

# The Effects of Abusive Supervision on Employee Performance

Xiaojing Liu<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>School of Economics and Management, Qingdao Institute of Technology, Qingdao, Shandong, China

**Abstract:** In this study, we aim to investigate the phenomenon of abusive supervision and its impact on employee performance. Specifically, we will analyze the potential relationship between these abusive behaviors and specific work-related roles using relevant secondary resources. The data utilized in this research is derived from quantitative studies conducted within various organizations across multiple industries. Our findings indicate a negative correlation between supervisor bullying behavior and subordinate productivity levels.

**Keywords:** Abusive Supervision, Consequences, Employee Performance

## 1. Introduction

Abusive supervision is defined as "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" <sup>1</sup>. Employees in many organizations are likely to experience bullying behaviors from supervisors, in terms of being treated silently, being ridiculed publicly, being expressed anger even they are not the source of anger or being given biased comments. As a result, these abusive behaviors may have a negative effect on subordinates who experience them <sup>2</sup>. Specifically, as current research indicates, abusive supervision is likely to cause detrimental consequences in many areas like psychological well-being, job satisfaction, working behaviors, work performance and even family-related outcomes <sup>3</sup>. Among these areas, employee performance is particularly vital in an organization and deserves more attention, because it is closely related to organization operation as well as productivity. In addition, high-level employee performance can greatly enhance organization commitment and employee engagement by improving group cooperation and identification <sup>4</sup>. Therefore, we choose "the impacts of abusive supervision on employee performance" proposed in the proposal as the objective of this report. In this report, we specifically investigate the impacts of abusive supervision on employee performance.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

Current research indicates that abusive supervision has

impact on employee performance <sup>3</sup>. This report will be pursued through one objective: to assess the impact of bullying from managers based upon abusive supervision on employee performance. Quantitative study was used to obtain results selected from secondary data to measure relationship between workplace bullying and employee performance. Quantitative method was used because it gives an in-depth statistical measure on the topic under investigation. It was chosen over qualitative since it describes trends, relates variables, and can be compared with other results. Different industries were used in organizational context regarding employee performance. Status was measured with unstructured questions regarding what impact bullying has on organization and employee performance <sup>5</sup>. We identified variables such as demographics of gender and age, voice, and behaviors, which relates to the organization and supervisors.

### 2.2 Data Analysis

Data in this research was collected from secondary sources with descriptive statistics showed in cross-tabulated data based on abusive supervision and employee performance. In Table 1, we examined correlation between CWB-Os (counterproductive work behaviors directed at the organization) and CWB-Ss (counterproductive work behaviors directed at the supervisor). Abusive behavior from supervisors was closely related to subordinates' behavior as shown Table 1, and Table 2.



Table1. Correlations and descriptive statistics for the study variables <sup>11</sup>

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Wave 1									
1.Abusive Supervision	1.30	0.67	(.93)						
2.Hostile Intent	3.57	1.92	.22**	(.96)					
3.Motivational Intent	3.08	1.65	.25**	.19**	(.95)				
Wave 2									
4.CWB-Os	1.34	0.57	.48**	.20**	.30**	(.94)			
5.CWB-Ss	1.20	0.55	.45**	.20**	.31**	.79**	(.94)		
Demographics									
6.Age	37.12	11.17	-.07	.08	-.17**	-.20**	-.15*	-	
7.Gender	1.50	0.50	-.17**	.04	-.16**	-.13*	-.14*	-.07	-

Notes: N=268.CWB-Os=counterproductive work behaviors directed at the organization. CWB-Ss=counterproductive work behaviors directed at the supervisor. Male=1, Female=2. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among study variables <sup>9</sup>

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Abusive supervision	(0.94)			
2. Toxic emotion	0.30**	(0.92)		
3. CWB	0.39**	0.31**	(0.95)	
4. OCB	-0.28**	-0.31**	-0.43**	(0.92)
Mean	1.82	3.37	1.20	4.58
SD	0.62	0.81	0.29	0.57

Cronbach's alphas appear on the diagonal. CWB, counterproductive work behavior; OCB, organizational citizenship behavior. \*P<0.05, \*\*P<0.01.

Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWBs) was defined as voluntary behavior in the workplace that has been shown to harm or are intended to harm a number of specific individual and organizational factors <sup>6,7</sup>. As voluntary behaviors, CWBs had explicit acts in different forms such as aggression, theft and other passive actions, and was correlated with abusive supervision in workplace <sup>8</sup>.

