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The Moderating Role of Positive Psychological Capital in the Relationship Between Social Undermining and Identification in The Workplace

Ali Isam Al-soltane
College of Administration and Economics, Business Administration Department, University of Al-Qadisiyah

Abstract: Social undermining at the workplace is a major threat to the welfare of employees, especially in the education sector, where social bonds are crucial. This paper examines how supervisor and coworker undermining affects the individual identification among education personnel in the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate, Iraq. Based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study also ex-amines the moderating effect of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) dimensions, which are Self-Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience. The samples were purposively selected and consisted of 325 staff members whose data were collected by a purposive sampling approach and analyzed by the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The findings indicate that supervisor and co-worker social undermining are strong contributors to the decrease of staff identification. Nonetheless, moderation analysis underscores the defensive strength of the personal resources. Resilience was found to be a universal buffer-moderator, which reduced the adverse impacts of super-visor and colleague undermining. Self-efficacy buffered against supervisor undermining, whereas Hope and Optimism moderated against coworker undermining. The findings are informative to the literature in that they prove that although workplace toxicity undermines a sense of identification, individuals can be defended against these negative outcomes by specific psychological strengths. The paper recommends that learning institutions ought to proactively develop PsyCap in order to have a more resilient and interconnected labor force.

Keywords: Social Undermining, Identification, Psychological Capital, Resilience, Educational Staff, Iraq

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1. Introduction

The workplace is no longer only a place of economic production but a complicated social space in which interpersonal relationships play an important role in influencing employee welfare and organizational performance. In this regard, the quality of relationships (good and bad) is critical in defining the psychological attachment of an individual towards his or her work. Although a significant amount of research has been done on the advantages of social support, recent studies have begun to examine the negative side of organizational behavior, namely, social undermining. Social undermining is a pernicious menace to organizational well-being as defined by [1] as actions that aim at impairing the ability of a worker to develop and sustain positive interpersonal connections, work-related success, and positive reputation. At the same time, the human need for identification, the need to have stable and effective relations, is one of the primary motivations. The loss of this feeling of belonging can be harmful in the school setting, where teamwork is a key component. Nonetheless, people are not mere victims of the environment; according to

Positive Organizational Behavior (POB), personal resources, especially Psychological Capital (PsyCap) as defined by [2], might enable employees to overcome unfavorable social climates.

Although the literature on mistreatment in the workplace is increasing, there is still a gaping need to understand how certain negative behaviors, including undermining by super-visors and colleagues, directly affect the sense of identification among educational professionals in non-Western settings. Although Rehmat, et al. [3] have discussed the effects of undermining on employee voice and Yildiz [4] has addressed organizational identification, the situation in the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate in Iraq has not been studied extensively. Moreover, although PsyCap is commonly examined as a composite measure, there is less information regarding how the separate elements of the construct, Self-Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience, play their own role as variables against social undermining. The research issue that this paper will focus on is the susceptibility of the educational personnel to the corrosive impact of workplace undermining that jeopardizes their professional integration as reflected in the Need for Identification scale [5], and the lack of knowledge on how certain psychological strengths can be tapped to counter such threats. In the absence of this knowledge, interventions to facilitate educational staff will be generalized instead of focusing on particular protective psychological resources.

To address these gaps, this research paper examines the essential interaction between adverse interpersonal processes and an individual's sense of identification. The main aim is to test the direct influence of social undermining by supervisors and colleagues on the identifi-cation of educational personnel. The study also aims at investigating the moderating effect of personal psychological strengths, i.e., examining the independent effect of Self-Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience on the correlation between undermining and identification. With the help of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) applied to the data gathered among 325 personnel in the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate, the following research questions are answered: To what extent does undermining by supervisors and colleagues lower levels of identification? And, which four different elements of Psychological Capital mediate these negative rela-tionships?

The study has great theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it expands the conservation of resources (COR) theory by showing how certain personal resources, pegged on the underlying PsyCap work of Luthans, et al. [2], guard against resource depletion (belong-ingness) due to environmental stressors (undermining). It also adds to the body of knowledge on workplace mistreatment in the Middle Eastern educational setting, answering the calls of more diverse cultural research in organizational psychology, as recent studies by Abid, et al. [6] and Malik and Björkqvist [7] did. In real life, the implications of the findings on educational administration and human resource development are immense. The study proposes that in-terventions need not only be aimed at decreasing the negative behaviors detected by Duffy, et al. [1] but should also be proactive in developing such psychological strengths by means of training, since the study finds that resilience, hope, optimism, and self-efficacy are protective factors against toxicity. It is a twofold strategy that enables the educational personnel to retain their sense of belonging and professionalism despite adverse interpersonal climates.

