

Abusive Supervision and Employee Burnout: An Empirical Evidence from Pakistani Cultural

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Abstract

Relationship between burnout in employees and abusive supervision have been explored in this paper and Conservation of Resources theory, which postulates that under abusive supervision, subordinates exhaust their resources in terms of emotional work and thus, burnout. A poll of Pakistani employees working in diverse businesses over the internet shows that abuse in supervision is closely linked with the burnout of the employees. The enormous impact on employees was also demonstrated by regression analysis which demonstrated that abusive supervision describes 44.3% of the variation in burnout. To alleviate the negative impacts of abusive supervision, managers ought to make active efforts such as development of equitable organization practices, offering employee assistance programs, and promoting deep acting approaches. The limitations of the study include the contributions of cross-sectional research design, restricted generalizability due to the geographical nature, and self-reporting bias. Researchers ought to consider longitudinal studies, comparisons across cultures, and interventions within organizations in order to gain more information on the impact of abusive supervision in the long-term. Furthermore, looking at interventions like leadership development courses and emotional intelligence training may offer helpful methods for reducing workplace abuse. Organizations can promote a better workplace and decrease the long-term effects of abusive supervision by addressing these issues.

Keywords: Abusive Supervision, Employee Burnout, Emotional Labor, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational leaders participate in the process of influencing others and of promoting individual and collective efforts to achieve shared goals (Jie Yu, 2020). Effective leadership is crucial to

ensure effectiveness, efficiency and profitability of the organization (Gümüştaş, et al., 2023; Erkutlu, 2008). For example, leaders who use transformational leadership tend to have followers with higher organizational Performance, commitment and job satisfaction (Erkutlu, 2008). However, the leadership dark area aspect obtained increasing interest among researchers and practitioners (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007). Of the several destructive behaviors leaders might display, abusive supervision has drawn substantial attention (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007). Abusive supervision is considered “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Pradhan, S., et al., 2020; Tepper, 2000). Rudeness, public criticism, hiding of important information, threatening through threats of termination, quiet therapies, and hostile eye contact are among behaviors that can be observed in abusive supervision (Aryee et al., 2008). Managers and supervisors engage in abusive supervision when they display dysfunctional and aggressive conduct towards their subordinates over an extended period of time. Some examples of verbal and nonverbal forms of abuse include publicly scolding a subordinate, refusing to promote them or provide other incentives, acting aggressively, setting unrealistic and unreasonable performance goals, and treating them silently (Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2006).

Numerous research has been conducted on this harmful style of leadership in businesses worldwide since Tepper's (2000) definition of abusive supervision was first proposed (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Schyns and Schilling, 2012). Abuse by those in authoritative positions is prevalent and a big concern worldwide, however the majority of research on this destructive style of leadership has focused on the North American setting. In some communities, particularly in Asian countries, wherein abuse by those in power is often accepted and rarely condemned, there is a noticeable lack of research on the topic. According to Tepper et al. (2006), US companies incur an estimated \$23.8 billion annually due to abusive supervision. According to a different survey, over 13% of US workers experience negative effects from abusive supervision (Zhang, 2025; Tepper, 2007). Up to now, research has shown that subordinates suffer significant psychological costs as a result of abusive supervision, that leads to job disengagement, lack of work satisfaction, severe emotional exhaustion, display of counterproductive behavior and finally employee turnover (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007). In addition to its costs, research has illustrated the negative effects of abusive supervisory practices on staff. Employees who feel their supervisors are abusive manifest less favorable job attitudes (Tepper, 2000), and more drinking problems (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006), workplace aggression (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007), and burnout (Li et al., 2016). Among these negative outcomes, the extensive research on burnout and its unique links to the workplace makes it a topic that is fascinating (Maslach et al., 2001). Over the past 25 years, researchers have developed burnout and investigated it as a work-related syndrome within a larger organizational context (Maslach et al., 2001). There are three aspects to the concept of burnout, which is a long-term response to persistent interpersonal and emotional stresses in the workplace: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminishing personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 2001). Research has found harmful outcomes in the workplace related to burnout, such as increased turnover (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), personal health problems (e.g., stress-related disorders; Schaufeli et al., 2009), and decreased job performance (Wu, T. Y., 2019; Wright & Hobfoll, 2004).

