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# Putting Workplace Bullying in Context: The Role of High-Involvement Work Practices in the Relationship Between Job Demands, Job Resources, and Bullying Exposure

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Previous research has demonstrated the crucial association between employee stressors and workplace bullying. In this article, we argue that a nurturing organizational context will protect employees from exposure to workplace bullying and will interact with individual demands and resources known to have effect on exposure to bullying in the workplace. In specific, we look at high-involvement work practices (HIWPs)—which include participation, information-sharing, competence development, and rewards. Multilevel analyses on the data from 28,923 Belgian employees from 144 organizations show that organization-level HIWPs are negatively associated with bullying exposure. Moreover, HIWPs interact with individually experienced job demands and resources, by decreasing the association between employee work pressure and bullying and by somewhat compensating for the lack of experienced social support from colleagues at work. HIWPs did not moderate the relationship between employee job insecurity and bullying and social support from the supervisor and bullying. These findings highlight the important role HIWPs can play in protecting employees from workplace bullying, while also suggesting the difficulty of compensating for certain individual risk factors.

**Keywords:** high-involvement work practices, Job Demands-Resources Model, work environment hypothesis, multilevel, workplace bullying

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Workplace bullying negatively affects both employees and organizations by reducing employee well-being and increasing organizational costs due to absenteeism, employee turnover, and lost productivity (Hoel et al., 2020; Mikkelsen et al., 2020; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). While looking for ways to reduce such negative workplace behavior, authors have discovered that work-related factors play a pivotal role in bullying emergence (i.e., the work environment hypothesis; Einarsen et al., 1994; Hauge et al., 2007). In specific, bullying researchers have identified a wide array of job-related demands (e.g., work pressure, role conflicts, and insecurity) and resources (e.g., autonomy, feedback, and social support) associated with workplace bullying in organizations (Balducci et al., 2018; Einarsen et al., 1994; Salin & Hoel, 2020).

Despite these insights into individual work stressors and their link with bullying, we still lack sufficient understanding of the role organizational context plays in influencing employees' experiences

(Hershcovis et al., 2020; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). This is an important omission, for several reasons. First, leading researchers in the field of workplace mistreatment have been advocating for more research into the role of context in influencing employee experiences (Hershcovis & Reich, 2013; Salin, 2003), yet such contributions have remained limited. Second, recent studies in the field of workplace mistreatment support the idea that contextual factors, such as organizational climate, structure, and leadership behavior, may play an important role in influencing exposure to mistreatment (Hershcovis et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2014), warranting further investigation of such effects.

In this study, building on this previous work, we investigate the role of organizational human resource (HR) practices, in specific, the high-involvement work practices (HIWPs), in the experience of workplace bullying. HIWPs are HR practices that emphasize information-sharing, employee participation in decision-making, rewards, and competence development, thereby assumingly increasing employee commitment and discretionary effort (Macky & Boxall, 2008; Searle et al., 2011). In line with the social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) that states that individuals' behavior is shaped by their work environment, we argue that through promoting positive intra and interpersonal functioning, HIWPs may reduce workplace bullying. Moreover, building on the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R; Demerouti et al., 2001), according to which organizational resources can moderate the effects of individual resources and demands in predicting employee well-being outcomes (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011), we hypothesize that HIWPs may buffer against negative effects of individual

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demands and may boost individual resources known to protect from bullying exposure. To study the proposed relationships, we conduct a large sample multilevel study that allows us to investigate the effect of organizational HIWPs on the individual relationship between job demands, job resources, and bullying.

The contributions of our study to the existing research are twofold. First, our study adds to the previous research on contextual factors influencing workplace mistreatment by showing a link between organization-level HIWPs and employees' experiences of workplace bullying. This is important as it highlights a potential protective effect of positive HR practices with regards to workplace mistreatment, in addition to previously examined climate and team characteristics (e.g., Kerse & Babadag, 2019; Li et al., 2019; Yang & Caughlin, 2017). Second, this article also adds to the theory building around the JD-R, by answering the call for a better understanding of the interaction between individual demands and resources and those stemming from the broader work context (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). The original JD-R model represents an individual-level approach. However, authors have recently started suggesting that the scope of the JD-R may be broader, including effects of higher-level demands and resources on employee well-being (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). By explicitly testing whether organization-level HIWPs can alter effects of individual demands and resources on bullying exposure, this article tests the boundaries of the JD-R and helps provide suggestions for ways forward in further developing this important occupational stress model.

## Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying relates to repeated and persistent negative acts directed toward one or more individuals who cannot defend themselves (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996). Such negative acts can be personal (e.g., gossiping), work-related (e.g., withholding relevant information), and in some cases can even escalate into physical attacks (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). In most cases, bullying is quite subtle and can often go unnoticed by others, while causing severe harm to the targets (Einarsen et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996). Bullying also has many similarities with other forms of interpersonal mistreatment and aggression, such as incivility, social undermining, or abusive supervision (e.g., Hershcovis, 2011). New findings about bullying may, thus, also provide insights into these related topics.

Previous studies on workplace bullying show that bullying is an important problem in organizations, with meta-analytical evidence suggesting prevalence rates of around 15% (Nielsen et al., 2010). This means that one or two out of every 10 employees experiences bullying behavior—an unsettling observation considering the negative consequences associated with it. Studies on the outcomes of bullying consistently and univocally demonstrate its devastating effect. In their meta-analytical study, Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) discuss the wide range of negative effects bullying has on targets, including both job-related outcomes (e.g., performance and job satisfaction) and health- and well-being outcomes (e.g., mental and physical problems). Furthermore, in their review of the literature, Paull et al. (2020) discuss just how wide reaching the effect of bullying can be, affecting not only the targets, but also the bystanders of this behavior (e.g., D'Cruz & Noronha, 2011;

Emdad et al., 2013; Salin & Notelaers, 2020a) and the organization as a whole (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Finally, bullying also affects organizations by diminishing employee productivity and increasing turnover intentions and absenteeism (Hoel et al., 2020), which can cost organizations billions annually (Kline & Lewis, 2018).

In sum, workplace bullying can have wide-reaching negative effects, affecting both targets of this behavior, others who are aware of its occurrence and the organizations as a whole. Consequently, it is important to investigate ways in which bullying can be prevented or mitigated.

## The Relationship Between the Work Environment and Bullying

A central tenet in workplace bullying research is that bullying largely stems from deficiencies in the work environment (Einarsen et al., 1994; Hauge et al., 2007). Namely, work environments elicit stress that can translate into workplace bullying (Leymann, 1993). Stress can be a source of frustration, increasing the risk of aggressive outbursts (e.g., Berkowitz, 1989; Dollard et al., 1939), but it also depletes individual resources, making employees more vulnerable to interpersonal attacks (Hoel & Salin, 2003; Neuman & Baron, 2003). In line with this theorizing, Zapf et al. (1996) report “high stress” as one of the most often quoted reasons by targets to explain the bullying situation. Furthermore, the proposition that stressful work environments contribute to bullying has gained considerable support, both in past workplace bullying research (Branch et al., 2013; Samnani & Singh, 2012; Van den Brande et al., 2016), and the general mistreatment literature (e.g., Burton et al., 2012; Penney & Spector, 2005; Rosen et al., 2016). Such studies uncovered a whole array of individual job stressors contributing to bullying, including work pressure, role conflicts, role ambiguity, interpersonal conflicts, poor leadership, and job insecurity (e.g., Gardner et al., 2016; Notelaers et al., 2010; Salin & Hoel, 2020; Skogstad et al., 2011). Certain organizational factors, such as organizational changes and climate, have also been found relevant in relation to bullying (e.g., Giorgi et al., 2013). However, authors typically measured such organizational factors from an individual perspective.