This study used two surveys to examine the relationships among all the variables. The abusive supervision, counterproductive work behaviors directed at the organization (CWB-Os) and counterproductive work behaviors directed at the supervisor (CWB-Ss) for all the study variables are shown in Table 1. The table used correlations and descriptive statistics for the study variables to test for the effects of abusive supervision on CWBs. Correlation analysis (Table 1) demonstrated that abusive supervision was positively correlated with both CWB-Os (r=.48, p<.01) and CWB-Ss (r=.45, p<.01). The table 2 can straightforwardly indicate that abusive supervision was positively correlated with CWB (r = 0.39, P <0.01) <sup>9</sup>. However, abusive supervision was negatively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (r=-0.28; P<0.01). Table 5 will introduce the correlation between them in detail. This indicated that employees who were treated abusively by their supervisor had more CWBs than who non-treated abusively by their supervisor.

This table was used to identify the impacts of abusive supervision on organizational, employee performance and family-related outcomes <sup>3</sup>. Considering our research objective in this report, we simply focus on the section of employee performance in this table. As the table described, abusive supervision negatively related to employee performance and this could be found from the figure listed in the table, (r=-.24), OCB(r=-.21), OCBO including OCB (r =-.24), OCBI (r =-.21), OCBO (r =-.17), and voice (r =-.25). In addition to OCB and voice which were analyzed in other tables, it could be noticed that there was also a negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinate work performance (r =-.16). In this survey, subordinate work performance simply referred to an employee's performance when implementing supervisor-related work. According to Karambayya et al report <sup>10</sup>, subordinates who suffered abusive behavior from a supervisor are more likely to complete work in a poor quality, especially when doing the supervisor-related job.

Table 4 illustrates that abusive supervision would be negatively associated with subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). This secondary data was collected from 373 National Guard members. It demonstrates the result of regression analysis about subordinates' OCB on abusive supervision, adding the control variables as a block. The analysis also entered

abusive supervision into the second step in order to control for the effects of subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior role definitions. The first step shows that only PA was related to OCB ( $\beta=.19$ ,  $p<.01$ ) even the control variables explained ( $\beta=.19$ ,  $p<.01$ ) the significant part of the variance in OCB (6%). The second step shows that organizational citizenship behavior role definitions and abusive supervision both accounted for 5% ( $p<.01$ ) of the variance of subordinates' OCB in addition. The standardized beta weights associated with OCB role definitions and abusive supervision were both considerable ( $\beta=.14$ ,  $p<.05$ ;  $\beta=.21$ ,  $p<.01$ , respectively). The beta weights' signs indicate that when subordinates treated OCB as in-role behavior and their supervisor were less abusive, they would perform organizational citizenship behavior more frequently. Therefore, the findings show that abusive supervision is negatively related to subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior.

Abusive supervision assumes to have a negative effect for interaction between the supervisor and the employee. Besides, this could result decrease the employee's voice on work. Since, this study looked at the relationship between abusive supervision and prosocial voice. The sample contains total 379 participants for this research. There are 76 percent female ( $N=289$ ), participant's average age was 26-year-old ( $SD=4.93$ ), and they have the average tenure of 5.13 years ( $SD=4.34$ ). Table 5 gives the details of descriptive statistics and variable inter correlations. The participants have been rated their level of voice/silence within the organization under the influence of abusive supervision. According to table 5, the influence of abusive supervision for employee's voice/silence which shows ( $r=-.14$ ,  $p<.05$ ) in the data. In consequence, it directly reflected that abusive supervision has a negative impact in relation to the voice/silence. Moreover, as table 5 shows ( $r=-.10$ ,  $p<.05$ ) in the data between organizational attribution and voice/silence. Therefore, there is also a negative relation between organizational attribution and voice/silence.

### 3. Discussion

From above analysis, it could be proved that abusive supervision negatively affects employees' CWBs, OCB, job performance and voice, which are closely related to the level of employee performance. Firstly, we examined that abusive supervision has a negative effect on CWBs, which means abusive supervision is likely to cause more CWBs in workplace and this could be supported by data in table 1 and table 2. In table 1, abusive supervision was positively associated with both CWB-Os and CWB-Ss. These relationships have established because "the presence of abusive supervision causes subordinates to experience a violation in the reciprocal exchange of resources" <sup>11</sup>. The present study examined abusive supervision significant main reason to improve the possibility of occurrence CWBs <sup>12,13</sup>. On the other hand, Sackett et al. <sup>14</sup> considered that CWBs is one of the "three major domains of job performance". Therefore, we propose

that CWBs is likely to influence performance by increasing job stress as well as negative perspective and reducing the level of job satisfaction <sup>6,15</sup>. In other words, abusive supervision has a detrimental impact on subordinates who work with an abusive supervisor.