Interestingly, empirical studies are currently lacking in their consideration of how Disappointed employees are more likely to experience burnout if their supervisors are abusive. So therefore, the negative impacts of burnout on employees highlight the importance of burnout research. Investigations on abusive supervision are getting a lot of attention in the United States, but other countries, particularly those with developing economies like Pakistan, have paid less attention to the issue. It is imperative to comprehend the impact of abusive supervision in various cultural contexts due to the prevalence of global corporations that employ experts from many ethnic backgrounds (Wu, et al., 2019; Mary et al., 2011). The impact of abusive supervision on workers'

attitudes, behaviors, and performance on the job has been the subject of several studies; nevertheless, the correlation amongst abusive supervision & burnout has been the subject of comparatively few empirical investigations in Pakistani perspective (McCord, M. A., 2024; Schyns and Schilling, 2012). Companies should strive to prevent burnout by recognizing and removing potential sources of stress, which will have a positive impact on employee health and happiness. These relationships are crucial and deserve greater attention and consideration. To further understand the relationship between abusive supervision and burnout, past research implies that it is important to investigate the relationship among abusive supervision and employee Burnout (Arshad, A., Sun, P. Y., 2025; Mackey et al., 2017). Therefore, the motive of this study is to examine the relationship between abusive supervision and employee Burnout attitude towards its organization in Pakistani Culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abusive supervision is identified as “subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which leaders engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact (Rakhy, et al., 2022; Tepper, 2000). Abuse in supervision can take several forms, including being impolite, having tantrums, being critical in public, and being careless. It is well-known that victims of abusive supervision or other types of workplace aggression may experience stress due to the many stress-related consequences (Tepper, 2000). Attitudes, resistance from workers, psychological discomfort, aggression along with deviance, performance inputs, and family well-being are all negatively impacted by abusive supervision, according to a recent review by (Rakhy, et al., 2022; Tepper, 2007). Abuse in supervision appears to have far-reaching consequences for subordinates' professional and personal lives. According to (Hoobler & Brass, 2006) studies, subordinates who endure abusive supervision end up with a skewed worldview and severely depleted resources. A subordinate's self-esteem could take a hit if they're abused, and there's mounting evidence that this trauma can cause the subordinate to act in ways that undermine them at work and at home.

It would indicate that the consequences of abusive supervision are far-reaching and cause the subordinate to lose resources in numerous parts of their lives. Unfortunately, subordinates risk retaliation when they respond to their abuser with faux positive sentiments. Anxiety and despair are among the negative outcomes that subordinates experience as a result of abusive supervision, according to mounting research (Tepper, 2000). Another one of those outcomes is burnout. Depression, anxiety, and a lack of self-confidence are the three hallmarks of burnout, according to Maslach (1982): emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and impaired personal accomplishment. The key component of burnout, according to Johnson and Spector (2007), is emotional weariness, which, according to COR theory, is most strongly associated with resources.

Therefore, in this study, we shall define burnout as emotional exhaustion. Consequently, this study's fundamental objective is to learn more about how abusive supervision contributes to employee burnout. Consequently, we postulate the mechanism by which abusive supervision causes conflict pathways in the workplace based on conservation of resources (COR) theory.

