack of political skill also lacked this buffering-like mechanism.

Luria and Torjman (2009) attempted to delineate whether an individual's perceived stress had a relationship to their resources (e.g., personality). The researchers measured physical fitness, social support, peer-acceptance, cognitive strengths, and abilities through the Core Self-Evaluation Scale (CSES). Data was gathered by administering the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to study the participants at a military unit. The results showed that those with higher CSES, cognitive measures, and levels of social support did perceive lower stress levels before the onset of a quasi-field experiment (designed to induce stress). Individuals rejected by current peers reported a perceived greater stress level as well. However, a weakness of the study was that it was undertaken at a military unit, and it is unknown whether the military personnel might have greater group cohesion, and peer acceptance. If the assumption is made that the

group dynamics do not cause greater stress in the form of social alienation and acceptance is made, then the data may be more valid.

Allison et al. (2009) provided a study from South Australia with parallel research in the United States. Their interest was to examine the relationship between past victimization and adult health-related quality of life after determining the proportion of adults bullied. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 2,833 adults. The participants were asked whether they had experienced bullying when they were in school. Using the Medical Outcomes Study Short Form with 36 health-related questions, both linear and logistic regression analysis were conducted, revealing that one-fifth of the adults had prior experiences of being the victims of bullying. Notably, adults who reported earlier victimization “experienced significantly poorer mental and physical health compared to those who had not been bullied” (Allison et al., 2009, p.1163).

Longitudinal Studies

Burt (2008) undertook the reassessments of 205 children aged between 8 and 12 years at the time of initial assessment, with follow-ups conducted after 7, 10, and 20 years. The longitudinal study revealed human “associations among internalizing, externalizing, and social competence” (Burt, 2008, p. 359). Their later studies undertaken after 7, 10, and 20 years of the initial assessment were designed to re-asses across 4 periods of development of the participants (e.g., at the age 9, 16, 19, and 29 years). The researcher did not initially find strong associations over cross-domain paths concerning social competence and externalizing problems of the victims.

The research relied primarily on a developmental psychopathology framework considered in relation to the cascading and transactional effects in the context of

individual social competencies as well as mental health symptoms over time. The article does not use the terms such as coping or stress but instead informs the field as far as the longitudinal nature and extent of bullying on victims over their lifetimes. This research interest overlaps with books about coping, individual personality and coping, and personal control (Bowling & Beehr, 2006, Folkman, 1986; Folkman 2013) as well as the contributions of social theorists, including Espelage and Swearer (2009).

At the time, Burt (2008) demonstrated that the bullied individuals displayed increased psychological distress, such as high rates of depression correlated to frequency of bullying, as well as anxiety disorders and higher rates of suicidality compared to non-bullied peers at the same ages. A study found that individuals who experienced bullying as children reported at age 50 the quality of life to be poor, as well as an associated lack of social relationships, economic challenges, and hardships (Takizawa, Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014). The researchers concluded that 30 to 40 years after childhood bullying, the victims were still at the risk of a variety of poor psychological and psychosocial outcomes.

Sigurdson et al. (2014) researched a large Norwegian sample between 14 and 15 years of age (in 1999 - 2000) and reassessed the same sample when they were between 26 and 27 years of age (in 2012). Even 12 years after experiencing bullying, the study participants reported significant social costs (Sigurdson et al. 2014). These findings seem consistent with this study's variables.

Reijntjes, et al. (2013) studied bullying within the immediate social groups of school children in Norway. A three-wave longitudinal study followed 394 children from 12 schools from their late childhood into early adolescence. The researchers were

interested in the social hierarchy of children who were bullied in their childhood and into their adolescence. Although the current study is focuses on the outcomes and perceptions of the victims of bullying, Reijntjes et al. (2013) highlight additional aspects of bullying. For example, (Reijntjes et al. (2013) three-wave longitudinal study featured an analysis of self-reports of social competence and internalizing symptoms.

The researchers reported on the high social status of bullies, who may view bullying as having social advantages, which is consistent with “contemporary researchers [who] agree that bullying is a strategic attempt to gain a powerful position in the peer group” (Reijntjes et al., 2013, p. 1). Although outside the scope of their study, the study on bullies and their self-perceptions and self-reports provided a reminder of the systems aspect of the bully-victim relationship. Additionally, it is to be noted that several researchers have highlighted a third category, namely a bully who is also a victim.

Controversy Within the Findings

Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith, and Pereira (2002) highlighted a controversial thread of inquiry, citing research developed in the 1990s and earlier. The team of researchers found that several researchers did not wish to rely on participant recollections of events. Therefore, to add stability to their study, the researchers recorded the memories of the bullied victims. For example, Rivers (1999) noted that memories of bullied victims were stable over a 14-month period. Furthermore, Olweus (1993) found that when he revisited the research participants’ recollections at age 23 (in comparison to the initial reports at age 16), the memories were closely allied. However, peer-witness statements are either not utilized or simply lacking from the research literature.

Lereya et al. (2015), compared bullying within the context of childhood maltreatment to shed light on the long-term effects of abuse. The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) in the United Kingdom (Golding, Pembrey, Jones, & ALSPAC Study Team, 2001) and the Great Smoky Mountains Study (GSMS) (Costello, Angold, Burns, Stangl, Tweed, Erkanli, & Worthman, 1996). in the USA are both longitudinal studies that include such data categories within childhood maltreatment as physical abuse, emotional abuse, and/or severe maladaptive parenting with bully victimization assessed at ages 8, 10, and 13. The researchers sought to measure variables such as maltreatment, being bullied, and mental health problems through binary logistic regression analyzes. Children who were bullied by peers were more likely than those children who were maltreated to have mental health problems in both cohorts (Costello, et al., 1996, Golding et al., 2001; & Lereya et al., 2015). The differences in the bullied children were significant concerning anxiety, depression, and self-harm (Lereya et al., 2015). The research results showed that being bullied by peers worsens the long-term adverse effects of bullying. This underscores the need for further research about bullying across the lifespan of victims.

Lereya et al. (2015) showed that the use of variables such as mental health, depression, and anxiety, based on ICD-10 definitions, is well-founded. Also, the methods used by the researchers helped to clarify the use of systematic reviews using Medline and PsycINFO for such search terms such as a bully, peer victimization, abuse, and depression. As noted by the researchers, the incidence of childhood abuse may be under-reported because parental reports of bullying were accepted without being corroborated. Therefore, those numbers may not be fully reflective of bullying prevalence.

Additionally, their study did not report on the age of onset of abuse or bullying. Also considering the variables severity of abuse, and onset may reveal additional dimensions to the study results.

Buwalda, Stubbendorff, Zickert, and Koolhass (2013) conducted animal research designed to shed light on the potential relationship(s) of social stress and later adaptation and or capacity into adulthood. The study was conducted on rats and these variables did not show a meaningful relationship between social stress and adaptive capacity. When rats in adolescence displayed social stress, the same feature necessarily did not lead to comprised adaptive capacity later (Buwalda et al., 2013). Quantifiably measuring results quantifiably may seem to result in more definitive conclusions, but animal research does not seamlessly replicate the same results on human participants.