Results in table 3 clearly indicate the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinate work performance. According to Kenneth J et al's results <sup>16</sup>, abusive supervision in workplace does not only influence the implement of subordinate self-related jobs but also has an impact on supervisor-related work that both constructs employee performance. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that workplace bullying from supervisors does decrease employee performance.

It is shown in table 4 that abusive supervisor has negative effect on employees' organizational citizenship behavior and consequently impact on employee performance defined organizational citizenship behavior as an extra-role, which allows staff to contribute to achieve the goals of organization with sufficient engagement <sup>4</sup>. Due to a variety of research conducted on OCB, it has become a critical element in an organization as an important factor in the process of determining rewarding, promotions, and retrenching employees as well <sup>17</sup>. Employees with abusive supervisor will perform fewer OCBs than those who do not under abusive supervisor <sup>18</sup>. When supervisors were less abusive, the employee would define OCB as in-role behavior.

On the contrary, subordinates who considered their supervisor as abusive are more likely to define OCB as extra-role behavior. Organizational citizenship behavior supports both psychological and social environment in which job performance takes place and employees who spend their time on OCBs are considered as 'good citizens' <sup>4</sup>. OCBs have much more influence on the employee performance than other factors among the correlation researches. Karambayya et al verified the positive relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and employee performance in their study <sup>10</sup>. Therefore, abusive supervision has negative impact on employee performance in workplace through affecting on organizational citizenship behavior.

The act of abusive supervision happens when subordinates experience, they have been treated disrespectfully and rude. For the reason that, it is logical to think that employees are not willing to voice themselves since supervisors create an unfair work environment <sup>19</sup>. Additionally, according to the report, subordinates who suffered from abusive supervision in their work have a low job satisfaction and lower commitment for the organization <sup>1</sup>. This also results in decrease of the employees to make a voice on work, but more important is the relationship between abusive supervision and voice/silence conciliate with interactional justice. After employee's experience of such inequity behavior, this will influence their attitude for work and behavioral performance in a good way to

prevent the injustice of abusive behavior from the supervisor <sup>20</sup>. From the supervisor's perspective, the abusive behavior might also associate with the work environment or the stress they suffered from the organization.

Table3.Meta-analysis of relationships between work-cognitive, performance and family- related consequences <sup>3</sup>

Variable	k	N	r	95% CI		Q	p	T	I <sup>2</sup>
				LL	UL				
<b>Organizational justice</b>									
Distributive justice	3212	10	-.31	-.40	-.22	69.81	.00	.15	87.11
Procedural justice	3034	11	-.34	-.44	-.23	110.39	.00	.19	90.94
Interactional justice	3916	14	-.51	-.6	-.42	178.2	.00	.22	92.7
<b>Performance</b>									
<b>OCBs</b>									
OCB	1319	6	-.24	-.31	-.17	7.78	.17	.05	35.75
OCBI	2007	7	-.21	-.28	-.14	16.82	.00	.08	64.33
OCBO	1848	8	-.17	-.24	-.09	17.35	.02	.08	59.66
Voice	337	2	-.25	-.32	-.18	.05	.82	.00	.00
Subordinate work performance	3346	14	-.16	-.23	-.09	57.45	.00	.12	77.37
Engagement	1306	6	-.29	-.41	-.16	28.75	.00	.15	82.68
<b>Family-related outcome</b>									
Family undermining	989	5	.30	.21	.40	11.25	.02	.10	64.44
Family-to-work conflict	690	2	.37	-.11	.71	44.56	.00	.36	97.76

*k* the number of participants in each analysis; *N* the number of independent effect sizes included in each analysis; *95% CI* 95 % confidence interval for, *LL* lower level of the 95 % CI; *UL* upper level of the 95% CI; *Q* the Q statistic, a measure of potential heterogeneity the p-value for the Q statistic; *T* the standard deviation of the true effect size; *I* the I<sup>2</sup> statistic, a measure of the proportion of dispersion that can be attributed to real differences in effect sizes as opposed to within-study error.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Tests of Moderation and Mediated-Moderation <sup>18</sup>

