

# The Relationship Between Occupational Category and Workplace Aggression: Workaholism as a Potential Moderator

Trevor E. Skinner, East Carolina University  
Shahnaz Aziz, Ph.D., East Carolina University

## Abstract

In our proposed study, we will look at the relationship between occupational category and workplace aggression, as well as the potential moderating influence of workaholism. Work environments are ever-changing and differ between blue- and white-collar employees. The work environment hypothesis emphasizes the role of workplace contextual and environmental factors (e.g., occupational category) on workplace aggression (Salin, 2015). Workaholism was chosen as a potential moderator for this relationship due to its relationship to increased work stress (Aziz et al., 2010), a correlate of workplace aggression (Glomb, 2002). If workaholism is found to moderate the relationship between occupational category and workplace aggression, this will provide incentive for companies to further encourage work-life balance to reduce the risk of workplace aggression and incidents of counterproductive work behavior (a form of workplace aggression).

## Occupational Category

Occupational category is the term used by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management to separate different job types (blue-collar and white-collar). They define blue-collar work as including activities such as trades and manual labor. White-collar work is broken down into administrative, clerical, professional, technical, and other-white collar, with analytical or judgement skills being emphasized over trade or manual labor skills.

Many differences arise, as one would expect, from these variations in working environment. Blue-collar workers have been found to have more physical work environment complaints, more health symptoms, less stimulation, less work enjoyment, less autonomy, more monotonous work, feelings of less job fit, and lower life satisfaction (Wright et al., 1994). White-collar workers tend to value intrinsic aspects of work compared to blue-collar workers who focus on external factors (Locke, 1973). Blue-collar workers are also linked to more counterproductive work behaviors than white-collar workers, most frequently abuse against others (Anjum & Parvez, 2013).

## Workaholism

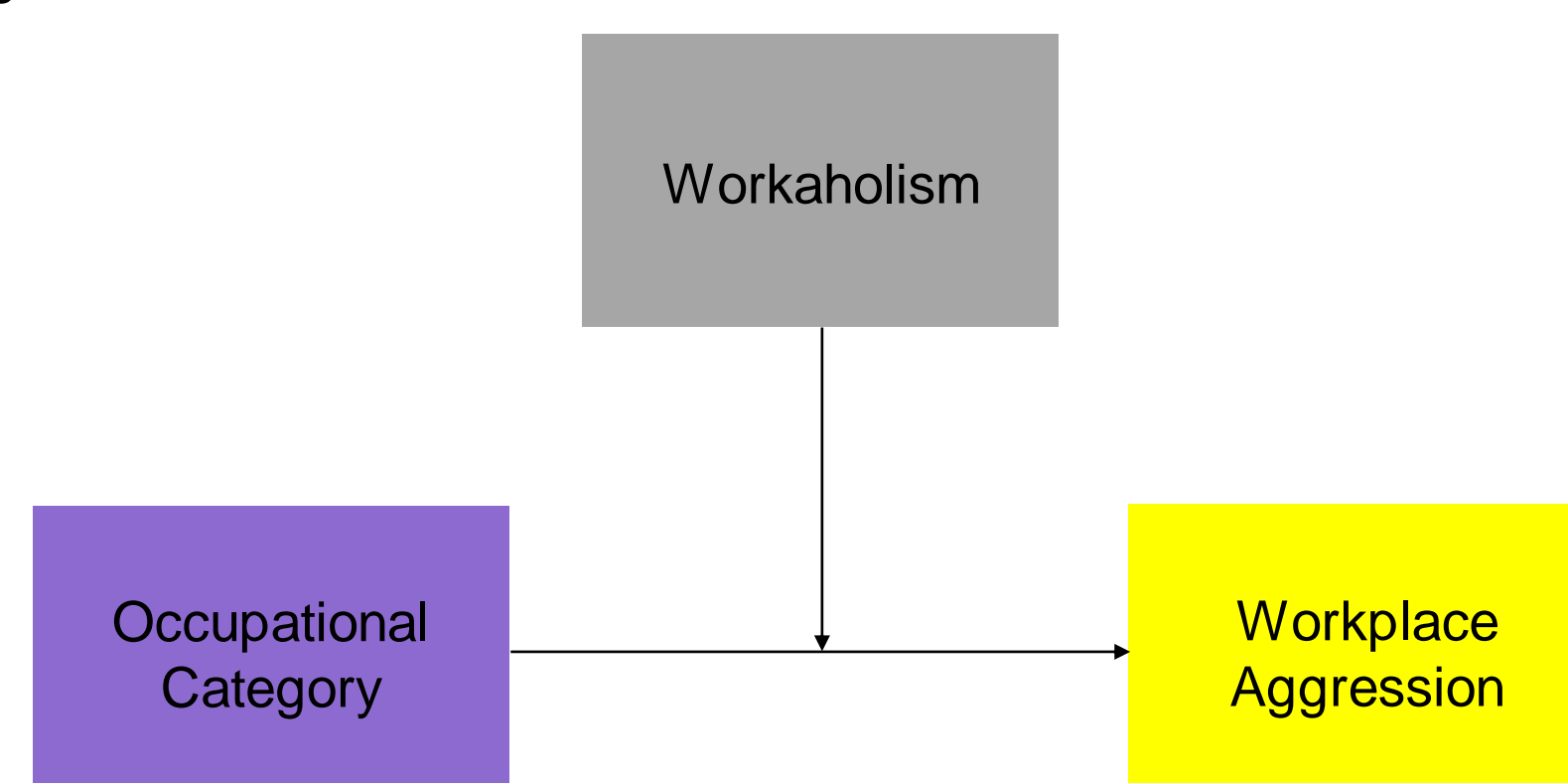
Workaholism first appeared in the work of Oates (1971), describing it as a strong compulsion to work. Since its inception, it has had many conceptualizations and definitions. The consensus definition proposed by Clark and colleagues (2016) defines workaholism as an addiction with compulsive feelings due to internal pressures, constant work-related thoughts, and excessive work regardless of potential consequences. Workaholism has a positive relationship with work stress (Aziz et al., 2010) and negative affect (Aziz et al., 2020). It leads to feelings of shame, guilt, and low self-worth when goals are not met, as well as a decrease in life satisfaction (Shimazu et al., 2015; van Beek et al., 2012). The current increase in remote work due to the pandemic (Parker et al., 2021) has been theorized to be even harder on workaholics than non-workaholics due to emotional exhaustion caused by the interruption in normal working conditions (Spagnoli et al., 2020).

