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## Article

# Innovative approach on abusive supervision and subordinate' performance

*Reference:* Ozsoy, Tugba (2021). Innovative approach on abusive supervision and subordinate' performance. In: Marketing i menedžment inovacij (4), S. 210 - 217.  
[https://mmi.fem.sumdu.edu.ua/sites/default/files/A561-2021-16\\_Tugba\\_0.pdf](https://mmi.fem.sumdu.edu.ua/sites/default/files/A561-2021-16_Tugba_0.pdf).  
doi:10.21272/mmi.2021.4-16.

This Version is available at:  
<http://hdl.handle.net/11159/6896>

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<https://doi.org/10.21272/mmi.2021.4-16>

JEL Classification: M12, F50, J10

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## INNOVATIVE APPROACH ON ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND SUBORDINATE' PERFORMANCE

**Abstract.** *Understanding the behavior of employees in working life and the search for building a more peaceful workplace has been the subject of many research and practices for many years. Although the importance of building an environment of peace in working life is known, many undesirable behaviors occur in organizations. Some of these behaviors that negatively affect the organizational climate are caused by the supervisor's behaviors towards the employees. One of them is abusive supervision. It is necessary to carefully analyze the causes and consequences of abusive supervision, which refers to the set of behaviors such as the systematic abuse of the supervisors, the contempt of the employees, and their belittlement. Although many studies have been carried out to understand the causes and consequences of abusive supervision, it has not been sufficiently examined whether the consequences of the perception of abusive supervision differ according to the individual differences of the employees. Since abusive supervision is closely related to subordinates' perceptions, it is assumed that the individual differences of subordinates would play a role in perceiving abusive supervision and its consequences on subordinates' work-related attitudes. The purpose of this study is to investigate the moderating role of general self-efficacy on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' perceived individual performance. Furthermore, it is aimed to discuss the ways to handle destructive outcomes of abusive supervision with an innovative approach. The quantitative research involved the employees working in Istanbul. Scales with previously tested psychometric properties were used to measure abusive supervision, individual performance, and general self-efficacy structures. A total of 304 employees participated in the study. The obtained data were analyzed by referring to the relevant quantitative analyzes (descriptive statistics, reliability, factor, correlation, and moderating analyses). According to the research findings, abusive supervision was negatively correlated with subordinates' perceived individual performance. Subordinates' levels of general self-efficacy did not have a significant moderating role in the relationship between abusive supervision and employees' perceived individual performance. The findings obtained within the scope of the research are discussed in the discussion section, and possible research suggestions that could be carried out in future studies are included in this direction.*

**Keywords:** abusive supervision, general-self efficacy, perceived employee performance, undesirable behaviours in organizations.

**Introduction.** Especially after the 2000s with the effects of positive psychology on organizational behaviour research, issues such as hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience, have begun to be studied extensively in the organizational context (Luthans and Youssef, 2007; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Youssef and Luthans, 2007). However, recently there have been an increasing number of studies on the organizational implications of the dark aspects of organizations (Linstead et al., 2014) and individuals (Furnham et al., 2013). In this context, issues such as mobbing (Leymann and Gustafsson, 1996), gossip in organizations (Wittek and Wielers, 1998), theft (Seale et al., 1998), sabotage (Ambrose et al., 2002), aggressive behavior (Neuman and Baron, 1997), sexual harassment (Von Gruenigen and Karlan, 2018), and jealousy (Vecchio, 2000) have been investigated in the organizational context. In general, these behaviours fall into undesirable behaviours in organizations. However, it does not include all of the behaviours mentioned above. Undesirable behaviours in the organizations could be called counterproductive work behaviours (Gruys and Sackett, 2003; Spector et al., 2006). Abusive supervision is one of the subjects that would contribute to a more precise understanding of organizations' dark side and should be examined in detail. Although many studies have been carried out to examine the

**Cite as:** Ozsoy, T. (2021). Innovative Approach on Abusive Supervision and Subordinate' Performance. *Marketing and Management of Innovations*, 4, 210–217. <http://doi.org/10.21272/mmi.2021.4-16>

