



RESEARCH PAPER

**The Relationship between Social Undermining and
Counterproductive Work Behavior: Analyzing the Gender
Differences**

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the impact of social undermining on counterproductive work behavior and also assessed the gender differences with regards to counter-productive work behavior considering the context of higher education institutes in Balochistan. Data was collected from 330 faculty members working in three public sector universities in Quetta Pakistan. Stratified random sampling technique was used to collect data for the current study. Results of the study revealed that social undermining had a positive significant relationship with counterproductive work behavior. The results further showed that the counterproductive work behavior of males was significantly higher than females. The results indicated that social undermining is a detrimental phenomenon which negatively effects a both individuals and organizations.

KEYWORDS Counterproductive Work Behavior, Gender Differences, Social Undermining
Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a noticeable increase in mistreatment within workplaces (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). While the negative impacts of such mistreatment have been extensively studied in Western countries, it remains a largely unaddressed issue in regions like Balochistan. Here, psychological issues often go unnoticed due to a lack of awareness. Given the significant influence of interpersonal links and interactions on work performance, they are critical factors in maintaining a healthy work environment. Authors such as East & Rook (1992) emphasize the complexity of social interactions, stating that they can yield both high satisfaction and disappointment simultaneously.

Furthermore, Beheshtifar (2014) identifies causes of social undermining, including anger, boredom, aimlessness, loneliness, a decrease in well-being and self-esteem, depression, dislike, and low life quality, leading to psychosomatic symptoms. Duffy et al. (2002) describe social undermining as a behavior that creates severe workplace destruction, hindering people from developing and sustaining healthy interpersonal relationships, achieving professional success, and maintaining a positive reputation.

Rook (1984) was among the first modern theorists to advocate focusing on the negative elements of social relationships. While social undermining is not considered a viable idea, the primary concern for any employer is employee work behavior. Various tangible and intangible elements affect work behavior, playing a role in both

encouraging good practices and counterproductive behavior. The interactions between individuals and their supervisors, co-workers, and subordinates in their workgroup are critical factors in this scenario (Sabeen & Arshad, 2019).

Negative effects of social undermining are well-documented, showing its psychological, cognitive, and behavioral impacts (Duffy et al., 2002; Taylor, 1991). Yoo & Frankwick (2013) highlight the effects of supervisor, peer, and subordinate undermining attitudes on the counterproductive behavior of sales employees. The lack of attention to the topic of social undermining in Pakistan has severe implications for the academic community, potentially perpetuating toxic behavior observed in the West.

Various political, social, and cultural factors contribute to the appointment of incompatible individuals in academic institutions, leading to social undermining in academia (Sabeen & Arshad, 2019). This behavior is believed to hinder decision-making and social connections over time (Shaheen et al., 2021). On the contrary, research has shown that decision making is improved by traits such as emotional intelligence (Dilawar et al., 2017). Social undermining is considered a public health problem, causing mood fluctuations, decreased productivity, loss of motivation, overall indifference, and cognitive changes (Cranford, 2004; Duffy et al., 2006).

Asa & Lasebikan (2016) find that social undermining may impede teachers' everyday activities, negatively impacting their performance. Management scholars focus on the effects of social undermining in survivor behaviors, as these behaviors disadvantage organizations by increasing absenteeism, decreasing dedication, and negatively affecting well-being (Sabeen & Arshad, 2019). Studies have primarily focused on the outcomes and objectives of the convict (Crossley, 2009).

Gant et al. (1993) state that social undermining causes social welfare workers to become oversensitive and emotionally drained, leading to frustration or anxiety. Workplace bullying and stress can make the workplace hostile, discomforting, constrained, dishonest, and stressful (Anwar & Sidin, 2016). Pearson et al. (2001) conclude that social undermining will adversely affect employees' well-being, productivity, commitment, and job satisfaction. Taherpour et al. (2016) note that social undermining is gaining more attention due to its connections and overall influence on people and their relationships, impacting performance at work. Scholars are increasingly inclined to study this phenomenon and develop approaches to address it (Abas & Otto, 2016).