The rest of this research paper is designed in such a way that it will give a detailed dis-cussion of these relationships. The literature review, based on this introduction, summarizes the existing studies on social undermining, workplace identification, and Psychological Capital to develop hypotheses of the study. The methodology section describes the sampling process in the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate, how the measurement scales, such as those used by Duffy, et al. [1] and Mayhew, et al. [5], were adjusted, and the analysis methods based on SmartPLS 4. Then, the findings based on the structural model are provided, with direct and moderating effects. Lastly, the discussion explains these findings in terms of past studies, the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and the research directions.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

The general theoretical framework that the current study will be based on is the Con-servation of Resources (COR) theory that was initially introduced by Hobfoll [8] and sub-sequently developed by [9]. COR theory assumes that people have a motivational urge to acquire, upkeep, and guard their resources, which is broadly defined as anything that is seen by the individual as aiding him or her in the accomplishment of objectives or in managing stress. The resources may be objects (e.g., possessions), personal traits (e.g., self-esteem, skills), conditions (e.g., marital status, employment), or energies (e.g., time, money). The cause of stress occurs when people are threatened with losing resources, or their resources are lost, or they cannot get resources despite investing them [10].

The concept of a sense of identification is being defined in the framework of the workplace as a condition resource, which plays a crucial part in the well-being, engagement, and stability of an individual in his or her working place [5, 10]. It is a psychological bond and a sense of belonging to the organization and the employees. On the other hand, Social Un-dermining, be it by the supervisors or coworkers, is a potent source of resource threat and resource loss [1]. These adverse interpersonal actions directly slur the social standing, reputa-tion, and emotional reserves of an individual and thus exhaust the available resources and hinder the obtainment of additional ones. This kind of depletion is a direct route to lower identification and stress.

Moreover, COR theory also focuses on the significance of resource caravans, whereby initial resource gains result in additional gains and vice versa; resource losses may develop into additional losses. Nevertheless, the theory assumes that people have personal resources that are capable of counteracting the loss of resources. In this research, Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and its four dimensions, Self-Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience, are the major personal resources [2]. Based on the buffering hypothesis that is based on COR, individuals who are gifted with greater amounts of such personal resources are in a better position to absorb the negative effects of environmental stressors, including social undermining, and, as a result, save their treasured condition resource of identification [6, 7]. This framework provides an op-portunity to take a closer look at the ways in which certain psychological strengths can serve as defensive tools in order to prevent toxicity in the workplace.

2.2. Social undermining and Sense of identification

Social undermining is a quiet and insidious form of mistreatment at work, which is different from overt aggression or bullying, because it is mostly accompanied by subtle and covert actions that are directed to damage the reputation, relationships, or work performance of a colleague [1]. Such actions may include rumors and backhanded compliments to not sharing information needed, and sabotaging work. The resultant impact of these measures is severe damage to the social and psychological well-being of the target. Social undermining and the effect it has on the feeling of identification in an individual is especially critical. Belongness is one of the basic human needs [5] whose nature is based on the sense of being accepted, valued, and included in social groups. When an employee feels undermined, particularly repeatedly, his or her feeling of acceptance and inclusion is directly put into question. It may result in isolation, alienation, and less attachment to the workplace [4].

Whether the undermining is done by a supervisor or a colleague, the source of under-mining may have a significant effect on the impact. The undermining by supervisors is espe-cially destructive because of the power imbalance. Supervisors influence key resources, such as job placements, performance reviews, and promotions. Undermining by the supervisor not only affects the direct work setting of an employee but is also an indication of overall lack of support by an important figure in the organization, which directly threatens the psychological safety and value of an employee in the organization [3]. Such an open

disapproval can drain the employee of much of his or her self-confidence in his or her place in the organization. Although coworker undermining does not imply direct control over the career of an employee, it is also harmful since it assaults the horizontal social structure of the workplace. Familiar people are the most common ones to receive daily social support, companionship, and cooperation. Once this support system becomes toxic by undermining behaviors, employees get a strong feeling of betrayal and rejection by their immediate workgroup [1]. The absence of peer support may cause social isolation and the feeling of connectedness to the team and the organization as a whole. Considering this, we are hypothesizing:

H1: Supervisor-initiated social undermining adversely affects the feeling of identification of educational staff significantly.