For adults, the greatest daily stressors often take place at work. Drach-Zahavy, Freund, and Krantz (2013) tested individuals working under stressful conditions and whether team effectiveness was strengthened or curtailed due to the stressful conditions. They utilized a structural contingency model focused on job structures as a primary factor, interacting with measures of stress on team attitude or team commitment, and outcomes or team effectiveness. The research results showed that team commitment mediated the relationships between stress, structuring, and team effectiveness (Drach-Zahavy, Freund & Krantz, 2013). The study does not feature a transactional approach and does not measure bullying in the workplace, per se. However, it added the dimension of the individuals within a team dynamic to the other search on adult coping and interpersonal dynamics.

Future Direction

Allison et al. (2009) reported that victims of bullying may display health-related problems in adulthood. The authors suggested focusing on school bullying as a preventative cause of mental health problems across the victims' lifespan. The authors emphasized the need for future research on the mechanisms of bullying within the school settings, as well as on the variables that affect adult coping. The latter helps to support the general direction of this study.

Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith, and Pereira (2002) provided a sociological perspective on the nature and incidence of adult bullying and victimization, primarily in the context of the American workplace. Specifically, the research team noted the lack of adequate measurement techniques that accurately convey the problem of workplace bullying, which is a subgroup of aggression. Workplace victims report physical and mental effects including stress, depression, and lowered self-esteem.

Cowie et al. (2002) bring to light the disagreement about the reliability and validity of self-reports noting the lack of evidence regarding time being a factor affecting individuals' ability to recall events accurately. The researchers mention the essential aspects of research methods such as phenomenological qualitative research, which is the basis for this study. For example, several studies described in the literature review of this study required the research participants to recollect bullying events that occurred during their lifespan.

Researchers Wolke et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal survey study of 1420 children and adolescents aged between 9 and 13 in North Carolina. The children were assessed for bullying involvement. During the study, the researchers controlled for family

hardships and childhood psychiatric disorders. The results of the study showed the individuals bullied during childhood had poorer health and social relationship outcomes as adults. Critics pointed out that the weakness of the research study was that it utilized reporting by parents and not the children. This was a prospective, longitudinal design with an appropriately large sample. However, the authors disclosed that study participants were lacking in some groups to allow identifying differences concerning ethnicity.

Studies Related to Research Questions

Gomes, Faria, and Goncalves (2013) studied the phenomenon of cognitive appraisal as a mediator within stressful encounters. The researchers' primary interest concerned the relationship between job stress and employee burnout, although their emphasis on cognitive appraisal as a mediator was useful. The researchers described appraisals as mechanisms working within the system of stressful situations at work. Their study featured a sample of over 300 teachers who worked in northern Portugal. The teachers were asked a series of questions regarding their work. The results confirmed that primary and secondary cognitive appraisals partially mediated the relationship between occupational stress and burnout. According to Gomes et al. (2013), the variables were a promising underlying mechanism for explaining adaptation at work. Their findings are consistent with Lazarus et al. (1985) hypothesis that stress is a complex subjective phenomenon mitigated by the activities of appraisal and coping.

With the growth of phenomenological research methods over time, the scientific community has begun to accept a great deal of qualitative research. With improvements in the validity and reliability of associated methods, this study relies on recent

developments so that participant data and recollections can be gathered and assessed appropriately.

Gaps in the Literature

Numerous quantitative studies that focused on bullying and bullying prevention as well as personality studies relating to bullying exist. However, qualitative studies specifically focusing on adult victims of bullying were significantly lacking in the literature.

Over the past decade, social, cognitive, and neuroscience perspectives, such as that of Harris (2009), shed light on bullying, coping, and stress. For example, McDougall and Vallancourt (2015) studied the long-term outcomes of peer victimization and its relationship to social relationships, self-perceptions, and mental health, through meta-analytic and long-term research. However, these researchers noted Caspi et al. (2003), who “showed a link between childhood maltreatment and depression in adulthood was moderated by the polymorphism in the promoter region of the serotonin transporter gene 5-HTTLPR” (McDougall & Vallancourt, 2015, p. 305). Coupling qualitative methods with other modes of research may be wise, given the complex nature of human interactions.

Furthermore, the studies focused on adults identified during the literature search were limited to adults in discrete settings. The questions were primarily focused on individuals in working environments. However, it is possible that a person can be bullied at work and display bullying behavior elsewhere. The tendency to polarize children or adults into categories of bullies or victims may render scientific study fruitless. Although there was significant data has been amassed regarding bullying reduction over the last 20

years, most of this subsection of research focused on how to reduce bullying through the development of new ways for all children to interact.

Summary and Conclusion

The psychological and psychosocial problems associated with bullying are well documented. Researchers such as Wolke and Lereta (2015) as well as Gini and Pozzoli (2013) recommend addressing this phenomenon to prevent and or reduce self-harm, suffering, health problems, and other psychosomatic problems related to this pervasive epidemic.

Gomes, Faria, and Goncalves (2013) stated that cognitive appraisal and the related processes are overly critical to the psychological studies on human stress adaptations. Individuals process and make decisions within the context of a stressful encounter based on appraisals and/or coping processes, as detailed by transactional research. Although more research exists on primary appraisals, Gomes, Faria, and Goncalves (2013) paper reported on the secondary appraisal variables such as coping potential, which is a self-judgment and control perception concerning whether individuals feel they have enough power to meet demands.

Through the insights of Mackey and Perrewe (2014), the AAA model was developed, and described that adults with incompatible amounts of personal assets may result in different appraisals and contrasting levels of behavioral responses and adaptations to the same demands. The researchers emphasize self-regulation as an explanatory variable for studies of stress and explain that it is a key concept for understanding how and why employees engage in positive and negative coping behaviors.

Conclusion

In this literature review, I reported on over five decades of theory and research. The transactional theory of stress and coping has provided a foundation for understanding the myriad components relevant to the purpose of this study. Employing a qualitative descriptive paradigm and undertaking data collection through in-person interviews was the established methods for coping and stress studies, despite the several caveats stated above. This research study aimed to locate and find the constructs that facilitated coping by adult victims of bullying as described by them. The variables stated within the research questions were within the general scope of this field.

Hymel and Swearer (2015) presented four decades of research on bullying. They noted that the methods for addressing bullying and victimization have been problematic, emphasizing such drawbacks such as the lack of agreement regarding measurements. Bullying and victimization behaviors are complex and influenced by a myriad of factors. Lewis and Orford (2005) discussed the complexities of work cultures and explained victimizing through a variety of sources such as parents, peers, supervisors, teachers, and coworkers. However, Hymel and Swearer (2015) credited self-reporting to be efficient in providing the victims of bullying with “a much-deserved voice in the assessment process” (p. 294) when studying bullying.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to understand the constructs employed by adult victims of bullying to facilitate coping. In this chapter, I present the research questions, central concepts of the phenomenon of bullying, and rationale for choosing a qualitative phenomenology paradigm as the research design. The remainder of this chapter includes discussions about the role of the researcher, methodology, issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, ethical procedures, and issues of trustworthiness. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

Four research questions were addressed in this study. The research questions were:

Research Question 1: How did the adult victims of bullying describe bullying?

Research Question 2: How did the adult victims of bullying describe their coping processes?

Research Question 3: How did the adult victims of bullying describe their coping methods?

Research Question 4: How did the adult victims of bullying describe their emotional response(s) to being bullied?