Literature review

Social Undermining

Rook (1984) highlighted the negative side of social interaction in the workplace. Other scholars, such as Ruehlman & Karoly (1991), emphasized negative social exchange concerns in interpersonal relationships, describing them as deliberate interception, mockery, and insensitivity. Vinokur & Van (1993) coined the term "social undermining." According to Vinokur & Van (1993), social undermining is the expression of detrimental feelings and emotions, such as animosity and hatred toward a target. Furthermore, it involves an unfavorable evaluation of a person's characteristics, actions, efforts, and behaviors that prevent them from achieving their instrumental goals (Duffy et al., 2012). The term "social undermining concept" refers to activities taken against a target that exhibit (1) negative affect (anger, dislike), (2) negatively evaluating the target's

characteristics, actions, and efforts (criticism), and/or (3) "actions that prevent the achievement of operational goals" (Vinokur et al., 1996).

Since social undermining has different aspects, it can harm relationships if those aspects aren't addressed properly. Direct actions constitute the first type. Direct undermining behavior includes actions such as criticizing, disparaging, openly rejecting, or insulting a person or their views. Such behavior can damage relationships and devastate a person's character. Keeping information or refusing to defend a peer or subordinate is another kind of undermining. Making disparaging comments about a peer or verbally insulting them is regarded as an active type of social undermining, as other aspects include verbal and physical forms. A passive type of undermining would include giving someone the silent treatment or withholding crucial information from a peer. Physical undermining can take the form of refusing to provide essential work materials or adopting counterproductive work activities to disrupt the target (Reynolds, 2009).

Authors Morrison and Robinson (1997) highlighted another important aspect of social undermining, which is the breach of the interpersonal contract. It may have detrimental effects on both the individual and the organization. Social undermining actions include (a) prolonged delay, (b) fighting for status, and (c) providing false information. All of these actions may have negative effects on the offenders, the victims, and the organizations in which they are placed (Greenbaum et al., 2012).

Authors Sabeen & Arshad (2019) addressed the psychological impact of social undermining, which is another important aspect to ensure the well-being of workers in professional settings. Subsequently, social undermining has an impact on how one performs at work and eventually induces undesirable behaviors like withdrawing from voluntary action. Employees will be less likely to act in a way that benefits their organization as a result of the social undermining they experience (Jung & Yoon, 2022).

The term "social undermining behavior" refers to deliberate unprofessional behavior in the workplace designed to harm another party's good reputation, their capability to accomplish tasks, or their capacity to create and maintain a positive social network (Duffy et al., 2002). Consequently, such behaviors could be viewed as a source of work stress. Negative emotional reactions like aggression are frequently brought on by job stresses (Fox et al., 2001) and might result in the destruction of trust (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005).

Social undermining practices have detrimental effects on the organization, including an increase in counterproductive work behaviors, reciprocal social undermining, and a decline in job satisfaction. Additionally, these actions may result in severe personal effects like anxiety, lowered self-esteem, and psychological problems (Duffy et al., 2006).

Social undermining was further explored and introduced to the workplace context by Duffy et al. (2002). They described social undermining as deliberate actions taken to prevent employees from establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships, succeeding, and having positive reputations at work. Moreover, Abbey et al. (1985) highlighted social undermining as a serious threat to effective coping and individual success.

Counterproductive Work Behavior

Counterproductive work behavior is defined as purposeful behavior designed to disrupt the organization or other members of the organization (Fox & Spector, 1999). It encompasses all behaviors with the intention of causing harm, including destruction, theft, intentional violation of duties, physical assault, verbal animosity, and insults. Some behaviors, such as hatred and aggression, are directed towards individuals, while others, like improperly performing duties or engaging in sabotage, are intended for the organization (Gonzalez-Mulé, DeGeest, Kiersch, & Mount, 2013).

Various scholars have investigated CWB, but they have done so from various theoretical perspectives, leading to an increase in the terms used to characterize overlapping phenomena (Spector & Fox, 2002). Beehr & Newman (1978) initially introduced the term organizational aggression for actions intended to harm an organization. Subsequently, Hogan & Hogan (1989) referred to it as delinquent behavior, Robinson & Bennett (1995) as deviance, Skarlicki & Folger (1997) as retaliation, and Neuman & Baron (1998) as aggression. Fox & Spector (1999) used the term "counterproductive," while Spector & Fox (2002) later introduced antisocial behavior and retaliation. Definitions of CWB by Neuman & Baron (1998), Beehr & Newman (1978), Leary-Kelly et al. (1996) were rooted in social psychological aggression studies. Hollinger (1986) and Robinson & Bennett (1995) based their concept on deviance, violating the organization's norms. Skarlicki & Folger (1997) introduced an organizational justice strategy, viewing CWB as a form of retaliation.

