



## STUDYING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEES' OPTIMISM WITH THEIR SELF-BELIEF AND SOCIAL UNDERMINING AT ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITY OF KERMAN PROVINCE

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### ABSTRACT

This study is aimed to examine the relationship between employees' optimism with their self-belief and social undermining at Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province. Sample of the study consisted of the whole employees of Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province (N=1135). To determine the sample size, 290 people were chosen using Cochran's formulae. Results indicated that there is reverse relationship between employees' optimism (and positive expectation component) and their social undermining, yet no relationship between the employees' selective attention and their social undermining. And, there is reverse relationship between employees' self-belief (and self-esteem component) and their social undermining, yet no relationship between the employees' personal efficiency and social undermining. Finally, there is relationship between the employees' optimism and their self-belief (as well as self-esteem and personal efficiency). General conclusion shows that social undermining is recently increasing as the most widespread behavioral disorder. Optimism and self-belief are factors enabling the individual to effectively interact and communicate and reduce his social undermining. On the other hand, these two characteristics lead to positive employees' behaviors which can improve his abilities.

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### INTRODUCTION

During the last fifteen years, many studies have been carried out on destructive organizational behaviours. And, valuable results are gained regarding interpersonal relationships. Based on evidences, there are numerous predictions and consequences concerning such behaviours in workplace (Herscovis, 2010: 499). Unfortunately, antisocial behaviours are increasing in many organizations and such behaviours lead to many serious problems. Yet, Baron (1996) argues that interpersonal relationships and interactions are the main factors influencing performance in workplace.

Among these behaviours, we can imply social undermining. Social undermining is one of the negative consequences of social life which is increasing. As defined by Duffy *et al* (2002), undermining is "the intentional and deliberate creation of obstacles aiming to ruin others' fame and prestige." It is created when the individual is unfairly accused of a deed which has finally led to the destruction of his prestige.

Social undermining includes all negative behaviors emitted by employees throughout time and lead to the discouragement of the individual's abilities. The abilities embrace making and keeping positive interpersonal relationships, occupational successes, and the credit and popularity in the organization (Khaef Elahi and Alipour Darvishi, 2007:46). Employees' social undermining can bring about negative consequences. For instance, Abbey *et al* (1985) realized that there is relationship between social undermining with tension, depression, and quality of life (Creed and More, 2003). And, the presence of such a negative phenomenon leads to the establishment of weak relationship between employees, hostility, aggressiveness, and consequently lack of occupational success as well as occupational satisfaction.

On the other hand, self-belief is a psychological notion formed within everyone during development period which cannot be changed simply and quickly. The improvement of self-belief formation process requires short term and long term specialized planning. Reviewing comments by researchers and scholars regarding creativity and self-

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belief indicated that both concepts are among acquisition characteristics (Farzianpour *et al*, 2012). Self-belief is a main psychological need. Today, despite many discussions on self-belief, the true meaning of the term *self-belief* is barely known and understood (Brandon, trans. by Gharachedaghi, 2005:17). Self-belief is emanated from the commitment of a person to himself. The commitment to do what is required to achieve his aspirations and needs (Angelis, trans. by Ebrahimi, 2003:22). Weak self-belief is resulted from having negative image of one's condition which can have several negative effects on the individual (especially in workplace). In the meantime, the most important negative effects of the lack or absence of self-belief in the workplace are implied:

- Fear from Success: The difference between successful and unsuccessful individuals is not only due to their knowledge or abilities rather it is resulted from their self-belief. Successful individuals believe in themselves and their abilities. Indeed, the amount of individuals' talents and skills manifestation is a reflection of their extent of self-belief and belief in their own level of intelligence and abilities. If someone feels good about himself, this will lead him toward executing ideas for becoming successful (Jahangiri, 2003:131).
- Jealousy: Another negative effect of not having self-belief is a feeling of jealousy in the person. Jealousy shows the fact that the person's self-belief is not at desirable level (Brandon, trans. by Selseleh, 2000:93).

