

Abusive supervision and employee deviance: a meta-analytic test of underlying processes and boundary conditions

Bad bosses are frequently the most stressful aspect of work and, unfortunately, they are not uncommon. Recognizing this, abusive supervision, which refers to “subordinates’ perceptions of the sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000: p. 178), has received a great deal of attention in the literature. Some victims of abusive supervision attempt to retaliate directly against their supervisors. However, this may not always be the case, because victims are in turn afraid of further retaliation from the supervisor. Instead, other victims of abusive supervision may engage in deviant behavior toward other targets such as the organization or even family members.

The current study meta-analytically examined *why* the victims’ aggression is directed back to the provocateur, i.e. the supervisor, versus when it is displaced onto another party, i.e. the organization. It also examined *under what circumstances* the victims react to abusive supervision more or less strongly. With 59 independent sample studies (N = 16,884), Hae Sang Park, Dr. Hoobler, Junfeng Wu, Dr. Liden, Jia Hu, and Morgan Wilson found

- Victims of abusive supervision are likely to engage in deviant behaviors towards the supervisor and the organization because they perceive both the supervisor and the organization as being unfair.
- Victims associate abusive supervision with supervisory justice rather than with organizational justice.
- Victims in lower power distance countries are more reactive to abusive supervision compared to those in higher power distance countries.
- Victims in high power distance countries are more likely to engage in displaced aggression rather than direct retaliation against the supervisor.

Implications of the Results:

This study sheds lights on victims’ reactions toward abusive supervision in different countries. Particularly, the study shows that power distance, a national cultural value, influences how strongly victims react to abusive supervision and the manner in which they display their aggression.