Spector & Fox (2002) adopted an emotion-based approach, asserting that certain organizational events may trigger unpleasant feelings, leading to emotions of retaliation and CWB. Numerous studies have linked counterproductive behavior to stressful events, such as frustration and aggression caused by stress and unpleasant work circumstances (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Gilboa et al., 2008; Reisel et al., 2010). CWB includes various forms of violence and theft (Benjamin & Samson, 2011), influenced by situational or external factors, such as the environment, workplace culture, or internal factors, like personality (Penney et al., 2011). It may manifest as disruptive behavior for the business or involve alcohol or drugs for the individual. Corporations recognize the importance of limiting the rise of such behavior (Lasisi Olukayode et al., 2014).

CWBs have diverse outcomes, originating from minor violations (stealing) and escalating to adverse behaviors such as harassment, physical or verbal abuse directed at a coworker, or dishonesty (Szostek, 2018). According to Bashir et al. (2012), counterproductive work behaviors impact both individuals and companies. Governmental employees who exhibit these behaviors experience detrimental consequences, including low morale, intense feelings of anger, irritability, stress, sadness, anxiety, low self-esteem, and work discontent, which may also manifest as physical problems and behaviors.

The existence of such practices can have various detrimental effects on the organization, including low productivity, poor job performance, higher insurance costs, high absenteeism and turnover rates, increased desire to quit work, poor quality of work, and other factors that contribute to organizational failure.

Effect of Social Undermining on Counterproductive Work Behavior

Research has reported the negative impact of social undermining, suggesting its adverse affective, psychological, and interpersonal consequences (Duffy et al., 2002).

Social undermining in the workplace has been identified as a critical issue having detrimental results in terms of workers' behaviors and attitudes (Sabeen & Arshad, 2019). Furthermore, it acts as a catalyst for counterproductive work behaviors, as employees may adopt antisocial actions to express discontentment with their organization. Consequently, engaging in counterproductive work behaviors becomes the last resort for employees (Sabeen & Arshad, 2019).

Research by Duffy et al. (2002a) has associated social undermining behaviors with counterproductive workplace behaviors and the well-being of the victim. Previous literature has indicated that social undermining behavior negatively impacts organizations, leading to decreased job satisfaction and an increase in counterproductive work behaviors, which are also measures of well-being (Yörük & Yörük, 2012; Seligman, 2002). On the positive side, some researchers have argued that psychological empowerment and work life balance practices reduce similar negative workplace behaviors such as organizational cynicism (Durrani et al., 2017; Kakar et al., 2022)

Duffy et al. (2006) suggest a higher likelihood of employees harming their organizations in environments with elevated levels of social undermining. They also found a close relationship between social undermining and counterproductive work behaviors. Authors Bruk-Lee & Spector (2006) proposed that conflicts with managers and coworkers compel employees to engage in counterproductive work behaviors. Crossley (2009) noted that such detrimental behaviors might be triggered by social undermining from coworkers or managers, or as revenge against unknown members of the public.

Numerous studies on social undermining indicate that victims' responses are significantly influenced by their own perspectives, resulting in negative effects on organizations. These effects include increased counterproductive behaviors, reciprocated social undermining, lower job satisfaction, and negative personal impacts such as distress, a reduction in self-esteem, and indications of psychosomatic illness (Duffy et al., 2006; Duffy et al., 2002). Keeping in view the arguments from previous literature, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1: There is a positive relationship between social undermining and counterproductive work behavior.