H2: Coworker social undermining has a great adverse effect on the sense of identification with educational staff.

2.3. PsyCap Moderation of Supervisor Undermining.

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is a higher order that comprises four positive psychological resources, which include Self-Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience [2]. These resources are state-like, i.e., they are developmental and manageable. COR theory states that these are personal resources that can serve as psychological buffers, which shield individuals against the adverse effects of loss of resources [9]. This paper examines each PsyCap component in a unique moderation relationship with particular undermining sources. A figure of authority may lead to a supervisor undermining, which may result in a very challenging and threatening en-vironment. Personal psychological resources are likely to be critical in the ability of employees to overcome this type of undermining.

Self-efficacy is a personal conviction in the ability of an individual to effectively implement courses of action to attain certain objectives [2]. Highly self-efficacious employees tend not to internalize the criticism or sabotage of a supervisor when it comes to self-efficacy and un-dermining. Rather, they have such confidence in their capabilities that they are able to stay focused on their work and efforts even when the supervisor tries to erode their professional identity and self-belonging ([7].

Hope is defined by a goal-focused will and the perceived capability to create avenues that will help one to reach the goals [6]. High-hope employees faced by an undermining boss are likely to find other ways or views of handling the situation to overcome the problem. They consider the challenges, such as supervisory negativity, as short-term hindrances instead of insurmountable obstacles to enable them to see an optimistic future in the workplace, thus sustaining their sense of identification [6].

Optimism is a positive attitude and positive attribution concerning future events [2]. The negative events of the life of an optimistic person are more likely to be ascribed to external, volatile, and particular factors, such as an undermining supervisor in contrast to internalizing them as individual failures or threats to others. Such an attributional style will help avoid eroding the self-worth and positive attitude of the employee towards the workplace in general, as the negative actions of the supervisor won't seep deep into their soul, which will help maintain the sense of identification [7].

Resilience refers to the ability to recover after an adversity, failure, or a major change [2]. In the case of supervisor undermining, members of educational staff with high levels of re-silience have the mental strength to overcome emotional losses swiftly and change their coping mechanisms. Their capacity to deal with negative experiences without permanently damaging their sense of self and belonging in the organization serves as an effective buffer, which protects their identification [6].

H3a: Supervisor social undermining and identification are moderated by self-efficacy such that the negative correlation between the two is less pronounced in individuals with high self-efficacy.

H3b: Hope is a moderator between social undermining by supervisors and identification, such that the

negative correlation is less among people with high hope.

H3c: Optimism mediates between social undermining by supervisors and identification, whereby the negative association between the two is less strong among individuals having high optimism.

H3d: The association between social undermining by supervisors and identification is moderated by resilience, such that individuals with high resilience have a less negative rela-tionship with the two.

2.4. PsyCap moderation of Coworker Undermining

The concept of coworker undermining is aimed at an employee's social level of integra-tion, that is, at the interaction on a peer level and the feeling of camaraderie that is essential to a harmonious work setting. Such effects can also be buffered by psycap components, but perhaps with varying emphasis.

Self-efficacy is critical in the performance of tasks and coping with authority figures, but may have a different effect in reducing the effects of peer-based social undermining. High self-efficacy employees may have confidence in their skills to cope with interpersonal conflicts and establish their social status, even with their colleagues. This trust can be used to ensure that they do not succumb to the social exclusion strategies that are usually used in undermining their colleagues, hence preserving their social networks and belonging.

Hope helps people have a positive attitude and strive towards achieving things regardless of their challenges [7]. When coworkers are undermined, the hopeful employees will tend to think that they can revive the positive relationships with the coworkers or they may establish new positive relationships. The proactive attitude towards imagining solutions and positive interactions in the future also makes them stay active and connected, and they do not lose their identity [6].

The positive attributional style of optimism may be especially helpful when it comes to coworker undermining. When peers are involved in undermining behaviors, optimistic people can explain such behavior as attributing it to particular, transient, or external causes (e.g., they are having a bad day, it is not directed at me, etc.) instead of personalizing the attack or seeing it as a lasting disruption of social bonds. This optimistic perception can be used to safeguard their feelings of social acceptance and indetification [7].

Resilience is a key psychological asset of coping with any kind of interpersonal stress, such as undermining by coworkers. Strong personalities have the emotional strength to take social hits and quickly overcome the sense of rejection or anger, and respond to stressful social situations. This resiliency helps them to continue to feel stable and connected in the workplace despite the existence of undermining behavior [6].

