

**Running Head:** Psychological Violence in the Workplace

**The Effects of Exposure to Psychological Violence in the Workplace on Commitment and  
Turnover Intentions: The Moderating Role of Social Support and Role Stressors**

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### **Abstract**

Exposure to workplace violence has been identified as a serious and universal issue facing modern organizations. The present study focuses more specifically on exposure to psychological violence, and its association with turnover intentions as mediated by workplace affective commitment. In addition, we also explore the moderating role of various facets of job demands (role stressors) and resources (social support) on the aforementioned relations. Data collected from 1228 university employees indicated that experiencing psychological violence at work was associated with lower levels of workplace affective commitment and higher levels of turnover intentions, and that the relation between psychological violence and turnover intentions was partially mediated by commitment. Furthermore, role stressors and social support were found to moderate the negative relation between exposure to psychological violence and workplace affective commitment, as well as between commitment and turnover intentions, but not the direct relation between psychological violence and turnover intentions. Theoretical and research implications for the literature on psychological violence and practical suggestions for minimizing its damaging consequences are proposed.

*Keywords:* Psychological Violence; Turnover Intentions; Commitment; Role Stressors; Social Support

The Workplace Bullying Institute (2010) found that 35% of US workers, an estimated 53.5 million Americans, report experiences of bullying in their workplaces. In the UK, around 47% of 3,979 surveyed employees report unreasonable treatment from others at work, and 40% report some form of disrespect (Fevre, Lewis, Robinson, & Jones, 2011). With such statistics, it not surprising that exposure to psychological violence at work has received significant media and research attention (e.g., Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Harvey & Keashly, 2005; Trépanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2013). Research on psychological violence has used a wide range of labels to describe this phenomenon (e.g., emotional abuse: Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; bullying: Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper 2003; psychological aggression: Grubb et al., 2005; mobbing: Leymann, 1996; psychological harassment: Bowling, & Beehr, 2006). Still, there is a general agreement that psychological violence refers to any form of non-physically aggressive, intimidating, derogatory, or offensive interpersonal behavior that is psychological in nature and is likely to have negative psychological and behavioral consequences for the target (Keashly, Hunter, & Harvey, 1997; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). Examples of psychological violence include a variety of behaviors, ranging from verbal mistreatment, social undermining, ostracism, and spreading rumors. This definition overlaps with definitions of psychological bullying or harassment where exposure to violence persists over an extended period of time (e.g., 6 months; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). However, in this study our focus is on the frequency of exposure to psychological violence, rather than on more severe or repeated incidents.

The negative consequences of exposure to psychological violence at work are relatively well-documented, and include damaging effects on mental health, reduced job satisfaction, and increased counterproductive work behaviors (for a review, see Bowling & Beehr, 2006). However, empirical research on the organizational consequences of psychological violence remains scarce (for a review see Yapici Akar, Anafarta & Sarvan, 2011). The purpose of the present study is to examine the relations between exposure to psychological violence at work and employees' affective commitment to their workplace and their turnover intentions. Turnover intentions reflect a detachment from the workplace (Allen, Shore, & Griffith, 2003; Hom & Griffeth, 1995) and are a critical component of employees' retention. In contrast, affective commitment reflects a positive attitude toward the workplace whereby employees come to consider organizational membership as a part of their self-identity (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). Importantly, affective commitment represents one of the key determinants of intentions to remain in the organization, as well as of a wide array of valuable outcomes ranging from work performance to psychological wellbeing (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Meyer & Maltin, 2010). Drawing upon the stressor-stress-strain framework, we argue that exposure to psychological violence in the workplace is a stressor that induces feelings of distress and strain and negatively relates to employees' workplace commitment and positively relates to turnover intentions (Lazarus, DeLongis, Folkman, & Gruen, 1985). This theoretical framework extends research on dysfunctional consequences of psychological violence by demonstrating its negative relation with commitment which is then represented as a mediator in the relation between violence and turnover intentions.

Theory and preliminary evidence suggests that the relations between exposure to psychological violence and its consequences might be moderated by individual and organizational variables (McCormack, Casimir, Djurkovic, & Yang, 2009). However, little attention has been devoted to the empirical identification of these moderators. Drawing from the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), this study investigates the moderating role of job demands (role conflict, ambiguity, and overload) and resources (perceived organization and supervisor support) in the relations between exposure to psychological violence, affective commitment, and turnover intentions.

### **Psychological Violence, Affective Commitment, and Turnover Intentions**

According to the stressor-stress-strain theoretical framework, objective stressors evoke cognitive stress appraisals which are then followed by coping responses or strain (Gross, 1970; Lazarus, et al., 1985). Within this framework, stressors represent environmental factors that increase the likelihood of an individual experiencing a subjective state of stress or displeasure. Strain consists of an objective psychological, physiological, or behavioral response to stress, such as burnout, physical illness, or poor job performance. Exposure to psychological violence is likely to be appraised as stressful by the exposed individual, resulting in strain when exposed employees struggle to make sense of and cope with the situation (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997).

