HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT BASED ON BASIC SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND ABILITY TO CONTROL NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES AT WORK AMONG YOUNGER EMPLOYEES

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Abstract: Studies have shown that personality traits (Welbourne et al., 2020) and socio-demographic characteristics (Marinaccio et al., 2013) can significantly affect an individual's ability to manage negative experiences at work. Negative experiences at work represent a major problem with multiple negative impacts on various aspects of the workplace. It directly influences employees' self-perception, the company's reputation, and diminishes their motivation to strive for the company's objectives (Glambek et al., 2015; Van Dick & Liang, 2018). Consequently, negative experiences at work also pose a threat to the company's smooth operations (Rasool et al., 2021). From the perspective of human resource management, it is essential to address such issues promptly if they already exist within the company. Moreover, preventing negative experiences at work through effective employee selection, educational processes, and the development of appropriate team-building strategies is highly desirable (Hussain et al., 2018; Alnoor et al., 2021). The present research aims to investigate the relationship between the ability to manage negative experiences at work among younger employees. The sample included 81 young employees (41 female) aged between 18 and 30 years. Socio-demographic variables (gender, age, marital status, educational status, and family status) were collected using a short questionnaire. Additionally, three aspects of the ability to control negative experiences at work (personal humiliation, professional humiliation, and professional obstructions) were assessed using a shortened version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (Vukelić, 2015). Firstly, descriptive statistics for the indicators of the ability to manage negative experiences at work were examined. Subsequently, their relationships with socio-demographic values were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. Three multiple regression analyses were performed, with socio-demographic variables as predictors, and personal humiliation, professional humiliation, and professional obstructions as dependent variables. The results indicated that only gender (β=.35; p<.01) and material status (β=-.28; p<.01 β=.35; p<.01) significantly contributed to explaining the ability to control professional obstructions (R^2=.22; F(5,75)=4.127; p<.01). Women and those with lower material status demonstrated potentially higher resilience in managing professional obstructions. Other socio-demographic variables did not show a significant impact on the ability to manage negative experiences among younger employees. Overall, the findings revealed some differences when compared to studies conducted with older employees and individuals with more diverse educational backgrounds (Sime et al., 2022; La Torre et al. 2018). The practical implications of these findings are discussed from the perspective of human resource management.
Keywords: socio-demographic variables, negative experiences at work, human resource management.

1. INTRODUCTION

While there are varying opinions on what workplace mobbing truly constitutes (Saunders et al., 2007), all authors agree that mobbing is based on negative behaviors encountered by individuals at work. Negative behaviors at work lead to reduced job satisfaction (Rodríguez-Cifuentes et al., 2020) for individuals facing such negative behaviors at work, while simultaneously impairing the functioning of the company (Rasool et al., 2021). In a work environment where negative actions towards employees are not mitigated, two possibilities can arise, neither of which is positive. In this case, employees either try to minimize the significance of such a situation, often resulting in assuming the role of a victim or they directly confront the situation, often leading to leaving the work collective (Salin, 2003). The reaction of an individual when confronted with negative workplace behaviors primarily depends on personality traits putting the company at a disadvantage. In other words, in the case of employees constantly facing negative behaviors at work, the stability and effectiveness of the company start depending on how much employees can endure such unpleasant experiences. On the other hand, in the Southeast European region, the socio-demographic characteristics of employees significantly influence their susceptibility to enduring mobbing (or unpleasant behaviors) at work. In other words, the ability to successfully overcome negative behaviors at work depends on both the employees' personality traits and their socio-demographic characteristics. The aim of this study is to investigate to what extent the demographic characteristics of younger employees influence their ability to successfully cope with negative behavior at work.

In addition to shedding light on the nature of the relationship between various socio-demographic characteristics and the experience of negative behaviors at work, the results should also provide information useful in the field of human resources management. Namely, the general assumption is that increasing the compatibility of individual

employee characteristics with job (and company) characteristics is a necessary condition for the successful functioning of a company. Therefore, it is expected that the results regarding the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics among younger employees in the study can be of multiple benefits in constructing accurate predictions in professional selection, orientation, and employee professional education.