H4a: Self-efficacy is a moderating effect between social undermining by coworkers and identification, where the negative relationship between them is smaller in high self-efficacy individuals.

H4b: Hope moderates the hope coworker social undermining/identification relationship, where the negative relationship is less strong in individuals with high hope.

H4c: Optimism will moderate the correlation between social undermining by coworkers and identification, where individuals with the highest optimism have a weaker negative correlation.

H4d: There is a moderating effect of resilience between social undermining by coworkers and identification, whereby the negative association between the two is less pronounced among high-resilience individuals.

Thus, the framework is as follows.

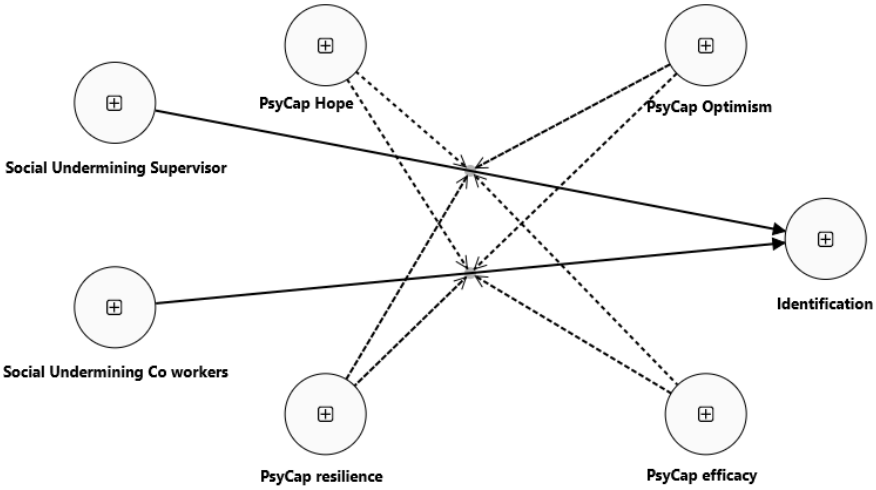


Figure 1. Framework

3. Materials and Methods

In this section, the research design, data-collection methods, demographics of the par-ticipants, measurement scales, and the method used to analyze the relationship between social undermining, psychological capital, and identification among the educational personnel of the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate, Iraq are described.

3.1. Collection of data and sample

The sample used in this research was the members of staff in the education sector in the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate in Iraq. The purposive sampling method was used to recruit the participants who were actively engaged in different education-related jobs (e.g., teachers, administrators, support staff) and had direct experience in terms of interpersonal dynamics in the workplace. The reason behind the use of this non-probability sampling ap-proach is that it is effective when it is necessary to explore a certain population within a specific geographical and organizational setting to gain in-depth knowledge of the workplace phe-nomena in an area where access to such data can be both delicate and difficult [11].

The appropriate authorities in the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate were able to provide ethical approval. All the potential participants were given an informed consent form before data collection, explaining the purpose of the study, anonymity and confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The consent of the participants was obtained through filling in and submitting the questionnaire. The data were gathered using self-administered questionnaires that were administered using specific liaisons in different schools and administrative offices in order to have a wide coverage. The ques-tionnaires were given out in Arabic, translated by a bilingual professional, and back-translated to guarantee semantic and cultural suitability [12]. The total number of questionnaires that were distributed was 350, and a total of 325 responses that could be used were received, and the response rate was about 92.86. The data collection exercise took a period of two months, and this gave the participants sufficient time to fill out the surveys carefully.

3.2. Participants Profile

The last sample was 325 teachers of the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate. The de-mographic description of the participants is presented in Table 1, which provides a whole picture of the sample makeup of the study.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	145	44.6
	Female	180	55.4
Age Group (Years)	25-34	98	30.2
	35-44	121	37.2
	45-54	84	25.8
	55+	22	6.8
Educational Level	Diploma	35	10.8
	Bachelor's Degree	205	63.1
	Master's Degree	70	21.5
	PhD	15	4.6
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	60	18.5
	5-10 years	110	33.8
	11-20 years	105	32.3
	More than 20 years	50	15.4
Position	Teacher	210	64.6
	Administrator	80	24.6
	Support Staff	35	10.8

3.3. Measures

Measurement of all constructs was based on a 7-point Likert scale, 1 (Strongly Disagree/Never) to 7 (Strongly Agree/Always) to ensure consistency and assist in statistical analysis. Social Undermining (Independent Variable): The social undermining was measured using the adapted scales of Duffy, et al. [1], with a distinction of the undermining conducted by the supervisor and the undermining conducted by a colleague. In every sub-scale, there were 13 items. Undermining by a Supervisor: Sample item provided, "How frequently has your supervisor... purposely... Hurt your feelings?"

