

Association of Abusive Supervision with Creativity and Work Engagement: The Moderating Role of Trust in Supervisor

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received: May 10, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: October 13, 2021</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords : Abusive supervision; Employees' Creativity; Work engagement; Trust in Supervisor; Higher Education</p> <p>DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.5567325</p>	<p><i>Abusive supervisory behavior is considered to be the dark side of leadership that in a Higher Education Institute (HEI) can yield a variety of outcomes for the employees. This research study examines the association of abusive supervisory behavior as an independent variable and employees' creativity and work engagement as dependent variables and explores the moderating effect of 'trust in supervisor' in these associations in higher education settings. Data was collected in two waves from 221 employees of private sector higher education institutes at Peshawar, Pakistan, working in administrative cadre through multistage random sampling procedure. Hierarchical least squares regression analysis was used to test the hypothesized model, using SPSS-25. Findings suggest that abusive supervisory behavior is negatively related to work engagement and creativity and trust in supervisor positively moderates these relationships. This implies that abusive supervision reduces the work engagement and creativity of HEI's employees, however, this negative effect can be lowered/controlled by instilling trust in the supervisors. Consequently, HEIs managers need to encourage and reward supervisors to promote trusting relationships with employees to reduce the negative consequences of abusive supervisory behavior.</i></p>

Introduction

'What have you done?', 'You can never do it right?', 'You are the most worthless person I have ever seen'— are just a few examples of angry tantrums heard by many employees from their supervisors almost across all types of organizations. Such supervisory abuse is one of the manifestations of destructive leadership. Abusive supervision is "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000). Consequences and outcomes of abusive supervisory behavior like outbursts, being rude to subordinates, blaming, and public ridicule of subordinates are extensively studied by scholars in the past two decades in a variety of organizational settings. Scholars have referred to these behaviors as petty tyranny, supervisor undermining, and supervisor aggression, however, abusive supervision is a more frequently used term (Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017). Abusive supervisory behavior is mostly linked with negative outcomes like lower levels of performance (Aryee et al., 2007), and satisfaction (Tepper, 2000), high turnover (Tepper, 2000), unfavorable work attitudes (Tepper et al., 2004; Dupré et al., 2006) and psychological distress (Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011). However, some scholars argued that abusive supervision can have positive outcomes as well (Ma, Karri, & Chittipeddi, 2004; Lee, Yun, & Srivastava, 2013; Zhang & Liu, 2018). Thus, there is a dire need, to investigate both negative and positive effects of abusive supervisory behavior, to test various moderating and mediating effects models, and to reassess the process and concept of abusive supervision more comprehensively and in different cultural contexts (Zhang & Liu, 2018).

In Pakistan, the expansion of higher education in the near past has been extraordinary in both the public and private sectors. Besides other hard challenges, higher education is facing the problems of inadequate funding, poor infrastructure and quality, and standards (Akhtar & Kalsoom, 2012). Akhtar & Kalsoom argued that although not inadequate, public sector HEIs receive some funding from the government. However, the private sector HEIs have to generate revenue on their own, where the major source of revenue is the tuition fee. Despite the lack of funding to the private sector, the requirements of the regulatory bodies for the provision of quality education are the same for both public and private sector HEIs. This largely influences the availability of finances and physical resources. Being able to sustain in a highly competitive market, and maintain standards of quality education, the inadequate resource availability poses high work demands, pressures, and stress on both administrative cadre employees and teaching staff of HEIs. Most of the research studies in higher education have focused on faculty and teaching staff

and studied job stressors, burnout, role conflict, psychological distress (Khan, Yusoffa&Azam, 2014; Chuadhry&Niazi, 2017; Quraishi, Aziz & Siddiquah, 2018). Green (2014) reported the prevalence of toxic leadership within educational institutes and Burton, Hoobler, and Scheuer (2012) concluded that abusive supervision is more likely by supervisors undergoing high levels of work-related stress. Tepper (2007) observed that employees working in organizations placing high work demands and pressure are more likely to perpetrate aggressive behaviors. The role of administrative cadre employees (working in the examination, finance, and establishment) is also pivotal in the provision of quality education. Such employees (particularly the supervisors/managers) might also experience high levels of job stress in meeting competing job demands, due to lack of adequate resources. Yam et al. 2016 found that balancing multiple competing demands arouses negative emotions and requires the substantial use of managers' mental resources. As these resources become drained and/or as negative emotions intensify, the ability to self-regulate is impaired and results in abusive behavior toward employees (Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017).