1.1. Negative behavior with work

Studies thus far consistently demonstrate that negative behaviors in the workplace have a detrimental impact on the company (Verschuren et al., 2021). Simultaneously, however, negative workplace behaviors also influence employees' behavior outside of work (Brotheridge & Lee, 2010), their social attitudes (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004; Cook & Bird, 2011), as well as their overall psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Nauman et al., 2019). Negative workplace behaviors commonly refer to various forms of workplace mobbing encountered by individuals in their work environment. This category encompasses all forms of discrimination and hindrance experienced by an individual, and Leymann and Gustafsson (1996) described mobbing as psychological terror at work. This psychological terror involves offensive and exclusionary behavior directed at one or more colleagues, who are unable to adequately defend themselves, leading to increased psychological, somatic, and social distress among those subjected to mobbing. Such behavior includes aggressive and disrespectful communication, attacks on one's integrity, individuality, and health, as well as creating professional and social obstacles (Saunders et al., 2007). Moreover, mobbing can be categorized as horizontal or vertical (Stefko et al., 2023). Horizontal mobbing occurs between employees at the same hierarchical level, whereas vertical mobbing is directed from superiors toward subordinate employees.

1.2. Relationship between socio-demographic characteritics with controlability of negativve behavior at work

Research conducted in various countries over the last two decades has yielded significant disparities in findings regarding workplace mobbing across European nations. These variations may be attributed to two primary factors. The first likely stems from diverse interpretations of the term "mobbing," while the second could be linked to differences in legal systems among different states (Trišić et al., 2017). Female employees, in general, exhibited notably lower susceptibility to mobbing at the workplace compared to males. However, other studies (Roberts et al., 2020) revealed that women also display higher levels of control over verbal mobbing incidents compared to men.

Concerning employees' age, most studies suggest that younger employees tend to manage negative workplace behaviors better, primarily because they do not share the same life challenges as older counterparts who may have familial responsibilities or childcare duties. Educational attainment has also been identified as a contributing factor to an individual's resilience against negative workplace behaviors. Vukelić (2015) presented evidence indicating that male employees, particularly those who are older, possess higher levels of education, and have longer work experience, demonstrate greater ability to effectively cope with negative workplace behaviors. A review of existing literature underscores the pivotal role socio-demographic variables play in an individual's capacity to withstand negative behaviors in the workplace. However, it is important to note that inconsistencies in research outcomes hinder the broad generalization of these conclusions. This is especially evident in terms of cross-country disparities, often resulting from cross-cultural distinctions in how negative workplace behaviors, falling under the domain of mobbing, are addressed. Therefore, further research examining the interplay between the controllability of negative workplace behaviors and diverse socio-demographic characteristics of employees is necessary.

1.3. Human resources management

John Commons used the term "human resource" in his book "Distribution of Wealth" in 1983, directly linking it to the establishment and maintenance of a quality employee structure within a company. Even today, the term "human resources" refers directly to employees in a company and their competencies, encompassing all interactions with employees within the company. As a result, human resources management is a concept that encompasses various activities such as candidate selection, job analysis, employee socialization and training, as well as performance and behavior management of employees. This significance continues to grow as a company progresses through the stages of Greiner's growth model (Greiner, 1972), especially in the third phase where the need to manage the company is realized through the establishment of middle management. In all subsequent phases, managing human resources becomes even more critical for successful business operations. Employee motivation, attitudes towards negative workplace events, such as various forms of harassment (Williams, 2012), and overall job satisfaction become of primary importance in later stages of company development (Čekrlija & Grujić, 2023).