Undermining by a Coworker: Sample item was, "How often has the coworker nearest to you purposely... Insulted you?" These scales represent different aspects of covert and overt actions to impair the reputation or the working efficiency of a colleague.

Identification was assessed through the sub-scale of the Need for Identification scale, namely, nID-identification, which consisted of 5 items [5]. This scale is used to measure the psychological attachment and sense of belonging in his or her work groups. Sample item: I like being a member of

The Psychological Capital (PsyCap) was measured with the help of certain items of the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24) developed by Luthans, et al. [2]. The four constructs used, Self-Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience, were measured using 6 items, 24 in total, of PsyCap. Self-Efficacy (6 items): Determines how an individual believes that he or she will succeed in doing difficult tasks. Sample item: I am confident that I can represent my work area during a meeting with the management. Hope (6 items): Indicates goal-focused energy and the perceived capability to create avenues to the realization of such goals. Sample item: "In case I were in a jam at work, I would be able to think of numerous ways to get out of it. Optimism (6 items): Measures positive attributional style and generalised positive prospects of future events. Sample question: When it comes to work, I tend to anticipate the best when things are not clear to me. Resilience (6 items): The ability to withstand the challenges and change. Sample item: "Whenever I experience a failure at work, I cannot get out of it and move on. (Note: This would be reverse-coded, meaning that the higher the score, the more resilient).

3.4. Justification of PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4

The primary analytical tool that has been selected in the given study is Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), and the analysis was performed with the help of SmartPLS 4 software [13]. This design decision can be explained by a number of reasons related to the aims of the study and the specificity of the data. To begin with, PLS-SEM is especially fitting when the focus is on prediction and exposition of target constructs, which is why it is suitable to conduct the study of complex relationships, with moderation effects, as is the case here [14]. Our study seeks to know the predictive and buffering role of PsyCap elements on the effects of social undermining on identification, which is in line with the predictive orientation of PLS-SEM.

Secondly, the PLS-SEM is a strong procedure that places fewer requirements on the normality of data distributions than covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), which is beneficial during the processing of real-world social science data that do not necessarily follow multivariate normal distributions [15]. This is a positive feature due to the specifics of self-report data in a particular professional setting.

Third, the model includes several latent constructs having multiple indicators and complicated interaction characteristics (moderation effects). PLS-SEM is effective in managing this complexity of models and gives credible estimates of path coefficients and interaction effects, even with comparatively small sample sizes [14]. Inasmuch as our sample size of 325 is sufficient in both PLS-SEM and CB-SEM, PLS-SEM is an effective tool because of its ability to predict and deal with interaction terms.

Lastly, SmartPLS 4 has highly developed options to test the quality of measurement models (e.g., reliability, validity) and structural model relationships (e.g. path coefficients, R-squared values, Stone-Geisser Q-squared to predictive relevance). The simplicity of its graphical user interface and bootstrapping processes of testing the significance offer a full set of tools to conduct intensive research on the hypotheses proposed [13]. The fact that the software can directly estimate interaction terms in moderation analyses without the need to pre-create product terms also makes it easier to analyse the buffering role of PsyCap

4. Results

SmartPLS 4 was used to analyse the data in order to test the measurement model and the structural model. The descriptive statistics, measurement model (reliability and validity), and the structural model results (hypothesis testing) are presented in the following sections.

4.1. Data Analysis

4.1.1. Descriptive Statistics

The standard deviation and mean of the study variables are presented in Table 2. The findings show that the participants perceived moderate social undermining by the supervisors (M = 3.42, SD = 1.15) and coworkers (M = 3.15, SD = 1.21). The identification score (mean = 5.12, SD = 0.98) was rather high, indicating that, despite the difficulties, staff tend to feel a sense of belonging. The highest averages in the PsyCap dimensions were Resilience (M = 5.45) and Hope (M = 5.32).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Undermining (Supervisor)	3.42	1.15
Undermining (Coworker)	3.15	1.21
Belongingness	5.12	0.98
Self-Efficacy	4.89	1.05
Hope	5.32	0.92
Optimism	4.95	1.1