Based on the abovementioned, identifying factors leading to the reduction of employees' social undermining and increase of self-belief is the main duty of managers. Some positive behaviours such as optimism and self-belief are among the factors which can be effective in the same regard.

Studies show that the whole system is open to any change and evolution, in an optimistic system. Somehow, in an optimistic space, individuals take action to plan and set target, and realistic and logical foresight (Silgman, 2009). Cynicism has its origin in individual's negative thoughts and remains devastating consequences (Hasanpour *et al*, 2009:124). This indicates the fact that employees' optimism or cynicism can affect their self-belief or lack of self-belief.

Results of this study are important for organizations in that the existence of positive thoughts like employees' optimism in an organization will lead to the emergence of positive organizational behaviours and employees' mental health. In the workplace, optimist employees not only affect the other employees positively, but also perform the assigned tasks better. The process of shaping positive thoughts in employees, recognizing the influences of such thoughts on self-belief as well as social undermining gets highlighted. In addition, believing in personal abilities in fulfilling the assigned tasks or having positive self-belief can lead to desirable consequences such as reluctance to turnover, organizational commitment, and enhancing employees' satisfaction. Hence, the significance of self-belief will be demonstrated better in successfully carrying

out tasks. Finally, social undermining hinders the establishment and maintenance of positive work-related interpersonal relationships in time. Namely, this destructive factor leads to the mutual dependency between managers and employees, and the reduction of their participation and cooperation in doing affairs.

### Theoretical Framework of the Study

Here, optimism is studied as predictor variable and social undermining as standard variable, and self-belief as the predictor and standard variable. An inquiry in *Nahjbalagheh* lessons (Nouri, 2008) shows that optimism consists of three components:

- Selective attention: includes positive attention to God's characteristics, world beauties, positive aspects of individuals' qualities and behaviors, positive thoughts and speeches, God's gifts and endowments, one's own positive points, and paying further attention to the results of the works rather than this problems.
- Logical interpretation: implies considering the problems and concerns as spiritual tests, considering positive and negative events as fleeting, as well as God's, oneself and the others' role in the happening of incidences.
- Positive expectation: shows that an optimist person believes in trusting in God, expecting desirable incidences, and expecting proper performance from himself and the others.

On the other hand, self-belief consists of two elements (Nouri, 2006:50):

1. Self-esteem: is one's judgmental and evaluative aspect regarding himself. That is the one with self-awareness has sort of valuing his attributes and if the valuing be negative, his self-esteem will be blemished (Biabangard, 2001:38).
2. Personal efficiency: The optimum level of personal performance is to the level where individual considers his ability a bit higher and gets encouraged to do challenging works and hobs. This is because individuals with too much personal efficiency will overestimate their abilities which can lead to irrecoverable loss.

Similarly, social undermining exists in three forms each of which has negative effect on interpersonal relationships:

- 1- Direct undermining including disgracing, the explicit rejection of the individual's ideas, disdaining the individual or his ideas, not defending the individual in critical conditions, not giving information for doing occupational affairs and creating obstacles on making relationship with others.
- 2- Verbal undermining including the terror and destruction of the individual's personality, gossiping and giving negative feedback explicitly and implicitly.
- 3- Physical undermining including making attempt to harming the individual in any possible way, the attempt is completely deliberate which is done aiming to undermine and hinder reaching good fame in workplace.

In all three types, the supervisor and colleagues' behavior is considered to be the cause of such undermining.

**Research Method**

This study was an applied one regarding its objective and descriptive-correlative regarding methodology. Sample of the study consisted of the whole employees of Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province (N=1135). Based on the short term syllabus of area 7 in Kerman Province in 2012, eleven universities were active at province level where 1135 employees were working. To determine the sample size, 290 people were chosen using Cochran's formulae. Then, using random stratified sampling, the sample size of the branch was estimated proportionate to stratified size.