From the perspective of human resources management, research exploring the relationships between employees' psychological and socio-demographic characteristics provides valuable insights. For instance, findings that demonstrate a negative correlation between neuroticism and stress resistance at work (Uliaszek et al., 2010), or a positive correlation between conscientiousness and agreeableness with task efficiency (Stock & Beste, 2015), allow for more accurate candidate selection and employee motivation. Similarly, results showing that women prioritize factors of social interaction, while men prioritize task accomplishment, or that younger workers prioritize skill

development, middle-aged workers prioritize direct and indirect monetary compensations, and older workers prioritize job security and stability (Proroković et al., 2009), provide significant information that is highly useful in the field of human resources management. Given the practical value of these results, they will be interpreted from the perspective of human resources management.

1.4. The current study

In the curent research relationship between basic socio-demographic characteristics of the employees and their ability to sucesfully cope with negative behavior at work. More closely, the posibility to predict youngeer employees' controlability of the negative behavior at work on the basis of their gender, age, marital, family and socio-economic status. From the many different types of negative behavior at work in this study we extracted personal humiliation, professional humiliation and professional obstructions, and their relations with aforementioned socio-demographic variables. The results are expected to provide an oportunity to provide usefull information for the different activities which belong to the human resource management.

2. METHOD

2.1. Sample

Sample comprised of 81 (women) younger employees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. All respondenets were aged between 18 and 30 years ($M = 24,06$ $SD =3.49$) in order to examine relations between tested variables at youngeer population. All participants provided informed consent and participatin in the study was completely voluntary and anonimous. The bassic socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristisc of examine young employees

Variables		f(%)
Gender	Male	35(4)
	Female	46(57)
Education	Elementary school	5 (6)
	Two or three-years high school	16(20)
	Four-years high school	60(74)
Marital/Family status	Single and without children	42(52)
	Single and have children	9(11)
	Married and without children	9(11)
	Married and have children	21(26)
Material status	Below average	17(21)
	Average	63(78)
	Above average	1(1)

2.2. Measures and variables

The short, 6-items scale, measuring three asspects of negative behavior at work (personal humiliation, professional humiliation and professional obstructions) were useed. Eeach asspect is assessed by two items from the original Negative Behaviors at Work Questionnaire (NAQ-R, Vukelić, 2015) which investigates the perceived controlability of negative behaviors at work. Personal humiliation was asssessed using items item 2 (*If someone were to humiliate you or make fun of the way you do your job.*) and item 5 (*When they spread rumors and gossip about you.*); professional humiliation was asssessed using item 3 (*When you would perform work below your level of expertise*) and item 18 (*If they would excessively control you when doing work.*); while professional obstructions was asssessed using item 16 (*When they would give you meaningless tasks, or tasks that cannot be completed within the given time.*) and item 21 (*If you were burdened with work that you could not do complete it.*). Respondentd answer on a 4-point Likert scale (*1=I would I would easily cope with it* to *4=I would hardly cope with it*). The descriptive statistics of the three subcsales were provided in the Table 2.

2.3. Statistical analysis

Descriptive parameters for the scores on three short measures of negative behavior at work were calculated first, as well as their inter-correlations. The multiple regression analysis was applied in order to directly examine assocciatins between socio-demographic variables and controlability of the negative behavior at work. Three multiople regression analysis were performed with the personal humiliation, professional humiliation and professional obstructions as criterion variables, respectively, while socio-demographic variables represented the sblock of independent variables.

3. RESULTS

The Table 2 reepresentsss the basic descriptive parameters for the scores on the personal humiliation, professional humiliation and professional obstructions scales. All three measures of perceived controlability of negative behaviors at work show similar values of means and standard deviations. Skewnees and kurtosis, both suggest that all three measures of perceived controlability of negative behaviors at work have normal distributions. The correlation analysis showed that all three examined aspects of ability to cope with negative behavior at work are significantly positively aociated among themselves. On th eother hand, only profesional humiliation ewas found correlated with age, suggesting that the youngest employees shoow the highest ability to control the an sucessfully cope with professional humiliation at work.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, inter-correlations and correlatio with age for personal humiliation, professional humiliation and professional obstructions scores

	M	SD	S	K	PERS hum	PROF hum	PROF obs	Age
1. PERS hum	4.05	1.35	.47	-.36	1.00	.48**	.31**	-.19
2. PROF hum	4.35	1.47	.15	-.59		1.00	.35**	-.26*
3. PROF obs	4.09	1.34	.60	-.22			1.00	-.14