While the individual focus applied previously is undoubtable valuable, authors are increasingly recognizing that individual evaluations of their context may not correspond with the shared perceptions that exist in an organization (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004). Heames and Harvey (2006) theoreticized that bullying is a multilevel phenomenon that can spillover from one level to another and that interaction between different levels needs to be considered when developing effective managerial plans to address the negative consequences of bullying. This has led to a call for more studies investigating the broader organizational context in relation to workplace bullying and general mistreatment (Hershcovis et al., 2020; Skogstad et al., 2011). In the recent years, such contextualized studies have provided some valuable insights. For instance, Skogstad et al. (2011) found that departments in which bullying takes place have a poor social work environment. Other studies showed that department-level identification and leadership can affect bullying (Escartín et al., 2013; Hauge et al., 2011). Studies on general mistreatment have also shown that aggression is more likely to occur in teams with negative characteristics, such as toxic leadership, low helping, and negative mood, and less likely to in

teams with a violence preventive climate (Gallus et al., 2013; Yang & Caughlin, 2017). Regarding the organizational context as a whole, some studies found that organizational-level climate can work both to promote (Kerse & Babadag, 2019; Li et al., 2019) and eliminate bullying (Law et al., 2011). A study by Zahlquist et al. (2019) even showed that a positive conflict management climate may buffer the negative effect of individually experienced stressors on workplace bullying in the context of ferry crew employees. In this study, we add to this line of work by investigating HR-related practices and their impact on employees' experience of workplace bullying behaviors and their cross-level effect on the individually experienced demands and resources.

### High-Involvement Work Practices in Relation to Bullying

Positive HR practices, such as those that foster learning opportunities and promote internal communication, shape the nature of the employee–firm relationship (Barrick et al., 2015) and play an important role in promoting employees' well-being (Alfes et al., 2013). In that regard, HIWPs are defined as work and employment practices designed to “enhance employees' levels of skill, motivation, information, and empowerment” (Guthrie, 2001, p. 180). Although organizations typically adopt HIWPs as they have been shown to increase organizational performance (Guthrie, 2001; Vandenberg et al., 1999), there is also widespread support that HIWPs are associated with many positive employee outcomes (Macky & Boxall, 2008; Vandenberg et al., 1999). Authors often examine HIWPs using the “PIRK” model (Vandenberg et al., 1999), which synthesizes HIWPs into four mutually reinforcing processes: power (P), information (I), rewards (R), and knowledge (K). In other words, HIWPs are practices that foster empowerment and participation in decision-making, information-sharing, and competence development, as well as motivate employees to invest in their work and employer (Kilroy et al., 2016; Searle et al., 2011; Vandenberg et al., 1999).

Social information processing theory has been widely used to explain the influence of social environments on employees, including how HR practices impact employee attitudes and behaviors. The social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) posits that individuals are motivated to communicate with others to develop stable and unambiguous interpretations of events, and that individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors are shaped by and through interactions and information exchange with others. When certain HR practices such as HIWPs are in place, they help employees understand the type of practices that are used and accepted in the organizations, both through direct communication with the managers and through implicit signals, such as implementation of rules and procedures (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Additionally, HR practices also affect employees by directing their attention toward things valued by the organization (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). As such, when a strong HR system is in place, employees are likely to share a common perception of their work environment and be influenced by it (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

In line with the social information processing theory, we argue that having HIWPs in place can reduce exposure to workplace bullying. First, HIWPs allow employees to have more meaningful jobs (Vandenberg et al., 1999), reducing employees' emotional exhaustion and feelings of depersonalization (Kilroy et al., 2016).

As such, this signals to the employees that they are valued (MacDuffie, 1995), and that their organization prioritizes their psychosocial well-being (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). When employees feel valued and cared for by their organization, this in turn reduces their proneness to aggression in the workplace (Dollard et al., 2017). Second, by ensuring fair remuneration, HIWPs increase employees' justice perceptions (Tremblay et al., 2000), which may lead employees to apply the same principles in their own work life when interacting with their colleagues (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). This may promote constructive coping strategies when issues at work arise, reducing the risk of conflicts escalating into bullying (Leon-Perez et al., 2015). Third, by increasing information-sharing between the organization and the employees (Vandenberg et al., 1999), the rules and procedures aiming to mitigate bullying are more likely to be clearly communicated to the employees. Namely, when employees know that there are formal ethical systems in place concerned with addressing unacceptable workplace behaviors, this positively impact their informal conflict management strategies and hence helps reduce bullying (Einarsen et al., 2017). We, therefore, propose the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* The extent of organizational-level high involvement work practices (HIWP) is negatively related to frequency of workplace bullying reported by employees in that organization.

### The Moderating Effect of High-Involvement Work Practices on the Relationship Between Individual Demands and Workplace Bullying

According to the JD-R model, a broad set of work characteristics can be categorized as either job demands or job resources, and these characteristics influence work-related outcomes. Job demands tax employees' capacities and energy, and may lead to behavioral strain outcomes, such as lower performance, higher turnover, and increased aggression (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In contrast, job resources are aspects of the work that reduce demands and their negative effect, while helping employees function to their optimal level (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In that regard, authors have found that workplace bullying can be regarded as social strain stemming from individually experienced job demands and a lack of job resources (Hauge et al., 2007; Notelaers et al., 2010).

Demands and resources can also be conceptualized at a higher level. In that regard, organizational resources refer to employee experiences of the distal, contextual, or system-level aspects of the organizational environment (Albrecht, 2012), which provide context for how employees experience their work (Albrecht et al., 2015; Leiter & Bakker, 2010). According to the JD-R, organization-level resources may interact with individual demands and resources and influence their effect on employee outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). As HIWPs are practices that foster empowerment and participation in decision-making, information-sharing, and competence development, as well as motivate employees to invest in their work and employer (Kilroy et al., 2016; Searle et al., 2011; Vandenberg et al., 1999), they can be portrayed as an organization-level resource (Kilroy et al., 2016; Vandenberg et al., 1999). Therefore, we argue that the organizational

resource of HIWPs will moderate the effect of individually experienced job demands on employee bullying.