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Received: 03 December 2021

Accepted: 20 December 2021

Published: 30 December 2021



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consequences of abusive supervision (Kernan et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2012; Zellars et al., 2002), there are a limited number of studies investigating the impact of supervisors' misconduct on their subordinates' performance (Mackey et al., 2017; Tepper et al., 2017). Especially in Turkey, there is limited research about abusive supervision. Existing research on the impact of abusive supervision on subordinate and supervisor-related attitudes indicates that abusive supervision mainly leads to negative consequences in terms of subordinates (Tepper et al., 2017). However, little is known about the conditional effects of abusive supervision on subordinates. Depending on some critical individual differences in the perception of abusive supervision, consequences of abuse might alter. Especially individuals who have a high level of intrinsic motivation, optimistic and determinate might not be as severely affected by the hostile attitudes of supervisors. Therefore, depending on subordinates' individual differences, the effect of abusive supervision should be examined in detail. In this context, the current research aims to test the moderating role of general self-efficacy on the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' self-rated individual performance. It is considered that more research on examining the moderating or mediating role of some critical individual differences would contribute to understanding the conditional consequences of abusive supervision. In the scope of the research, firstly, abusive supervision was defined briefly. Then, the findings of empirical studies on the effects of abusive supervision are briefly mentioned. Following this, the study's hypothesis was formulated based on the empirical background and the theoretical framework of abusive supervision. Finally, the findings of the study were shared and discussed.

**Literature Review.** Abusive supervision refers to supervisors' verbal and non-verbal hostile behaviours on subordinates, and it does not involve physical contact (Tepper, 2000). In this context, behaviors such as being ridiculed, offending, and insulting subordinates could be considered abusive supervision. Abusive supervision is a subjective concept because it includes behaviours perceived by the superiors (i.e., manager, supervisor, team leader). After all, each subordinate cannot perceive his/her supervisor's behaviours in the same way (Tepper et al., 2006; Tepper et al., 2009; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, 2007). Performance is a multidimensional concept. It is not easy to define it. Although it simply means «to perform a certain task». This definition could not involve the dimensions of job performance because job performance is not just outcome-oriented but also related to certain required behaviours. Additionally, it does not only involve task performance. It also includes contextual and adaptive performance (Johnson, 2001). Self-efficacy refers to the belief in an individual's ability to use mental resources to meet specific situational demands (Wood and Bandura, 1989). The concept is discussed in the literature in two main distinctions: 1) task-specific self-efficacy; 2) general self-efficacy (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995). General self-efficacy refers to the individual's belief in the ability of the individual to cope successfully with complex or challenging situations, to fulfill personal duties (Luszczynska et al., 2005).

Abusive supervision is an ongoing verbal and non-verbal hostile behavior that supervisors apply on his/her subordinates. Besides, it does not include physical violence (Tepper, 2000). Abusive supervision refers to universally unwanted verbal and non-verbal behaviors of the supervisors on the subordinates (Tepper et al., 2006; 2009; Tepper, 2000; 2007). Tepper (2000) introduced the concept of abusive supervision. Herewith, there has been an increasing scientific interest in this topic worldwide. In this context, the number of studies on the antecedents and consequences of abusive supervision is increasing (Tepper et al., 2017). It is emphasized that more studies are needed to understand better the consequences of abusive supervision and the relationship between abusive supervision and performance (Mackey et al., 2017; Tepper et al., 2017). Especially in the Turkey sample, there are limited numbers of empirical research regarding abusive supervision. It could be argued that more research on abusive supervision in Turkey would contribute to the literature. Above all, obtaining findings from different cultures about abusive supervision might bring new insights on the cross-cultural prevalence and consequences of abusive supervision. As negative behaviors are not perceived the same by all individuals and cultures, heterogeneity of research sample on both the antecedents and consequences of abusive supervision is

considered to be contributing to the literature. In previous research, abusive supervision was found to be negatively related to, for example, job satisfaction (Kernan et al., 2011), task performance (Xu et al., 2012), organizational citizenship behavior (Zellars et al., 2002). Moreover, abusive supervision was found to be positively correlated with emotional exhaustion (Yagil, 2006; Wu and Hu, 2009), depersonalization (Yagil, 2006), and organizational deviance (including interpersonal and supervisor-directed deviance) (Wang et al., 2012). These empirical findings showed that abusive supervision mainly adversely correlates with subordinates' work and organization-related outcomes. With the theoretical perspective, if a supervisor constantly behaves the subordinates badly, makes fun of them, and doesn't empathize with the subordinates, they are expected to be affected adversely by these kinds of behaviors. Therefore, it is hard to expect a subordinate to build positive attributes (e.g., trust, love, commitment) towards the supervisor. Although the effect of abusive supervision might differ depending on the personality traits of the subordinate (Brees et al., 2014), it is still expected that abusive supervision negatively affects subordinates who are in the span of control of the manager or boss misbehaves to the subordinates. In this respect, based on the existing empirical findings and the theoretical background, it is expected that abusive supervision would negatively correlate with subordinates' perceived individual performance.