Workplace commitment represents a "force that binds an individual to a course of action of

relevance to one or more targets” within the workplace (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 299), in addition to the organization itself (Cohen, 2003; Morrow, 1993). This force can be anchored in different mindsets. Affective commitment (stemming from an emotional attachment) represents the most widely studied mindsets, the most generalizable across targets, and the most strongly associated with desirable work behaviors (Meyer et al., 2002; Meyer & Maltin, 2010; Solinger et al., 2008). So far, research has supported the assertion that employees can differentially commit to a variety of targets within their workplaces, and that each of these commitments has positive implications for their behavior (Cohen, 2003; Morin, Madore, Morizot, Boudrias, & Tremblay, 2009; Morin, Vandenberghe, Boudrias, Madore, Morizot, & Tremblay, 2011; Morrow, 1993). Over and above these commitments to multiple constituencies, Morin, Morizot et al. (2011) identified the presence of an overarching construct of workplace affective commitment underlying all of these specific commitments. Here, we focus on this overarching construct depicting employees’ affective workplace commitment.

The social exchange and psychological contract theories underpin commitment research and propose that commitment emerges when employees feel that they are in a trustful social exchange relationship with different constituencies in their organizations (Blau, 1964; Lavelle et al., 2007; Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006; Rousseau, 1995). More precisely, a strong commitment is assumed to emerge when workplaces are characterized by fair and supportive treatment of their employees (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005; Rhoades et al., 2001). In turn, commitment has been shown to relate to a desire to reciprocate by adopting behaviors that benefit the workplace and by stronger intentions to remain working for the organization (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2004; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Meyer et al., 2002). This positive social exchange forms a psychological contract between the workplace and the employees, defining their reciprocal expectations and contributions (Rousseau, 1995). As part of this psychological contract, workplaces are legally and morally responsible to offer a psychologically safe work environment to employees. In this context, exposure to psychological violence at work is likely to be seen as a failure on the part of the organization to uphold its psychological contract with the victimized employee (Rousseau, 1995). This perceived violation of the psychological contract, coupled with the inherently stressful nature of psychological violence, is likely to lead to a deterioration of workplace affective commitment among exposed employees, leading in turn to turnover intentions. Theory also suggests that the pathways between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions might be more direct. Indeed, exposure to stressful events tends to promote negative emotional reactions, such as anger, and to lead to decreases in employees’ belief in their ability to overcome future work-related challenges (Parsons, Herold, & Leatherwood, 1985; Weiner, 1985). In turn, both of these reactions might increase their intentions to leave the organization as a way to recover self-confidence or to limit these negative emotions.

However, little research has explored workplace affective commitment and turnover intentions as outcomes of exposure to psychological violence. Among the few studies conducted specifically to assess the impact of exposure to various forms of workplace violence, Barling, Rogers and Kelloway (2001) surveyed 399 healthcare employees and found that sexual harassment was positively related to negative emotions, which was in turn negatively related to commitment and intentions to remain in the organization. Similarly, Yildirim (2009) examined data from 286 Turkish nurses and found that exposure to violence was associated with burnout, decreased productivity, and lower commitment. Here, we further document these relations by testing the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* Exposure to psychological violence will be negatively associated with workplace commitment.

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Exposure to psychological violence will be positively associated with turnover intentions.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* Workplace commitment will be negatively associated with turnover intentions.

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* Workplace commitment will partially mediate the negative relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions.

### **Role Stressors and Social Support as Possible Moderators**

Perhaps even more important than exploring the outcomes of exposure to psychological violence in the workplace is the identification of the work environment characteristics that influence how psychological violence is experienced when it occurs (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Salin, 2003; Zapf, 1999). Even the best preventive programs are unlikely to completely eliminate all incidents of workplace violence, making it a worthwhile question to explore how to limit its negative impact for

employees, especially by focusing on moderators falling under the control of organizations. So far, research has documented that some working conditions (e.g., social support) may buffer the deleterious impact of exposure to psychological violence, whereas other conditions (e.g., job insecurity, workload, role stressors) may worsen this impact (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Einarsen, 2000; Keashly & Harvey, 2005; Salin, 2009). In this study, we use the theoretical perspective of the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) to examine the influence of role stressors and social support as possible moderators of the relation between exposure to psychological violence, commitment and turnover intentions (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The JD-R model positions employees' wellbeing as dependent on two specific characteristics of the work environment: job demands and job resources (Demerouti, et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job demands refer to those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the work context that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort and are, therefore, associated with physiological (e.g. insomnia) and/or psychological costs (e.g., burnout). Job resources refer to those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the work context that are helpful in achieving work goals, diminishing the demands of the job, or leading to personal growth and development. A critical assumption of the JD-R model is that stress reactions occur as a result of: (a) high job demands which deplete an individual's mental and physical resources, and/or (b) the absence of job resources which reduce motivation and may create cynicism and frustration (Demerouti et al., 2001).

### **Role Stressors as a Job Demand**

According to the JD-R model, high job demands are physically and psychologically draining, as they require continuous coping efforts and tend to generate negative emotional reactions (e.g., anxiety and discomfort) that carry a toll for exposed employees (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Because of this toll, high job demands are likely to limit the personal resources available to the employee to cope with psychological victimization, thus potentially worsening the consequences of exposure to psychological violence. Indeed, by taking an important toll on employees' psychological resources, high demands are likely to diminish employees' autonomy and sense of control at work (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2001), and in turn decrease their ability to cope effectively with psychological violence.