Job demands are inherently present in many jobs. However, organizational resources may help reduce the negative effects of such individual job demands—an idea that has received some empirical support in the past (e.g., Zahlquist et al., 2019). In this article, we focus on two such demands: perceived workload and job insecurity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Workload refers to mental strain resulting from performing a task, coupled with the capability of the operator to respond to those demands (Cain, 2007). Some degree of workload is an inevitable part of the working life. Moreover, some studies suggest that work pressure has been on the rise for jobs of all skill levels (Lopes et al., 2014). Job insecurity is a stressor that refers to employees' concern about the continuity of their employment (Klandermans & van Vuuren, 1999). Due to recent global trends, such as offshoring, increasing competition, and technological changes, feelings of job insecurity among employees have been on a rise (Lee et al., 2018). In other words, workload and job insecurity are both job demands likely to be present in many jobs, despite organizational best efforts to reduce them. Furthermore, previous evidence indicates that these individual demands are important antecedents of workplace bullying. Employees faced with high work pressure are more likely to experience bullying (Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011; Balducci et al., 2011; Goodboy et al., 2017; Hauge et al., 2007), due to an increase in interpersonal frictions and little time left for constructive conflict management (Salin & Notelaers, 2020b). Moreover, bullying seems to thrive when employees experience subjective job insecurity (Baillien & De Witte, 2009; De Cuyper et al., 2009; Notelaers et al., 2010; Park & Ono, 2017), probably as feeling insecure depletes individuals' resources making them an easy target of interpersonal attacks (Baillien, Rodriguez-Muñoz, et al., 2011; Baillien & De Witte, 2009).

While the individual experience of work pressure and job insecurity may make employees vulnerable to bullying exposure, we also argue that HIWPs may help attenuate the negative effect of such individual demands by changing how people perceive or deal with these demands. HIWPs practices offer a sense of control to employees and make them feel more respected by the organization, which can help them become more resilient to the individual demands (Kilroy et al., 2016; Wood & De Menezes, 2011). Furthermore, since HIWPs offer employees discretion and opportunity for creativity, this can also stimulate employees to find ways to reduce the individual demands they experience (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). The shared work environment created by the HIWPs can buffer the individually experienced demands, by increasing chances that employees perceive ambivalent negative situations (e.g., perceived rudeness by a colleague) as less threatening, and instead feel more empowered to deal with them through constructive problem-solving (Törnroos et al., 2020). This resonates with the concept of resource caravan passageways (Hobfoll, 2011; Loh et al., 2018), which draws attention to the social ecologies of resource reservoirs. According to Hobfoll (2011), when a combination of resources is present in an environment, they can link together to form a caravan of resources, creating an accumulating positive effect. Moreover, organizations characterized by such resource caravans can potentially compensate for the presence of other stressors (Loh et al., 2018), by signaling to the employees that their organization cares about them (e.g., McAllister & Bigly, 2002).

Following the above reasoning, we argue that employees experiencing high work pressure in the context of HIWPs may perceive a high work pressure as a challenge instead of an obstacle. In support, previous research has shown that positive HR practices are able to convert stress from a threat into a source of energy with positive outcomes for employees (Hargrove et al., 2015). Furthermore, we argue that having HIWPs, such as a good pay incentive and opportunity to learn and grow, this may at least partially reduce the burden associated with sense of insecurity. This is in-line with previous research that shows that participative decision-making, (Probst, 2005), organizational communication (Jiang & Probst, 2014), and trust in management (Jiang & Probst, 2019)—all elements of HIWPs—attenuate negative effects associated with perceived job insecurity. Thus, we argue that when organizations employ HIWPs, employees experiencing high work pressure and job insecurity will be less vulnerable to bullying exposure.

*Hypothesis 2:* Organizational-level HIWPs attenuate the positive relationship between employee's job demands (work pressure, 2a; and job insecurity, 2b) and their experience of bullying.

### The Moderating Effect of High-Involvement Work Practices on Relationship Between Individual Resources and Workplace Bullying

In the past years, authors have been increasingly interested in the interactive effect between different experienced employee resources (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). The idea that resources can interact and have an amplifying effect has already received support in previous studies building on the JD-R (e.g., Vander Elst et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020) and other frameworks (e.g., Conservation of Resources Theory [COR]; Mäkikangas et al., 2010; Whitman et al., 2014). Situational resources modulate the efficacy of individuals' actions to achieve desired goals and outcomes (e.g., Zeffane, 1994). Namely, a nurturing work environment enables different individual and contextual resources to connect or link together to form a caravan of resources (Loh et al., 2018), thereby increasing the protective effect of individual resources (Hobfoll, 2011). Recent empirical research supports this idea by showing that individual resources depend upon organizational factors, such as HRs practices and healthy leadership (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). As HIWPs foster employee empowerment, participation, control, and competence development (Kilroy et al., 2016; Searle et al., 2011; Vandenberg et al., 1999), they may therefore help employees optimally utilize individual resources protecting them from bullying exposure.

In this study, we focus on two particularly relevant individual resources from the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Van Der Doef & Maes, 1999): support from colleagues and support from the supervisor. Social support refers to social interactions which improve coping, esteem, belonging, and competence through actual or perceived exchanges of physical and psychosocial resources (Gottlieb, 2000), and is an essential resource protecting individuals from workplace bullying and its negative effects (Einarsen et al., 1994). Namely, bullying comes to life through a process in which the target loses power to defend him or herself (Einarsen et al., 2011), and social support from others or the lack thereof plays an

essential part in determining target's power (Zapf et al., 1996). In that regard, an abundance of evidence demonstrates the link between lack of social support and exposure to bullying (e.g., Austraikaite et al., 2015; Goodboy et al., 2017; Rousseau et al., 2014). Social support in the workplace can come from different sources, typically either from peers or from supervisors. While both have been shown to be important for employee attitudes and well-being, previous studies seem to highlight the strong effects of supervisory support in particular (Nakata et al., 2014; Ng & Sorensen, 2008; Nielsen et al., 2020).

While having social support has positive effects on employee exposure to negative workplace interactions, we argue that this will be especially the case in work environments that nurture positive employee relationships. Social support consists of instrumental support, information support, emotional support, and feedback (House, 1981). As such, employees who have social support are more likely to get help and advice from others that can help protect them from exposure to bullying, or to receive emotional support that can make them less likely to perceive themselves as targets. However, social support does not automatically lead to positive outcomes. Having social capital can involve excessive demands being placed on group members to help each other, restriction of freedom from the members of a social group, and in certain cases aggressive behavior depending on the group norms (Portes, 1998). However, we argue that when HIWPs are in place, this will increase the chance that the individual resource of social support from colleagues and supervisors will be implemented in a constructive and effective way that can protect employees from bullying.