We, therefore, aimed to explore the association of abusive supervisory behavior with creativity and work engagement of administrative cadre employees in HEIs in Peshawar, Pakistan, and to explore the moderating role of 'trust in supervisor' in this relation. It is conceptualized that the negative impact of abusive supervisory behavior on work engagement and employees' creativity might be abridged or even transformed to be constructive if the employees devour trust in the supervisor. A survey design, collecting data in two waves, was followed and the hypothesized model was tested using hierarchical regression analysis. Two major research gaps were thus addressed by this study. First, Higher education in Pakistan, particularly the private sector is facing the problems of inadequate availability of financial and physical resources. This poses high work demands, pressures, and stress on both teaching & administrative cadre employees and managers. Most of the existing research has focused on faculty and teaching staff, however, the administrative cadre managers may also experience high levels of job stress in meeting such competing job demands. As evident from a substantial body of research, workplaces placing high job pressure and work demands on employees might drive employees to perpetuate aggressive behaviors, and supervisors facing higher levels of job stress are expected to display abusive behavior. Therefore, we aimed to explore the influence of abusive supervisory behavior in this context. Second, several past studies have observed the mediating and moderating effect of various constructs in relation to abusive supervision and its outcome and have explored abusive supervision in various contexts and cultures such as the U.S., China, and Korea. However, to study, the consequences of abusive supervisory behavior in the context of Peshawar, Pakistan, and the moderating effect of trust in supervisors remains understudied and empirical confirmation in relation to such a conceptualization is relatively deficient.

Literature Review & Hypothesis Development

Theoretical foundation

Blau's (1964) Social Exchange Theory posits that people tend to respond in the same positive ways when they receive benefits from. Employee perception of a supervisor being fair, impartial, and trustworthy will entail unspecified future obligations on the part of the employee. This research is drawn on this desire to reciprocate proclaimed by social exchange theory. It is conceptualized that, if employees perceive supervisor as trustworthy despite being abusive, the effort to reciprocate might result in a higher level of work engagement and creativity.

Abusive Supervision

The importance of studying supervisory leadership is evident from the fact that there are a plethora of research studies on this topic that have examined the interaction process between supervisors and subordinates and the outcomes of various supervisory behaviors (Tepper, 2007). Assessment of abusive supervision by the subordinates is relatively subjective that may very well vary with differences in the work context and subordinates' characteristics. It is a continuous exposure of subordinates to supervisory mistreatment which means that it involves sustained hostility (Tepper, 2000) on part of the supervisor and it also is a purposive behavior (Tepper, 2007). In the past two decade scholars has extensively studied the consequences and causes of abusive supervisory behaviors like outbursts, being rude to subordinates, blaming and public ridicule of subordinates. Many researchers have characterized abusive supervisory behavior as displaced aggression, which is usually focused towards innocent and relatively convenient targets where the reprisal is not feasible or even impossible (Pedersen, Gonzales, & Miller, 2000; Bushman et al., 2005). Supervisors who experience mistreatment are more likely to exhibit their hostility against others, not the source i.e., their supervisors or the organization, as doing so may result in further mistreatment (Tepper, 2007). Hoobler and Brass (2006) also considered the breach of psychological contract experienced by supervisors as an antecedent of abusive supervisory behavior. Subordinates' counterproductive behaviors (Duffy et al., 2002), experienced interactional injustice (Aryee et al., 2007), and aggression targeting the

supervisor (Inness, Barling, & Turner, 2005) are also cited as antecedents for abusive supervisory behavior. Furthermore, abusive supervision may be perceived differently in different cultures, however, cross-culture effects associated with abusive supervisory behaviors are addressed by limited studies (Vogel et al., 2015).