Research Design

This was a qualitative phenomenological study exploring the coping mechanisms employed by adult victims of bullying. Creswell (2014) listed quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method designs as research options and recommended considering the nature of the phenomenon, the researchers' subjective experiences, and the audience as a guide

deciding on a suitable design. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014, p. 246). A qualitative approach is best suited in the following cases: (a) studies involving research questions about people's experiences, (b) inquiry into the meanings people make of their experiences, (c) studies exploring individuals in the context of their social/interpersonal environment, and (d) research studies where not enough is known about a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Because I wanted to gather data based on the first-person accounts of the phenomenon under study, a qualitative approach was deemed to be the most appropriate method.

A quantitative methodology was not selected because that design is best suited for researchers seeking to test scientific theories by examining the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2014). In contrast, qualitative studies allow the researcher to emphasize descriptions that are not based on a value gained through measurements of quantity. I did not choose a mixed-method tradition because the tradition incorporates a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection unsuitable for this study (Creswell, 2013). In comparison, qualitative studies that are phenomenological rely on the research participants' perspectives. The phenomenological approach is used when attempting to understand shared experiences. "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding the nature of meaning of our everyday experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). A phenomenological qualitative method allows for the researcher's personal insights and reflections to be highlighted by including heuristic inquiry, which, according to Patton (2002), is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the foreground the personal experiences and insights of the researcher. Participants' observations, recollections, and

memories can provide critical insight into the victims' perspectives. Qualitative studies emphasize descriptions that are not based on a value gained through measurement, or quantity. Instead, qualitative studies that are phenomenological rely on the research participants' perspectives. Because the focus of this study was on the constructs of coping, phenomenology was deemed to be the most appropriate qualitative method.

Role of the Researcher

Creswell (2014) stated, "qualitative research is interpretative research; the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants" (p. 187). As the researcher in this study, I served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Patton (2002) advised the researcher to disclose such things as the researcher's experiences, training, and perspectives. Therefore, operating in this role during the study created the potential for ethical issues including possible researcher bias (Patton, 2002). To manage these ethical issues and biases, my personal experience, points of view, and assumptions that influence the data collection processes or study results were rigorously guarded against throughout the study. I used the following strategies to minimize potential researcher bias, ethical issues, and errors in this study:

- Data collection did not occur without authorization from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB), therefore protecting the rights of all participants.
- Informed Consent was used when soliciting study participants.

- I furnished statements about my past or present subjective experiences relating to the research subject and/or participants that could have potentially shaped my interpretations during this study (Creswell, 2009).
- I recognized and set aside preconceptions using bracketing to focus on understanding and authentically relaying participants' perspectives on coping with bullying as an adult (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002).
- All study participants were treated fairly and ethically (Creswell, 2009; Patton 2002).
- I accurately recorded participants experiences as reported by the participants.
- I maintained a detailed record of observations, feelings, impressions, and personal thoughts during data collection and kept the record in a locked filing cabinet (Creswell, 2009)
- I used structured data collection, analysis, and reporting procedures that were trustworthy, authentic, and balanced (Patton, 2002).
- I remained aware and addressed all ethical issues that arose throughout the research process (Creswell, 2009).

Methodology

Participant Selection Strategy

Decisions about sample size included considering the purpose of the inquiry, the depth of the information sought regarding the topic, and how the data would be used (Patton, 2002). In this study, I explored and identified the constructs of coping employed by the adult victims of bullying as described by participants. The demographics of the

targeted population for this study were adult men and women aged 19 and older who reported experiencing bullying during adulthood. Adults reporting only childhood bullying victimization (18-years and younger) were excluded from this study.

Polkinghorne (1989) recommended interviewing five to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Creswell (2014), on the other hand, noted that there is no specific sample size associated with the number of participants needed for qualitative studies that exists. However, phenomenological studies, Creswell (2014) suggested that three to 10 individuals will suffice. According to Patton (2002), there are no rules concerning sample size in qualitative inquiry. This study consisted of eight individuals who self-identified as having experienced the phenomena as an adult.

The sample size in purposeful sampling depends on the number of interviews needed to produce rich, useful data (Patton, 2002). I chose 20 individuals using purposeful sampling to ensure they met the criterion for program participation. The final eight individuals chosen were interviewed in-person using semi-structured questions. I interviewed each participant for 60 minutes. I continued to interview each participant until saturation was achieved. According to Patton (2002), sampling stops when no new information or themes emerges from the sample, and the saturation of the data occurs.

Instrumentation

I used an interview protocol in this study (see Appendix B), digitally audio recorded each interview, and created verbatim transcripts of the interview audiotapes. Audiotaping interviews and transcribing the transcripts verbatim accurately captured the participants describing their experiences with the phenomenon.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Procedures for recruitment. Participants were recruited by advertising on paper flyers. The flyer detailed the nature of the study, criterion for participation, and the contact email address and phone number of the point-of-contact person (POA). As the researcher, I was the POA for this study. Participant recruitment flyers (see Appendix A) were placed in public libraries, churches, gyms, colleges, and restaurants. I requested, in person, permission to place recruitment flyers soliciting study participants at these establishments. Personnel in charge of each facility were informed of the nature of this study and permission was secured to place flyers in places where the flyers were visible to an array of individuals. Interested participants who responded to the recruitment flyers went through an initial screening with me by phone.

Participants. The selection criteria for participation in this study was based upon (a) age (19 years and above), (b) experience of being bullied during adulthood, (c) the willingness to share experiences while participating in a doctoral dissertation study, (d) willingness to sit for a 60-minute interview, and (e) willingness to participate without payment. Adults who reported being bullied only during childhood (age 18 and below) were excluded from participating in this study.

Data collection. Data collection involved the following steps:

1. I displayed flyers soliciting study participants.
2. I communicated with potential participants via phone. During these conversations with potential participants, I clarified for them the purpose of the study and further screened them for eligibility.

3. I informed the participants that the study involved meeting for approximately 60 minutes for an in-person interview.
4. Each participant and I scheduled a date, place, and time for the in-person meeting.
5. Before each interview, I provided participants with informed consent and conducted the individual, in-person interviews. I recorded each interview and took additional notes.

Each in-person meeting was separated into two sections: (a) an information segment and (b) a data collection segment. The information segment occurred at the start of the meeting and lasted approximately 10 minutes. I did not ask research questions during this time. Instead, I discussed informed consent, detailing the purpose of this study, confidentiality, and the participants' right to withdraw from this study. I addressed the participants' questions and used that time to build rapport with the participant. The participant was provided with a five-minute break (when needed) after this segment.

The second segment of time involved data collection, which lasted approximately 50 minutes. I asked the participants the research questions and collected their responses during each semi-structured in-person interview. I conducted interviews until saturation was reached. Once saturation was achieved, I informed each participant that no further questions were necessary, and that I would contact them upon the completion of transcription to ensure accuracy. I recorded each interview with a digital voice recorder.