HIWPs create a positive and nurturing work environment (Butts et al., 2009; Macky & Boxall, 2008; Mohr & Zoghi, 2008; Searle et al., 2011). When employees operate in enjoyable work contexts, they are favorably disposed to gain from the support provided by their supervisor and their coworkers (Rousseau & Aubé, 2010). Trust, organizational identification, and improved employee moral engendered by HIWPs (e.g., Liu et al., 2019; Searle et al., 2011; Vandenberg et al., 1999) enable employees to benefit from organizational communication and stay abreast of important developments in the organization. They can use their skills and autonomy to make optimal use of their social support to engage in job crafting, improve their own work conditions, and reshape daily interactions to avoid negative encounters (cf. Hu et al., 2020). Furthermore, the support from peers and supervisors can also enhance employees' possibilities to use their autonomy and empowerment to cope with ambiguous negative behavior and conflicts in a constructive manner and encourage them to use conflict resolution procedures provided by HR at early stages of conflict before they escalate. Good conflict management and early intervention have been argued to reduce the risk of conflicts escalating into bullying (Salin & Hoel, 2020). We therefore argue that social support and HIWPs are likely to have synergistic effects. The higher the level of HIWPs, the more effective support from supervisors and peers become in protecting employees from bullying.

*Hypothesis 3:* Organizational-level HIWPs amplify the negative relationship between employee's job resources (social support from supervisors, 3a; and social support from colleagues, 3b) and their experience of bullying.

## Method

### Sample

The current sample stemmed from a statistical consulting agency that specializes in the measurement of occupational stress for Belgian Health and Safety Executives. The latter are by law entitled to guide organizations and employers with respect to their prevention policies regarding safety, ergonomics, health, and well-being. The data were collected between January 2018 and December 2019 in different ways. In some cases, data were collected in organized group sessions allowing employees to complete a paper-and-pencil version of the questionnaire, while at work. For some organizations, the paper-and-pencil version of the survey was distributed by mail (internally or externally). In other ones, both a paper-and-pencil self-administered survey and an electronic version were used. Finally, most participating organizations employed an electronic survey distributed to employees' email. Anonymous paper-and-pencil questionnaires were collected during group sessions or were returned to sealed boxes that were collected directly by the health and safety bodies. Alternatively, in many organizations, employees were given the option of returning completed questionnaires directly by mail to the specific health and safety body or to the statistical consultancy agency in a sealed envelope. No members of a surveyed organization had access to any of the completed questionnaires, whether manually or electronically completed, and all email addresses were deleted, herewith guaranteeing anonymity. The sample consisted of 28,923 employees from 147 organizations, ranging from 1 to 2,972 participating employees, with a mean employee size of 210 ( $SD = 402$ ). Three organizations were omitted from the final analyses as they had only one participating employee and no composite score could be created for their organizational-level HIWPs. The sample characteristics are denoted in Table 1.

### Measures

All measures, except the workplace bullying measure, stemmed from the Short Inventory to Monitor Psychosocial Hazards (SIMPH; Notelaers et al., 2007). This questionnaire was developed as a response to the deficiencies of the Questionnaire on Experience and Evaluation of Work (QEEW; van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994). The QEEW in the Netherlands and the SIMPH in Belgium are the most widely used questionnaire for global psychosocial risk analysis. Like the QEEW, the response categories in SIMPH are "never," "sometimes," "often," or "always." In this inventory, work pressure was measured with three items (e.g., "Do you work under time pressure?"), and job security was measured with four items (e.g., "I feel insecure about the future of my job"). Their respective within-level reliability was  $\alpha = 0.84$  and  $\alpha = 0.88$  (Geldhof et al., 2014). Social support from colleagues and supervisor were measured with three items each (e.g., "If necessary, can you ask your colleagues/supervisor for help?"). Their respective within-level reliability was  $\alpha = 0.82$  and  $\alpha = 0.89$ .

HIWPs were measured with four subdimensions of the SIMPH (Notelaers et al., 2007) that tap onto the four subdimensions of HIWPs (Vandenberg et al., 1999): opportunities to learn (knowledge), participation in decision-making (power), communication about the organization (information), and pay satisfaction (rewards). Opportunities to learn (e.g., "Does your job offer you opportunities for personal growth and development?"), participation in

**Table 1**  
*Sample Characteristics in Percentages*

Sample characteristics	%	Sample characteristics	%
Managerial position		Branch	
No	75.7	Industry	22.7
Yes	24.3	Production and distribution of energy	5.1
Gender		Construction	3.2
Female	40.2	Retail and fixing cars and motorbikes	14.9
Male	59.8	Transport and logistics	13.4
Other	0.0	IT and communication	9.8
Age		Financial activities and insurances	7.8
<25	4.0	Real estate	0.5
25–34	24.6	Liberal professions, science and technology	1.4
35–44	28.0	Administrative and supportive services	4.3
45–54	27.5	Public service, defense, and social security	4.3
55+	15.3	Education	0.7
Contract		Social services and health	7.7
Full-time	79.9	Art, amusement, and recreation	4.2
Part-time >60%	16.6	Educational level	
Part-time <60%	3.4	Primary school	2.1
Type of contract		Lower secondary school	12.3
Permanent	89.9	Higher secondary school	35.9
Temporary	6.0	Academic bachelor	25.5
Other	2.7	Master or higher level	24.2
Interim	1.4	Organizational tenure	
Working regime		≤1 year	3.2
Daytime	60.7	1–4 years	25.0
Shift work	25.6	5–9 years	18.9
Irregular hours	5.2	10–14 years	15.2
Other	8.5	15–19 years	12.8
Occupational tenure		20–24 years	7.9
≤1 year	4.5	>25 years	16.8
1–4 years	37.8		
5–9 years	21.1		
10–14 years	14.5		
15–19 years	9.0		
20–24 years	5.3		
>25 years	7.8		

decision-making (e.g., “Can you participate in decisions affecting issues related to your work?”), communication about the organization (e.g., “Are you kept sufficiently up-to-date concerning important events within the company?”), and pay satisfaction (e.g., “Do you think that your company pays good salaries?”), were all measured with three items each. The multilevel Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of the overall HIWPs measure was 0.97 at the within-level and 0.91 at the organizational level (Geldhof et al., 2014).

Finally, workplace bullying was measured with the Short Negative Acts Questionnaire (SNAQ; Notelaers et al., 2019) which is the abbreviated and validated version of the most widely used bullying scale, the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (Einarsen et al., 2009). The SNAQ consists of nine negative acts (e.g., “Rumors about you are being spread”) where the respondent can indicate the frequency of exposure: “never,” “occasionally,” “monthly,” “weekly,” or “often.” The multilevel Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of the SNAQ measure was 0.84 at the within-level and 0.89 at the organizational level (Geldhof et al., 2014).