Data collection tool included three questionnaires: a) optimism questionnaire: Based on *Nahjolbalagheh* lessons, optimism consisted of three components: selective attention, logical interpretation, and positive expectation (Nouri, 2008). The questionnaire was composed of 16 questions; b) self-belief questionnaire: Based on Karimi (2006), the questionnaire consisted of two components: self-esteem and personal efficiency. The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions; and c) social undermining questionnaire: Based on Duffy *et al* (2002), social undermining has two dimensions (i.e. supervisor's undermining and colleagues' undermining) each of which has three components: direct undermining, verbal undermining, and physical undermining. The questionnaire included 30 questions.

To determine and ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the validity was calculated respectively as 0.92, 0.95, and 0.94 for optimism, self-belief, and social undermining questionnaires. Within-test consistency was set using Cronbach's alpha. Results were respectively 0.88, 0.91, and 0.98 for employees' optimism variable, self-belief variable, and social undermining variable. To describe collected data, describing demographic indices as well as research variables was done by means of frequency distribution and descriptive statistics. In data analysis section, hypotheses testing and reviewing research questions were carried out. The hypothesis testing was done using Spearman and Kendall's correlations.

**RESULTS**

Studying demographic variables indicated that of 290 employees under study 130 (%44.8) were men and 153 (%52.8) women.

Inter alia, seven (%2.4) did not determine their gender. Among them, 27 (%25.2) were 30 years old or younger, 112 (%38.6) between 31 and 40, and 96 (%33.1) 41 or higher. Besides, 9 (%3.1) did not specify their age. And, 117 (%40.3) were less than 10 years of working, 107 (%36.9) between 10 and 20, and 34 (%11.7) 20 and higher. Besides, 32 (%11.0) did not determine their job background. Regarding education, 30 (%10.3) had diploma, 41 (%14.1) associate degree, 141 (%48.6) undergraduate, and 71 (%24.5) postgraduate. And, 7 (%2.4) did not specify their education. Concerning marital status, 72 (%24.8) were single and 199 (%68.6) married. Again, 19 (%6.6) did not specify their marital status. Descriptive indices of three main research variables are listed in Table 1.

For hypothesis testing, normality of research variables should be determined by one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Results showed that the assumption of normality was rejected for two optimism and social undermining variables (p<0.05). That is, normality was rejected with the confidence level of %0.95. But the assumption of normality was approved (p>0.05). That is, the assumption of normality is approved with the confidence level of %0.95. Since the assumption of normality was rejected, non-parametric Spearman and Kendall's correlation tests were applied to test hypotheses of the study.

**The Main H1**

Based on data analysis, chi-square test and its significance were gained as 0.00. Accordingly, H0 is rejected at the level of significance 0.05. P-value is <0.05. That is, it cannot be said that employees' optimism and social undermining (by supervisor and colleagues) are independent from each other. To examine the two variables, Spearman and Kendall's correlation tests were applied (quantitative variables). Results are presented in Table 2.

**The Main H2**

Based on data analysis, chi-square test and its significance were gained as 0.00. Accordingly, H0 is rejected at the level of significance 0.05. P-value is <0.05. That is, it cannot be said that employees' self-belief and social undermining (by supervisor and colleagues) are independent from each other. To examine the two variables, Spearman and Kendall's correlation tests were applied (quantitative variables). Results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 1** Values of descriptive indices (n=290)

No response	Max	Min	Stretch	Skewness	Mode	Median	SD	Mean	Variables
0	5	2/71	-0/05	-0/43	4/12	4/17	0/49	4/13	Optimism
6	5	1/86	-0/16	-0/11	4/24	3/52	0/60	3/56	Self-belief
0	5	1	-0/99	-0/11	2/60	3	1/08	2/92	Social undermining

**Table 2-** Spearman and Kendall's correlations regarding employees' optimism and their social undermining

Type of relationship	Relationship	Frequency	Sig. (P-value)	Correlation coefficient	Correlation statistic
Reverse	Has	290	0/046	-0/081	Kendall
Reverse	Has	290	0/038	-0/122	Spearman