Among job demands, role stressors appear to be particularly stressful for exposed employees. More precisely, employees are expected to perform certain work roles, some of which may be demanding or difficult to fulfil, thus creating stress for the exposed employees (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Research on work stressors has traditionally focused on three that are particularly critical, which describe exposure to incompatible (role conflict), ambiguous (role ambiguity), or unrealistic (role overload) role expectations (Balducci, Checchin & Fraccaroli, 2012; Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2010; Rizzo et al., 1970). Exposure to contradictory messages from different stakeholders (role conflict), unclear directions regarding expected work outcomes (role ambiguity), or excessive work demands (role overload) are generally appraised as highly stressful by individuals (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005; Schuler, 1980). Furthermore, past research has consistently shown that these role stressors are associated with negative consequences for employees and organizations, such as reduced levels of job satisfaction, commitment, and job performance, as well as higher levels of turnover intentions, burnout and depression (e.g., Bettencourt & Stephen, 2003; Hang-yue, Foley, & Loi 2005; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; LePine et al., 2005).

Based on the JD-R, we propose that role stressors will moderate the relation between exposure to psychological violence, commitment, and turnover intentions. More precisely, we propose that victimized employees exposed to high levels of role stressors will tend to present lower levels of commitment and higher levels of turnover intentions than victimized employees not exposed to role stressors. Exposure to psychological violence and to role stressors, are both likely to limit employees' ability to exert their autonomy and sense of control at work, making it harder for them to fulfill their work responsibilities. Research has shown that some employees will attempt to cope with this loss of autonomy, control, and efficacy by mentally distancing themselves from their work, from others, and from the organization, leading to a decrease in their commitment and their intentions to stay (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; LePine et al., 2005). The combined effect of role stressors and psychological violence is thus even more likely to result in a depletion of employees' resources, resulting in a likely multiplicative effect on their commitment and turnover intentions.

*Hypothesis 5 (H5):* The negative relation between exposure to psychological violence and workplace commitment will be stronger for employees exposed to high levels of role stressors (i.e.,

role conflict, ambiguity, and overload) than for those exposed to low levels of role stressors.

*Hypothesis 6 (H6):* The positive relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions will be stronger for employees exposed to high levels of role stressors (i.e., role conflict, ambiguity, and overload) than for those exposed to low levels of role stressors.

### **Perceived Social Support as a Form of Job Resource**

In organizational settings, perceived social support refers to the extent to which individuals feel that their wellbeing is valued by workplace constituencies, such as supervisors and the organization (Eisenberger, Singhammer, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007). This includes experiences of feeling cared for, appreciated, involved, and supported by these constituencies (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999; Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Perceived supervisor support (PSS) refers to the emotional and work-related assistance that the employee perceives receiving from his or her immediate supervisor. Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to the extent to which an employee feels that the organization cares for his or her wellbeing and recognizes his or her contributions (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Both involve supporting employees' socio-emotional and task specific needs by providing resources to cope with work-related demands and responsibilities (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

A critical assumption of the JD-R model is that job resources may help to replenish or maintain employees' physical and mental resources, thus potentially mitigating the extent to which job demands or stressors induce dysfunctional consequences for employees (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004).

Specifically, high levels of POS and PSS may enhance an individual's capacity to adapt to exposure to psychological violence. Because psychological violence depletes individuals' resources, access to high levels of POS and PSS might be particularly helpful in helping victimized employees to better cope with their victimization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). POS and PSS may also convey to employees the idea that their exposure to psychological violence is an isolated incident in an otherwise caring environment, thus decreasing the appraisal of their victimization as stressful, while helping them to maintain their commitment and intentions to stay (Jex, 1998; Mossholder, Settoon, & Henagan, 2005). POS and PSS have been shown to represent some of the most consistent predictors of commitment (Eisenberger et al., 2002, 2010; Meyer et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Research indicates that POS and PSS may counteract the effect of job demands on stress-related outcomes such as burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005), commitment (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2006), job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Zickar, Balzer, Aziz, & Wryobeck, 2008).

*Hypothesis 7 (H7):* The negative relation between exposure to psychological violence and workplace commitment will be weaker for employees exposed to high levels of supervisor and organizational support than for those exposed to low levels of social support.

*Hypothesis 8 (H8):* The positive relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions will be weaker for employees exposed to high levels of supervisor and organizational support than for those exposed to low levels of social support.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were employees of a large French-Canadian University, located in the Province of Quebec, Canada. Quebec was the first province or state in North America to legally ban psychological harassment at work. Although researchers have tracked the legal implications of the act, research tracking the organizational consequences of psychological violence in Quebec has been relatively scarce. Although these participants form a convenience sample regarding the research questions pursued here, it is noteworthy that data collection answered a demand from the University to obtain an objective overview of the prevalence of psychological violence in the workforce as part of the implementation of this new law. All employees working in this university at the time of the survey ( $N = 3240$ ) received an email invitation to an online questionnaire, stating that their participation was voluntary and that their answers would be strictly confidential. We received 1228 completed surveys for a response rate of 37.40%. Average age was 43 years and 44.30% of the sample was male. Average organizational tenure was 4.29 years and average position tenure was 3.33 years. 38.10% of the participants were in support staff roles, 27.60% were professors and other teaching staff, 24.5% in research and administrative staff roles, and 9.80% in various other areas. This study and procedure was approved by the University's research ethics committee.

