Abusive Supervision and Subordinates' Retaliation: The Mediating Role of OCB.

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate a mechanism which enables a subordinate to respond to abusive supervision.A total of 920 subordinates were surveyed in groups, where focal person reports abusive supervision, the support he or she gets from peer group members and counter-productive work behavior towards supervisor and organizational citizenship behavior towards organization is reported by focal person's peer. Hierarchal regression and process macro were used to analyze the data. The results show that organizational citizenship behavior-peer group and organizational citizenship behavior-organization play mediating role between abusive supervision and counter-productive work behavior towards supervisor.

Keywords: Leadership; Abusive Supervision; Organizational Citizenship Behaviors; Counter-productive Work Behaviors; Moral Licensing Theory; Attraction-Selection-Attribution Theory; Moral Licensing Theory.

Introduction

Management researchers have studied the "dark side" of leadership using labels like tyrannical leadership, destructive leadership, bullying, and toxic leadership (Pellitier, 2010), but one of the most widely studied leadership styles to date is that of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007; Tepper, Simon & Park, 2017). Tepper (2000, p. 178) defines abusive supervision as "subordinates' perception of … their supervisors' engagement in a sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact." Scholars have shown a keen interest in the subject because of its pervasiveness and damaging effects (Schyns& Schilling, 2013), which are likely due to its involving supervisors implies those leaders with whom subordinates have direct daily interactions, the frequency of which makes supervisors more prone to being perceived as abusive (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

Several authors have grounded discussions about subordinates' retaliating against the supervisors' abusive behavior (Tepper, Duffy & Shaw., 2001). However, subordinates may not be able to show their resentment openly for fear of retaliation, punishment, or lost rewards. Therefore, they exhibit counter-productive work behaviors (Aryee,

Chen, Sun &Debrah, 2007; Duffy, Scott, Shaw &Tepper, 2002; Liu & Wang, 2013; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007), which are not part of their job descriptions, are not evaluated through formal processes, and are largely unobservable and not punishable. Counter-productive work behavior (CWB) is an intentional behavior that is contrary to an organization's legitimate interests (Sackett, 2002).

Tepper, Simon, and Park's (2017) meta-analysis revealed that, since its emergence in 2000, many studies have examined the consequences of abusive supervision based on mediated frameworks. But these mediation frameworks test typically account for mostly a single mechanism underlying the effect of abusive supervision. Tepper, Simon, and Park (2017) further stated that though previous studies are informative but they leave us with an incomplete picture that which mechanisms and corresponding theoretical perspective are more or less important. Tepper, Simon, and Park (2017) suggested for studying more multi-pathway mechanisms under specific circumstances that untangles the relationship between abusive supervision and its outcomes. This study aims to examine one of the mechanisms through which an abused employee becomes inclined to retaliate against his or her supervisor through the mediating effect of two dimensions of OCB.OCB has been defined as behaviors that support an organization's social and psychological environment (Organ, 1997). The present study proposes two mediators that enable subordinate to show resentment against supervisors, the mediators grounded on moral licensing theory, include ― OCB-organization (OCB-O) and OCB-peer (OCB-P).

Literature Review

OCB, CWB, and moral licensing theory:

Research on the relationship between OCB and CWB has evolved since its formal emergence in the work of Organ in 1997. In the classical literature, CWB and OCB had been considered conceptually opposite to each other (Dalal, 2005), with the former working to harm the organization and the latter referring to extra effort that enhances the organization's productivity. Initially, scholars have declared them to be the opposite poles of the same bar (Bennett & Stamper, 2002; Sackett& De Vore, 2001). Later, the relationship between the two had been found to be only modest. Recent developments have contradicted the classical belief by declaring that OCB and CWB are effect-based phenomena ―implies that a person can display both behaviors (OCB and CWB) at the same time, depending on the situation (Dalal, Lam, Weiss, Welch, &Hulin, 2009). Contemporary literature grounded in the

premise of moral licensing theory has moved a step further, assuming that in some instances, OCB itself becomes the cause of CWB (Merritt, Effron&Monin, 2010, Klotz &Bolino, 2013).