Data analysis plan. To obtain an overall understanding of the data, I conducted a data analysis in a series of six stages. Following these stages enabled me to describe, classify, organize, and interpret the data (Creswell, 2013). The outcome of following

these steps in a qualitative phenomenological study is to bracket the researcher's personal experience with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Following these steps helps to ensure that the focus remains on the participants. Upon completing the interviews, I thoroughly read the transcripts to identify significant statements detailing how the participants had experienced the phenomenon and identifying non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements. Following this step, I grouped significant statements into themes until saturation of themes was achieved. Next, I created a code manual that contained codes and definition of codes in order to help me analyze the data. The qualitative data analysis software NVivo was used to store, organize, and categorize the data to find the themes that emerged from the coding process. Detailed descriptions of how the participants explained their experiences with the phenomenon were written to form rich textual descriptions of their experiences.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness are addressed differently in qualitative studies than quantitative studies. For example, validity does not carry the same connotations, nor is it a companion of reliability or generalizability, as it is in quantitative research (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Creswell and Miller (2000) as reported in Creswell (2014), state that validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account (p. 201). Creswell suggested the following recommended strategies to enhance a researcher's ability to assess the accuracy of the findings: (a) triangulating; (b) member checking; (c) compiling rich, thick descriptions; (d) clarifying bias; (e) presenting negative or discrepant information; (f) spending prolonged time in the

field; (g) peer debriefing; and (h) external auditing. Therefore, I clarified bias, incorporated triangulation, included rich, thick descriptions, and undertook member checking to address issues of trustworthiness.

Ensuring Credibility/Clarifying Bias

Clarifying bias entails self-reflecting to identify and list how the researcher's own experiences and biases could have been used to influence the interpretation and approach to this study (Creswell, 2014). I maintained a detailed record of observations, feelings, impressions, and personal thoughts during data collection.

Triangulation

Triangulation involves corroborating evidence from various sources to shed light on a theme or perspective. Once evidence is located to document the codes or themes in different sources of data, triangulation of information occurs, thereby the validation of the research findings (Creswell, 2014).

Member Checking

Member checking is used to determine the accuracy of a study by soliciting the participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). I solicited participant feedback during the interviews by summarizing the responses and verifying with the participants the accuracy of my notes. After transcribing all of the interviews, I met individually with the participants for feedback to add to the credibility of this study.

Transferability/Rich Thick Descriptions

Providing descriptive statements that were credible makes duplicating this research easier for other researchers. Providing rich, thick descriptions will allow the readers to make decisions regarding transferability of the findings using the interview transcripts (Creswell, 2014). Rich, thick descriptions were used in the verbatim transcriptions that provided evidence of the actual responses of the participants. These steps increased the reliability of the interview outcome.

Ethical Procedures

Approval for Research

Permission to conduct research was obtained from the Walden University IRB. No recruitment or data collection occurred before IRB approval. After approval was secured for this study, I recruited male and female individuals who were aged 19 years and above and reported experiencing being bullied during adulthood. All participants were notified that participation was voluntary and they could choose to withdraw at any time during the study without further obligation. Informed consent was obtained from each participant at the start of the in-person meeting.

All participants were treated with respect during the recruiting and interviewing as well as after this study was completed. Randomly generated numbers in the data were used to identify the participants to protect their confidentiality. I secured the participants' personal information in a combination locked safe. Only I had the combination and access to the safe. All field notes, audiotapes, and transcripts were secured separately in a filing cabinet with a lock. Only I had access to the key and filing cabinet.

Treatment of Data

I recorded all interviews using a digital voice-recording machine. The digital voice recorder was stored in a locked container that was only accessible by me. Study participants were identified by an assigned number and gender. No identifying personal information associated with the participants was stored electronically or on paper. All recorded interviews, field notes, and any other documentation associated with this study will be stored for a minimum of five years.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I discussed the research design and rationale, as well as the role of the researcher. I outlined the participant selection method, instrumentation, and procedures for recruitment. Subsections included the data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

I review the purpose of this study and the research questions in Chapter 4. I describe the settings in which the interviews took place, the demographics of this qualitative phenomenological study, as well as data collection, data analysis, results. I conclude Chapter 4 with a summary and transition to Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

The foundation of this study was based on the insight that the adult victims of bullying possess varying levels of psychological, psychosocial, and emotional responses depending on their respective perceptions, experiences, and coping resources. The aim of this study was to ascertain and critically examine the coping processes and mechanisms that were adopted by the adult victims of bullying based on the outcome from the interviews. Specifically, there were four research questions that formed the focus of this study. The first research question sought to determine the participants' views on the description and experiences of bullying. The participants' perceptions on the coping processes and methods of bullying were assessed in research questions two and three. The purpose of the final research question was to investigate the emotional responses (reactions) associated with the adult victims of bullying experiences.

In the subsequent section, I describe the participants' demographics, discuss data collection, and provide an assessment on any unusual variations and circumstances that were not anticipated based on the study design. Data analysis and four main themes that were derived based on the outcome of the NVivo qualitative analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness related to the instrument of data collection (interview) are also presented. I conclude this chapter with a summary on the outcome of the qualitative data analysis with a specific focus on the four primary research questions.

There were no personal distinct aspects pertaining to the participants that influenced the outcome of the study or my interpretation of the data. Additionally,

during the entire period of the interview, there were no organizational issues, logistics challenges, or schedule delays that may have influenced the outcome of the study or my interpretation of the data.

Demographics

Participants demographics relate to the respondents' unique attributes, profiles, and characteristics that distinguish one individual from the other (Creswell, 2013). There are various demographic classifications that could have been applied to distinguish the interview participants. However, I used the basic demographic profiles of age and gender. The participants' demographic characteristics provide an important descriptive insight on how the research subjects would react in response to variations of the key aspects of the research (Sekaran, 2003). Creswell (2013) noted that the demographic attributes have an important influence in determining the experiences, perceptions, and responses to certain social stimuli.

Age and gender are considered relevant in explaining the coping mechanisms that are adopted by the adult victims of bullying (Giorgi, Leon-Perez & Arenas, 2015).

There were eight interview respondents (male = 4; female = 4), meaning that the participants were equally represented with regards to gender. The importance of fair gender representation was highlighted by Creswell (2013) who stated such a sample composition is likely to have less bias. Due to the criteria for participation, all the interview participants were age 19 and older. Age is important for this study given that individuals differ in terms of their experiences, perceptions, and cognitive responses to bullying depending on whether they are young or older adults (Gomes, Faria, &

Goncalves, 2013). Table 1 is a depiction of the demographic profile of the interview participants with respect to their ages.

Table 1

Interview Participants' Demographic Based on Age

Age group	Gender	Number of participants	Proportion
19-25 Years	Male (2), Female (1)	3	37%
26-35 Years	Male (2), Female (1)	2	25%
36-45 Years	Female (1)	2	25%
Above 46 Years	Female (1)	1	13%

The majority of the interview participants (38%) were within the age group of 19-25 years, followed by 25% of the respondents within the age groups 26-35 years and 36-45 years. Only one interview participant was within the age group of 46 years and above. Therefore, the sample was substantially biased towards young adults. It is possible that this bias might affect the nature of the emotional and cognitive response mechanisms that are adopted by majority of the interview participants (Harris, 2009).

Data Collection

Participants

Sixteen individuals responded to the recruitment flyer soliciting volunteers for this study. The initial sample of the interview participants consisted of nine volunteers who met the study criteria. However, due to the need to enhance detailed analysis and fair demographic representation of gender, I settled on the sample of eight interviewees. The remaining one participant was kept on standby

just in case an unplanned event occurred that resulted in the absence of a scheduled interviewee. The use of four male and four female participants resulted in a sample that was fairly represented based on gender.

Location

Five of the interviews took place in private rooms at two public libraries, one at a university library, and one at an apartment clubhouse. All interview locations were quiet places that provided privacy and security. The locations were chosen by the interviewees and agreed upon by me. The interviews took place over the span of 3 months (June – August 2019). The interviewees selected the date, time, and location of the interviews. The minimum duration of each interview was 60 minutes. However, where there was no saturation, the interview was extended beyond the 60-minute period.