### **Measures**

**Exposure to Psychological Violence.** Exposure to psychological violence was measured with the Workplace Aggression Questionnaire (Courcy & Savoie, 2004), originally developed and validated in French. This instrument respects the legal definition of psychological violence used in the Canadian Province of Quebec, and its content can be considered to be representative of the forms of psychological violence that may occur in universities or other professional settings. The participants answered 9 questions related to their exposure to various forms of psychological violence on a 5-point frequency scale (1= never to 5= every day). Sample items were “I was talked down to” and “I was mocked”. The scale score reliability was  $\alpha = .88$  in this study.

**Workplace Affective Commitment.** Commitment was measured using the short form of the Workplace Affective Commitment Multidimensional Questionnaire (WACMQ; Morin et al., 2009; Morin, Vandenberghe, Turmel, Madore, & Maïano, 2013), originally developed and validated in French and English. The instrument includes 24 items that measure workplace affective commitment directed at seven different targets: coworkers, supervisor, career advancement, organization, customers, job role, and work in general. Responses were scored on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. In this study, the scale score reliability coefficients for the respective targets are  $\alpha = .88$  for coworkers (e.g., “My coworkers make me feel like going to work”),  $\alpha = .92$  for supervisor (e.g., “I feel privileged to work with someone like my supervisor”),  $\alpha = .77$  for career advancement (e.g., “It is important for me to move up through the ranks or obtain promotions”),  $\alpha = .83$  for organization (e.g., “I am proud to say that I work for this organization”),  $\alpha = .84$  for job role (e.g., “I find the tasks I perform in my current position stimulating”), and  $\alpha = .78$  for work in general (e.g., “Work is a priority in my life”). Following Morin, Morizot et al. (2011) all items were used to create a composite score of global workplace affective commitment ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Turnover Intentions.** Turnover intentions were measured using a three item scale ( $\alpha = .79$ ; “I will probably look actively for another job soon”; “I often think about resigning”; “It would not take much to make me resign”) based on Becker and Billings (1993). Participants rated the items on a 5-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).

**Role Stressors.** Role stressors were measured using 13 items adapted to French from Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, (1970) using a classical translation-back-translation procedure. Responses were scored on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. In this study, the scale score reliability coefficient for the role stressors were  $\alpha = .78$  for role conflict (4 items; e.g., “I receive incompatible requests from two or more people”),  $\alpha = .83$  for role ambiguity (4 items; e.g., “I know exactly what is expected of me”), and  $\alpha = .83$  for role overload (5 items; e.g., “It seems like I have too much work for one person to do”).

**Perceived Social Support.** POS and PSS were respectively measured using 3 ( $\alpha = .97$ ; e.g., “The organization provides necessary support to help employees in need”) and 6 items ( $\alpha = .90$ ; e.g., “Supervisors know how to appropriately support employees”) developed in French for the purposes of this study based on Eisenberger et al. (1986). Participants rated the items on a 5-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).

**Control Variables.** Many authors have reported socio-demographic variables as important correlates of commitment and turnover intentions (Meyer et al., 2002; Morin, Morizot et al., 2011). In this study, five variables were selected: (a) age (b) organizational tenure (c) position tenure (d) employment status (coded 1 = full time; 2 = part time) and (e) gender (coded 1 = males; 2 = females).

### Analyses

**Preliminary Analyses.** To ascertain that the measurement model underlying all constructs assessed in this study was adequate, we estimated a preliminary confirmatory factor analytic model including all constructs using Mplus 7.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2014) in conjunction with full information maximum likelihood estimation to handle the very low levels of missing data present at the item level ( $M = 0.70\%$ ;  $SD = 0.80\%$ ). In this model, all items were allowed to load on their a priori constructs, with no cross-loadings on other constructs. A higher-order factor was used to test for the presence of a global workplace affective commitment factor underlying all specific commitment subscales. A priori correlated uniquenesses were integrated to represent the methodological artefact related to four reversed-keyed items included in the instruments (DiStephano & Motl, 2006; Marsh et al., 2010). This model provided an adequate fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 8619$ ;  $df = 1554$ ;  $RMSEA = .06$ ;  $CFI = .93$ ;  $TLI = .92$ ), and revealed well-defined factors, as well as a pattern of factor correlations (see Table 1) in line with our expectations. More precisely, these correlations support the presence of significant associations

between the proposed demographic controls and the key study variables, as well as significant associations between exposure to psychological violence and lower levels of commitment, POS, and PSS, as well as higher levels of role stressors and turnover intentions. As expected, affective commitment was positively related to POS and PSS, and negatively related to the role stressors and turnover intentions, whereas turnover intentions showed the reverse pattern of associations with the other variables. Finally, POS and PSS were positively related to one another, and negatively related to the role stressors, which were themselves positively related to one another. Still, these correlations remained of a moderate magnitude, supporting the decision to consider them as separate variables. This decision was further supported by an examination of the confidence intervals for the factor correlations which all excluded 1.00, as well as by the estimation of alternative models in which the most highly correlated factors were combined which resulted in a substantial decrease in model fit.