**Table 3-** Spearman and Kendall's correlations regarding employees' self-belief and their social undermining

Type of relationship	Relationship	Frequency	Sig. (P-value)	Correlation coefficient	Correlation statistic
Reverse	Has	284	0/015	-0/099	Kendall
Reverse	Has	284	0/017	-0/142	Spearman

**Table 4** Spearman and Kendall's correlations regarding employees' self-belief and their optimism

Type of relationship	Relationship	Frequency	Sig. (P-value)	Correlation coefficient	Correlation statistic
Direct	Has	284	** <0/001	0/369	Kendall
Direct	Has	284	** <0/001	0/503	Spearman

\*\*level of significance 0.05, \*\*\*level of significance 0.01

### The Main H3

Based on data analysis, chi-square test and its significance were gained as 0.00. Accordingly, H<sub>0</sub> is rejected at the level of significance 0.05. P-value is <0.05. That is, it cannot be said that employees' self-belief and optimism (by supervisor and colleagues) are independent from each other. To examine the two variables, Spearman and Kendall's correlation tests were applied (quantitative variables). Results are presented in Table 4.

### Secondary Hypotheses

Based on correlation test results, Kendall's correlation coefficient is -0.047 and Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.067. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between employees' selective attention and social undermining (by supervisor-colleague) at Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province ( $p > 0.05$ ). According to correlation tests results, Kendall's correlation coefficient is -0.068 and Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.083. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between employees' logical interpretation and social undermining (by supervisor-colleague) at Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province ( $p > 0.05$ ). According to correlation tests results, Kendall's correlation coefficient is -0.111 and Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.161. This indicates that there is significant relationship between employees' positive expectation and social undermining (by supervisor-colleague) at Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province ( $p < 0.05$ ). Hence, H<sub>0</sub> is rejected. The relationship between the two variables is reverse. According to correlation tests results, Kendall's correlation coefficient is -0.107 and Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.158. This indicates that there is significant relationship between employees' self-esteem and social undermining (by supervisor-colleague) at Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province ( $p < 0.05$ ). According to correlation tests results, Kendall's correlation coefficient is -0.071 and Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.100. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between employees' personal efficiency and social undermining (by supervisor-colleague) at Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province ( $p > 0.05$ ). As a result, H<sub>0</sub> is rejected.

According to correlation tests results, Kendall's correlation coefficient is -0.291 and Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.406. This indicates that there is significant relationship between employees' optimism and self-esteem (by supervisor-colleague) at Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province ( $p < 0.05$ ). Based on correlation tests results, Kendall's correlation coefficient is -0.368 and Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.492. This indicates that there is significant relationship between employees' logical interpretation and social undermining (by supervisor-colleague) at Islamic Azad Universities of Kerman Province ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### DISCUSSION

Results showed that there is reverse relationship between employees' optimism and their social undermining (by supervisor-colleague). Optimism can play a role in adapting to negative events in workplace. These negative events can be several cases such as social undermining. In the same regard, Seligman (2009:83) can be implied. He believes that optimism and hope lead to better resistance against depression, better performance at work especially in challenging ones, and better physical health. In their study, Hill *et al* (2011) realized that there is significant relationship between optimism and social supports. Since lack social supports means social undermining, lack of optimism or cynicism can lead to social undermining.

Accordingly, there is disagreement between optimist individuals and those understanding social undermining. Based on Mendler's (1984) feeling theory, social undermining in workplace works toward preventing from accomplishment of the objectives and hindering relationships, prestige, and fame (Rock and Pietromonaco, 1987). And, individuals with unstable thoughts will fail in the area.

An optimist person due to his qualities seeks for removing the obstacles which create undermining. On the other hand, optimist employees can move toward removing problems as good as the others if they encounter any from supervisors or colleagues with improper objectives. So, it is expected that employees reduce their own amount of social undermining from supervisor and colleague by emphasizing on selective attention, logical interpretation, and positive expectation in workplace.