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were utilized (see Appendix B). The structured component of the interview consisted of 10 formal questions, including the demographic attributes. The unstructured element of the interview consisted of contextual questions that were dependent on the participants' unique experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses to certain structured questions. I used a digital audio recorder, a Phillips Voice Tracer, to record the responses of the participants. Based on the audio recording, I created verbatim transcripts into Microsoft Word documents, which were used for data coding and thematic analysis in the NVivo QSR International software.

Variation in Data Collection

There was no substantial variation in the data collection plan as outlined in Chapter 3 because the interview sessions were organized as planned. One deviation from my initial plan was that some interviews spanned more than one hour given the interest and level of information pertaining to participants' experiences with bullying. These interviews helped to achieve saturation of the data. The second variation that was not anticipated in my initial plan is the equal number of male and female participants.

Evaluation of Unusual Circumstances

There were no unusual circumstances pertaining to the interview participants, to myself, or to the interview settings that might have influenced the outcome of the study. Specifically, all the interview participants presented themselves as scheduled and cooperated effectively. Furthermore, none of the interviewees opted out of the interview sessions at any time.

Data Analysis

Development of Themes

A summary on the distinct themes that were derived based on the inductive and thematic analysis is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

Table of Themes

Coding	Description and Experience of Bullying	Coping Processes to Bullying	Coping Methods to Bullying	Emotional Response to Bullying
Participant 1	Job-related Coercion	Calm	Confrontation	Low Self-Esteem
Participant 2	Social Exclusion	Ignored	Social Support	Social Anxiety
Participant 3	Verbal Abuse	Ignored	Confrontation	Low Self-Esteem
Participant 4	Physical Harm	Self-Blame	Retaliation	Physiological Strain
Participant 5	Job Demands	Empathized	Social Support	Mental Fatigue
Participant 6	Sexual Abuse	Switched	Physical Violence	Mental Stress
Participant 7	Job-related Intimidation	Focus	Retaliation	Mental Stress
Participant 8	Cyberthreats	Calm	Avoidance	Anxiety
Key Theme	Job Demands and Coercion	Retaliatory	Retaliatory	Mental Stress and Anxiety
		Calmness	Confrontation	Anxiety

Thematic Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was used to inductively define the individual coded elements for each participants' response to form a generalizable theme. This inductive thematic process was effectively applied by Machackova et al. (2013) to derive common themes that described the coping strategies used by the victims of cyberbullying in the Czech Republic. This process relies on the distributions of common codes to generate basic themes that capture the predominant insights and perceptions represented by the individual codes (Adams & Lawrence, 2011).

In defining the participants' descriptions and experiences of bullying, each of the eight participants was assigned a code that represented the perceptions of the bullying phenomenon. The individual codes ranged from "job-related coercion," "social exclusion," "cyberthreats," and "physical harm." However, in order to generate a

common inductive insight from the interview participants' responses, I identified the outcome of the thematic process analysis as "Job Demands and Coercion" as the most prevalent theme associated with the adult respondents' description and experiences with bullying.

Additionally, in defining the interview participants' coping processes to bullying, the distinct responses of the eight interviewees were also assigned a unique code. The relevant codes ranged from "calm," "ignored," "self-blame," "switched focus," and "empathize." Based on the inductive analysis, the predominant generalizable theme that was noted was "Calmness." The implication is that the common response by adult victims of bullying with regards to their coping processes was "calmness."

Furthermore, when assessing the adult victims of bullying coping methods, the eight responses were also assigned a unique code based on the common insight (theme) that was derived based on the interview replies. The stated individual codes included "confrontation," "retaliation," "physical violence," and "social support." The distinct codes representing the interviewees' replies were further assessed using inductive reasoning process and the common theme that was derived was "Retaliatory Confrontation."

Finally, in assessing the adult victims of bullying emotional response to bullying, each of the eight participants' responses were summarized using a distinct code. The individual codes that represented the participants' emotional responses to bullying included, "low self-esteem," "social anxiety," "physiological strain," "mental stress," and "mental fatigue." Based on the

inductive reasoning process, the common theme that captured the participants' emotional response to bullying was "Mental Stress and Anxiety."

Emergent theme 1. For each of the participants' responses with respect to the 10 interview questions (see Appendix B), a unique code was assigned to represent the perceived insight. In the case of the first research question that sought to ascertain the respondents' perceptions and experiences of bullying, the distinct codes were "job-related coercion," "social exclusion," "cyberthreats," "verbal abuse," "job demands," "sexual abuse," "job-related intimidation," and "physical harm." Job Demands and Coercion was the common theme based on the thematic and inductive analysis. The significance of the job-related demands and coercion is evidenced by the interview responses of participant 1: "Personally, I have experienced bullying in the workplace when my employer forced me to work for extended hours against my wish" (P1).

Emergent theme 2. The unique codes that captured the adult victims of bullying coping processes in response to any incidences of intimidation were defined by the following codes: "calm," "ignored," "self-blame," "switched focus," "empathize," and "switched focus." The Inductive and thematic assessment analysis revealed that the basic theme that captured the interview participants' coping processes to bullying was "Calmness." The importance of "calmness" as an appropriate coping processes in response to the incidence of bullying is highlighted by participant eight who was a victim of cyberbullying;

"When I was incited and harassed online, I just remained calm and focused my attention on other things" (P8).

Emergent theme 3. There were five distinct codes that were applied to describe the coping methods of the participants as outlined in the interview verbatim transcripts. The stated five codes include “confrontation,” “retaliation,” “physical violence,” “social support,” and “avoidance.” The outcome based on the inductive thematic analysis generalized the five codes into a single common theme, which was defined as “Retaliatory Confrontation.” The implication is that the majority of the interview participants mentioned retaliation and confrontation as the predominant form of coping method when faced with bullying. To illustrate the significance of retaliatory confrontation, I include a quote from participant 3, who was subjected to verbal abuse admitted to retaliation:

“When my colleague at work insulted me, I vented by saying a similar abusive word towards him” (P3).

Emergent theme 4. Similarly, the interview participants’ reactions with regards to their emotional responses to bullying were also coded into five distinct sub-themes. The unique codes for each of the eight participants were summarized as follows: “low self-esteem,” “social anxiety,” “physiological strain,” “mental stress,” and “mental fatigue.” Based on the inductive process reasoning and thematic analysis, the common theme with regards to the participants’ emotional response to bullying was “Mental Stress and Anxiety.” The insinuation is that the majority of the participants were emotionally affected in terms of their mental stress and anxiety. The significance of mental stress and anxiety as the most common emotional response was depicted by the responses from participant 5 who cited the intense job demands as the core form of bullying:

“In the subsequent weeks, I felt mentally stressed, fatigued and anxious due to the intense job demands in my workplace” (P5).

Discrepant cases. There were very few discrepant cases that were noted based on the interview response analysis. Specifically, unrealistic and abnormal responses such as feeling happy when subjected to physical abuse and intense work burnout were noted from the interview replies of the participants. Additionally, unrelated emotional effects such as feeling a headache in response to bullying were also noted. However, all the discrepant cases such as being happy and feeling a headache were excluded from the coding and thematic analysis because they did not represent the common perceptions among participants. This elimination approach was also effectively utilized by Bowling and Beehr (2006) who suggested that the inclusion of discrepant cases is likely to have an adverse effect on the reliability of the findings and the interpretations.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are important in establishing the validity of any research findings from the perspective of the researcher, the participants, and the readers. In the next section, I describe the measures that were adopted to enhance the credibility of the data, its transferability and dependability, and the confirmability of the interview outcome.