Abusive supervision is linked with diverse negative outcomes. Scholars have reported that abusive supervisory behavior results in a lower level of job performance (Aryee et al., 2007), lower jobsatisfaction (Tepper, 2000), counterproductive work behaviors (Duffy et al., 2002; Dupré et al., 2006), and unfavorable work attitudes (Schat, Desmarais, & Kelloway, 2006). High turnover (Tepper, 2000), diminished family well-being, and psychological distress are also noted to be the negative outcomes of abusive supervision (Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011). Although not endorsing abusive supervision, Ashkanasy (2002) and Zhang and Liu (2018) stated that abusive supervision may also produce positive effects, and employees facing it may constructively respond to organizations, supervisors, and coworkers. Tepper et al. (2017) suggested that abusive supervisory behavior might also be associated with possible positive outcomes because of the desire to prove the supervisor wrong or to avoid further mistreatment. Considering the rational cost-benefit, the victims facing abusive supervision may not engage in retaliatory behaviors (Zhang & Liu, 2018).

Abusive Supervision and Work Engagement

Work engagement is “*a positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in ones’ work*”(Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employees who are emotionally and physically involved with their work and are cognitively vigilant are considered to be engaged (Basit, 2017). Relationship of work engagement with abusive supervisory behavior is explored by relatively less number of studies. Although several positive aspects of leadership are linked positively with employees’ level of work engagement, the effects of negative leadership behaviors are still understudied. Work engagement in relation to abusive supervision was first examined by Tepper et al. (2001). Perceived abusive supervision is associated negatively with work engagement (Scheuer et al., 2016). Thus we hypothesized that:

H1: Abusive supervision is associated negatively with the Work Engagement of HEIs employees.

Abusive Supervision and Employees Creativity

Employees' creativity is defined by Thatcher & Brown (2010) as “*the generation of novel and appropriate ideas, products, processes, or solutions that are useful or appropriate to the situation*”. Employee creative behavior is linked with innovation in organizations and it contributes to competitive advantage (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Many scholars have argued that supervisory behavior is one of the significant factors associated with employees’ creativity (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Extant research has focused on the “dark side of leadership” in the past few years (Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Aryee et al., 2007). Research on the relationship of employees’ creativity with abusive supervision is relatively limited and somewhat inconclusive. A curvilinear relation between abusive supervisory behavior and employees’ creativity is discovered by some studies (Lee et al., 2013) while other studies revealed a negative relationship (Liu et al., 2016; Zhang & Zhou, 2014). Between employees’ creativity and abusive supervision. Consequently, we hypothesized that:

H3: Abusive supervision is associated negatively with the creativity of HEIs employees.

Trust in Supervisor

In organizational behavior and leadership research, the significance of 'trust in leadership' is widely recognized (Bachmann & Zaheer, 2006; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Trust is “*a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another*”(Rousseau et al., 1998). The literature distinguishes it as character-based, which is characterized as cognitive in nature that describes the trustee’s reliability and competence aspects, and relationship-based trust, which captures the benevolence aspects of the trustee and is affective in nature (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; McAllister, 1995). Trust in a supervisor is defined as “*a supervisee’s positive expectations of competence, reliability, and benevolence*”(Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; McAllister, 1995). Supervisors who demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to job performance are perceived as competent (Nooteboom, 2002). When the future behavior of supervisors is predictable, and there is over-time consistency in what they say and do, they are perceived to be reliable (Whitener et al., 1998). Benevolence reflects the supervisor's concern for supervisees' well-being (McAllister, 1995).