## Procedure

We first assessed the fit of different measurement models, using multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) analyses in Mplus 8.4 with a robust Maximum Likelihood estimator (MLR). The full

results of the CFA model comparisons are available in [Supplemental Analyses](#). Below, we report the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) values (Raftery, 1995), with lower BIC values indicating a better model fit. We estimated four different models, including one in which all study variables were estimated on both Level 1 (individual) and Level 2 (organizational; BIC = 1771342.11), and one in which individual demands (workload and job insecurity) and resources (social support from colleagues and supervisors) were estimated only on Level 1, while HIWPs and bullying were estimated on both levels (BIC = 1766863.25). We also included a model in which HIWPs subscales were separate latent constructs (BIC = 1771407.73) and one in which work pressure and job insecurity were combined as one factor (job demands) and social support from colleagues and supervisors were combined as one factor (job resources; BIC = 1827160.12). These measurement model comparisons suggested that the best-fitting measurement model was one in which individual demands and resources were estimated on Level 1 only, while HIWPs were estimated on both Level 1 and 2, as one latent construct. This model displayed a good fit to the data (comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.93, Tucker–Lewis index [TLI] = 0.91, Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual [SRMR] = 0.05, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.03). Finally, we compared our best-fitting model with a fifth model in which the outcome variable bullying was only included on

Level 1. This model displayed similar model fit to our best-fitting model (CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91, SRMR = 0.05, RMSEA = 0.03), with a slightly lower BIC value (1763763.32). To make sure that measuring bullying on Level 2 was justified, we additionally calculated the  $rWG(j)$  value of bullying. The  $rWG(j)$  was 0.75, justifying aggregating bullying on the between-level in addition to measuring it on the within-level.

Next, we assessed the intraclass coefficients (ICC) of our study variables. The ICC of workplace bullying equaled 0.05, indicating that 95% of the variance in bullying was found on the within-organization level. Calculating the design effect  $(1 + (\text{average cluster size} - 1) \times \text{ICC} = 11.4)$  indicated the appropriateness of a multilevel design (i.e., design effects  $> 2$ ; cf. Muthen & Satorra, 1995). We also estimated the ICCs of other study variables. They revealed that work pressure, job insecurity, social support from colleagues, and social support from the supervisor displayed 93%, 85%, 95%, and 94% within-organization variation. Thus, most variance in our data could be attributed to within-organizational factors, as expected. In the further analyses, we group-mean centered these variables and estimated them on the within-organization level only. Additionally, HIWPs displayed 89% within- and 11% between-organization variation. Moreover, the  $rWG(j)$  value of HIWPs was 0.81, which indicated that aggregating self-referenced individual ratings of HIWPs across organizations (i.e., direct consensus model of composition; Chan, 1998) was warranted. This is also in-line with evidence suggesting that constructs assessed through self-referenced items can be meaningfully aggregated to the unit level of analysis, despite having a greater within-level variability (e.g., Kozlowski & Hults, 1987).

To test the proposed relationships, we conducted stepwise model comparison using MLwiN software, and following recommendations by Aguinis et al. (2013). The detailed results of the stepwise testing are added to the Supplemental Materials. In Table 3, we report results of the tests relevant to our study hypotheses. In the first step (Model 0), we fitted a null model, to check the amount of variance at each level in our dependent variable, workplace bullying. Next (Model 1), we added regressions effects of individual demands (work pressure and job insecurity), resources (social support from colleagues and the supervisors), and individual HIWPs perceptions on workplace bullying. In Model 2, we added the organizational-level HIWPs predictor to the model, by including the (grand mean-centered) aggregated value of HIWPs as a Level 2 predictor of bullying. Lastly, in Models 3 and 4, we added the cross-level interaction of Level 2 HIWPs on the slopes of all the within-organization regression effects,

in order to test whether HIWPs moderated the effect of different job demands and resources on bullying. We additionally tested for the effect of sociodemographic variables and organizational sector on our model. However, these did not yield significant results and were therefore omitted from Table 3. Finally, we probed the significant cross-level interactions using Simple Slopes analyses.

## Results

The descriptive statistics of the study variables are presented in Table 2. The results of the multilevel analyses (see Supplemental Materials) confirmed that M1 fitted the data better than a baseline model (M0) with no predictors included. Moreover, there was a significant improvement in model fit after addition of each of the proposed main effects. We found that individual-level HIWPs were significantly negatively related to bullying exposure, meaning that employees who rated their organization higher on HIWPs, also reported less bullying exposure ( $b = -.29$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p < .01$ ). We also replicated effects from previous studies by finding that individually experienced work pressure ( $b = .13$ ,  $SE = 0.004$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and job insecurity ( $b = .12$ ,  $SE = 0.003$ ,  $p < .01$ ) had a positive and significant relationship with bullying exposure, while individually experienced social support from colleagues ( $b = -.18$ ,  $SE = 0.004$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the supervisor ( $b = -.08$ ,  $SE = 0.004$ ,  $p < .01$ ) had a significant negative relationship with workplace bullying exposure. Jointly, these predictors explained 25% in the within-person variance of exposure to bullying.

Next, we freed the slopes of the effect of individual demands (work pressure and job insecurity) and resources (social support from colleagues and the supervisor) on bullying exposure. Models in which the slopes of the Level 1 variables were allowed to vary fitted the data better than the fixed slopes model (see Supplemental Materials). Slopes of all individual demands (work pressure and job insecurity) and resources (social support from colleagues and the supervisor) were significant, meaning that across organizations the relationship between individual demands and resources on the one hand, and exposure to bullying on the other hand, significantly varied. Furthermore, the slopes were also positively related to the intercept, meaning that the more employees experienced bullying, the stronger the effect of individual demands and resources was on bullying exposure, except for social support from the supervisor. These random slopes models explained additional 2% of variance in the individual experiences of bullying.

In a following step, we started with the test of our research hypotheses. Hence, we included Level 2 predictors in the model.

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

Level	Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Level 1	1. Bullying	1.44	0.23	<b>0.84</b>	—	—	—	—	—
	2. Work pressure	1.51	0.45	0.23**	<b>0.84</b>	—	—	—	—
	3. Job insecurity	0.69	0.57	0.26**	0.16**	<b>0.88</b>	—	—	—
	4. Social support colleagues	1.05	0.50	-0.37**	-0.19**	-0.16**	<b>0.82</b>	—	—
	5. Social support supervisor	1.18	0.70	-0.37**	-0.23**	-0.23**	-0.53**	<b>0.89</b>	—
	6. HIWPs	1.41	0.29	-0.32**	-0.17**	-0.28**	0.38**	0.53**	<b>0.97</b>
Level 2	1. Bullying			<b>0.89</b>	—	—	—	—	—
	2. HIWPs			-0.60**	<b>0.91</b>	—	—	—	—

*Note.* Level 1 = within-organizations, Level 2 = between-organizations. HIWPs = high involvement work practices. Bullying is measured on a scale from 1 to 5. All other variables are measured on a scale from 0 to 3. The multilevel reliabilities are printed in bold and reported on the diagonal.

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .



**Table 3**  
*Results of Multilevel Regression Analysis With Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (Standard Errors) Predicting Exposure to Workplace Bullying*

Model	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	1.4378*** (0.0104)	1.4379*** (0.0109)	1.4455*** (0.0093)	1.4457*** (0.0093)	1.4471*** (0.0100)
Level 1					
HIWP		-0.0953*** (0.0057)	-0.09532*** (0.0057)	-0.09478*** (0.0057)	-0.0950*** (0.0057)
Work pressure (WP)		0.0836*** (0.0066)	0.0858*** (0.0066)	0.0841*** (0.0062)	0.0844*** (0.0061)
Job insecurity (JI)		0.1000*** (0.0064)	0.1023*** (0.0063)	0.1022*** (0.0064)	0.1025*** (0.0063)
Social support colleagues (SSC)		-0.1398*** (0.0072)	-0.1425*** (0.0070)	-0.1434*** (0.0069)	-0.1434*** (0.0069)
Social support supervisor (SSS)		-0.0810*** (0.0052)	-0.0813*** (0.0052)	-0.0809*** (0.0052)	-0.0816*** (0.0052)
Level 2					
HIWP			-0.2639*** (0.0383)		
HIWP × WP				-0.3083*** (0.0422)	
HIWP × JI				-0.1279*** (0.0327)	
HIWP × SSC				-0.0126 <sup>ns</sup> (0.0342)	
HIWP × SSS					0.1145*** (0.0388)
Variance terms					0.0245 <sup>ns</sup> (0.0295)
Level 1					
Within variance (SD)	0.2182*** (0.0018)	0.1652*** (0.0014)	0.1653*** (0.0014)	0.1653*** (0.0014)	0.1655*** (0.0014)
Level 2					
Between variance intercept	0.0116*** (0.0018)	0.0136*** (0.0019)	0.0094*** (0.0014)	0.0092*** (0.0014)	0.0091*** (0.0016)
Between variance slope WP		0.0021*** (0.0006)	0.0015*** (0.0006)	0.0015*** (0.0005)	0.0014*** (0.0005)
Between covariance intercept-slope WP		0.0022*** (0.0008)	0.0022*** (0.0007)	0.0011*** (0.0007)	0.0011*** (0.0006)
Between variance slope JI		0.0021** (0.0006)	0.0019** (0.0005)	0.0020** (0.0006)	0.0020** (0.0005)
Between covariance intercept-slope JI		0.0024*** (0.0008)	0.0024*** (0.0007)	0.0024*** (0.0007)	0.0024*** (0.0007)
Between variance slope SSC		0.0029*** (0.0007)	0.0026*** (0.0007)	0.0025*** (0.0007)	0.0024*** (0.0007)
Between covariance intercept-slope SSC		-0.0046*** (0.0010)	-0.0036*** (0.0009)	-0.0033*** (0.0008)	-0.0033*** (0.0008)
Between variance slope SSS		0.0007* (0.0003)	0.0007* (0.0003)	0.0007* (0.0003)	0.0007* (0.0003)
Between covariance intercept-slope SSS		-0.0006* (0.0003)	-0.0005 <sup>ns</sup> (0.0005)	-0.0006 <sup>ns</sup> (0.0005)	-0.0006 <sup>ns</sup> (0.0005)
Model comparison					
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> within (%)	—	24.28	24.24	24.24	24.24
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> between (%)	—	—	30.88	33.01	34.10
-2 × log likelihood	38300.96	30350.11	30313.23	30299.21	30291.65
Δ -2 × log likelihood		7950.85***	36.88***	14.016***	7.56*
Δn parameters		8	1	2	2

Note. HIWP = high-involvement work practice  
 \*  $p < 0.1$ . \*\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; ns = not significant.

The results of this analysis are portrayed in Table 3. First, we added the effect of the organization-level HIWPs on workplace bullying exposure (M2). This model fitted the data better than the model without HIWPs included on Level 2 (M1). We found that the higher the organizations' HIWPs, the lower the bullying rate ( $b = -.26$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Organizations' HIWPs explained 31% in the between-organizational variance in exposure to workplace bullying. This finding confirmed Hypothesis 1. The results from Model 2 also shed light on how much organizations' HIWPs accounted for the slope variance. Organizations' HIWPs accounted for 28.5% of the slope variance of work pace, 9% of the slope variance of job insecurity, and 10% of the slope variance of social support from colleagues. Introducing organizations' HIWPs did not change nor affect the slope variance of social support from the supervisor. As we wanted to test the cross-level moderation model, we introduced in the following two models interaction terms with organizations' HIWPs on the one hand and job demands (M3) and resources on the other hand (M4). We found that the interaction between HIWPs and work pressure ( $b = -.13$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and between HIWPs and social support from colleagues ( $b = .10$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significant but that with job insecurity and social support from the supervisors were not. The addition of the cross-level interaction of HIWPs on the slopes of work pressure and social support from colleagues improved the model fit and added 4% of additional variance explained in the between-organizational variance in exposure to workplace bullying compared to Model 2, with only a main effect of Level 2 HIWPs.

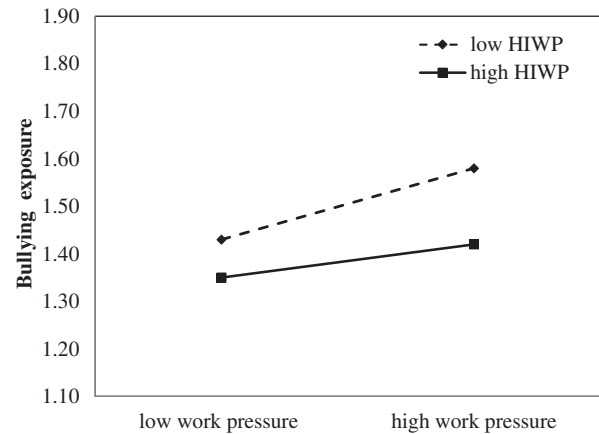
To interpret the interaction effects, we created two simple slopes plots, one for each significant interaction effect found (Preacher et al., 2006). As demonstrated in Figure 1, we found that the effect of work pressure on bullying was weaker for organizations scoring higher on HIWPs. Simple slopes analysis revealed that the positive association between work pressure and exposure to bullying scores was stronger at lower ( $b = 0.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ) versus higher ( $b = 0.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ) levels of HIWPs, although both slopes significantly differed from zero. This means that HIWPs were able to mitigate the negative effect of work pressure on bullying exposure to some extent. Regarding social support from colleagues, simple slopes analysis revealed that the negative association between social support from colleagues and exposure to bullying scores was stronger at lower ( $b = -0.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ) versus higher ( $b = -0.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ) levels of HIWPs. In Figure 2, we can observe that employees working in organizations scoring lower on HIWPs were most likely to become exposed to bullying when also experiencing lower social support from colleagues. For employees working in organization scoring higher on HIWPs, lower social support from colleagues seemed to play a less prominent role. Thus, we find a positive moderation effect of HIWPs on the effect of social support from colleagues on workplace bullying exposure, but the simple slopes test reveals that this is not a boosting effect, but rather a substitution effect (HIWPs substitute for low levels of social support from colleagues). In sum, we find support for Hypothesis 2a, but not for Hypotheses 2b, 3a, and 3b.