Credibility

Creswell (2014) noted that in qualitative research, there is a risk that the researchers' personal experiences and perceptions might influence the manner in which the interview or survey responses are interpreted. In the verbatim transcriptions of the interview responses, care was taken to ensure that only the interview responses as noted

from the digital audio recorder were incorporated for further analysis. This practice allowed limited room for the incorporation of my personal experiences and perceptions with regards to the coping strategies used by the adult victims of bullying.

Transferability

In order to enhance transferability, rich and thick descriptions were used in the verbatim transcriptions to provide evidence of the actual responses of the participants. The verbatim transcriptions present the exact interpretation of each interviewee's digitally recorded responses. These steps increased the reliability of the interview outcome because a different researcher would likely generate similar conclusions using the interview transcripts.

Dependability

The internal consistency related to the interview outcome and the thematic analysis was corroborated by locating and referencing the selected codes in both the digital audio recorder and the verbatim transcript. Specifically, given the high consistency, it was possible to locate a particular code using the information from both the digital audio recorded interviews and the verbatim transcripts. This practice enhanced the dependability of the interview results.

Confirmability

I applied member checking to promote confirmability of the interview results. In this context, I asked each of the participants to confirm the responses for all the 10 interview questions immediately after the session was over. This

approach enhanced reliability of the interview outcome because any considerable deviation from the participants' replies would be pointed out by the interviewee.

Results

In this section, I present the outcomes of the interviews with a specific focus to the four research questions that were delineated for this study.

Research Question 1

The purpose of research question 1 was to assess the participants' perceptions on the phenomenon of bullying and their respective experiences of bullying. The adult victims' perceptions and experiences to bullying based on the insight from the interview results are depicted in Figure 1.

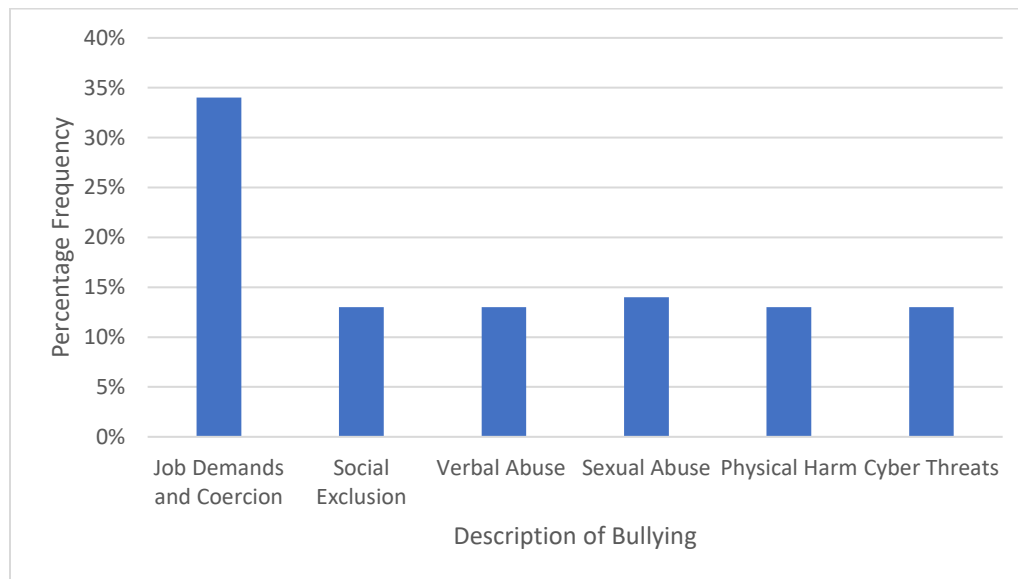


Figure 1. Participants' descriptions of bullying experiences.

A greater majority of the participants aged 19 years and above defined their bullying experience with a specific focus on the workplace setting. Essentially, 34% of the participants noted that their experiences with bullying pertained to intense job

demands and coercion. In this case, participant 1 was subjected to coercion at work: “Personally, I have experienced bullying in the workplace when my employer forced me to work for extended hours against my wish” (P1).

Based on the analysis, other descriptions of bullying that were evident from the interview transcripts and thematic analysis included social exclusion (13%), verbal abuse (13%), sexual abuse (14%), physical harm (13%), and cyberthreats (13%). The key discrepant case that was noted was job commitment, which was not included because it failed to meet the definition of bullying based on the work of Wolke and Lereya (2015).

Research Question 2

The basic aspect that informed the formulation of the research question 2 was to assess the coping processes that are adopted by the adult victims of bullying. The summary based on the thematic analytical insight of the basic coping processes to bullying is highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3

Participants’ Coping Processes to Bullying

Coping processes to bullying	
Calmness	62%
Self-Blame	13%
Empathize	13%
Switched Focus	12%

The results depict that 62% of the adult participants describe their primary coping process in response to bullying as being calm. Essentially, the insight reveals that majority of the participants remained calm during the bullying incidents. The other

evident coping processes that were applied by the participants include: empathize (13%), switched focus (12%) and self-blame (13%). The significance of calmness as the predominant coping process is highlighted as follows based on the interview transcripts of participant 7: “I just remained calm and did not respond in anyway as I watched my superior threaten me with a warning letter if I did not comply with his demands” (P7).

The discrepant case that was noted in one of the participants pertains to the feeling of being happy in response to bullying. The stated unusual response was not integrated as part of the analysis due to its potential to have an adverse effect on this study outcome.

Research Question 3

The basic aim of the research question 3 was to delineate the coping methods that are predominantly adopted by the adult victims of bullying. Table 6 and Figure 4 recaps the insight that was derived from the thematic analysis with respect to the coping methods that were used by the adult victims of bullying.

Table 4

Participants’ Coping Methods to Bullying

Coping methods to bullying	
Retaliatory Confrontation	62%
Social Support	25%
Avoidance	13%

The results highlighted in table 4 reveal that 62% of the participants confessed to using the retaliatory confrontation as the dominant coping method in reaction to being bullied by their perpetrators. Additionally, 25% of the respondents claimed that they

sought social support from friends, colleagues and the relevant higher authority whenever they were bullied. In this context, only 13% of the interview participants adopted the avoidance tactic as the coping method in response to bullying. The significance of the retaliatory confrontation is highlighted by the interview transcripts of participant 3: “When my colleague at work insulted me, I vented by saying a similar abusive word toward him” (P3).

In the case of the coping methods that were applied by the adult victims of bullying, there was no discrepant case, which became evident from the assessment of the interview transcripts.

Research Question 4

The aim of the research question 4 was to ascertain the adult victims of bullying emotional and cognitive response when faced by any form of bullying phenomenon.

Table 5 depict the outcome on the participants’ emotional responses towards bullying.