Note: PERS hum = personal humiliation, PROF hum = professional humiliation; PROF obs = professional obstructions; M = Mean; SD = Standard deviationa; S = Skewness; K = Kurtosis:
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

The results in the Table 3 show beta coefficients obtained in the miltuple regression analysis, in which predictive power of the socio-demographic variables were analyzed. Values od the R^2 and F test indicated that socio-demographic variables do not explain significant amount of variance for the personal humiliation and professional humiliation. In other words, controlability of personal humiliation and professional humiliation, as negative behaviors at work, cannot be predicted on the basis of examined socio-demographic variables of the younger employees. On the other hand, obtained results showed that gender and material status significantly contribute to the explanation of the controlability of the professional obstructions at work, showing higher controlability at women and employees with lower material status.

Table 3. Beta coefficients in predicting the personal humiliation, professional humiliation and professional obstructions from soccio-demographic variables

	PERS_hum		PROF_hum		PROF_obs	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
Gender	.06	.643	.09	.487	.35**	.007
Age	-.113	.367	-.24	.091	-.01	.934
Educaction	.06	.628	.14	.247	-.09	.429
Marital/Family status	-.08	.551	.04	.734	.11	.381
Material status	.12	.318	.10	.373	-.28**	.008
R^2	.06		.11		.22	
F(5,75)	.913		1.766		4.127	
P	.477		.130		.002	

Note: PERS hum = personal humiliation, PROF hum = professional humiliation; PROF obs = professional obstructions; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

4. DISCCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether socio-demographic characteristics affect the ability to successfully cope with negative behavior at work, including personal humiliation, professional humiliation, and professional obstructions. The study, in general, showed that age, marital and family status do not significantly affect the controllability of any of the examined negative behaviors at work among younger respondents. In other words, the examined population of employees appears to be more resistant to negative behavior at work than older workers. This phenomenon might be related to the fact that younger employees do not develop as strong a relationship with the workplace and company as older employees.

On the other hand, the association between material status could be linked to the fact that higher material status provides existential security, causing younger employees to avoid experiencing negative consequences at work. Alternatively, it may be possible that younger employees do not perceive the aforementioned behaviors as

excessively negative at all. In such cases, it could be presumed that resistance to professional obstacles increases with age and work experience.

The obtained findings are only partly in line with Vukelić's (2015) results, which indicated that the age and family status of respondents also predict the ability to cope successfully with negative behavior at work. Furthermore, Vukelić (2015) reported a more significant role of gender. The differences in findings might be attributed to the fact that this study only included younger employees. Additionally, while Vukelić (2015) examined the general controllability of negative behavior at work, the current study investigated its components. Separated analyses like this could lead to differences in findings. Considering this, future studies should pay attention to both approaches: exploring the overall controllability of negative behavior at work and examining its specific aspects as well.

5. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is potentially the first to directly examine the relationship between personal humiliation, professional humiliation, professional obstructions, and socio-demographic characteristics among younger employees. Therefore, the results need replication. Another limitation concerns the generalizability of the findings due to the use of only one sample of younger employees. Furthermore, the sample size might be considered relatively small for conducting multiple regression analysis, serving as a third limitation of the study. Consequently, further research with larger and more diverse samples of younger employees is necessary to derive valid conclusions. Finally, the fourth limitation could be associated with the fact that the conducted study solely relies on self-reported measures, which could lead to an increase in socially desirable responses. Subsequent studies should also incorporate observational data to assess the controllability of negative behavior at work.

Considering all the conclusions and limitations presented, it becomes evident that successful strategies formulated by human resources management must be based on empirical data observed within the company. In other words, socio-demographic characteristics might have different relationships with the ability to successfully cope with negative behavior at work. Decisions for younger employees should differ from decisions made for the general working population or older employees. The controllability of negative behavior at work among younger employees might be less influenced by socio-demographic characteristics than in older employees.

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