Theory building

Direct effect of abusive supervision on CWB-supervisor

Organizational psychology literature has added that employees tend to aggress against aversive circumstances exist in the organization and interpersonal provocation is one of the most significant aggravators that become the cause of such retaliation (Jones, 2009; Organ,1997; Tepper,2010). Tepper (2000) stated that employees tend to react if they perceive to be mistreated by their supervisors. Zellars, Tepper,and Duffy (2002) suggested that when employees are mistreated, they feel like losing control and try to regain it through changing their discretionary behaviors, like raising CWB.

Moreover, De Quervain, Fischbacher, Treyer, and Schellhammer(2004) claimed abusive supervision as the strongest provocation to instigate a retaliatory reaction by a subordinate. Apparently, this relationship looks unconvincing due to the power distance between a subordinate and a supervisor (Tepper, 2007). However, on contrary many research studies have presented a different picture as majority claimed that despite power gap, employees do retaliate, nevertheless the intensity of reaction may differ (Hershcovis&Barling, 2010; Tepper&Almeda, 2012). In the light of previous literature, it is proposed that abusive supervision leads to CWB towards a supervisor.

H1: Abusive Supervision is positively associated with CWB-S.

Mediating role of OCB-P

Peng, Schaubroeck& Li (2014) claimed that the interaction of abusive supervision perceived by a subordinate will trigger if his or her co-workers have the same perception about the supervisor. Tepper (2007) noted that, when employees feel abusive supervision in an organization, they try to seek the support of other group members in leveling retribution. Hence, abused peers support each other by developing a bond and use this bond to fight against perceived sources of abuse. This notion is also well supported by moral licensing theory, which proposes that, if an employee has a good group image and support, he or she is more likely to indulge in CWB(Miller and Effron, 2010).

Management literature has also established that individuals with similar tendencies form groups and manifest similar

behaviors (Schneider, 1975). The group association becomes stronger if individuals are facing injustice, which further leads to protest (Kelloway, Francis, Prosser, & Cameron, 2010). The abused employees identify with one another; this identification, along with detachment from the source of injustice, leads an abused individual to feel strong enough to react against the target in order to restore his or her position (Lau, Au & Ho, 2003) .

In the same context, Saydar (2008, p.115) stated that, when "a constructive, caring and creative work-group is strived for, the seemingly unbearable emotional discomfort evoked by primitive anxieties such as rejection, starvation, annihilation, and loss of love causes group participants to behave in ways that render this impossible" .Several other empirical studies have observed that employees look to their coworkers for guidance on appropriate behavior and feel secure in acting as a member of a group, rather than acting alone in indulging in a counter-productive behavior (Duffy et al., 2006; Glomb and Liao, 2003. Hence, it is posited that OCB-P mediates between an employee's abusive supervision and counterproductive work behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: Abusive supervision has an indirect effect on CWB (supervisor) through OCB(peer).

Mediating role of OCB-organization

 Prior studies have averred that an individual who remains successful in creating a good image in front of others would feel tempted to be involved in deviant activities like CWB (Blanken, Van deVen&Zeelenberg, 2015). In this context, Blanken,Van de Van and Zeelenberg (2015) identified 91 studies where employees who consider themselves morally upright in some way granted a license to themselves to behave negatively.

Recently management studies have insisted that the different dimensions of OCB like towards organization and supervisor are distinct from each other; OCB-Ois more inclined towards perceived organizational support and OCB-S are more inclined towards leader-member exchange thus, not indispensable but have a considerable effect on one another (Wayne, Shore &Liden, 1997). Furthermore, Bowler and Brass (2006) argued that good employees of the organization, despite their loyalty may still engage in CWB-S. Though several past studies have proved that supervisory behavior does not affect OCBs-O (Liu & Wang, 2013) but it may happen reversely, an employee with more OCB-O may act as a catalyst in retaliating relation of an abused employee with his/her supervisor (Merritt, Effron&Monin, 2010).