Table 5

Participants’ Emotional Response to Bullying

Emotional response to bullying	
Mental Stress and Anxiety	62%
Low Self-Esteem	25%
Physiological Strain	13%

The mental stress and anxiety (62%) were noted by the adult interview participants as the main form of emotional response towards bullying. This means that majority of the interview participants felt mentally stressed and anxious after the bullying incident. Additionally, the low self-esteem (25%) was also highlighted as the other key

form of emotional response that was experienced by the adult victims of bullying who were interviewed. In this case, only 13% of the participants experienced physiological strain as a form of emotional reaction to bullying. The significance of mental stress and anxiety as the predominant aspect of emotional response to bullying is highlighted by the verbatim transcripts of the participant 5:

“In the subsequent weeks, I felt mentally stressed, fatigued and anxious due to the intense job demands in my workplace” (P5).

The main discrepant case that was not included in the analysis based on the interview participants emotional reaction to bullying relates to the feeling of headache. The primary justification is that the headache might have been caused by other conditions although research evidence indicates that it can result as an indirect effect from trauma (Chang, 2017).

Summary

The results of the study highlighted the fact that a significant percentage (34%) of the participants revealed that their experiences with being bullied occurred in a workplace setting. A greater proportion of the participants defined their bullying experience as related to the intense job demands and coercion. Additionally, with regards to the coping processes that are adopted by the adult victims of bullying, the option of remaining calm was preferred by most participants who were interviewed. In terms of the coping methods that were used by the adult victims of bullying, the option of retaliatory confrontation and seeking social support from people in friends and colleagues were the predominant tactics that were employed by the adult victims of bullying. Finally, the main emotional

response to bullying relates to mental stress and anxiety followed by the feeling of low self-esteem.

The next chapter presents the implication of the results with a specific reference to the theoretical and the empirical findings. The limitation, recommendations and implications of this study will also be highlighted in the discussion section. Finally, the conclusion with respect to the coping processes and methods that are adopted by the adult victims of bullying is also presented in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The primary purpose of this study was to ascertain the constructs of coping processes and methods, and the emotional responses to the phenomenon of bullying among adult victims. This study was undertaken as a phenomenological qualitative study because it relied on the interview participants' perceptions and experiences of bullying to generate the relevant conclusions and inferences. This study was conducted with a definitive aim of addressing the existing research gap related to the constructs of coping among adult victims of bullying. Essentially, this study derives motivation based on the insight that there are limited studies that have examined how adult victims of bullying cope with bullying.

A key finding in this study is that adult victims of bullying experienced the phenomenon within the context of the workplace setting. Specifically, the majority of the participants noted that they experienced bullying in the form of intense job demands and coercion. Additionally, the option of being calm was noted by the majority of the interview participants as the main coping process employed by the adult victims of bullying in response to bullying. Furthermore, retaliatory confrontation and social support were considered as the main coping methods that were applied by the participants in response to bullying incidents. Finally, mental stress and anxiety were the predominant emotional responses to bullying.

Interpretation of the Findings

The interpretation of the findings is organized with a specific focus on the four research questions defined for this study. The interpretation of the findings is described with a specific focus on the Lazarus and Folkman (1986) transaction theory of stress and

coping. According to this theoretical framework, individuals utilize the primary and secondary appraisal tools when they encounter stressful events. The implication is that the degree to which the victims of bullying cope with stressful events depends on the effectiveness of the primary and the secondary appraisal tools. The primary appraisal aspect assists the individuals in deciding whether such traumatic incidences are consistent with the prior experiences (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Additionally, the secondary appraisals define the resources of the victims of bullying for coping with bullying (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Furthermore, a discussion and interpretation of the findings is undertaken with a specific focus on prior research findings related to the constructs of coping among the adult victims of bullying.

Theme 1

The primary theme 1 is defined in terms of the first research question. The first research question sought to ascertain how the adult victims of bullying define bullying and their specific experiences to bullying. The thematic analysis results from the interview participants' description and experiences to bullying indicated that the common emerging theme pertains to the intense job demands and coercion. The implication is that most of the interview participants were exposed to job-related bullying in the workplace setting. Some of the job-related bullying experiences included coercion, intimidation, sexual abuse, and intense job demands, resulting in employee burnout. Furthermore, social exclusion, verbal abuse, and cyberthreats were also mentioned as some of the bullying experiences encountered by the adult victims.

Results regarding bullying perceptions and experiences are consistent with the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). According to the JD-R model, job strains and demands are considered as the most predominant form of bullying in the workplace. The main justification for the integration of the job demands and job strain as a form of bullying is due to the fact that in some informal occupations, which are not regulated by the workers union, the adult victims are helpless in terms of the resources that they can adopt to cope with the stated adverse experiences (Mackey & Perrewe, 2014). Essentially, based on the conservation of resources theory, adult victims of bullying are forced to persevere with the traumatic experience at work with the ultimate aim of safeguarding their job security, which is why there are several incidences of bullying among adults occurring in the workplace situations (Mackey & Perrewe, 2014).

Theme 2

Theme 2 is defined with respect to the second research question. The purpose of the second research question was to assess the main coping processes used by adult victims of bullying to deal with the traumatic feelings during and after the experience of being bullied. The insight from the thematic analysis depicted that majority of the interview participants (62%) usually remain calm during and after the bullying incident. In other words, a number of the interview participants chose to either disregard the bullying incident and remain calm as they received abuse, harassments, and intimidation. Additionally, 13% of the interview participants opted to blame themselves as the cause of the bullying. Furthermore, 13% of the participants also empathized with the perpetrators of the bullying incident given their nature and the resources at their disposal. The use of

empathy by 13% of the participants as a coping mechanism was evident in the participant who encountered intense job demands. In this case, the participant noted that he empathized with the situation that his manager was experiencing due to the backlog.

The finding that most of the participants chose to remain calm during the bullying incident as an appropriate coping mechanism is supported by the Lazarus and Folkman (1986) stress and coping theoretical model. According to the theoretical framework, the response by the victims of bullying depends considerably on the resources at their disposal. In this case, given that majority of the adult victims of bullying experienced the traumatic incident in the workplace setting, implies that the perpetrators have considerable resources compared to the victims. This finding is supported by the conservation of resources theory, which purports that the victims of bullying experienced in the workplace setting have limited resources and options to address the traumatic phenomenon. Essentially, most of them are pre-occupied with retaining their job security, which means that they are most likely to remain calm as the abuse, coercion, intimidation, and insults are directed towards them (Copeland et al., 2013).

Theme 3

The basic insight pertaining to theme 3 relates to the predominant coping methods employed by the adult victims of bullying in response to the stated traumatic phenomenon. Essentially, theme 3 sought to assess the coping methods that are adopted by the adult victims of bullying to manage the bullying phenomenon. The insight based on the thematic analysis is that 62% of the participants confessed to using the retaliatory confrontation when faced with the bullying incident. The results imply that majority of the victims either retaliated or used confrontation as their methods for coping with the

bullying. Retaliatory confrontation was mainly evident among the adult victims of bullying who encountered job-related intimidation, physical harm, and abuse insults. Additionally, the use of social support was cited as the most common coping method employed by the interview participants. In this aspect, the participants opted to report the bullying incident to a senior official such as the manager, law enforcement agencies, and other individuals that hold positions of high authority. Finally, the thematic analysis also revealed that 13% of the victims opted to completely avoid the bullying incidence as an appropriate coping method.