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory

One popular framework for understanding stress is conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), especially within the field of organizational psychology. At its core, COR stands on the idea that “individuals strive to retain, protect, and build resources”. The idea behind resource conservation is that people have a tendency to emphasize the number of resources they lose and understate the number of resources they obtain. Based on this, the theory of conservation of resources states that people experience stress whenever they are unable to get, have their central

resources jeopardized, or have them lost. Workers worry about potential resource loss when it comes to their job domains. When employees go through tough times, they could end up losing resources and even experiencing burnout. Therefore, abusive supervision is one of the ongoing risks to available resources that leads to burnout. One of the symptoms of burnout is emotional tiredness, which is characterized by a loss of energy and indicates that a person's emotional resources have been depleted, according to research (Mackey et al., 2017). To comprehend abuse of authority as a stressful event that drains subordinates' psychological resources and leads to burnout, it is fair to use Conservation of Resources as a foundation. We hypothesize that subordinate burnout is positively correlated with abusive supervision because both stress and burnout result from the slow but steady depletion of specific psychological resources. Hence, subordinates are more prone to burnout if they face abusive supervision.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data and Sample

Members of executive teams, supervisors, and employees from a variety of businesses in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province were surveyed online. They were requested to complete the survey and forward it to five business associates. As part of this process, 300 employees from different industries in Pakistan were mailed the link to the questionnaire. The survey's web link and instructions to complete it were included in the email. Among the several benefits of using email surveys is the fact that they assist decrease social desirability bias and make it easier to sample individuals spread out across a large geographic area. Additional advantage was considering the sensitiveness of the topic we opted for electronic medium of data collection. The prospective respondents were assured that their responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. The total duration of the data collecting process was almost three months (April 2024–June 2024). Consistent with other research of its kind, 246 valid replies were collected, for a response rate of 82%. The sample consisted of 131 males and 115 females, or 46.5% and 53.5% respectively. Those who took part in the survey ranged in age from 28 to 55. Following these guidelines, we designed the survey questionnaire. Several sectors contributed to the total number of responses: 35% from banking, financial services, and insurance; 20% from education; 20% from manufacturing; 25% from information technology and engineering services; and 25% from manufacturing overall.

Measures

Before this study or model was even considered, all of the variables relied on were those that other researchers had found to be valid and dependable from their own work. Modest oversight A five-item abusive supervision scale was used to determine the extent to which subordinates considered their supervisors as abusive (Tepper, 2000; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). Employee burnout was assessed using a six-item scale drawn from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach et al., 1996), while statements like "My supervisor ridicules me" and "My supervisor says me what I'm thinking and feeling are stupid" were examined using five-point Likert scales. "I feel emotionally draining by my work" and "I am burnt out by my work" were two examples of the sample items that were evaluated by respondents using a five-point Likert scale. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with each statement. Also, correlation analysis aims at establishing the type and the intensity of the relationship between two or more variables. It aids the researchers in making interpretations of the data trends by determining whether the difference in one factor is related to a difference in another one. Such analysis plays a critical role in predicting, performing hypothesis testing and identifying possible confounding factors in a diverse range of disciplines such as the social

sciences, business, and medical practice. The usefulness of correlation analysis in decision making and future research is because the correlation measures relationship. Regression analysis seeks to determine the impact of the changes in predictor variables on the outcome by analyzing the relationship between the dependent variable and one or more independent variables. It is an effective statistical instrument used to determine trends and predict in the future as well as proving the hypothesis related to the relationship between the variables. Regression analysis is quite common in most areas such as business, economics, healthcare, and even in the social sciences in analysis of complex data and offering information to make decisions. It allows researchers to assess the risk factors, maximize the tactics and identify the force and importance of correlations, by quantifying the effect of independent variables. Regression analysis can be of great help to policymakers and strategists because, unlike correlation analysis, regression analysis can suggest the potential causal effect.

DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

Correlations

According to the investigation a high Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.666 indicates an extensive positive association between abusive supervision & burnout. Based on these findings, it appears that employees experience more burnout when their supervisors are aggressive. With a p-value of 0.000, we know this connection is significant at the 0.01% level, indicating that the likelihood of this relationship being coincidental is extremely low. With 246 participants, the results show that supervisors' mistreatment is associated with burnout and disengagement in the job. In order to prevent burnout and enhance employee well-being, firms must address toxic leadership behaviors, as demonstrated in the correlation table.