Thus, the present study posits the role of OCB-O as a

mediator to the retaliation process of an abused employee against his or her supervisor.

 Hypothesis 2: Abusive supervision has an indirect effect on CWB (supervisor) through OCB (organization).

Method

Sample and Data

Data were collected through a survey of2000 employees from twenty large-scale multi-sectorial organizations in Pakistan. This study focuses on the impact of direct supervisors with whom subordinates interact on daily basis (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). Hence, suitable respondents for this purpose are subordinate employees who have daily face-to-face interactions with their supervisors (Gong, Chang & Cheung, 2010) and work in a group of at least four people who all serve under one supervisor, as data were collected for abusive supervision have to be averaged for the abusive supervision-work unit.

Of the 2000 questionnaires final sample was comprised of 920 employees who belonged to 230 groups, for a 46 percent response rate. Sixty-one percent of the respondents were male, and the average age was 33.4 years. The average job tenure was 10.3 years.

Measures

Abusive supervisor. The abused employees required for this study must fulfill two conditions a) they themselves perceive abuse supervision, b) to get OCB from others; a general level of abusive supervision is required among peer group members. To fulfill these conditions abusive supervision was measured through two dimensions, abusive supervision (own) and abusive supervision (work unit). This method allows capturing the perspective of the both– the focal person and his/her group. For abusive supervision (own) five items were adapted from Peng, Schaubroeck, and Li (2014).Ratings were obtained on a 5-pointLikert scale, ranging from 1 [never] to 5 [almost always]. Abusive supervision (work unit) was calculated based on the mean of squad members' abusive supervision (own) reports (excluding the self-report of the focal individual). It is being conceptualized through work unit mean, not as a shared unit construct but as a descriptive index of the general level of abuse perceived by the unit (Martinko, Harvey, Brees& Mackey, 2013; Peng, Schaubroeck, and Li, 2014).

OCB (Peer group). This study used a scale adapted from Dalal et al. (2009) to measure OCB-P. OCB-P group are measured by asking the focal person about the support he or she gets from peers, based on the fact that the focal person is being abused by the supervisor. Data were collected on 5-

point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

OCB (organization). For the purpose of this study scale

Table I *Mean, standard deviation and correlation*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Age	1.6	.80							
Tenure	2.0	1.1	.77*						
Gender	1.3	.48	-.13*	.146*					
ABS	3.0	.72	-.001	.088*	.009	**.798**			
OCB-P	2.7	.61	-.078	-.014	-.024	.430*	**0.722**		
OCB-O	2.9	.96	-.005	.036	.053	.293*	.272*	**0.798**	
CWB-S	3.0	.85	.041	.042	.058	.331*	.265*	.240*	**0.787**

Note. Bold values in diagonals are the square root of AVE scores of latent constructs .
**Correlation is significant at 0.01 (Two-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at .05 (Two-tailed)

Hypothesis testing

Direct effects. Hierarchal regression analysis has been conducted to test hypothesis 1, as reported in TableII, abusive supervision significantly and positively influences CWB toward the abusive supervisor (β=.39, p< .01).

Effect of ABS on CWB-S

Variables	B	SE	? R²
CWB-P			
Model l			.109**
Intercept	1.86**	.114	
ABS	.391**	.037	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Mediated Effects. The mediated relationships between abusive supervision and CWB-S through OCB- P and OCB-O were tested by applying a process macro method (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

The results summarized in Table III indicate the significant indirect effect of abusive supervision on CWB-S through the mediation of OCB-P.

Table III *Mediating effect of OCB-P between Abusive Supervision and CWB-S*

	B	SE	95% CI	R²
Constant	1.5229	.1371	1.2539,1.7918	
OCBs-AP (mediator)	.2105	.0478	.1167,.3042	
Abusive Supervision (independent variable)	.3143	.0404	.2350,.3935	
Model R²				.3574**
Direct effect of independent variable on dependent variable	.3143	.0404	.2350,.3935	
Indirect effect of independent variable on dependent variable	.0764	.0206	.0339,.1145	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results summarized in Table IV indicate that the significant indirect effect of abusive supervision on CWB-S through OCB-O.