Analyzing the Gender Differences

Previously, gender and counterproductive work behavior have been correlated in organizational research. Authors Berry et al., (2007) explained relationship between counterproductive work behavior and gender in study where he concluded that counterproductive work behavior was significantly different between males and females where males often reported higher levels of counterproductive behavior as compared to females. Additionally, the same literature was reviewed by (Hershcovis et al., 2007), who used the term "aggression," for CWB and they showed similar results, where males typically reported higher counterproductive work behavior than females. Likewise, Spector & Zhou, (2014) also found that men reported greater CWB than females. Apart from mean variations, Gender has also been examined as a moderator of the relationship between aggression and other variables (Bowker et al., 2012; Crick, 1997; Fives et al., 2011; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2005). Several researchers have analyzed gender differences regarding workplace behaviors in asian context (Durrani et al., 2017; Yalalova & Durrani 2017). Grych & Kinsfogel, (2010) revealed that there is a more substantial association between aggressive attitudes and aggression in male adolescents than in

female adolescents. It has been discovered in the developmental literature that boys and girls aren't prone to the same types of aggression. Girls exhibit greater relational aggression or acts that harm relationships, as opposed to boys, who often exhibit more physical and verbal aggressiveness (Archer, 2000; Card et al., 2008). Relational aggression comprises both direct actions (withholding friendship unless a demand is met) and indirect actions (demanding other people to avoid a target). Duffy et al., (2002) argued that indirect actions of aggression include undermining, as undermining entails targeting a rival's position or reputation, while relational aggression targets interpersonal relationships frequently in an effort to control the target.

Generally, research has shown that men are prone to display aggression in different forms more than women. For instance, researcher have shown higher tendency in males showing aggression (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Kaukiainen et al., 2001; Rutter & Hine, 2005), which include bullying (Simpson & Cohen, 2004), and counterproductive work behavior (Hershcovis et al., 2007). Moreover, according to the Social Role Theory principles, men are perceived as having higher degrees of authority and status than women in conventional workplaces, as well as taking part in Counterproductive work behavior in order to gain or sustain their outstanding status and authority (Eagly et al., 2000). Unfortunately, no research has ever been done in Quetta city to analyze the impact and relationship of social undermining and counterproductive work behavior. Gender is another important element to get educated about either men and women experience and respond to counterproductive behavior differently.

Considering various arguments from previous researchers, we propose the following hypothesis for the context of the current study:

H2: The counterproductive work behavior of males will be significantly higher than that of females.

Theoretical Framework

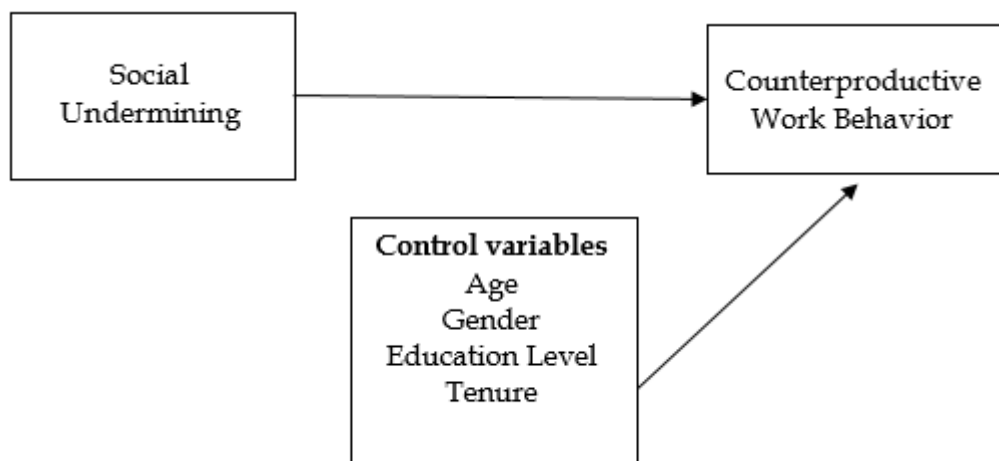


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

As represented in Figure 1 above, social undermining has been taken as an independent variable, and counterproductive work behavior as a dependent variable. whereas, other individual differences such as age, gender educational level, and tenure are taken as control variables.

Material and Methods

Research Design

This study is correlational and quantitative in nature; a cross-sectional study design has been selected to obtain an overall snapshot of facts as they stand at the time of study. Moreover, since the data has been gathered at a single point in time (cross-sectional), causality can only be implied rather than longitudinally established.

Data Collection and Variables of Study

Data was collected through primary sources from 330 respondents from three higher education institutions in Quetta City. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect responses. All measurement scales were taken from previously valid and reliable studies.