Resilience	5.45	0.89

4.1.2. Correlation Matrix

Table 3 shows the correlation between the latent constructs. As expected, Social Un-dermining (Supervisor and Coworker) demonstrates a great negative relationship with identi-fication (r = -0.45, p <.01 and r = -0.38, p <.01 respectively). The identification and the four dimensions of PsyCap are positively correlated, and the Undermining is negatively correlated with the four dimensions of PsyCap, which offers preliminary support to the theoretical framework.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Undermining (Sup)	1						
2. Undermining (Cow)	0.52**	1					
3. Belongingness	-0.45**	-0.38**	1				
4. Self-Efficacy	-0.21*	-0.19*	0.42**	1			
5. Hope	-0.25**	-0.22*	0.48**	0.55**	1		
6. Optimism	-0.18*	-0.15	0.39**	0.49**	0.51**	1	
7. Resilience	-0.28**	-0.24**	0.51**	0.58**	0.62**	0.54**	1

Note. **p < .01, *p < .05

4.2. Assessment of the Measurement Model

4.2.1. Outer loadings, Reliability, and AVE

Outer Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were used to measure the reliability and convergent validity of the constructs. As presented in Table 4, all the outer loadings are above the recommended value of 0.708 [15]. All constructs have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values of higher than 0.70, which is a satisfactory internal consistency level. Moreover, the values of AVE were between 0.584 and 0.712, which is greater than the 0.50 mark, which proves that there is sufficient convergent validity [14].

Table 4. Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Outer Loading Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	AVE
Undermining (Sup)	13	0.725 - 0.865	0.912	0.915	0.654
Undermining (Cow)	13	0.710 - 0.842	0.895	0.898	0.621
Belongingness	5	0.755 - 0.880	0.876	0.881	0.685
Self-Efficacy	6	0.740 - 0.855	0.865	0.869	0.642
Hope	6	0.732 - 0.868	0.882	0.885	0.665
Optimism	6	0.715 - 0.835	0.854	0.858	0.612
Resilience	6	0.768 - 0.892	0.898	0.902	0.712

The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) was used to measure discriminant validity. Table 5 demonstrates that all the HTMT values fell below the conservative value of 0.85 [16], which confirms that the constructs are empirically different.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Undermining (Sup)							
2. Undermining (Cow)	0.582						
3. Belongingness	0.498	0.415					
4. Self-Efficacy	0.235	0.212	0.468				
5. Hope	0.278	0.245	0.532	0.615			
6. Optimism	0.205	0.168	0.435	0.552	0.575		
7. Resilience	0.312	0.268	0.565	0.645	0.692	0.605	

4.2.2. Multicollinearity Assessment

To be sure that the results were not contaminated due to the collinearity issues, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were investigated. According to Table 6, all inner VIF values were lower than the value 3.0 [14], which means that there is no multicollinearity in the structural model.

Table 6. VIF Values

Predictor Construct	VIF
Undermining (Supervisor)	1.854
Undermining (Coworker)	1.765
Self-Efficacy	2.125
Hope	2.45
Optimism	2.015
Resilience	2.38

4.2.3. Explanatory Power (R-Square)

The model was tested in terms of the explanatory power based on the R-square (R2). According to Table 7, the model describes 56.7% of the identification (R2 = 0.567). This is a moderate to substantial explanatory power, which means that social undermining and PsyCap are influential predictors of the feeling of identification of an individual [15].

Table 7. R2

Dependent Variable	R^2	R^2 Adjusted
Identification	0.567	0.545

4.3. Structural Path Analysis

A bootstrapping test with 5,000 subsamples was used to evaluate the structural model to test both the direct relationships and the particular moderation effects. Table 8 summarizes the results, such as path coefficients (Beta), t-statistic, and p-values.

In line with the first postulation, the result analysis established that there were strong negative correlations between social undermining and identification. In particular, identifica-tion was considerably adversely affected by Social Undermining by Supervisors (H1) (=beta -0.312, t = 5.120, p < 0.001). Likewise, other negative factors that affected identification were Social Undermining by Coworkers (H2) with a beta = -0.245 and t = -4.015, p = 0.001. These results offer strong support to the idea that workplace toxic behavior of any nature is a big killer of the sense of belonging among educational staff members.