**Main Models.** Hypotheses were tested while controlling for gender, age, organizational tenure, position tenure, and employment status. All predictors and moderators were converted into deviation score form (centered at their mean) to limit non-essential multicollinearity issues inherent in tests of moderation (Hayes, 2013). Hypotheses 1 to 3 were tested using hierarchical multiple regressions. To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, two regression models were estimated in which psychological violence was used to predict workplace affective commitment (H1) and turnover intentions (H2). Another model in which workplace affective commitment was allowed to predict turnover intentions (H3) was also estimated. Taken together, Hypotheses 4 to 8 form a moderated mediation model illustrated in Figure 1. Moderated mediation happens when the mediated effects (H4) are dependent on the value of a moderator (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Hayes, 2013). We conducted statistical tests of moderation for each of the three individual paths of the mediated model (paths a, b, and c), and calculated estimates of indirect effects ( $a * b$ ) and total effects ( $a * b + c$ ) for different levels of the moderator, where “a” represents the path from one predictor to a mediator, “b” is the path from the mediator to the outcome, and “c” reflects the direct path from the predictor to the outcome. Mediation is therefore expressed in terms of direct, indirect, and total effects at selected levels of the moderator. To test the total moderation model, two regressions were estimated: The first examines whether a specific moderator (Z) moderates the effect of independent variable (X) on the mediator (M). The second captures the moderating effects of the moderator (Z) on the relation of the independent variable (X) and the mediator (M) with the dependent variable (Y). Hayes’ (2013) process macro was used to compute simple slopes and path coefficients. Bootstrapped (1000 in this study) 95% confidence intervals (CI) were used to test the significance of the indirect (mediated) effects (Cheung & Lau, 2008; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). An indirect effect is significant when this CI excludes “zero”.

## Results

### Hypotheses 1 to 4

Hypotheses 1 to 3 were first tested using hierarchical multiple regressions, including the controlled variables but no moderators. The results from these analyses are reported in Table 2, and fully support Hypotheses 1 to 3. These results show that exposure to psychological violence significantly predicts higher levels of turnover intentions and lower levels of workplace affective commitment, whereas workplace affective commitment significantly predicts lower levels of turnover intentions. Hypothesis 4 predicted that levels of workplace affective commitment would partially mediate the associations between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions. A hypothesis of partial mediation implies that residual relations between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions should be maintained once levels of workplace affective commitment are taken into account. We tested this hypothesis through the estimation of a path analytic model, which reveals that exposure to psychological violence ( $b = .51$ , s.e., .05,  $p \leq .01$ ;  $\beta = .28$ ) and workplace affective commitment ( $b = -.61$ , s.e., .04,  $p \leq .01$ ;  $\beta = -.38$ ) both predict turnover intentions, while exposure to psychological violence also predicts commitment ( $b = -.38$ , s.e., .03,  $p \leq .01$ ;  $\beta = -.32$ ). This model thus confirms the significance of all hypothesized paths, as well as the significance of the indirect relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions which is mediated by workplace affective commitment (indirect effect = .23; 95% CI = .18 to .29).

### Moderated Mediation

The moderated mediation coefficients are reported in Table 3 (Regression 1) and 4 (Regression 2). This study’s hypotheses predicted that the relation between exposure to psychological violence and workplace affective commitment would be moderated by role stressors (Hypothesis 5) and perceptions

of social support (Hypothesis 7). As shown in Table 3, the results indicate that role conflict and role ambiguity moderate the relation between exposure to psychological violence and workplace affective commitment, but not role overload. Likewise, POS, but not PSS, significantly moderates the relation between exposure to psychological violence and workplace affective commitment. Simple slopes representing the effects of exposure to psychological violence on workplace affective commitment calculated at one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean of the moderators (role conflict, role ambiguity, and POS) are reported in Table 5. These results reveal a higher negative relation between exposure to psychological violence and workplace affective commitment for employees exposed to low levels of role stressors than for employees exposed to high levels of role stressors. Furthermore, the negative relation between exposure to psychological violence and commitment is more pronounced when it occurs in the presence of higher levels of POS. These results are not in line with Hypotheses 5 and 7 which rather expected role stressor to amplify the effects of exposure to psychological violence, and social support to protect against these effects.

Hypotheses 6 and 8 respectively predicted that role stressors and perceptions of social support would moderate the relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions. As shown in Table 4, neither of these hypotheses was supported by the results when one considers the direct relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions. However, the results show that the indirect relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions, as mediated by workplace affective commitment, is itself significantly moderated. Indeed, the results show that POS, PSS, role conflict, and role overload (but not role ambiguity) all moderate the relation between workplace affective commitment and turnover intentions. Simple slopes representing the effects of workplace affective commitment on turnover intentions calculated at one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean of the moderators are reported in Table 5. These results show that the negative relation between workplace affective commitment and turnover intentions is more pronounced for employees exposed to higher levels of role conflict or role overload, as well as for employees exposed to lower levels of PSS and POS. Overall, these results provide partial support for Hypotheses 6 and 8.