## Discussion

In this article, building on the social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) and the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), we investigate the association that HIWPs, individual

**Figure 1**

*Conditional Effect of Work Pressure on Bullying Exposure for Different Levels of High-Involvement Work Practices (HIWPs)*

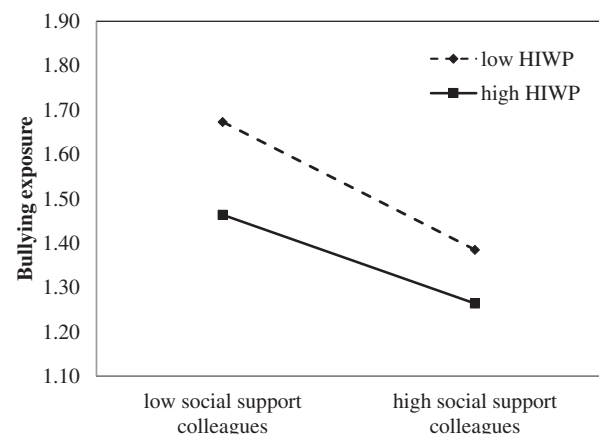


demands, and individual resources have with workplace bullying exposure. We argue that HIWPs signal the importance of positive intra- and interpersonal functioning to the employees and as such reduce frequency of bullying. Furthermore, we hypothesize that HIWPs can act as an organizational resource that buffers the negative effect of individual demands on bullying exposure and boosts the protective effect of individual resources. The findings of the multilevel analyses show that organizations scoring higher on HIWPs have lower rates of bullying exposure, even when controlling for individual-level perceptions of HIWPs. We also replicate previous research by finding a positive association between job demands (i.e., workload and job insecurity) and a negative association between personal resources (i.e., social support from colleagues and the supervisor) and bullying exposure.

The cross-level interaction analyses showed that organization-level HIWPs had a small moderating effect on the individual-level

**Figure 2**

*Conditional Effect of Social Support From Colleagues on Bullying Exposure for Different Levels of High-Involvement Work Practices (HIWPs)*



associations between work pressure and bullying, and social support from colleagues and bullying. In specific, work pressure had a lower positive effect on employees' experienced bullying in organizations scoring higher on HIWPs. This means that HIWPs acted as an organizational resource, reducing the effect of individually experienced demand of work pressure. Furthermore, the effect of HIWPs on the relationship between social support from colleagues and exposure to bullying seemed to be most pronounced for employees experiencing low social support from colleagues. In other words, when employees lacked individual resources of social support from colleagues at work, the organizational resource of HIWPs was able to somewhat compensate for this. This is contrary to our expectation that HIWPs would boost the negative relationship between social support from colleagues and bullying frequency. Finally, HIWPs were not able to moderate the effects of job insecurity and social support from the supervisor on bullying.

The study has important contributions for the workplace bullying literature. Although authors widely acknowledge the importance of organizational environments in relation to workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 1994; Hauge et al., 2007), most evidence regarding this idea comes from measuring individual experiences. Additionally, while there has been a recent increase in studies looking at organization-level predictors of workplace mistreatment, many studies focused on organizational climate as a relevant contextual variable (e.g., Kerse & Babadag, 2019; Li et al., 2019; Yang & Caughlin, 2017; Zahlquist et al., 2019). We argue that our study has a meaningful contribution beyond these studies for two reasons. First, while knowing that different types of climates can contribute to bullying exposure is valuable, climate remains an elusive construct that is challenging to measure and change. In our article, we focus on specific Human Resource Management (HRM) practices that can help reduce bullying exposure, which are more concrete and potentially easier to implement as a bullying prevention strategy. As such, we believe this study is an important first step toward more research on how HRM can be implemented to promote positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Second, an additional contribution of our study is the investigation of how different-level demands and resources interact. Namely, while positive HRM practices may negatively relate to bullying exposure, this does not necessarily mean that such organizational-level resource will be able to mitigate the negative effects of individually experienced demands known to predict bullying occurrence in the workplace. In our study, we explicitly test this by looking at how HIWPs can alter the association between individual level demands and resources and workplace bullying.

The findings of this study also contribute to the literature on the effectiveness of HR practices. Previous meta-analytical evidence shows that organizations that invest in their HR strategy can significantly improve employees' commitment, job satisfaction and motivation (Jiang et al., 2012; Kooij et al., 2010), and the overall organizational performance (Combs et al., 2006; Rauch & Hatak, 2016; Subramony, 2009). In that regard, interest in practices designed to maximize employees' sense of involvement with their work, and their commitment to the wider organization has been growing as studies show that such practices not only positively influence employee performance, but also their well-being (Böckerman et al., 2012; Mackie et al., 2001). In this study, we show that such practices can also have an impact on the behavioral

outcome of workplace bullying, extending previous research on the outcomes of HIWPs. Since HIWPs increase employee empowerment, immersing people in their jobs (Guthrie, 2001), it is possible that such context do not leave much room for people to engage in interpersonal mistreatment. Bullying persists in poor work environments (Baillien & De Witte, 2009), while employees working in environments characterized by HIWPs are likely healthy and resilient, making them less vulnerable to becoming victimized. In support, HIWPs have been associated with increased employee well-being and control in past research (Böckerman et al., 2012; Butts et al., 2009; Mackie et al., 2001), which are work factors that minimize employees' exposure to bullying (Baillien, Rodriguez-Muñoz, et al., 2011; Rousseau et al., 2014).

These findings also add to the JD-R literature, as they suggest that HIWPs can be conceptualized as an organizational-level resource that moderates the effect of individually experienced job demands and resources on bullying. In this study, we find that HIWPs moderated the relationship between work pressure and bullying and between social support from colleagues and bullying. Regarding the former relationship, in our study we observe that with increase in organizational HIWPs, the positive relationship between individual work pressure and bullying exposure decreases. The mitigating effect of HIWPs on the effect of individual demands is in-line with previous research, which finds that HIWPs may help offset the negative effect of psychological hazards at work (Cottini et al., 2011), and with the JD-R that suggests that resources can buffer the negative effect of demands. Regarding the latter, we did not find support for the idea that HIWPs would further strengthen the negative effect of social support from colleagues on bullying exposure. Instead, the opposite occurred, meaning that the negative effect of social support from colleagues on bullying became weaker as organizations' level of HIWPs increased. This result contrasts with the notion of resource caravans, which suggests that resources link together to create an accumulating positive effect (Hobfoll, 2011). Instead, they are in-line with the substitution hypothesis (Hobfoll & Leiberhan, 1987), according to which when a given resource is absent or inadequate, another resource may substitute for it. This idea has received some support in previous research (e.g., Koltai & Schieman, 2015; Ott et al., 2019; Tomprou et al., 2020), and is corroborated by our study results as well. Considering this unexpected result, we urge researchers to further explore how different types of employee resources interact (when do they link together and when do they substitute), as such exploration would be a valuable addition to the current JD-R theorizing.