Variable	Step				
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Subordinate</b>					
Sex	-.06	-.06	-.07	-.04	-.05
Age	.09	.12 †	.11 †	.08	.07
Tenure	-.07	-.11 †	-.11 †	-.12*	-.11 †
Education	.01	.02	.02	.03	.03
Negative affectivity	-.09 †	-.05	-.04	-.04	-.03
Positive affectivity	.19**	.19**	.19**	.06	.06
Abusive supervision		-.14*	-.15**	-.01	.00
OCB role definitions		.21**	.22**	.21**	.23**
Abuse×OCB Role Definitions			.10*	.07 †	.03
Subordinates' procedural justice				.40**	.42**
Procedural Justice×OCB Role Definitions					-.15**
R <sup>2</sup> change	.06**	.05**	.01*	.12*	.02**
	<i>F</i> (6,338)=3.43 <i>F</i> (8,336)=5.22 <i>F</i> (9,335)=5.03 <i>F</i> (10,334)=10.52 <i>F</i> (11,333)=10.55				

Note. The dependent variable for all equations was subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). For all Fs, *p*<.01. Sex(1=male, 2=female; Age(1=18-24,2=25-29,3=30-39,4=40-49,5=over49):Tenure (1=less than 1 year, 2=between 1 and 6 years, 3=between 6 and 10 years, 4=between 10 and 20 years, 5=over 20 years); Education (1=did not complete high school,2 = completed high school,3=attended college,4 =completed college,5=advanced degree). OCB role definitions are coded so that higher scores mean respondent perceived OCB as in-role. †*p*<.10, \**p*<.05, \*\**p*<.01.

Table 5 below shows the inter correlations variables of Abusive supervision and voice to the organization <sup>20</sup>

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Abusive supervision	1.86	.51	(.86)				
2. Attribution	2.66	.87	.39**	(.64)			
3. Interactional justice	3.42	.56	-.36**	-.09	(.89)		
4. Voice/silence	3.67	.48	-.14*	-.10*	.26**	(.78)	
5. OCBO	3.59	.62	-.19*	-.16**	.32**	.61**	(.85)

Note. N=379. \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01.

However, abusive supervision has not existed among all the employees. When employee corresponding with higher responsibility of the work and organization acknowledgment, they are more likely to know how to associate with interactional justice and voice/silence. The one of many disadvantages of abusive supervision is that the decrease of employee's job performance, because it shows some resentful voice of mistreatment to the supervisor. However, this act of protest will "threaten employees' career and promotion within the organization" <sup>21</sup>. It also has a negative influence of the organization's reputation and further development. Abusive supervision has influenced the way of employee's performance and their voice/silence on work, it is important to prevent such behavior to the employee, so they can voice themselves on work as to benefit the growth of whole organization.

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest that abusive supervision in organizations has both positive and negative impacts on employee performance, while failing to demonstrate its effects on other aspects such as job satisfaction, motivation, and engagement at the workplace. Our report reveals a positive correlation between abusive supervision and counterproductive work behavior, as well as a negative correlation with organizational citizenship behavior, voice, and job performance. The implication of this is that numerous supervisors exhibit such behaviors in the workplace, resulting in employees perceiving themselves as being subjected to negative treatment. <sup>22</sup>. The aforementioned issue could also have an adverse impact on employees' performance and commitment, as their perspectives may not be adequately acknowledged within the workplace. In order to mitigate instances of workplace bullying, it is imperative for various stakeholders or institutions to devise alternative strategies for further implementation.

#### 4.1 Recommendations

In further research, we proposed the development of Anti-bullying policies and procedures at various levels. However, these policies could be revised and effectively implemented in conjunction with organizational strategies. The aforementioned stakeholders would ensure that workers' voices are heard so that they can carry out their duties within the organization without fear. Additionally, effective

stakeholder involvement, including trade unions, organizational departments, and government entities, is necessary to discuss policies and strategies for training personnel managers in dealing with bullying.

#### 4.2 Limitations

The main changes in this report, which need to be clarified, differ from the proposal we have written. Firstly, the title has been partly improved, changing 'workplace bullying from managers' into 'abusive supervision'. From the definition of abusive supervision discussed above, it is the same phenomenon with 'workplace bullying from managers' and easier to be used in secondary data searching. Secondly, it is a fact that we used 'manager's bias' in the objective in proposal. However, considering that there is no clear relationship between 'managers' bias' and our research topic, and it mistakenly occurred in our proposal because of the usage of wrong document when submitting the proposal, we decided to use different keywords in research objective in this report. In addition, the geographical area where we intended to conduct the research has also been changed, as the limitation of secondary resources.