### Discussion

Although the personal consequences of exposure to various forms of violence in the workplace are relatively well-documented (e.g., Bowling & Beehr, 2006), research on the consequences of exposure to more subtle forms of psychological violence on work-relevant outcomes remains scarce. More importantly, possible moderators of the relations between exposure to psychological violence and its consequences remain mostly undocumented. Using social exchange theory and the JD-R model as background theoretical frameworks, this study aimed to provide preliminary answers to these remaining questions by: (1) exploring the relations between exposure to psychological violence, workplace affective commitment, and turnover intentions, and (2) exploring whether these relations were moderated by role stressors and perceived social support.

As hypothesized, our results demonstrated that employees who experience psychological violence at work are more likely to report lower levels of affective commitment at work, and higher levels of turnover intentions. Our results further showed that workplace affective commitment significantly and partially mediated the relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions. Importantly, although the strength of the indirect relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions, as mediated by levels of workplace commitment, fluctuated as a function of the moderators, none of the moderators changed the nature of this relation. Moreover, the remaining direct relation between exposure to psychological violence and turnover intentions appeared to be completely unaffected by the moderators. These results thus supported the importance of workplace affective commitment as a key determinant of employee's retention in workplaces where psychological violence occurs. Overall, these findings are supportive of the stressor-stress-strain framework (Lazarus et al., 1985), as well of the social exchange (Blau, 1964) and of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995) theories. Experiencing psychological violence at work is likely to represent a significant source of stress for exposed employees, leading directly to a desire to escape the situation. This chain of reactions is coherent with the "flight" response of the acute stress theory (Cannon, 1929), considering the intention to quit as a proven predictor of turnover (Jeen, 2014).

Similarly, exposure to psychological violence is also likely to be perceived as a breach of the psychological contract between employees and the organization, thereby resulting in a reduction of

employees' perceived attachment and identification with the organization (Jeen, 2014). This result suggests that identifying ways through which commitment could be maintained in the presence of psychological violence should represent a key direction for future studies. For instance, organizations should seek to implement way of providing resources and support to exposed employees, while simultaneously communicating a clear message that violence will not be tolerated through the implementation of policies aiming to encourage and safeguard whistleblowing.

Using the JD-R model as our theoretical underpinnings, we then explored whether job demands (i.e., role stressors) and resources (i.e., perceptions of social support) could moderate the relations between exposure to psychological violence, commitment, and turnover intentions. We expected role stressors to potentially amplify the negative impact of psychological violence, and perceptions of social support to protect the exposed employees against the negative consequences of psychological violence. Rather, our results showed that, for employees exposed to high levels of role stressors, the negative relation between exposure to psychological violence and workplace affective commitment tended to be attenuated, while the negative relation between commitment and turnover intentions tended to be accentuated. Overall, this suggests that psychological violence occurring in an already stressful work context is likely to have a less drastic impact on employees' levels of commitment and turnover intentions, than psychological violence occurring in a less stressful work environment. This observation suggests that there could be a ceiling to the negative effects of stress accumulation for employees. Furthermore, this observation is consistent with social exchange and psychological contract theories, suggesting that the presence of a high level of role stressors is likely to be perceived, in and of itself, as a breach of the psychological contract between the employee and the organization so that any further breaches are unlikely to be as important in terms of consequences. Still, although we relied on relatively clear definitions of role stressors versus psychological violence, these distinctions may not be as clear in the mind of the employees who may already view role stressors as a form of psychological violence (e.g., Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010).

Our results also showed that for employees exposed to high levels of perceived support in the workplace, the negative relation between exposure to psychological violence and workplace affective commitment tended to be accentuated, while the negative relation between commitment and turnover intentions tended to be attenuated. Once again, these results could be explained by the fact that non-supportive organizations are likely to be perceived as already in breach of their psychological contracts with employees, thus reducing the likely impact of further breaches. Although these results confirm the importance of support variables in influencing reactions to psychological violence (Karasek, 1979; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999), they also show that support variables are unlikely to play a buffering role in the stressor-stress-strain relation, at least when the outcomes considered are commitment and turnover intentions. Employees are likely to expect their organization to prevent violence and provide them with a secure work environment. It would be interesting to specifically investigate the moderating impact of more direct support provided to the victimized employees themselves, or of more generic interventions showing that psychological violence will not be tolerated in the workplace on these observed relations. Such interventions, in addition to being more directly supportive of employees in terms of dealing with real or anticipated victimization, could also help to restore a psychological contract between the employee and the organization by showing employees that the organization is willing to do what it takes to honor its side of the contract.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The present study was a field study where all the measures were collected from a single source at a single point in time. Although there are concerns about the use of self-report measures, these concerns themselves have been questioned, particularly when the constructs are ideally suited to self-report (Chan, 2009). More importantly, Siemsen Roth, and Oliveira (2010) recently provided an equation-based demonstration that multivariate analyses including multiple predictors and controls assessed with the same method, such as in the present study, include a natural control for shared method variance given that multivariate effects are estimated from each predictor's unique (i.e., not shared) contribution to the equation. In addition, following Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff's (2012) recommendations, constructs were measured in different sections of a longer questionnaire to minimize patterned responses biases, and participants completed the questionnaire anonymously, to help make them feel confident that their answers would be full confidential. Finally, preliminary analyses supported the distinct nature of the constructs assessed in the context of the present