Furthermore, in our study, we found a significant positive association between job insecurity and bullying exposure, but we found that HIWPs were not able to mitigate this effect. Trends such as gig-economy have resulted in an abundance of temporary, short, and on-demand contracts, increasing employee vulnerability (Friedman, 2014). Such temporary nature of employees' job contracts can leave them feeling stressed and thus vulnerable to bullying behavior (Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2008). The lack of a moderating effect of HIWPs on job insecurity-bullying relationship could be attributed to the fact that job insecurity is a particularly harmful stressors which is more difficult to compensate by having HIWPs. That is, even when the work is fulfilling, the experience of insecurity regarding one's employment may be a significant source of stress making people vulnerable to bullying. In support, past studies found

that the devastating effect of job insecurity on employees' well-being is difficult to compensate for, even when employees perceive themselves as highly employable (Silla et al., 2009). Furthermore, meta-analytical evidence shows that job insecurity leads to negative outcomes in employees even in countries with good welfare regimes and high re-employment rates (Virtanen et al., 2013).

In this study, we confirm previous findings that social support from one's supervisor is negatively related to bullying exposure (e.g., Hansen et al., 2006), illustrating the importance of leadership in protecting employees from negative interpersonal interactions at work. We did not find a moderating effect of HIWPs on this relationship. While the organizational resource of HIWPs was able to substitute for the lack of individually experienced social support, it is possible that this is more challenging in the case of lack of social support from the supervisor, as supervisors have formal power to change employee outcomes and colleagues do not. This is also in-line with a study by Nakata et al. (2014) who compared the effect of different types of social support on employees' physiological well-being, finding that particularly supervisor support had a strong effect on employees' inflammatory markers. Furthermore, since for many employees their supervisors are an embodiment of the organization, this may reduce the ability of HIWPs to produce a positive effect when supervisor support is lacking. There results underline the importance of good leadership, illustrating not only that it protects from bullying exposure, but also that it cannot easily be substituted for by other organizational measures.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Like any study, our study has potential limitations. First, it is important to recognize that our study relied on a cross-sectional survey design. Therefore, we cannot make any definite inferences about causality. Future research should consider using longitudinal designs as to provide greater insights into the causal relationships among job demands, job resources, HPWP, and bullying at work. Second, to obtain a score on the organizational-level HIWPs, we used a direct consensus approach, by aggregating scores pertaining to individual perceptions of HIWPs (e.g., "I believe that"). Several scholars (e.g., Chan, 1998; Liao & Rupp, 2005) have argued that theoretically it may be more appropriate to use referent-shift consensus measures, by aggregating scores pertaining to collective perceptions of a certain phenomenon (e.g., "We believe that"). Both measurement approaches have been widely used in climate research, both across and within types of climates, and a standard has not yet emerged (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009). In this study, a direct consensus approach seems to be justified, as it is very likely that members of large entities—such as organizations—are not aware of collective perceptions present in their organizations regarding various work-related factors (Van Mierlo et al., 2009).

Third, all variables measured in this study were obtained through self-reports, suggesting potential common method bias. Yet, self-reports are justifiable and probably even necessary when studying constructs that are self-referential respondent perceptions, such as the measures in our study (Chan, 2009). Still, we attempted to mitigate common method bias in this study. First, we used valid measures. Second, we adopted the recommendations for questionnaire design (e.g., protecting respondent anonymity and reducing evaluation apprehension; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Finally, we aggregated HIWPs measures to the organization level. The design

strategies, plus the fact that some of our hypotheses included cross-level interactions, suggest that common method bias may be of less concern in our study (Conway & Lance, 2010).

Fourth, the public sector was underrepresented in this study. Future research may wish to replicate our findings in a sample that is representative for both the public and the private sector. Such research may be valuable as compared to employees from the public sector in Belgium, private sector employees are confronted with relatively more job demands (Smulders & Houtman, 2012) and more bullying (Notelaers et al., 2011). As public sector employees typically enjoy better job protection, more favorable terms of employment and report more positive work-related experiences (Millard & Machin, 2007), the relationships established in this study might exhibit different patterns when tested in a public sector sample. Furthermore, Notelaers et al. (2011) argued that the favorable job conditions of public servants, including advantageous pension plans, may function as a "golden cage" for targets of bullying. Similarly, the cemented fixed position of employees, makes it almost impossible to dismiss perpetrators for misconduct. The latter are face-valid arguments to focus more attention toward the public sector. Also, note that our sample was exclusively Belgian. Due to government regulations, salaries are probably less negotiable in Belgium than in many other countries, including the USA. Hence, before generalizing our findings to employees from other countries and cultures, replicating the results with a more diverse sample would be preferable.

Fifth, in this study, we argue that HIWPs protect employees from exposure to bullying through signaling to the employees the importance of positive intra- and interpersonal functioning. Unfortunately, we did not have the observations necessary to examine these explanatory mechanisms. Furthermore, while we assume a moderating relationship of HIWPs on the relationship between job demands and resources and bullying, it could be argued that HIWPs reduce bullying through direct effect on job demands and resources experienced by employees. Considering the cross-sectional nature of our data, testing mediation would also not be meaningful as cross-sectional mediation tests produce biased effect estimates (see Maxwell et al., 2011). Additionally, past studies suggest that HIWPs do not necessarily reduce employees' experiences of job demands and can even be associated with elevated pressure at work (Wood et al., 2012). Still, future research could further explore mechanisms responsible for the beneficial effect of HIWPs on exposure to workplace bullying and test an alternative mediation model in which HIWPs reduce bullying through decreased demands and increased resources. Finally, we were not able to collect data on HIWPs by objective means, for instance, by studying policy documents and interviewing HR personnel and the Union representatives of all these organizations. Accordingly, more research is needed to collect data from multiple sources to link the intended HIWPs to the experienced HIWPs and the employee level relationships we have studied. Future research may want to aim to more directly investigate the mechanisms through which work climates and job stressors and resources jointly influence employee outcomes.

### Practical Implications

Following our results and in line with the essence of HIWPs (cf. Kilroy et al., 2016; Searle et al., 2011), organizations should focus on empowering their employees by increasing their access to

information, their competence, and their participation in decision-making and incentivize employees to invest in their work and employer. The discretion and autonomy that the HIWPs encompass can enable employees to better handle individual demands they experience (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Kilroy et al., 2016). Investments in HIWPs may be a way of helping employees cope with existing work pressure, which organization cannot always eliminate because of the inherently demanding nature of certain jobs. Furthermore, HIWPs can help protect vulnerable employees, particularly when employees are lacking in social support from their colleagues. However, managers need to be aware that HIWPs cannot protect from all forms of stressors. The results of this study indicate that although HIWPs may buffer the negative effects of work pressure, they cannot compensate for low job insecurity or low support from supervisors. Organizations should, therefore, strive to maintain balanced levels of job insecurity and train supervisors to be considerate toward their employees, through leadership training programs that have been shown to increase supervisor effectiveness (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

### Conclusion

In this study, we find that organizations with higher levels of HIWPs also have lower rates of bullying, and that HIWPs can reduce the association between individually experienced work pressure and bullying exposure. However, we also find that the effect of job insecurity is more difficult to compensate for by organizational HRM practices. Furthermore, we find that the organizational resource of HIWPs is particularly important for protecting employees who lack the individual resource of social support from colleagues. However, HIWPs cannot compensate for the lack of support from the supervisor. These results underline the importance of the organizational context in limiting exposure to workplace bullying, while also discussing the boundaries to organizational influence.

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