The finding that interview participants used retaliatory confrontation as the predominant coping method captures the theoretical framework, the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986). According to the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986), the secondary appraisal aspects, including the resources at disposal, have a considerable influence in determining the coping methods that are adopted by the victims of adult bullying. The fact that the participants opted to retaliate and confront the perpetrators implies that they had considerable financial and other resources to support their actions (Cross, 2016). A different perspective is that the victims' coping methods might be influenced by their cognitive and mental strength (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). In other words, the victims' cognitive and mental strength had a considerable influence in shaping their emotional reactions to certain adverse events (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013).

Theme 4

Theme 4 represents the adult victims' emotional responses to being bullied, including short-term and long-term cognitive, behavioral, and emotional reactions. The

insight that was derived from the thematic analysis in this study revealed that 62% of the interview participants experienced mental stress and anxiety as a result of being exposed to the bullying phenomenon. Most of the participants who encountered social exclusion, job-related bullying, and cyberthreats reported mental stress and anxiety as the adverse response to being bullied. Additionally, 25% of the adult victims of bullying also reported that they experienced low self-esteem as a result of being bullied. The low-self-esteem emotional response was mostly prevalent among the adult victims who encountered job-related coercion in the workplace setting. Finally, only 13% of the interview participants experienced physiological strain as a result of encountering physical harm from the violent actions of the perpetrators.

The results of this study regarding the emotional response of the adult victims of bullying concurs with the empirical findings of Machackova et al. (2013), who concluded that majority of the cyberbullying victims in their study experienced negative emotions including depression, stress, and anxiety. Likewise, the results of this study mirror those of Gini and Pozzoli (2013), who found that the majority of the adult victims and children who experience bullying tend to experience adverse psychosocial and psychological effects that affected their quality of life. Similarly, as purported by the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986), victims of bullying who encounter psychological trauma tend to have adverse experiences that affect their overall perception of such incidences in the future.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study was that the research findings rely on the interview insights from a limited sample of participants. Specifically, the face-

to-face interview was conducted with eight interviewees who agreed to participate in this study. The most ideal sample size for conducting qualitative phenomenological studies that rely on interviews is 25-30 respondents (Creswell, 2014). The implication based on the stated limitation is that the findings may not be reliably inferred to the general adult population due to the restricted sample size (Creswell, 2014).

The other limitation associated with this study was the risk of my bias influencing the overall perceptions and responses of the participants (Sekaran, 2003). Additionally, my experiences and perceptions might have also influenced the reliability of the verbatim transcripts, which are recorded based on the insight revealed in the digitally recorded interview. However, I addressed this limitation through participants' confirmations that the transcripts were accurate. Moreover, I took care to ensure that the verbatim transcripts matched the digital audio recorded information. The final limitation of this study is related to the thematic analysis used to analyze the interview transcripts. According to Creswell (2014), the primary restriction (weakness) of thematic analysis and inductive reasoning is the high possibility of bias when interpreting the interview responses. In other words, the formulation of the themes is likely to be affected by the participants' bias if appropriate mechanisms are not put in place to avoid such a scenario. However, I addressed this potential bias by using the NVivo QSR software to conduct thematic analysis.

Recommendations

In this study, the majority of the adult victims of bullying experienced the traumatic phenomenon in the workplace setting. The thematic analysis revealed that most of the adult victims experienced mental stress and anxiety as a form of emotional response to being bullied. According to the conservation of resource theory, the victims' lack of alternative options might explain their decisions to preserve in such situations (Hobfoll, Freedy, Lane, & Geller, 1990). Therefore, I recommend that organizations set up effective reporting centers to address incidences of bullying among employees in such a manner that those affected feel free to report without being retaliated against or stigmatized. In addition, I propose that corporate entities consider setting up counseling sessions for the employees who have encountered bullying in the workplace setting. This practice is likely to be important in enhancing the employees' welfare, mental health, and overall work productivity given the adverse effects that are associated with bullying in the workplace (Heames & Harvey, 2006).

In the case of the general population other than the workplace setting, I recommend the formulation of appropriate anti-bullying legislations in various institutions and within community settings. The adoption of such legislations to combat adult bullying may reduce incidences of physical harm, abusive insults, cyber threats, and social exclusion. Furthermore, the relevant authorities should also consider setting up community counseling centers to address the long-term psychological and related psychosocial needs of the victims of adult bullying. This proposal is based on the fact that the majority of the adult victims of bullying who have weak resilience and poor mental

strength are likely to experience depression and have suicidal thoughts as forms of emotional response to bullying (Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2002).

Implications

Positive Social Change

If my recommendations are adopted, I anticipate that they will have considerable positive implications for the social lives of adult victims of bullying, including increased resiliency and reduced rates of depression and suicidal thoughts. I expect that the findings of this study will inform the adoption of positive social change policy actions, promoting the welfare of adult victims of bullying at the community level and within organizational settings.

Methodological Implications

The primary methodological implication of this study is that the findings are not generalizable because of the limited sample size of eight participants. In other words, the results may not represent the exact attributes of adult victims of bullying within the population.

Theoretical Implications

This study has considerable implications for the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986). Specifically, the results of this study align with the primary and the secondary appraisal aspects likely to determine adult victims' emotional responses to bullying. Similarly, the findings of this study have considerable implications for the conservation of resource theory, which states that the desire to safeguard limited resources forces adult victims of bullying to persevere.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of this study have implications for the researchers who seek to ascertain the coping processes and methods adopted by adult victims of bullying. Essentially, to address the limitations of the present study, I recommend that researchers consider conducting interviews using more than 25 participants.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to determine the coping processes and methods that are utilized by adult victims of bullying in response to the traumatic phenomenon. The most significant finding in this study is that most of the bullying incidences experienced by the adults were encountered in the workplace. Additionally, although the majority of the participants in this study opted to remain calm during the incidents because of job security concerns, it should be noted that some of adult victims engaged in retaliatory confrontations. Finally, most of the adult victims of bullying experienced mental stress, depression, and anxiety in response to bullying.

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Research Question 1

1. What does the word bullying mean to you?

2. Can you describe what bullying experience or experiences you have had as an adult?

Research Question 2

3. Can you tell me what you were thinking when you were being bullied?

4. What were your thoughts after you were bullied?

Research Question 3

5. Can you tell me what specific things you did when you were being bullied?

6. Can you describe what specific things you did after you were bullied?

Research Question 4

7. Can you describe how you felt when you were being bullied?

8. Is there any specific emotion or emotions you experienced when you were being bullied?

9. Is there a specific emotion or emotions you experienced after you were bullied?

10. How do you feel about being an adult victim of bullying?

Appendix C: Categories and Themes

Coding	Description and Experience of Bullying	Coping Processes to Bullying	Coping Methods to Bullying	Emotional Response to Bullying
Participant 1	Job-related Coercion	Calm	Confrontation	Low Self-Esteem
Participant 2	Social Exclusion	Ignored	Social Support	Social Anxiety
Participant 3	Verbal Abuse	Ignored	Confrontation	Low Self-Esteem
Participant 4	Physical Harm	Self-Blame	Retaliation	Physiological Strain
Participant 5	Job Demands	Empathized	Social Support	Mental Fatigue
		Switched		
Participant 6	Sexual Abuse	Focus	Physical Violence	Mental Stress
	Job-related			
Participant 7	Intimidation	Calm	Retaliation	Mental Stress
Participant 8	Cyberthreats	Calm	Avoidance	Anxiety
	Job Demands and		Retaliatory	Mental Stress and
Key Themes	Coercion	Calmness	Confrontation	Anxiety