Table 1. Correlation

		Abusive Supervision	Burnout
Abusive Supervision	Pearson Correlation	1	.666**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	246	246
Burnout	Pearson Correlation	.666**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	246	246

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Model Summary

A major predictor of burnout, according to the model summary, is abusive monitoring. With an R-value of 0.666, we can suggest that the two variables are highly related to one another. Abuse in supervision accounts for 44.3% of the variation in burnout, according to the R Squared value of 0.443. Once we account for the total amount of predictors in the model, the Adjusted R Square (0.441) drops a little, but it still provides strong evidence of the link. Indicative of the model's accuracy, the standard error of the estimate is 0.54326, which is the standard deviation of the measured burnout values from the anticipated values. Although abusive supervision does account for a considerable amount of burnout, there may be additional elements that contribute to employee burnout that need to be explored further.

Table 2. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.666 ^a	.443	.441	.54326

a. Predictors: (Constant), Abusive Supervision

ANOVA

The ANOVA table assesses the overall significance of the regression model predicting burnout based on abusive supervision. Burnout and abusive supervision have a statistically significant link, as evidenced by the p-value (Sig. = 0.000), which is significantly below the 0.01 cutoff. The variation in burnout that can be attributed to abusive supervision is represented by the regression sum of squares (57.303), whereas the unexplained variance is taken into account by the residual sum of squares (72.013). Sum of squares for the model comes to 129.315; this proves that abusive supervision is a major factor in employee burnout.

Table 3. ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	57.303	1	57.303	194.159	.000 ^b
	Residual	72.013	244	.295		
	Total	129.315	245			

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

b. Predictors: (Constant), Abusive Supervision

Coefficients

The regression model's coefficients table sheds light on the connection between burnout and abusive supervision. The estimated amount of burnout in the absence of abusive monitoring is represented by the constant (0.893). By the unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.727), an increase in abusive supervision by one unit will increase the burnout by 0.727 units. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.666) indicates that there are significant positive relationships between the two variables. The p-value (Sig. = 0.000) is extremely large and the t-value (13.934) is significant, which proves that abusive supervision is one of the key predictors of burnout. These results suggest that work-related supervisor abuse plays a significant contribution to employee burnout, and there should be an effort made to alleviate the level of abusive leadership.

Table 4. Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.893	.196		4.557	.000
	Abusive Supervision	.727	.052	.666	13.934	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

The researchers set out to fill gaps in our knowledge by examining the mechanisms by which abusive supervision contributes to employee burnout. We postulated, based on the principle of Conservation of Resources (COR), that a subordinate's capacity to handle work demands would suffer as a result of abusive supervision. This would manifest as the subordinate's attempts the resulting burnout. There are obvious effects of abuse, but subordinates who work under an abusive boss also experience indirect effects, such as surface acting, which leads to burnout and a loss of resources. Employees who endure more severe forms of supervisorial abuse are more prone to suffer from burnout, according to the correlation statistics, which shows a robust positive association amongst abusive supervision to burnout ($r = 0.666$, $p = 0.000$). In addition, the R Square value from the regression analysis shows that abusive supervision accounts for a significant amount (44.3%) of the variation in burnout. According to this study, there is a partial influence of burnout and resource loss caused by abusive supervision and subordinate job conflict. According to previous studies (Wu & Hu, 2009), emotionally draining monitoring is associated with abusive behavior. Nonetheless, no prior research has examined the emotional work that subordinates engage in as a response to abusive supervision; we are the first to do so. Experiencing abuse can lead to a shift in how subordinates perceive themselves, such as a transient decline in self-esteem (Burton & Hoobler, 2006). However, it is crucial to comprehend the more consequential impacts on their mental well-being and their capacity to manage domestic and professional relationships. Past studies have shown that when subordinates experience abuse, they may act aggressively in a different way by taking out their frustrations on those at home instead of on the abusive supervisor (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). Because of the inequality in position and power and social norms about emotional expression in the workplace, subordinates are unlikely to feel comfortable or following experiencing abusive behavior, it is acceptable to communicate openly with their supervisor about how they feel. Workers may be afraid their boss will punish them if they voice their displeasure or anger on the job. Rather than expressing how they really feel, subordinates may try to put on an act. These results add to our understanding of how emotional labor and fatigue contribute to the detrimental effects of abuse on a subordinate's life outside of work.