There is reverse relationship between employees' self-belief and their social undermining (by supervisor-colleague). Self-belief directly affects choice making, motivation, perseverance, mental pattern, and susceptibility to tension. In the same regard, we can imply Fang (2010:14). He believes that people use information from social environment to adapt their attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs to social environment. When they trust in themselves and have positive self-belief, they will be more successful in their social relationships.

Weak self-belief is resulted from a weak and negative self-image yet positive self-belief will result in positive self-image. So, it is expected that as the employees' self-esteem and personal efficiency improve, their social undermining from supervisor and colleagues will decrease.

There is relationship between employees' optimism and self-belief. Positive suggestion is a fruitful and useful suggestion and leads to the individual's growth and prosperity. On a contrary, a negative suggestion is an adverse and destructive suggestion and hinders the individuals' creativity and innovation and leads them to a passive position. The result of these negative suggestions

is the lack of self-belief and lack of belief in one's abilities (Forouzan *et al*, 2001:6). This indicates the fact that employees' optimism or cynicism can affect their self-belief or lack of self-belief. In their study, Majer *et al* (2004:57) found out that there is significant relationship between individuals' optimism and their self-belief. So, it is expected that self-belief be enhanced among employees via selective attention, logical interpretation, and positive expectation in workplace by improving their optimism.

There is no relationship between the employees' selective attention and their social undermining (from supervisor-colleague). Since optimist individual is a healthy person and emphasizes on positive stimulations in his choice, it was expected that if there was any problem from supervisor or colleagues in workplace, he can quickly remove the problem by this positive quality (selective attention). Yet, results show the absence of any relationship. In this regard, it can be argued that some intervening factors and variables such as organizational culture, organizational structure, employees' attitude, and the like affect the relationship which were difficult to be controlled. Accordingly, in addition to positive thoughts and words, one's own positive points, and regarding the results of works rather than problems in workplace, it is required to pay attention to factors resulting in the creation of social undermining in workplace.

There is no relationship between the employees' logical interpretation and their social undermining (from supervisor-colleague). Employees with proper logical interpretation from their surrounding environment are not annoyed so much by the existing problems rather they try to remove them by thinking properly. Lack of logical interpretation can lead to counterfactual reaction.

Studies on unrealistic thinking show that people usually reflect things into their lives (Niedental *et al*, 1994). Most people imagine a variety of realities which usually return to counterfactuals. In fact, they imagine that they are real yet they may be counterfactuals. They always seek for identifying cases that result in their failures and they consider them as the negative events of their lives. Negative events (like social undermining) lead to the stimulation of individuals' imagination on realities and take control of their minds to the extent that turns realities to counterfactuals sometimes (Landman *et al*, 1995). But, people with logical interpretation toward their surrounding events not only do not see them as obstacles on their progress but also consider them as a factor for success and growth.

Yet, results show no relationship. In this regard, it can be argued that some intervening factors and variables such as organizational culture, organizational structure, employees' attitude, and the like affect the relationship which were difficult to be controlled. So, as well as focusing on these problems and difficulties as God's tests, considering positive and negative events as fleeting, God' and their own and the others' roles in the occurrence of the events, it is required to take factors creating social undermining in workplace into account.

There is reverse relationship between the employees' positive expectation and their social undermining (from

supervisor-colleague). Positive expectation is a commitment-bearing and driving expectation; the one relieving human from stillness and passiveness to dynamicity. According to Bicchieri (1990), positive expectation means expecting a factor from others to adapt and tendency to adaptation. It includes many desirable perceptions (Yapko, 2002) like doing affairs better, further commitment, and ....

On the other hand, the undermined individual definitely does not have positive image. A person feeling to get undermined creates an imaginary fact in a counterfactual process for himself. Based on counterfactual process theory, the consequences of such a situation destruct the person's emotional condition. For instance, it places the individual in a more unstable condition or involves him more in whims and fancy. Usually, the existence of relationship between individuals in a work group at the time when a person or persons understand high levels of undermining results in the instability of changeability (Bandora, 1986). No doubt, a person with positive expectation does not create such counterfactual image in his mind. Generally, there is no correlation between employees' positive expectation and perception. And, as their positive expectation increases, their social undermining is reduced.