The moderation analysis tested the buffering role of the four PsyCap dimensions (Self-Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, Resilience) against the undermining by the supervisors and coworkers, respectively. Self-Efficacy (H3a): The interactive effect (Undermining Supervisor Self-Efficacy) was significant with a positive value (beta= 0.165, = 2.310, = 0.05). Supervisor undermining has a negative effect that is cushioned by high self-efficacy. Hope (H3b): The interaction term (Undermining Supervisor x Hope) also had a significant and positive rela-tionship (beta= 0.198, t = 2.750, p < 0.01). High hope persons exhibit a better sense of identification in the face of supervisor hostility. Optimism (H3c): The interaction effect of Optimism (Undermining Supervisor x Optimism) was not significant (beta = 0.032, t = 0.450 p = 0.652). In this case, optimism did not have any significant moderating effect on the effects of supervisor undermining. Resilience (H3d): The interaction term of Resilience (Undermining Supervisor x Resilience) was found to have a significant positive effect (beta = 0.245, t = 3.820, p < 0.001), indicating resilience has a significant buffering effect against supervisors.

Self-Efficacy (H4a): The interaction term (Undermining Coworker X Self-Efficacy) was not significant (beta=0.055, 0.890, 0.373). Self-efficacy did not have a significant change in the effect of coworker undermining. Hope (H4b): The interaction term (Undermining Coworker x Hope) was significant and positive (beta =0.145, t = 2.105, p < 0.05). Peer undermining has negative effects that are alleviated by hope. Optimism (H4c): The interaction term (Under-mining Coworker x Optimism) was also significant and positive (beta = 0.128, t = 1.980, p < 0.05). Contrary to the case with supervisors, optimism served to cushion the undermining of coworkers. Resilience (H4d): The interaction term (Undermining Coworker times Resilience) was significant and positive (beta= 0.210, t = 3.150, p < 0.01). The two forms of undermining are always countered by resilience

5. Discussion

This paper set out to examine the negative effects of social undermining by supervisors and colleagues on the sense of identification of educational personnel in the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate in Iraq. Also, it aimed to test the buffering effect of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) dimensions: Self-Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience dimensions, as independent moderators of such relationships. The results, which stemmed from PLS-SEM analysis, provided subtle details on how personal resources interplay with the toxicity in the workplace in order to maintain an individual with their workplace.

The findings provide strong empirical evidence for the direct negative effect of social undermining on identification. In line with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory [9], social undermining is a major environmental stressor that empties the resources of the indi-vidual, namely, the feeling of social integration.

To begin with, identification was significantly affected negatively by Supervisor Un-dermining (H1). This observation is consistent with the recent studies by [3], who claimed that supervisors are major agents of the organization. Formal rejection of the value of the employee through undermining behaviors, i.e., belittling or exclusion, is a strong indicator of the su-pervisor rejecting the psychological contract and inclusion of the employee.

Second, Coworker Undermining also showed a high negative correlation with identifi-cation (H2). This supports the efforts of Yildiz [4], who emphasized that the workplace social fabric is comprised of lateral relationships. Toxic peer behavior in learning institutions where collaboration is a prerequisite poses an isolating effect, a direct consequence of which is the avoidance of the core human need of belonging, as explained by [5].

The main value of the work is that the four PsyCap dimensions have a differential moderating effect, which shows that not all psychological resources can be equally applied against various undermining sources.

The results were in favor of the moderating effect of self-efficacy against the undermining of the supervisor. High-self-efficacy educational personnel have a firm belief in their abilities, and as a result, they can project their value to their own competence instead of being validated by their supervisor. This observation also aligns with the results of Malik and Björkqvist [7] who propose that self-efficacious people have a lower likelihood of internalizing vertical aggression, thereby maintaining their sense of belonging in the organization. Hope (H3b): Hope also turned out to be an important moderator. High-hope people are achievement-oriented and are able to see other avenues to success [2]. In the presence of a hostile supervisor, it is reasonable to expect hopeful employees to perceive the situation as a transitory state instead of a per-manent one so that they can preserve their sense of belonging by concentrating on potential outcomes instead of existing shortages [6]. Optimism (H3c): To expected results, the effect of supervisor undermining was not buffered by optimism. This statistically insignificant result can be explained by the Stockdal Paradox according to which the uninhibited optimism towards the negative (especially structural) can occasionally result in disappointment when reality fails to change [9]. A culture of high power distance, such as in Iraq means that the actions of a supervisor are a strong reality that can be overcome by a general positive attitude. Resilience (H3d): Resilience acted as a strong buffer. This corroborates the agreement on POB literature that resilience is essential to bouncing back after a setback [6]. Strong employees can take the emotional blow of being undermined by their superiors without letting the experience break their attachment to the larger organization.