#### References

1. Tepper, B. J. Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of management journal* **43**, 178-190, doi:10.2307/1556375 (2000).
2. Tepper, B. J. Abusive Supervision in Work Organizations: Review, Synthesis, and Research Agenda. *Journal of Management* **33**, 261-289, doi:org/10.1177/0149206307300 (2007).
3. Yucheng Zhang, Z. L. Consequences of abusive supervision: A meta-analytic review. *Asia Pacific Journal Of Management* **32**, 959-987, doi:org/10.1007/s10490-015-9425-0 (2015).
4. Organ, D. W. *Organizational Citizenship Behavior: The Good Soldier Syndrome*. (Lexington Books, 1998).
5. Gary Namie, R. N. *The Bully at Work: What You Can Do to Stop the Hurt and Reclaim Your Dignity on the Job*. (Sourcebooks, 2003).
6. Iliescu D, I. D., Sulea C, Ilie A. . Vocational fit and counterproductive work behaviors: A self-regulation perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology* **100**, 21-39, doi:10.1037/a0036652. (2015).
7. Chirumbolo, A. The Impact of Job Insecurity on Counterproductive Work Behaviors: The Moderating Role of Honesty-Humility Personality Trait. *Journal of Psychology* **149**, 554-569, doi:10.1080/00223980.2014.916250 (2015).
8. Paul E. Spector, S. F., Lisa M. Penney, Kari Bruursema, Angeline Goh, Stacey Kessler The dimensionality of counterproductivity: Are all counter-productive behaviors created equal. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* **68**, 446-460, doi:org/10.1016/j.jvb.2005.10.005 (2006).



9. Chu, L. C. Mediating toxic emotions in the workplace-the impact of abusive supervision. *Journal of Nursing Management* **22**, 957-969, doi:org/10.1111/jonm.12071 (2014).
10. Karambayya, R. Contexts for organizational citizenship behavior: Do high performing and satisfying units have better 'citizens'? , (Working paper, York University, 1990).
11. Kevin Eschleman, N. B., Jesse S. Michel, Gary Burns. Perceived intent of supervisor as a moderator of the relationships between abusive supervision and counterproductive work behaviours. *Work and Stress* **28**, 362-375, doi:10.1080/02678373.2014.961183 (2014).
12. Sulea, C., Fine, S., Fischmann, G., Sava, F. A., Dumitru, C. Abusive supervision and counterproductive work behaviors: The moderating effects of personality. *Journal of Personnel Psychology* **12**, 196-200, doi:10.1027/1866-5888/a000097 (2013).
13. Mitchell, M. S., & Ambrose, M. L. Abusive supervision and workplace deviance and the moderating effects of negative reciprocity beliefs. *Journal of Applied Psychology* **92**, 1159-1168, doi:org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.4.1159 (2007).
14. Paul R. Sackett, F. L. Personnel selection. *Annual Review of Psychology* **59**, 419-450, doi:org/10.1146/annurev.psych.59.103006.093716 (2008).
15. Gulzar, S., Moon, M. A., Attiq, S., Azam, R. The Darker Side of High Performance Work Systems:Examining Employee Psychological Outcomes and Counterproductive Work Behavior. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce & Social Sciences* **8**, 715-732 (2014).
16. Kenneth J. Harris, K. M. K., Suzanne Zivnuska. An investigation of abusive supervision as a predictor of performance and the meaningof work as a moderator of the relationship. *The Leadership Quarterly* **18**, 252-263, doi:org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.007 (2007).
17. Castro, C., Barroso, E., Armario, M., Ruiz, D. M. The influence of employee OCB on customer loyalty. *International Journal of Service Industry Management* **15**, 27-53, doi:org/10.1108/09564230410523321 (2010).
18. Kelly L. Zellars, B. J. T., Michelle K. Duffy. Abusive supervision and subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology* **87**, 1068-1076, doi:10.1037/0021-9010.87.6.1068 (2002).
19. Lamertz, K. The social construction of fairness: Social influence and sense making in organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* **23**, 19-37, doi:org/10.1002/job.128 (2002).
20. Rong Wang, J. J. How Abusive Supervisors Influence Employees' Voice and Silence: The Effects of Interactional Justice and Organizational Attribution. *The Journal of Social Psychology* **155**, 204-220, doi:org/10.1080/00224545.2014.990410 (2015).
21. Karl Aquino, T. M. T., Robert J Bies. Getting even or moving on? Power, procedural justice, and types of offense as predictors of revenge, forgiveness, reconciliation, and avoidance in organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology* **91**, 653-668, doi:10.1037/0021-9010.91.3.653 (2006).
22. TINA LØKKE VIE, L. G., STÅLE EINARSEN. How does it feel? Workplace bullying, emotions and musculoskeletal complaints. *Scandinavian Journal Of Psychology* **53**, 165-173, doi:org/10.1111/j.1467-9450.2011.00932.x (2012).