study, although future research should still carefully consider the fact that some of the observed correlations were relatively high, and that perhaps even more clearly differentiated measures could be required. More damaging is the reliance on a single time point, which precludes interpretations regarding the direction of the relations between exposure to psychological violence, commitment, and turnover intentions. Although our predictions were based on clear theoretical expectations regarding the direction of the associations, our design does not allow us to rule out the possibility of reverse causality, reciprocal influence, or spurious associations. The nature of our sample can also limit the generalizability of our results. The present sample came from a single organization, operating in one specific setting (university), and targeting an equally specific population (French-Canadian). Some of the instruments used in the present study, such as workplace aggression questionnaire, were also developed (i.e., workplace violence) or adapted (i.e., role stressors, POS, PSS) specifically for a French-Canadian population. This raises issues of generalizability to other organizations, to more established measures, to non-North American contexts, and to the wide diversity of employees present in modern workplaces (e.g., from other linguistic groups or nationalities, or from minority groups based on religion, ethnicity, disabilities, or sexual orientation) who may be even more likely to be exposed to psychological violence at work. Clearly, future research should attempt to explore the extent to which the current results replicate to these more diverse populations, to alternative measures of the various constructs, and to do so while considering a wider array of consequences and moderators.

### **Practical Implications**

Experiencing psychological violence at work is damaging to the employee and can have negative impacts for both the individual and the organization. Our results indicate that experiencing psychological violence at work is associated with lower levels of workplace affective commitment and stronger levels of turnover intentions. This stresses the importance of preventing - or controlling - psychological violence by adopting measures, such as employee-friendly policies, that discourage all forms of violence and encourage employees to come forward with complaints in a secure manner (Baillien, Du Cuyper & De White, 2009; Chappell & Di Martino, 2006).

The model proposed in this study also suggests alternative interventions that can be implemented. Thus, usual interventions designed to increase employees' and managers' understanding of what constitutes violence, such as personnel training, should from now on be complemented by interventions reinforcing the importance of social support in the workplace from peers and supervisors for employees who need help in dealing with various forms of work-related strain. In particular, it appears important to train Human Resources employees in how to best intervene early on in conflictual situations before they escalate to psychological violence (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). Such early mediation or conciliation ventures are likely to go a long way in showing employees that their perspectives are important to the organization. Perhaps even more importantly, strategies aiming to provide additional support to victims as a way to help them recover from this stressful experience and to help restoring the psychological contract with the organization appears to be highly desirable. Finally, managers should be continuously striving to maximize role clarity by providing frequent feedback to employees, by ensuring clear communications regarding organizational values and work priorities, and by monitoring employees' workload. As a result, interventions aimed at curbing and managing psychological violence at work would have positive effects not only on individuals but also on organizations (Wheeler, Halbesleben, & Shanine, 2010).

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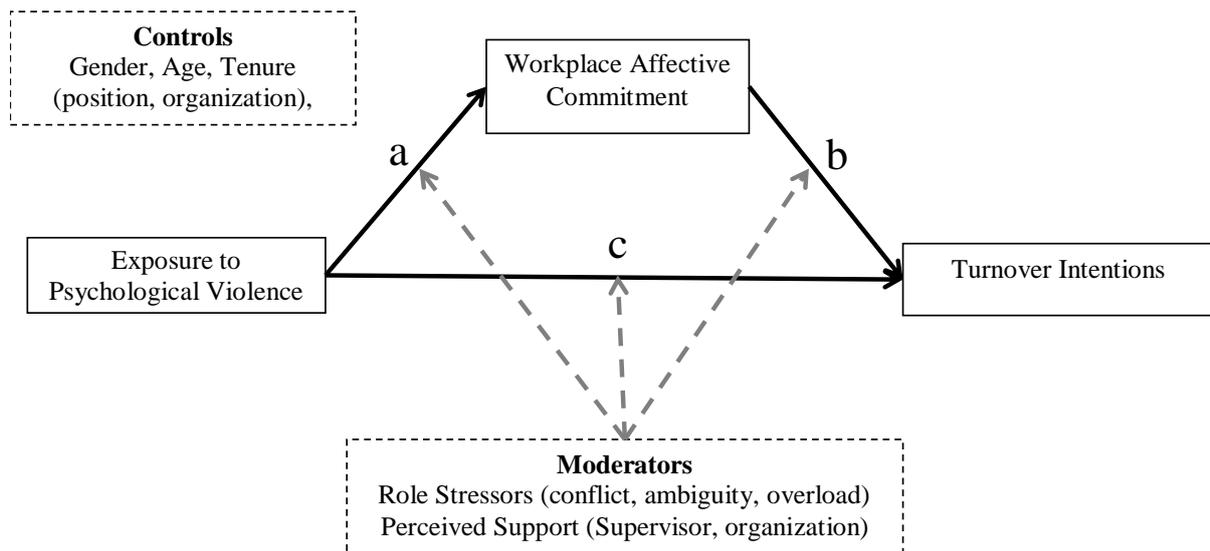


Figure 1.

Moderated Mediation Model Underlying Hypotheses 4 to 8.