Surprisingly, the moderating role of self-efficacy was not significant between coworker undermining and identification. This implies that although self-confidence cushions one against critical performance (which is usually by the supervisor), it does not cushion against social rejection by the peer group, which is aimed at relational needs, but not competence [1].

Hope and optimism played an important role in mitigating coworker undermining. This means that having a positive attitude and hope of social reconciliation in the future allows people to overcome peer conflict. Peer dynamics tend to be more volatile, unlike the structural permanence of a supervisor, which is why optimism may prove a better tool in this situation [4].

In line with the outcomes of the supervisor, resilience greatly reduced the adverse effects of coworker undermining. This creates resilience as the most generally safeguarding asset in this research, protecting identification despite the origin of the toxin. This is consistent with the recent results provided by Malik and Björkqvist [7], who see resilience as an important coping strategy towards workplace bullying.

5.1. Limitations and Future Directions

Although the current study offers significant information on the buffering effect of Psychological Capital against social undermining among the educational staff in Iraq, there are a number of limitations that have to be considered in order to put the findings into perspective and inform future studies.

5.1.1. Limitations

To begin with, the research was conducted in a cross-sectional design which was the collection of data at a time. This design does not allow the causal relationships to be established between social undermining, PsyCap, and identification. An example of this is when we assert that undermining lowers identification, and after that, it is also possible that when people feel a lesser sense of identification, they experience ambiguous interactions as undermining. Also, the buffering effects of PsyCap could change over time, which cannot be observed by a cross-sectional snapshot [17].

Second, self-report measures were used to obtain the data. Even though both the Common Method Bias (CMB) was minimized with the help of procedural remedies (e.g., ensuring anonymity) and statistical checks (e.g., Harman single factor test, VIF assessment), the use of one source to measure both independent and dependent variables is still likely to cause inflation in the observed relationships [18].

Third, a purposive sampling method was used to capture the sample of the study but it was limited by the Al-Qadisiyah Education Directorate in Iraq. Although it offers a level of depth in a certain cultural and professional setting, it restricts the ability to generalize the results to other sectors (i.e., healthcare, corporate) or other parts of Iraq or the Middle East which might have different organizational cultures or social norms on workplace hierarchy and in-teraction [11].

Lastly, although the paper looked at the four elements of PsyCap separately, it has not taken into consideration other possible boundary conditions or mediating processes. To il-lustrate, organizational culture, leadership approaches (except undermining) or external social support (family/friends) could also contribute to how undermining affects the sense of iden-tification in an individual, as was not the focus of this study.

5.1.2. Future Directions

Based on these limitations and the results of the study, it is possible to suggest several directions on future research:

Future research ought to utilize longitudinal research designs or time-lagged designs to test the causality of the proposed model. Monitoring educational staff throughout an academic year would enable the researchers to monitor the effects of the undermining effect over the course of the year and determine whether the protective potential of PsyCap resources (such as resilience) is exhausted or reinforced over time [9]. Future studies need to repeat this model in various educational environments of different governorates in Iraq and other Middle East nations to increase the generalizability. Relative research on the effect of undermining and the effectiveness of PsyCap might also show that the effects of undermining and the effectiveness of PsyCap may vary according to the organizational structure and job security. In this study, the moderation was investigated, but future research needs to explore the mechanisms by which undermining impacts the identification. Potential mediators might be psychological safety, emotional exhaustion or trust in management. It would be more specific to the intervention to understand why undermining is weakening identification (e.g. is it actually creating fear or fatigue?) [4]. Since the research has established that undermining is buffered by resilience and hope, the next step in the research should be to shift to intervention-based research to de-termine whether the development of these psychological resources can result in real changes in employee health and retention in toxic workplaces [2]. The mixed-methods design with qualitative interviews may be used to gain a better insight into which kind of undermining behaviors are the most common in the Iraqi education setting. Qualitative data may reveal the cultural peculiarities of the definition and perception of identification by staff and supplement the quantitative results.

6. Conclusion

Overall, this paper confirms that social undermining is a powerful source of the identi-fication of educational personnel. Nevertheless, not all people are equally affected; it depends on the profile of the psychological capital. Resilience seems to be an omnipresent barrier, whereas Self-Efficacy is more horizontal (supervisor) conflict, and Optimism is more vertical (coworker) conflict. These results can be used to expand COR theory by showing the specificity of resource application in the area of workplace aggression.

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