On the other hand, it is critical to state that abusive supervision could change depending on subordinates' perceptions (Tepper et al., 2006). It is impossible to state that abusive supervision is perceived the same by all subordinates who report the same supervisor. Additionally, subordinates' cognitive and individual differences might play some role here, especially general self-efficacy. As the level of general self-efficacy increases, it is expected that a person can handle difficult situations easier (Luszczynska et al., 2005). Abusive supervision is a way of managing employees negatively. It is expected that if subordinates' level of general self-efficacy is high, subordinates could handle these negative behaviors and attitudes perceived by their supervisor.

**Methodology and research methods.** This study aims to test whether general self-efficacy is moderating in the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' perceived individual performance. In this direction, data were collected from the sample of employees using the questionnaire form. It includes the scales measuring the relevant structures, whose psychometric properties were tested previously, and a personal information form. At this point, quantitative research methods were used. The background of the research is discussed under the title of the literature review. Within the scope of this background, based on the theoretical developments and empirical findings in abusive supervision studies, the hypothesis of the research was determined as follows,

H1: General self-efficacy has a moderating role in the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' perceived individual performance. The quantitative research findings carried out to test the relevant hypothesis are shared below.

Employees from different private and public operating in Istanbul participated in the study. Participants from the private sector were from two different industries. Remarkably, one of the private enterprises is in the small household appliances industry. The other is a manufacturer of plastic kitchen utensils and similar plastic tools (such as plastic trash cans and storage containers). A total of 96 employees from a small household appliance manufacturer and 62 employees from the manufacturer of plastic kitchen utensils participated in the study. The rest of the participants were from several public sector organizations. The questionnaire was prepared for the research purpose (including abusive supervision, perceived individual performance, general self-efficacy scales, and some basic personal information questions). It was distributed to the participants manually (paper-pen method). In this context, 12 incomplete and sloppy questionnaires were eliminated. A total of 304 questionnaires was used for the relevant analyses.

The Turkish version (Ulbeği et al., 2014) of the 15-item abuse supervision scale developed by Tepper (2000) was used. Ulbeği et al. (2014) tested the validity and reliability of the Turkish version of the abusive supervision scale. They concluded that the psychometric properties of the Turkish version of the scale

were acceptable. The scale was used on a five-point Likert Type (1- I cannot remember him/her ever using this behaviour with me, 5- he/she uses this behaviour very often with me). A sample item is «My boss expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for other reason» (Tepper, 2000). Performance was measured with the self-appraisal approach. A 3-Item self-appraisal performance scale (Stevens et al., 1978; Darwish, 2000) was used. The Turkish translation (Balaban and Ozsoy, 2016) of the scale was used in the current study. Balaban and Ozsoy (2016) tested the scale's factor structure and omitted the third item (normally, the scale has 4 items). Thus, they used a 3-item version of the scale. Therefore, the 3-item version of the scale was used in the current study. A sample item is «how do you evaluate your performance of yourself at your job compared with your peers doing the same kind of work?» (Darwish, 2000). The scale was used on a five-point Likert scale (1-very low, 5-very high).

The Turkish version (Aypay, 2010) of the 10-item general self-efficacy scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) was used with a five-point Likert-type response scale (1 – definitely disagree, 5 – definitely agree). The Turkish version of the scale's psychometric properties was found acceptable (Aypay, 2010). A sample item is «It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals».

**Results.** Table 1 presents the overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants. 51.3 % of the participants were female, 52.3 % were married, and 74 % were white color. The participants' educational status distribution is as follows: primary school is 7.3 %, high school – 18.4 %, associate degree – 14.1 %, undergraduate – 53 %, and graduate – 7.2 %. Employees' age (Mean = 32.24, SD = 7.57) and tenure (Mean = 9.97 SD = 7.67).

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants**

Variable	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	148	48.7
Female	156	51.3
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	159	52.3
Single	145	47.7
<i>Education Level</i>		
Primary School	22	7.3
High School	56	18.4
Associate Degree	43	14.1
Undergraduate	161	53.0
Graduate	22	7.2
<i>Category</i>		
Blue color	79	26.0
White color	225	74.0
<i>Sector</i>		
Public	146	48.0
Private	158	52.0

Sources: developed by the author.