## Workplace Aggression

Barling and colleagues (2009) suggested that workplace aggression has become widespread in the modern work environment. They defined workplace aggression as negative behaviors enacted by employees with the intention to harm individuals within the organization or the overall organization. The work environment hypothesis emphasizes the role of the work environment and workplace contextual factors on workplace aggression (Salin, 2015). Inness and colleagues (2005) found situational factors to play a larger role than personal factors in workplace bullying risk. Environmental factors such as lack of autonomy, heavy job demands, and poor physical conditions all lead to an increased risk of workplace aggression (Finstad et al., 2019; Salin, 2015). Work stress acts as both an antecedent and outcome of aggression (Glomb, 2002).

## Conceptual Model

Figure 1.



## Hypotheses

Workplace aggression has been shown to positively relate to work stress and poor physical conditions (Glomb, 2002; Salin, 2015). Blue-collar workers often face poorer physical working conditions than their white-collar counterparts, and have greater mental and physical health issues (Wright et al., 1994). The increase in stress from these conditions and health issues leads us to our first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Occupational category will be related to workplace aggression, such that workplace aggression will be greater in blue-collar workers than in white-collar workers.

Given the internal motivation of white-collar workers is similar to descriptions of internal compulsions of workaholism (Clark et al., 2016; Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009), combined with the greater access to technology that allows for work outside of operating hours (Kakabadse et al., 2009), white-collar workers are presented with more reason and opportunity to work excessively hard. Thus, our second hypothesis states:

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Workaholism will be related to occupational category, such that workaholism will be greater in white-collar workers than in blue-collar workers.

Both workplace aggression, including counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) which we consider a form of workplace aggression, and workaholism are related to higher levels of work stress (Clark et al., 2016; Glomb, 2002). High levels of workaholism are also associated with CWBs and emotional discharge (Clark et al., 2016; Shimazu et al., 2010). Balducci and colleagues (2012) theorized this emotional discharge could build into aggressive behavior in workaholics. Based on these ideas, we also propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Workaholism will be positively related to workplace aggression.

After looking at the totality of the information above, we also propose our final hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Workaholism will moderate the relationship between occupational category and workplace aggression, such that with high levels of workaholism, the stronger the relationship between occupational category and workplace aggression.

## Method

### Participants

Participants will consist of full-time faculty and staff employed at a large Southeastern university. They will be recruited through an online email distribution service.

### Procedure

Following review and approval by the Institutional Review Board and Survey Review and Oversight Committee, the survey will be developed in Qualtrics. After providing informed consent, participants will be prompted to provide demographic information, which will include questions to determine occupational category. They will then be provided with measures of workaholism and workplace aggression to complete.

### Measures

**Occupational Category.** This study will use the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's definition of occupational category (blue- and white-collar). Questions will be added to the demographics items to further understand and categorize each respondent's position. These responses will be compared to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's definitions of blue- and white-collar. For statistical analysis, blue-collar jobs will be coded 1, while white-collar jobs will be coded 0.

**Workaholism.** The 29-item Workaholism Analysis Questionnaire (WAQ; Aziz et al., 2013) will be used to measure each participant's level of workaholism. This measure is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In the original study, a Cronbach's alpha of .93 was obtained.

**Workplace Aggression.** The Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992) will be used to measure each participant's level of workplace aggression. The measure consists of 29 items broken up into 4 subfactors. As instructed by Buss and Perry, items will be scrambled so that no items from a single factor occur frequently in a row. The measure is scored on a 5-point scale where 1 equates to "*extremely uncharacteristic of me*" and 5 equates to "*extremely characteristic of me.*" The original study achieved a Cronbach's alpha of .89 for the total score. Instructions for the measure will be worded to ensure respondents answer in the context of their work.

### Data Analysis

Data will be cleaned using SPSS v28, with data analysis completed using both R and JASP v 0.14.1.0. Descriptive statistics (i.e., means, standard deviations, and frequencies) will be collected to break down and describe the study participants.

Hypotheses pertaining to the relationship between the study variables will be analyzed by looking at their correlations. Using R, a multiple regression analysis will be used to test the potential moderating influence of workaholism. We will first examine the main effect of occupational category and workaholism, followed by their interaction (Occupational Category X Workaholism). If this interaction proves to be significant, Long's interaction R package (2019) will be utilized to determine the potential moderating influence of workaholism.

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