Managerial Implications

Important possibilities for leaders and organizations are also borne out by this study. Organizations must make it clear to individuals in leadership roles that these damaging and hostile practices will not be accepted, since the impacts of abusive supervision can be seen in the subordinate's job and personal life. Negative views of procedural fairness have been associated with increased instances of subordinate abuse, according to several studies (Tepper et al., 2006). Consequently, businesses should make sure that people in managerial roles view company rules and processes as just and equal. In addition, when abusive supervision is found, institutions should encourage staff members to seek assistance through their organizations or other resources (such as counseling or stress management) so that they can learn to cope with abuse in healthier ways than just acting out on the surface. We found that programs that teach people deep acting techniques in the workplace may help them deal with conflict more effectively. Reducing the discrepancy between one's felt and shown emotions, deep acting can be a rehabilitative technique for stress (Grandey, 2003). In order for workers to exhibit the good emotions expected of them on the job, it is possible to teach them to control their own emotions. Subordinates may mask their true feelings in reaction to abuse, leading to subordinate burnout; this research adds to the existing body of knowledge by utilizing conservation of resources theory to examine the role of abusive Supervision and subordinate burnout.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

A number of limitations should be noted, even if this study offers insightful information about how abusive supervision affects employee burnout. Firstly, an online survey was used for data collection, which has the advantage of reaching a geographically distributed sample but also the potential drawback of introducing self-reporting biases. Despite the guarantees of privacy, respondents might have overstated or understated their experiences because of social desirability bias. Second, the study was confined to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan and therefore it cannot be generalized in other organizational and cultural settings. One should be careful when applying such findings to a bigger population as it is possible that working conditions and supervisory practices are different in other industries and countries. Third, it cannot make any conclusive conclusions regarding causality presented by the cross-sectional research methodology. Even though the regression analysis results show that there is high correlation of burnout and abusive supervision, further studies are needed to demonstrate causation and investigate how the two effects vary with time. Fourth, neglecting any mediating/moderating factors such as personality characteristics, organizational support, and coping strategies, the study focused primarily on two variables abusive supervision and exhaustion. Further research needs to be done into other variables that might influence or counteract the adverse effect of abusive supervision on burnout.

Future Research Directions

The way to overcome these disadvantages is to conduct more research that considers the impact of abusive supervision on workers over time based on a longitudinal research. In addition, qualitative methods of research such as case studies or in-depth interviews could provide more insight into the coping mechanisms used by workers and their real experience concerning abusive supervision. The findings would also be justified and generalized because the study will be extended to other organizational and cultural settings. The cross cultural research may also focus on whether abusive supervision influences burnout differently across the leadership expectation and the workplace standards.

The impact of abusive supervision needs to be studied further and the ways of mitigating it by interventions and organizational policies. To provide an example, the study of the role of leadership development courses, employee assistance programs, and emotional intelligence training can present convenient solutions to companies in need of reducing abuse at work.

Lastly, the impact of abusive supervision on the larger organizational level would be understood more comprehensively through researching other behavioral and psychological consequences, including retributive behavior at work, job dissatisfaction or intentions to quit the firm. By examining these issues, future research can contribute to the development of viable strategies to overcome abusive supervision and promote conducive workplaces.

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