Kahn's model (Kahn, 1990) of engagement postulates that employees' feeling of being valued and worthwhile contributes to their work engagement. Trust in one’s supervisor is considered to be important in stimulating job engagement (Kahn, 1990; Macey et al., 2011), however, there are very few studies that have directly looked at this association empirically (Chughtai & Buckley, 2009; Ugwa, Muhammad, & Ugwa, 2014). Based on Blau's (1964)

Social Exchange Theory, if employees perceive supervisor as trustworthy despite being abusive, the effort to reciprocate might result in more work engagement. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Trust in supervisor has a moderating role in the relationship between Abusive supervision and HEIs employees' work engagement.

Inconsistent findings in the literature suggest that employees' creativity might be indirectly affected by abusive supervision (Gu, Song, & Wu, 2016) and various other mediating or moderating mechanisms may be examined. The inconsistency may also be attributed to cultural and contextual factors. Thus, studies need to identify various moderators and mediators to further elucidate the association of employees' creativity and abusive supervisory behavior (Lee et al., 2013). Blau's (1964) Social Exchange Theory posits that people tend to counter in similar positive ways when they receive benefits from others. By this token, if employees perceive supervisor as trustworthy despite being abusive, in order to desire to reciprocate, it is expected to result in higher creativity. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Trust in supervisor moderates the relationship of Abusive supervision with the creativity of HEIs employees.

Conceptual model

The conceptual model (Figure 1) of the study presents the direct and moderating effects among the study variables. The model posits trust in the supervisor as a moderator in the association of abusive supervision and its outcomes (employees' creativity and work engagement). The model also presents that hypotheses H1 and H2 conceptualize direct association between dependent and independent variables, while hypotheses H3 and H4 conceptualize the moderating role of trust in supervisors in the association of dependent and independent variables.

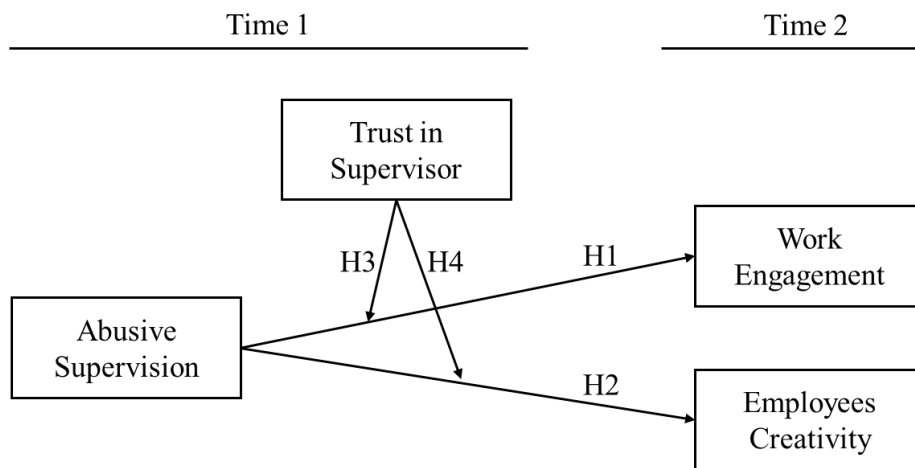


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

Methods

Sampling procedure

We gathered data from employees working in the administrative cadre in private sector universities of Peshawar, Pakistan. Multistage cluster sampling procedure was employed for sampling. A sample frame comprising of all the clusters (universities) was developed. For cluster sampling, the frame consists of a list of clusters not the list of individual cases (Saunders, 2011). We selected three clusters using the simple random sampling procedure. Administering the survey questionnaires to all the members of a cluster was not feasible due to time and cost constraints, consequently, a sample of respondents was selected based on simple random sampling procedure after obtaining relevant data of the cluster's members. As we collected data based on the survey method, one-time data collection, measuring both criterion and predictor variables at the same point in time, was expected to raise concerns for Common Method Variance (CMV) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Therefore, we separated the measurement of dependent and independent variables and collected data in two different surveys about four weeks apart (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Based on Lindell and Whitney's (2001) procedure, to test for the effect of CMV empirically as posthoc analysis, we also used marker variable procedure. A marker variable is the one that is

unrelated theoretically to the study variables but data regarding it is collected using the same instrument and at the same time as the variables of interest, and can be used to empirically test for CMV.