Internal Consistencies, Factor analysis and Descriptive statistics. First off, all reliability scores of the scale have been calculated, and all scales scored higher than .70. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) has been performed to test the factor structure. All the scales consist of one single factor, and therefore one-factor solution CFA(s) is applied to all scales. For the perceived individual performance scale, the RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) value was .71, and factor loadings ranged were .76, .79, and .94. Thus bi-factor model fits the data adequately for the perceived individual performance scale. This scale consists of only three items, so further fit indexes could not be calculated. As for general self-

efficacy scale one-factor model fit the data well  $\chi^2 = 62.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.21$ , TLI (Tucker–Lewis index) = .98, CFI (comparative fit index) = .98, RMSEA = .06, standardized regression weights ranged from .67 to .86. For abusive supervision one-factor model fit the data adequately ( $\chi^2 = 224.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.67$ , TLI = .94, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .70), standardized regression weights ranged from .64 to .86. All these findings supported to factor structure of the scales. Thus, no items were dropped.

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency findings. As can be gleaned in Table 1, the level of abusive supervision that the employees perceived from their supervisors are quite low. The individual performance levels of employees are moderate, and the level of general self-efficacy was high. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency scores of the scales were acceptable (with a minimum  $\alpha$  value of .81). These findings indicate that the reliability levels of the scales used in the research are high. When the standard deviation values are examined, it is seen that these values are not very high.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics and internal consistencies**

Variable	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
Abusive Supervision	1.63	0.72	.96
Perceived Individual Performance	3.43	0.98	.81
General Self-Efficacy	4.21	0.72	.95

Note. N = 304

Sources: developed by the author.

Correlation Analysis Findings. Table 3 shows a negative correlation between abusive supervision and subordinates' perceived individual performance ( $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, there is a negative but insignificant relationship between abusive supervision and general self-efficacy. The positive relationship is between perceived individual performance and general self-efficacy. These findings indicate that as the perception of abusive supervision increases, the performance of subordinates decreases. On the other hand, it has been determined that as the general employees' self-efficacy levels increase, their performance levels also increase.

**Table 3. Correlation Findings**

Indicators	AS	PIP	GSE
Abusive Supervision (AS)	–		
Perceived Individual Performance (PIP)	-.36***	–	
General Self-efficacy (GSE)	-.11	.35***	–

Note. N = 304. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Sources: developed by the author.

Moderating analysis findings. For testing the moderating role of general self-efficacy on the relationship between abusive supervision subordinates' perceived individual performance, Hayes' (2013) PROCESS model was used. Table 4 shows that the interaction effect is insignificant.

That means general self-efficacy did not significantly moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' performance. To detail the findings, general self-efficacy is divided into three categories. In the first categorization, general self-efficacy was present at + SD (standard deviation) from the mean value, mean value itself, and SD.

Effects size chanced only at a very limited ratio (Table 4). Also, in the second categorization, PROCESS divided general self-efficacy into three segments. Remarkably, the effect size decreased at 0.04 point here. These findings proved that general self-efficacy did not have any moderation role in significantly changing the effect size.

Table 4. Moderating effect findings

Variables	$\beta^a$	95% CI	T	$\Delta R^2$	F(1, 922)	p
Abusive Supervision	.03	[-.11; .17]	0.36	.00	0.13	.716
Conditional effect of Abusive Supervision on Perceived Individual Performance at values of the moderator(s)						
<b>Category Option 1 (+ 1 SD, - 1 SD)</b>	<b>GSE</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>95% CI</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	
Category 1	3.49	-.45	[-.63; -.28]	-5.14	***	
Category 2	4.21	-.43	[-.57; -.30]	-6.24	***	
Category 3	4.93	-.41	[-.58; -.24]	-4.75	***	
<b>Category Option 2</b>						
Category 1	-.72	-.45	[-.65; -.26]	-4.58	***	
Category 2	.00	-.43	[-.63; -.24]	-4.29	***	
Category 3	.72	-.41	[-.68; -.14]	-3.01	**	

Note: N = 304. SD = Standard Deviation, \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

a Standardized regression coefficient of the interaction effect (abusive supervision  $\times$  general self-efficacy)

b Independent variable (predictor). Moderator = global self-efficacy.

Sources: developed by the author.

**Conclusions.** The current study found that the subordinates' perceived abuse supervision was negatively associated with the perceived individual performances. This finding in the current research is coherent with the relevant previous research (Xu et al., 2012). On the other hand, the finding on the moderating role of general self-efficacy was not as expected and coherent with previous research (Lv et al., 2006). Therefore, the research hypothesis was not supported.