Measures

Social Undermining (SU)

A thirteen-item scale designed by Duffy et al., (2002) was used to evaluate Supervisor Social Undermining. Participants were asked to rate how often their immediate superiors exhibited a variety of behaviors. A Likert-type scale was used to show agreement with each item, anchored by (1). Never, and (6). Everyday. "A specimen item is How often has your supervisor intentionally hurt your feelings". Its Cronbach's alpha was 0.94.

Counterproductive Work behavior (CWB)

CWB was evaluated with a ten-item scale designed by Spector & Fox (2010). Items were measured, ranging from (1). Never to (5). Always, on a 5-point response scale. A specimen item is "How often have you purposely wasted your employer's material on your present job" Its Cronbach's alpha was 0.93.

Control Variables

Gender, education, and tenure are considered as control variables in the current study.

Sampling

The study's target population was public-sector university faculty members in Quetta City which included:

1. University of Balochistan (UOB), Quetta.
2. Balochistan University of IT, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUITEMS), Quetta.
3. Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University (SBKWU), Quetta.

Sample Size

The study's overall population is 1190. This includes 511 faculty members from the University of Balochistan, 450 from BUITEMS, and 229 from SBKWU.

The sample size (n) was calculated using the formula below:

$$N = [z^2 * p * (1 - p) / e^2] / [1 + (z^2 * p * (1 - p) / (e^2 * N))]$$

N = population size, E = margin of error.

$$Z = 1.96, p = 0.5, N = 1190, e = 0.05$$

$$N = [1.96^2 * 0.5 * (1 - 0.5) / 0.05^2] / [1 + (1.96^2 * 0.5 * (1 - 0.5) / (0.05^2 * 1190))]$$

$$N = 384.16 / 1.3228 = 290.409$$

$$N \approx 291.$$

With finite population correction, the sample size required is 291. However, as a precaution to reach the targeted level of sample size, we collected the data from 390 respondents. Out of these, 40 responses were dropped from the analysis for various reasons, such as incomplete data or having the same response for all the items. Out of the remaining 350 responses, (150 from UOB, 133 from BUIITEMS, and 68 from SBKWU) we further dropped 20 responses randomly (8 from UOB, 8 from BUIITEMS, and 4 from SBKWU) in order to maintain the proportionate ratio from each university. So, the final sample size was 330 with samples from each university according to the population proportion.

Sample Composition

The sample size corresponds to approximately 27.7% of our target population. Therefore, the sample composition would be as follows:

Table 1
Sample Size Estimation

University	Population	Sample
University of Balochistan	511	511*0.277=142
BUIITEMS	450	450*0.277=125
SBKWU	229	229*0.277=63
Total	1190	330

Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling was used to choose respondents from the proportion of the population stipulated above. In stratified random sampling, based on members' shared attributes or characteristics, the entire population is split into smaller, more significant groups. It is also called proportional random sampling (Zikmund et al., 2000).

Research Analysis Tools

Descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis have been applied to the data, and analysis of the conceptual framework has been done on SPSS. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha was used to analyze the reliability of the research instruments. Moreover, we used independent sample t-test to analyze the gender differences for counterproductive work behavior.

Results and Discussion

The data was gathered from faculty members working in the three universities of Balochistan. The respondents varied in age, gender, educational qualification, designation, tenure, and universities. The respondents' brief demographic information is provided as follows.

Table 2
Demographic Information (Age)

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
20 - 30 years	11	3.3%
31 - 40 years	131	39.7%
41 - 50 years	119	36.1%
51 - 60	69	20.9%
Total=	330	100%

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40(39.7%). 36.1% were between 41 and 50, and 20.9% were between 51 and 60. Respondents between 20 and 30 were (3.3%).

Table 3
Demographic Information (Gender)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	193	58.5%
Female	137	41.5%
Total=	330	100%

Table 3 describes the participant's gender. Most of the respondents were male (58.5%) and female population employees were composed of 41.5%.

Table 4
Demographic Information (Education)

Education:	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelors/Masters	22	6.7%
MS/M.Phil.	195	59.1%
Ph.D.	113	34.2%
Total=	330	100%

As shown in Table 4, the education level of employees is very divergent. Most of the respondents have MS/M. Phil and Ph.D. Degrees (59.1% and 34.2% respectively), whereas fewer participants have Master's / Bachelor's degrees (6.7%).