Table IV

Mediating effect of OCB-P between Abusive Supervision and CWB-S

	B	SE	95% CI	R²
Constant	1.6160	.1239	1.3729,1.8591	
OCB-O (mediator)	.1377	.0283	.0821,.1933	
Abusive Supervision (independent variable)	.3366	.0380	.2619,.4112	
Model R²				.3628**
Direct effect of independent variable on dependent variable	.3366	.0380	.2619,.4112	
Indirect effect of independent variable on dependent variable	.0541	.0124	.0320,.0809	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

This study tested the direct effect of abusive supervision on CWB-S and the mediation effect of OCB-P and OCB-O. The significant and positive relationship between abusive supervision and CWB-S is consistent with previous studies of abusive (Jones, 2009; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper, 2000; Zellars, Tepper& Duffy, 2002). This study also established that OCB-P work as a mediator between abusive supervision and CWB-S because the power gap makes it difficult to react against an abusive supervisor. Therefore, abused employees use group collaboration to retaliate against higher-ups. In this process, the seemingly opposite behaviors (OCB and CWB) work as catalysts for each other. This phenomenon can be justified through moral licensing theory; which states that an employee who practices moral behaviors toward one group is licensed by that group to involve in CWBs against another group without distorting his or her good image (Merritt et al., 2010; Miller &Effron, 2010).

This study evidenced the mediation of OCB- O in the retaliation process of abused employees. Scholars have claimed that an individual, who shows more commitment towards organization expects the return of the same intensity and if somehow he/she feels deprived of it, would have a tendency to licenses themselves to engage in deviant behaviors (Blanken, Van de Ven&Zeelenberg, 2015). Hence a good citizen of organization encountering an undesirable situation is more prone to react.

Theoretical implications.

This work also contributes to the literature of moral licensing theory in a number of ways. The moral licensing theory is still new. Although the mechanism through which moral licensing works in an organization has been discussed theoretically in the literature, there is no empirical evidence; this study fills that gap (Yam, Klotz, He & Reynolds 2014).

Most of the literature on abusive supervision has been based on the individual level even though organizations consist of groups of individuals (Priesemuth, Schminke, Ambrose, &Folger 2014). The present study contributes to group literature by showing how an employee's attitude changes with the perception of affiliation with a specific group.

Practical implications.

Managers should be aware of the potential harmful impact of their behaviors on the discretionary behaviors of supervisors that ultimately shape the work environment.

Organizations should conduct training programs for managers to improve their sensitivity to the direct and indirect reciprocal influences that they may have when they are abusive toward subordinates. Moreover, organizations should establish an ethical code of conduct that establishes a psychologically safe environment that enables employees to respond to their supervisors' inappropriate behavior.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is subject to certain limitations. First, the data used in this study were collected in Pakistan, which has its own boundary conditions (Hofstede, Hofstede&Minkov, 2010). In the future, the same study can be performed in other regions to determine whether the relationships shown here are generalizable across cultures.

Second, the data collected for this study were based on subordinates' perceptions; there was no attempt to determine whether there was actual abuse. A causal influence of abusive supervision on interpersonal relationships may be more plausible when the leader's report of leader-subordinate relationship has also been used in previous studies (Sin, Nahrgang, &Morgeson, 2009). Future research can seek to capture objectively observable abusive supervision in determining its impact on subjects.

Conclusion

This study tested the response of employees who face supervisory abuse, along with their peer groups, in light of moral licensing theory. The study posits that abused subordinates retaliate against supervisors. In this process, abused employees develop OCB-P to support each other, which give them strength to retaliate. Moreover, good employees of an organization are more likely to indulge in such behaviors. The study's findings indicate that the direct effects of abusive supervision on CWBs toward the supervisor were positive and significant. The mediation effects of OCBs-Pand OCBs-O were also proved to be significant.

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