There is reverse relationship between the employees' self-esteem and their social undermining (from supervisor-colleague). Self-esteem is a positive attribute accompanied with positive consequences. Individuals with high level of self-esteem have a sense of personal competency, and satisfaction (Oka and Uten, 2010). Self-esteem is effective in making relationships with others. People feeling good about themselves tend to have positive relationship with others. On the other hand, individuals not loving themselves mostly have problems in making relationship with others (Shafti, 2003:59). Definitely, with respect to the above characteristics, individuals with high self-esteem do not feel that they are socially undermined in workplace. What Duffy *et al* have emphasized is an undeniable fact, because a person being disdained, undermined, and generally undergone personality terror feels failure and defeat in his works due to getting highly vulnerable. For sure, he cannot have any commitment regarding the tasks assigned by the organization. This feeling of oppression leads to a sort of mental entanglement which consequently affects his thoughts and attitudes toward organization. Definitely, a person with such negative behavior cannot have high self-esteem. As a result, it is expected that employees will rarely get undermined with being proud of their jobs, accepting their own strengths and weaknesses, and others' satisfaction with his company which shows his high self-esteem.

There is no relationship between the employees' self-efficiency and their social undermining (from supervisor-colleague). People with high self-efficiency choose challenging tasks and works. On a contrary, people with weak self-efficiency will have low self-belief and feel depressed and stressful and nurture pessimistic thoughts about their successes and progresses. Yet, social undermining includes negative feelings and emotions like anger and reluctance targeted and led toward a particular

person (Khef Elahi and Alipour Darvishi, 2007:47). It seems that people with low self-efficiency will get socially undermined further compared to people with high self-efficiency.

At the same time, results show no relationship. In the same regard, it can be argued that some intervening factors and variables such as organizational culture, organizational structure, employees' attitude, and the like affect the relationship which were difficult to be controlled. Accordingly, in addition to having fearless conversation with their superiors, making suitable decisions, satisfaction with what they have done, fulfilling the affairs in the best way possible, accepting the others' ideas, doing affairs in an appropriate way, being committed to the decision made, feeling to be considered qualified by supervisors, the presence of high skills in doing affairs, and quickly learning the related affairs which shows high efficiency, employees must pay attention to the factors leading to their social undermining in workplace.

There is relationship between the employees' optimism and self-esteem. Optimistic individuals have high self-esteem. They are purposeful, motivated for their success at present and for what they intend in future, have confidence, have no tendency to compare themselves to others and have self-awareness (Modap and Steve, 210:2). In this regard, Patton *et al* (2004:193) have confirmed the relationship between optimism and self-esteem in their study. Leung *et al* (2005:335) also found out that optimism is a key predictor for personal health and fosters self-esteem, organization of relationships, and positive perceptions on financial condition.

There is relationship between the employees' optimism and self-efficiency. An optimist individual never recognizes negative issues rather he fights them. Having a positive thinking attitude is a deliberate and intentional process (Tavanai and Salimzadeh, 2010). And, Nouri (2006:73) considers self-efficiency as trusting in the performance of mind. That is, a person believes in being able to think, understand, learn, chose, and make decisions. Namely, he believes in being able to understand facts and realities related to his own wants, and he trusts in and relies on himself.

Hence, it can be argued that an optimist person has high self-efficiency. Researchers realized that there is significant relationship between optimism and successful occupational performance (Seligman and Schulman, 1986). Robinson and Snipes (2009:16) have also approved the relationship.

Finally, followings are suggested:

- Based on results, an increasing attention shall be paid to employees' social undermining so that organizations can take actions for reducing the issue as an obstacle for achieving personal and organizational objectives.
- Organizations shall lead to personal and organizational accomplishment by enhancing self-efficiency as a key factor in organization growth. And, since lack of optimism brings about undesirable consequences for personal and organizational

objectives, it is recommended that organizations pay attention to factors inducing cynicism in the workplace.

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