Table 5
Demographic Information (Organization)

Organization:	Frequency	Percentage
University of Balochistan	132	40.0%
BUIITEMS	125	37.9%
SBKWU	73	22.1%
Total=	304	100%

The results in Table 5, also showed that the majority of the respondents were from the University of Balochistan, Quetta (40.0%), 37.9% belonged to BUIITEMS, Quetta and 22.1% belonged to SBKWU, Quetta.

Table 6
Demographic Information (Tenure in the current profession)

Current Tenure	Frequency	Percentage
1 – 5 years	13	3.9%
6 – 10 years	128	38.8%
11 – 15 years	114	34.5%
Above 15 years	75	22.7%
Total	330	100%

Table 6 presents the participant's tenure in their current positions. 3.9% of employees have 1 to 5 years tenure, 38.8% have 6-10 years tenure, and 34.5% have 11 to 15 years tenure. 22.7% have above 15 years tenure.

Table 7
Means, Standard Deviation, and Correlation among the Variables

	SU	CWB	Age	Gender	Education	Tenure
Social undermining	.943					
Counterproductive work behavior	.570**	.935				
Age	-.030	-.028				
Gender	-.043	-.179**	.022			
Education	.080	.043	.653**	.002		
Tenure	.005	-.046	.824**	.006	.675**	
Mean	3.72	3.66	2.75	1.42	2.28	3.73
Standard Deviation	0.93	0.90	0.822	0.49	0.58	0.93

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$

Table 7 summarizes the results of the correlation analysis along with the mean and standard deviation. The Cronbach's alpha reliability measure for each scale is given diagonally in the top row of each column for the corresponding variable. The means and standard deviations for social undermining, counterproductive work behavior age, gender, education, and tenure were 3.72 (.93), 3.66 (.89), 2.75(0.822), 1.42(0.49), 2.28(0.58), 3.73(0.93) respectively.

As expected by the theoretical framework, the correlation between SU and CWB was significantly Positive ($r = .570^{**}$, $p < .01$). However, no significant relationship was found between social undermining and age ($-.030$, $p < .01$), social undermining and gender ($-.043$, $p < .01$), social undermining and education ($.080$, $p < .01$), as no relationship was found between social undermining and tenure ($.005$, $p < .01$). The correlation analysis further represents that counterproductive work behavior has no significant relationship with age ($-.028$, $p < .01$), education ($.043$, $p < .01$) and tenure ($-.046$, $p < .01$). Moreover, only CWB and gender was found significantly negative ($-.179^{**}$, $p < .01$).

Table 8
Results of Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Unstandardized β	Standardized β	T	R ²	F	Sig. (F)
Model 1:				.325	157.677	
SU → CWB	.550**	.570**	12.557			<.001
Model 2:				.355	35.678	
SU → CWB	.543**	.563**	12.497			<.001
Age → CWB	.095	.087	1.067			.287
Gender → CWB	-.285**	-.157**	-3.504			<.001

Education → CWB	.063	.041	.649	.517
Tenure → CWB	-.156	-.147	-1.770	.078

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$. SU = Social Undermining. CWB = Counter Productive Work Behavior

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis to test the hypotheses are presented in Table 8. According to the findings, social undermining (SU) has a significant positive impact on counterproductive work behavior (CWB) ($\beta = 0.550$, $p < .01$), supporting Hypothesis 1. It was found that CWB explained a significant proportion of the total variation in social undermining (SU), as shown by $R^2 = 0.355$. None of the control variables (Age, education, and tenure) were found to be significantly related to the counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Only the control variable of gender was found to be significantly related to the CWB.

Table 9
Gender-based group differences

Variables	Male		Female		Mean Difference	T	Df	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
CWB	3.80	0.82	3.47	0.96	0.327**	3.302	328	0.369

Note: ** $p < .01$, CWB = Counter Productive Work Behavior

The results for the independent sample t-test analyzing gender-based differences are given in Table 9. The results from the sample t-test revealed that the average score for the counterproductive work behavior (CWB) was significantly higher for males ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.82$) as compared to females ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.96$), $t(328) = 2.43.3025$, $p < .01$, with a relatively small effect size of Cohen's $d = .369$. Thus hypothesis 2 was also supported.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the relationship between social undermining and counterproductive work behavior. Additionally, the research sought to analyze potential gender differences in the manifestation of counterproductive work behavior.