For data collection we administered Time 1 survey to collect data about independent (abusive supervision), moderating (trust in supervisor) and the marker variable (task variety), and Time 2 survey to collect data about dependent variables (i.e. work engagement and employees' creativity). The number of questionnaires distributed at Time 1 was 290 of which 263 were received back (with a response rate of 90%). Employees who successfully completed the first survey were contacted after four weeks in order to administer the Time 2 survey. Of the 263 participants (of the time 1 survey), 251 could be contacted, of which 234 completed the Time 2 survey (with a response rate of 88%). Among the total returned questionnaires 13 were discarded due to incompleteness and incorrectness and 221 questionnaires (resulting in an overall response rate of 76%) were used for analysis.

Instruments

We used Hierarchical Least Square Regression to study the association between the study variables 'Abusive Supervision (AS)', 'Employees' Creativity (EC)' and 'Work Engagement (WE)' and the moderating variable "Trust in Supervisor (TIS)". Results of the regression analysis were used as a basis for hypothesis testing. Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) approach derived from Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure was used to examine the moderating influence of 'Trust in Supervisor (TIS)' in the association of the study variables. We entered the models in three steps. In the first step, the dependent variables (EC & WE) was related with the independent variable (AS), in the second step, the independent variable (AS) was associated with dependent variables (EC & WE) and moderating variable (TIS) and in third step dependent variables (EC & WE) were related with the independent variable (AS), moderating variable (TIS) and the interaction term of moderating and independent variable (AS*TIS). To reduce potential collinearity between the interaction term and its comprised variables, both the moderator (trust in supervisor) and independent variable (abusive supervision) were mean-centered and were also entered into the model alongside their respective interaction term (AS*TIS), as recommended by Aiken and West (1991).

Measures

We developed two English language surveys (one each for assessment of time 1 and time 2 variables) based on adopted scales to gather data relevant to the variables. No major issue regarding the understanding of the statement was revealed by a pretest of the survey on 15 employees of the participating organizations. Tepper's (2000) 15-items scale was used for measurement of perceived abusive supervision using which the frequency of supervisor's treatment such as 'My boss is rude to me' and 'My boss ridicules me' are reported by employees. Response options of the scale ranged from '1-never' to '5-very often'. The 5-items employee creativity scale developed by Ganesan and Weitz (1996) was adopted for the assessment of employees' creativity. Participants responded on the scale from '1-strongly disagree' to '5- strongly agree'. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) of Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006) was used for the assessment of work engagement. It is a 9-items scale where responses to each of the items were recorded on a 5-point Likert type scale with '1-never' to '5-very often'. The Trust scale of McAllister (1995) was employed to assess the level of 'Trust in Supervisor', which is an 11-item scale to measure employees' perceptions of their supervisor's benevolence, reliability, and competence. Likert type scale with response options of '1-strongly disagree' to '7-strongly agree' was used to record the responses. We also controlled for demographic factors of the employees and included age, gender, and highest education attained as control variables. Age was measured as a continuous variable, Gender was assessed as a categorical variable with coding as 1 (male) and 2 (female). The highest education attained was measured with six possible values: 1 for high school or less, 2 for college education, 3 for 4-year college or university education, 4 for a master degree, 5 for MS/M. Phil qualification and 6 for Ph.D.

Marker variable

Though we separated the collection of data of criterion and predicted variables over time, data for some of the study variables were still gathered at the same point of time, which could result in common method variance (CMV). Thus, following Lindell and Whitney's (2001) and Richardson, Simmering, & Sturman, (2009) procedure, we employed marker variable to examine the influence of CMV. We selected 'task variety' as our marker variable which is defined by Morgeson & Humphrey (2006) as "the degree to which the job requires that the employee perform a wide range of tasks". We used Morgeson & Humphrey 4-items scale for assessment of 'task variety' from the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ).

Data Analysis & Results

We tested the analysis models using hierarchical least square regression, with ‘Abusive Supervision (AS)’ as the predictor variable, ‘Employees’ Creativity (EC)’ and ‘Work Engagement (WE)’ as criterion variables, ‘Trust in Supervisor (TIS)’ as moderating variable and ‘Abusive Supervision x Trust in Supervisor (AS*TIS)’ as the interaction term of the moderating and independent variable.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We first performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to justify the measurement model and to establish internal consistency reliability, discriminant, and convergent validity of the multiple-item variables. A baseline model comprising of all the four variables was examined first, which indicated an acceptable fit to the data as shown in Table 1. Factor loadings for the items were computed to be greater than the 0.70 criterion and were also significant, thus confirming convergent validity, except for two items used for abusive supervision and one item each for work engagement and trust in supervisor, which were dropped from the analysis. To check the discriminant validity, the baseline model was compared against alternative models. The Four-factor model was indicated to be preferable by the fit indices presented in Table 1. Thus, discriminant validity was confirmed as well.

Table 1: Results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Model	χ^2	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	TLI
Four factors model-1:	267.83	.07	.05	.92	.91
Three Factor model-1: Employee Creativity & Engagement merged	791.91	.14	.07	.64	.56
Three Factor Model-2: Trust in Supervisor & Engagement merged	438.45	.10	.06	.79	.81
Two Factor Model: Work Engagement, Employees Creativity & Trust in Supervisor merged	419.74	.11	.07	.83	.82

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender ^a	1.18	.393							
2. Education ^b	4.35	.996	-.009						
3. Age	34.00	7.450	-.021	.564*					
4. Tenure	7.06	5.190	.087	.407	.786**				
5. Abusive Supervision	3.78	.6005	-.220	-.348	-.341	-.244			
6. Work Engagement	4.27	.8156	.121	.181	.263	.206	-.548**		
7. Employees ‘Creativity	3.70	.7215	.018	.153	.095	.375	-.555*	.533*	
8. Trust in Supervisor	5.00	1.073	.119	.636**	.261	.351	-.488*	.632**	.635**
9. Task variety	3.74	.7241	.314	.112	.273	.340	.217	.335	.431

Note: N=221, *p < 0.05 (2-tailed), **p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

^a Gender: 1=male, 2=female

^b Education: 1= High school, 2=College, 3=Bachelors, 4=Masters, 5=MS/M Phil, 6=PhD

Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations

Table 2 summarizes descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables. As anticipated, our independent variable abusive supervision is significantly associated negatively with our dependent variables, work engagement ($r = -.548, p < .01$), employees’ creativity ($r = -.555, p < .05$), and moderating variable trust in supervisor ($r = -.488, p < .05$). However, our moderating variable trust in the supervisor is significantly positively correlated with work engagement ($r = .632, p < .01$) and employees’ creativity ($r = .635, p < .01$). Table 2 also presents the association between the study variables and task variety—our marker variable. Evidently, the marker variable was not correlated significantly to any of the study variables. As the degree of correlation among the study variables and the marker variable represents the occurrence of common method variance (CMV), we successfully avoided the problem of common method variance.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis H1 predicted a negative association between perceived abusive supervisory behavior and employees' level of work engagement. Correlation analysis (Table 2) and hierarchical regression analysis results (Table 3) confirmed this hypothesis (Model 2, $\beta = -0.744$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis H2 predicted that abusive supervision will be negatively associated with employees' creativity. It is evident from the correlation analysis (Table 2) and hierarchical regression analysis results (Table 3) that abusive supervisory behavior is negatively related to employees' creativity (Model 6, $\beta = -0.666$, $p < .01$), confirming the hypothesis H2.

Table 3: Hierarchical regression analysis results

Variables	Work Engagement				Employee Creativity			
	Model-1	Model-2	Model-3	Model-4	Model-5	Model-6	Model-7	Model-8
<i>Control</i>								
Gender	0.14	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.16	0.07	0.08	0.08
Education	0.15*	0.11	0.08	0.08	0.14	0.09	0.09	0.07
Age	-0.08	-0.03	-0.03	0.02	0.10	0.02	0.04	0.02
<i>Independent</i>								
Abusive Supervision		-0.744**	-0.427**	-0.049**		-0.666**	-0.387**	0.311**
<i>Moderator</i>								
Trust in Supervisor			.364**	0.776**			0.321**	0.602**
<i>Interaction</i>								
Abusive Supervision * Trust in Supervisor				0.182**				0.163**
R²	0.03	0.300	0.475	0.603	0.02	0.308	0.482	0.674
ΔR²	0.03	0.270	0.175	0.128	0.02	0.288	0.174	0.192
F	1.83	21.004**	21.692**	23.793**	2.14	21.772*	22.290**	15.792*
ΔF	1.83	17.210**	15.964**	15.180**	1.76	23.661**	16.434*	11.571*

Note: N=221, *p < 0.05 (2-tailed), **p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

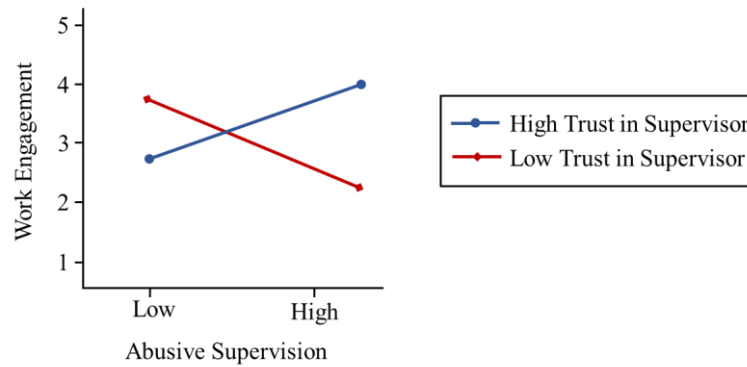


Figure 2. Moderating role of Trust in supervisor in the association of Work engagement and Abusive supervision.

Hypothesis H3 predicted that trust in supervisors will bear moderating effect in the association between work engagement and abusive supervision. From Table 3 it is evident that the interaction of trust in supervisor and abusive supervision is significantly (Model 4, $b=.182, p<.01$) associated with work engagement. Thus, employees' trust in supervisors positively moderates the association between employees' work engagement and abusive supervision, thus confirming hypothesis H3. For a more detailed exploration of the moderating effect of trust in supervisors, regression lines representing the association of abusive supervision with work engagement were plotted (Figure 2). The regression line was negatively sloped for the association of abusive supervision and work engagement when employees had lower trust in the supervisor, while the slope was positive for a higher level of trust in the supervisor. This further confirmed hypothesis H3.

Hypothesis H4 predicted that trust in the supervisor has a moderating role in the association of abusive supervisory behavior with employees' creativity. Table 3 presents that trust in supervisor and abusive supervision interaction term is significant statistically (Model 8, $b=.163, p<.01$). It is evident that trust in the supervisor positively moderates the association of abusive supervision with employees' creativity, thus confirming hypothesis H4. A similar graph to Figure 1 was also obtained for the association of abusive supervisory behavior and employees' creativity, however, it is not presented due to space constraints.

Discussion

This study focused on the predictive association of work engagement and creativity of HEIs employees with abusive supervision and examined the moderating effect of employees' trust in supervisors in these associations. A significant contribution of this research is to explore the combined influence of trust in supervisors and abusive supervision on employees' engagement and their creativity. Results showed that (1) abusive supervisory behavior negatively affects the employees work engagement, (2) abusive supervision is negatively associated with employees' creativity, (3) trust in supervisor is positively associate with work engagement and moderates the association of abusive supervisory behavior with employees work engagement, and (4) trust in supervisor is also positively associated to employees' creativity and have a moderating influence in the association of abusive supervisory behavior with employees' creativity. High-quality supervisors and subordinate relations are regarded as grounded in the reciprocal understanding of each other's needs, expectations, and objectives (Scandura & Graen, 1994) and stimulate positive and productive work behaviors on the part of subordinates. It is established by the scholars that the perception of the subordinates about their relationships with the supervisors can have a substantial influence on the subordinates' work behaviors and attitudes (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Subordinates facing abusive supervisory behavior will reciprocate the bad supervisory behavior with bad work behaviors (Matthew Valle et al., 2018). As abusive supervision bears a negative effect on both work engagement and employees' creativity, organizations need to lessen the destructive reactions to abusive supervision (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012) and thus it is necessary to recognize buffering factors to reduce its deleterious impact. An obligation to reciprocate with suitable work behavior and performance will be developed within the subordinates when they perceive that they are receiving trust and support (Gouldner, 1960). This research provided evidence that fostering employees' trust in supervisors within higher education settings can play a buffering role to diminish the noxious impact of abusive supervision. Therefore, HEIs managers and leaders need to take steps to foster trust in supervisors and encourage and reward supervisors to do so.

Limitations & Future research

Future research studies can address several limitations, of this research study. First, the data for this research was gathered from one type of organization (i.e., Higher Education Institutes), which raises issues of generalization to other types of organizations. Generalizability may be increased by extending the study to other types of organization settings. Second, the current study's focus is restricted to work engagement and

employees' creativity, however, other organizational factors are associated with perceived abusive supervision, like productivity, withdrawal behavior, turnover, and performance. The effect of trust in supervisors in relation to such outcomes should therefore be addressed in future studies. Third, various other moderating and mediating mechanisms needed to be explored in relation to the impact of abusive supervisory behavior and its outcomes. Fourth, this research was conducted in the Pakistan context, where there is power distant culture in most of the organizations, however, no cultural variables were included in the conceptual model. Research suggests that there are differences with respect to acceptance of abusive supervision across cultures (Mackey et al., 2017). A future line of inquiry could be to study the effect of cultural context variables in the conceptualization of this study. Foundational work in this direction is that of Lian, Ferris, and Brown (2012) and Lin et al. (2013) who concluded that in cultural contexts characterized by power distance, employees are least expected to respond negatively to abusive supervision. Finally, other studies should replicate this study in other settings and explore the association of abusive supervisory behavior, work engagement, employee creativity, and trust in supervisors in further detail in those settings.

Implications & conclusion

First, this research contributes to the literature on abusive supervisory behavior by exploring its impact in the higher education context of Pakistan. The findings revealed that supervisory abuse would negatively affect employee creativity and work engagement in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Pakistan, where there is high power distance and rigid hierarchies, and employees are more vulnerable to the authorities. The empirical evidence provided about the negative effects of abusive supervisory behavior is important as abusive supervision is signified as a dark side of leadership that is frequently observed in organizations (Tepper et al., 2009). Second, the study revealed the moderating effect of trust in supervisors between the association of abusive supervisory behavior with both employees' creativity and work engagement. The conclusions advocate that the negative effects of abusive supervisory behavior on workers' creativity and work engagement can be moderated by employees' trust in their supervisors. Such findings add to the literature on abusive supervision as well as respond to the call for examining various moderating effects in relation to abusive supervisory behavior and its outcomes (Lee et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007; Zhang & Liu, 2018). Third, it is evident from the findings that obnoxious supervisory behavior reduces work engagement and employees' creativity. Hence, to enhance work engagement and creativity, HEIs management needs to strive to wipe out/reduce abusive supervision by educating, disciplining, training, and monitoring supervisors and taking a zero-tolerance stance towards abusive supervision. Supervisors should also be trained in anger management and interpersonal skills (Aryee et al., 2007). Fourth, considering that altogether elimination of abusive supervision may not be possible, its negative effects can be lowered or controlled by instilling trust in the supervisor. For HEIs managers, this suggests that to overcome the destructive consequences of abusive supervision, trust in supervisors can play a vital role and they can make efforts to encourage supervisors to foster a trusting relationship with employees to reduce the gravity of negative outcomes of abusive supervision.

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