This study has several limitations. The first one is the sample size of the research was very limited. Another important point is that the participants are mainly blue-collar employees. Another point regarding the study's limitations was that performance is difficult to define and measure. However, the current research measured performance with only the self-appraisal method.

In particular, the number of studies on abusive supervision in Turkey is extremely limited. For this reason, it is thought that more empirical research should be done to examine the consequences of abusive supervision in different cultures (Mackey et al., 2017). Specifically, when evaluating the antecedents or consequences of abusive supervision, research including the variables such as individual differences, contextual differences (e.g., workgroup, sector, and culture) should be carried out. Thus, the nature of abusive supervision could be understood in more detail. It was determined that the correlation of abusive supervision with subordinates' performance was similar to the existing research, but general self-efficacy did not play any role here. However, to draw a comprehensive conclusion, more empirical research is still needed, especially in the areas that are emphasized in research limitations and proposed under future research proposals. In this study, although the perception of abusive supervision of the employees was not that high, it was determined that some participants had a very high perception of abusive supervision. This situation reflects negatively on the performance of the subordinates. In this respect, the behaviour of managers, leaders, or supervisors towards employees in organizations has critical importance. A vital issue neglected in studies on abusive supervision is how to deal with abusive supervision effectively. In this direction, it is also aimed to put forward some innovative ways within the scope of the study. Accordingly, a mechanism should be established to submit complaints to the top management without revealing their identities and personal information. Thus, employees' level of hesitation can decrease in reporting the negative behaviors that their supervisor exposes to them. For example, questionnaire forms arranged in an electronic environment where the participant is not identified can lead to effective outcomes to get healthy feedback. Another innovative application is that the subordinates come together and report the negative opinions of their supervisors to the top management through an intermediary. Thus, it will not be possible to understand who the complainant is. Many reasons could lead to abusive supervision. One

of them is destructive organizational culture and insufficient support of employees in organizations. In this case, more transparent and fair organizational practices should be implemented, and necessary sanctions should be made on time when managers/supervisors/leaders exhibit negative behaviours. Even if utmost care is taken in all practices in the workplace, in some cases, the supervisors could exhibit undesirable behaviours towards the subordinates. That is due to the personality traits of the supervisors. It is known that selfish, insensitive, and low level of empathy individuals have a higher tendency to apply abusive supervision. Therefore, special attention should be paid to personality traits, especially when recruiting individuals in managerial positions or when employees are promoted to managerial positions.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

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Інновації в управлінні аб'юзивною поведінкою та трудовими ресурсами**

Автором визначено, що проблематика формування позитивного психологічного клімату в трудовому колективі досліджується низкою вчених. При цьому інноваційні підходи в управлінні трудовими ресурсами дозволяють уникнути небажаних форми поведінки як в середині колективу, так і з боку менеджменту компанії. У статті наголошено, що однією з форм негативної поведінки є аб'юз (систематичне зловживання повноваженнями зі сторони керівництва, прояв неповаги до співробітників та їх приниження) та надмірний контроль. У статті проаналізовано причини виникнення аб'юзу та наслідки його впливу на психологічний клімат в трудовому колективі та його продуктивність праці. Автором досліджено відмінність між рівнями сприйняття надмірного контролю та його впливу на продуктивність працівників залежно від їх індивідуальних особливостей. Метою дослідження є емпіричне обґрунтування медіаційної ролі індивідуальної ефективності працівників у ланцюзі «рівень контролю менеджменту компанії – продуктивність праці підлеглих». Емпіричне дослідження проведено на основі результатів анкетування 304 працівників підприємств Стамбулу (Туреччина). При анкетуванні для оцінювання рівнів надмірного контролю з боку менеджменту компанії, продуктивності праці та індивідуальної ефективності працівників застосовано відповідні психометричні шкали. Методологічною основою дослідження є методи кількісного аналізу (описова статистика, аналіз надійності, факторний, кореляційний та модераційний аналізи). За результатами емпіричного аналізу встановлено, що надмірний контроль має негативний кореляційний зв'язок з індивідуальною продуктивністю праці. При цьому рівень індивідуальної ефективності працівників не мав суттєвої посередницької ролі між надмірним контролем та загальною продуктивністю праці. Враховуючи результати дослідження, автором запропоновано низку перспективних напрямків для проведення подальших досліджень з означеної проблематики.

**Ключові слова:** аб'юз, надмірний контроль, загальна ефективність, ефективність співробітників, небажана поведінка.