Results showed that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between these two variables ($\beta = .550$, $p < .01$) which means social undermining at the workplace has been identified as a critical issue having detrimental results in terms of the worker's behavior and attitudes. Moreover, social undermining can serve as a catalyst for unfavorable actions that are known as counterproductive work behavior. According to Duffy et al., (2006), there is a higher likelihood that employees may harm their organizations when there is a high level of undermining in the social environment, they found that there was a close relationship between the social undermining and counterproductive work behaviors.

Generally, research has shown that males are prone to display different types of aggressive behaviors more frequently than females. For instance, researchers have shown a higher tendency in males to show aggression (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Kaukiainen et al., 2001; Rutter & Hine, 2005), bullying (Simpson & Cohen, 2004), and counterproductive work behavior (Hershcovis et al., 2007). The findings of this study align with those of previous studies which show that the average score for counterproductive work behavior (CWB) was significantly higher for males ($M = 3.80$,

SD = 0.82) as compared to females ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.96$), $t(328) = 2.43.3025$, $p < .01$, with a relatively small effect size of Cohen's $d = .369$.

Practical Implications

This study has a number of significant practical implications. This study highlights the necessity for improving workplace management by enhancing our knowledge about social undermining and counterproductive work behavior as one of its potential consequences. Employees who are emotionally drained due to undermining adopt negative behavior towards both the individuals and the organization, regardless of the source of the undermining. The results from the current study suggest that organizations need to take solid steps to minimize the damaging effects of social undermining. In order to minimize social undermining and its negative effects, managers should recognize the importance of having a collegial environment and strive to improve the already existing relationships among employees. Workplace with inadequate rules to manage undermining should be modified, by using extremely strict codes of conduct and programs warning employees about the repercussions of social undermining. Open communication between employees, team members, and supervisors aids in eradicating the causes of social undermining.

The role of gender in experiencing CWB is one of the important findings of the study. This study could aid to understand the causes CWB exhibited in different genders differently. It provides an opportunity for researchers ahead to explore expectations of workplace settings from men and women when it comes to exhibiting CWB. Considering the gender differences highlighting higher CWB in males as compared to females, the management need to develop gender specific strategies for dealing with such behavior. To reduce degrading attitudes like social undermining, the management should consider improving the environmental factors surrounding their employees. Addressing their issues, especially psychological ones often kept hidden, makes them feel heard. This, in turn, leads to better behavior, fostering professional growth and personal development.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Research on the effect of social undermining on counterproductive work behavior is still in the early stages of development. Like the previous studies, this particular study also has some limitations. It is difficult to approach employees and ask them about such sensitive incidents and their reaction to it as it may create social desirability bias. However, this research tried to overcome such limitation by ensuring and communicating the anonymity of the respondents. This study highlights only one antecedent to CWB particularly social undermining. The phenomena and its harmful implications need to be investigated in more depth. Further investigations may be undertaken to determine the underlying reasons for social undermining. Studies may examine the personalities of the leaders who exhibit these actions more frequently.

Though the gender differences are analyzed, the scope of the current study does not provide detailed insights into what lies behind these gender discrepancies, although we proposed several possibilities based on gender norms and responsibilities. Future studies could focus on the fundamental causes of men and women responding to counterproductive work behavior inducing situations distinctly.

Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the impact of social undermining on counterproductive work behavior and explore gender differences in this context. The results revealed that supervisor social undermining significantly correlated with higher levels of counterproductive work behavior among employees, indicating the detrimental nature of social undermining affecting both individuals and organizations negatively. Furthermore, the findings indicated that males exhibit more counterproductive work behaviors than females in the workplace. This suggests that in patriarchal societies like Pakistan, the manifestation of negative consequences due to social undermining is more pronounced in males compared to females. However, the presence of counterproductive behavior as a consequence of social undermining in both genders emphasizes the need for organizations to implement counter-measures to mitigate social undermining and strive for a more positive and productive work environment.

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