**Table 1**  
*Latent Variable Correlations from the Preliminary Confirmatory Factor analytic Model*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Employment status												
2. Gender	.08**											
3. Organizational Tenure	-.41**	-.09**										
4. Position Tenure	-.30**	-.19**	.73**									
5. Age	-.28**	-.06	.63**	.53**								
6. Psychological Violence	-.14**	-.00	.06	.05	.04							
7. Workplace Commitment	.07*	.07*	-.07*	-.13**	.02	-.51**						
8. Turnover Intentions	.10**	-.08*	.04	.07	-.07*	.50**	-.74**					
9. Perceived Supervisor Support	.10**	.05	-.10**	-.16**	-.07*	-.49**	.65**	-.44**				
10. Perceived Organizational Support	-.05*	.14**	.02	-.05	.02	-.32**	.46**	-.36**	.50**			
11. Role Conflict	-.09**	-.08*	-.02	.01	-.06*	.59**	-.46**	.43**	-.47**	-.26**		
12. Role Ambiguity	.03	-.06	-.18**	-.14**	-.25**	.37**	-.57**	.44**	-.43**	-.31**	.51**	
13. Role Overload	-.20**	-.12**	.07*	.12**	.07*	.40**	-.28**	.35**	-.33**	-.29**	.46**	.28**

Note.  $N=1228$ . Employment status (0 =Permanent; 1 = Temporary); Gender (0= Males; 1= Females); Tenure (number of years worked at current organization or position); \* $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 2**  
*Results from the Hierarchical Multiple Regression (Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3)*

	Hypothesis 1 (Predicting Turnover Intentions)		Hypothesis 2 (Predicting Workplace Commitment)		Hypothesis 3 (Predicting Turnover Intentions)	
	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	$\beta$	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	$\beta$	<i>b</i> (s.e.)	$\beta$
Gender	-.08 (.05)	-.05	.01 (.03)	.01	-.07 (.04)	-.04
Position Tenure	.06 (.02)**	.13	-.05 (.01)**	-.15	.03 (.02)**	.06
Organizational Tenure	-.02 (.02)	-.05	.00 (.01)	.00	-.02 (.02)	-.05
Employment Status	.25 (.06)**	.13	-.01 (.04)	-.01	.21 (.06)**	.11
Age	-.01 (.00)*	-.07	.00 (.00)**	.07	-.00 (.00)	-.03
Psychological Violence	.74 (.05)**	.40	-.38 (.03)**	-.32		
Workplace Commitment					-.75 (.04)**	-.47
$\Delta R^2$ (Psychological Violence)	.16**		.10**			
$\Delta R^2$ (Workplace Commitment)					.22**	
$R^2$ (total)	.18**		.12**		.24**	

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$

**Table 3***Regression Coefficients from the First Regression Listed by Moderator*

Dependent variable: Organizational commitment					
Moderator	Intercept	Psychological Violence	Moderator	Violence*Moderator	R <sup>2</sup>
Supervisor Support	-.07	-.22**	.17**	-.01	.23**
Organizational Support	-.03	-.32**	.15**	-.06*	.19**
Role Conflict	-.02	-.36**	-.09**	.07**	.15**
Role Ambiguity	.17	-.28**	-.27**	.10**	.25**
Role Overload	-.05	-.39**	-.02	.05	.13**

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ **Table 4***Regression Coefficients for the Second Regression Listed by Moderator*

Dependent variable: Turnover intentions							
Moderators	Intercept	Psychological Violence	Commitment	Moderator	Violence*Moderator	Commitment*Moderator	R <sup>2</sup>
Supervisor Support	1.45	.40**	-.54**	-.05*	-.08	.10**	.32**
Organizational Support	1.47	.47**	-.57**	-.04	-.01	.12**	.32**
Role Conflict	1.39	.38**	-.60**	.06*	.06	-.10*	.32**
Role Ambiguity	1.40	.49**	-.57**	.07*	.02	-.01	.31**
Role Overload	1.39	.46**	-.60**	.08**	-.01	-.09**	.32**

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 5***Moderated Mediation: Analysis of Simple Effects (With 95% Bootstrapped Confidence Intervals for Indirect Effects)*

Moderators	Violence → Commitment	Commitment → Turnover Intentions	Direct effect: Violence → Turnover Intentions	Indirect Effect: Violence → Commitment → Turnover Intentions
Perceived Supervisor Support				
Low	-.20**	<b>-.77**</b>	.49**	.13 [.08 / .19] *
High	-.23**	<b>-.41**</b>	.31**	.10 [.06 / .17] *
Perceived Organizational Support				
Low	<b>-.26**</b>	<b>-.82**</b>	.48**	.18 [.12 / .24] *
High	<b>-.38**</b>	<b>-.52**</b>	.46**	.17 [.04 / .25] *
Role Conflict				
Low	<b>-.43**</b>	<b>-.50**</b>	.32**	.22 [.14 / .32] *
High	<b>-.28**</b>	<b>-.85**</b>	.45**	.20 [.14 / .27] *
Role Ambiguity				
Low	<b>-.36**</b>	-.67**	.47**	.20 [.13 / .29] *
High	<b>-.20**</b>	-.68**	.50**	.12 [.07 / .18] *
Role Overload				
Low	<b>-.45**</b>	<b>-.59**</b>	.47**	.22 [.15 / .32] *
High	<b>-.33**</b>	<b>-.83**</b>	.45**	.23 [.17 / .30] *

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; bolded coefficients indicate significant interactions effects; for indirect effects, significance was tested using bias-corrected bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals.