



Abusive supervision: a systematic literature review

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Abstract

The interest generated by abusive supervision among researchers can be gauged from the fact that more than 140 articles on abusive supervision have been published by leading journals in the last five years alone. However, a comprehensive understanding of the same is lacking. As a result, we systematically reviewed 273 articles on abusive supervision published between 2000 and 2022. This enabled us to present five interrelated aspects of abusive supervision literature. First, we focus on the definitional issues associated with abusive supervision. Second, we examine two widely used abusive supervision scales. Third, we review and critique different research designs utilized in abusive supervision studies. Fourth, we look at the key theories underpinning abusive supervision research and map the nomological network of abusive supervision. Fifth, we suggest novel avenues for theoretical advancement. In sum, we endeavored to portray a detailed picture of research on abusive supervision.

Keywords Abusive supervision · Dark form of leadership · Counterproductive work behavior · Abusive leadership · Workplace aggression

JEL Classification D23-Organizational Behavior · O15-Human Resources

1 Introduction

Abusive supervision is defined as, “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours, excluding physical contact” (Tepper 2000). Abusive supervisors consistently mock and humiliate their direct reports, invade their privacy, remind them of their past mistakes or failures, give them the silent treatment, break promises made to them, and put them down in public (Tepper 2000). Abusive supervision is often

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referred to as a dark form of leadership (Zhu et al. 2019), with primarily negative managerial implications (Mackey et al. 2017) and high financial costs to organizations (Detert et al. 2007). Since Tepper's (2000) seminal piece, the research on abusive supervision has mostly seen an upward trend. In fact, during collecting research articles for penning this systematic review, we were able to locate six meta-analyses published in 2019 that examined abusive supervision (see: Hiller et al. 2019; Kaluza et al. 2019; Mackey et al. 2019b; Wang et al. 2019; Zhang et al. 2019b; Park et al. 2019), which indicates the burgeoning literature that has accumulated in two decades. In addition, two recent critical reviews (Tepper et al. 2017; Zhang and Liu 2018) have investigated abusive supervision in a detailed manner.

Although meta-analyses and critical reviews have enriched the abusive supervision literature, they have analysed different facets of the same phenomenon with little in common. For instance, Zhang and Liu (2018) restricted the scope of their review to 48 empirical articles that gathered data only from Asian countries. While Mackey et al. (2017) considered the detrimental consequences of abusive supervision on subordinates, Kaluza et al. (2019) illustrated the adverse outcomes of abusive supervision on managers. Similarly, Hiller et al. (2019) contrasted paternalistic leadership with abusive supervision, and Zhang et al. (2019b) shed light on the relationship between abusive supervision and its two consequences: employee counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Furthermore, Mackey et al. (2019b) reported weak support for the curvilinear relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' workplace deviance, while Park et al. (2019) considered the role of national culture in subordinates' response to abusive supervision. Notably, between Tepper et al.'s (2017) critical review and the writing of this manuscript, 125 articles on abusive supervision have been published in leading journals (see Fig. 1). Thus, there is a need for a systematic review or meta-analysis that can holistically synthesize various facets of abusive supervision research. This article is an attempt toward that end, and it tries to make two significant contributions to the existing literature. First, it charts the nomological network of abusive supervision based on two decades of accumulated literature. Second, it identifies critical research gaps in the existing literature to advance abusive supervision research.

We began the review with five broad questions in mind: (a) how well does the definition of abusive supervision hold up against empirical findings?; (b) what are the scales used in abusive supervision research?; (c) what are the research designs utilized in abusive supervision research?; (d) what are the antecedents, moderators, mediators, and consequences of abusive supervision based on critical theories?; and (e) based on the empirical findings, what are the "knowns" in abusive supervision, and where do we go from here?

2 Search protocol, inclusion criteria, data coding, synthesis, and limitations of the study

To obtain relevant articles, we searched nine databases: EBSCO, Sage pub, Springer Link, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, Science Direct, Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, and Emerald Insight by using the word "abusive" with different strings such as "supervision", "supervisor", "line manager", "manager", "frontline manager", "boss",

“leader”, “leadership” and “executive”. Tepper’s (2000) work is the first research paper on abusive supervision. Thus, the search period for the systematic review was between 2000 and June 2022 (inclusive), and all papers needed to be in English.

The search yielded a total of 2371 hits. After going through the abstracts of these papers, we eliminated 111 because the context was different from abusive supervision (e.g., abusive parents, abusive relationships, abusive men). Next, we excluded 97 conference proceedings and working papers from the sample to ensure data homogeneity. Concerning the quality threshold, we included only those articles in our review that have been published in A* or A-category peer-reviewed journals as ranked by the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC). This further reduced the sample size of articles to 267. Next, we manually checked the references of six meta-analyses published in 2019 to find additional articles consistent with our inclusion criteria. This process yielded another six research papers. Thus, the final sample contains 273 research papers published in 39 journals.

In the next step, we entered data from the selected articles in an excel spreadsheet. The authors and two research associates independently carried out data coding to ensure accuracy. We resolved all discrepancies through discussion. Further, the authors evaluated 20 randomly selected articles for accuracy. To answer the research questions discussed in the introduction, we entered the following information in the spreadsheet for each article: journal name, title of the research paper, year of publication, theories used, predictors, mediators, moderators, outcomes, type of paper (empirical, review, or conceptual), research design (quantitative, qualitative, and/or mixed), scales used, country, industry, unit of analysis (individual, group, organization, or multilevel), sample size, and findings. Thereafter, we analysed the columns to discern themes. For example, we examined the spreadsheet columns- “journal name”, “year of publication”, and “type of paper” to develop the section titled, “General sample characteristics”. Similarly, we assessed the column- “findings”, to build the section titled, “Abusive supervision: Definition and Measurement”. From the next section onwards, we present the results of our review.

Similar to any other systematic review, our review too has limitations. First, we only included A* and A-category peer-reviewed articles in our study. We further excluded all working papers and conference proceedings on abusive supervision. We took these two steps to ensure the quality of the systematic review but it also opened the possibility of publication bias in our study. Nonetheless, we believe that the final catchment of 273 articles represents the extant abusive supervision research. Second, our findings are not informed by studies published in non-English journals. Third and finally, human oversight during the selection of papers cannot be ruled out.

3 General sample characteristics

As illustrated in Table 1, the Journal of Applied Psychology has published the highest number of articles on abusive supervision to date, followed by the Journal of Business Ethics and Journal of Organizational Behavior. The Academy of Management Journal published the first scholarly work on abusive supervision i.e., Tepper (2000). Notably, 53.47% of the articles (i.e., 146 out of 273 papers) have been published alone in the last five years (see Fig. 1).

Table 1 Distribution of research papers (journal-wise)

| Name of the Journal | Area of the Journal | Number of Publications |
|---|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Academy of Management Journal | General Management | 18 |
| Academy of Management Review | General Management | 4 |
| Annual Review of OP and OB | Organizational Behavior | 1 |
| Australian Journal of Management | General Management | 1 |
| Applied Psychology: An International Review | Applied Psychology | 6 |
| Asia Pacific Journal of Management | General Management | 4 |
| British Journal of Management | General Management | 1 |
| Business and Society | General Management | 1 |
| Cornell Hospitality Quarterly | Hospitality | 1 |
| Engineering, Construction, and Architectural Management | Engineering and other areas | 1 |
| European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology | Organizational Behavior | 10 |
| Group and Organization Management | General Management | 3 |
| Human Performance | Organizational Behavior | 3 |
| Human Relations | Organizational Behavior | 5 |
| Human Resource Management | Human Resource Management | 1 |
| International Journal of Conflict Management | Organizational Behavior | 3 |
| Human Resource Management Review | Human Resource Management | 1 |
| International Journal of Hospitality Management | Hospitality | 6 |
| International Journal of Human Resource Management | Human Resource Management | 6 |
| Journal of Applied Psychology | Applied Psychology | 40 |
| Journal of Business and Psychology | General Management | 12 |
| Journal of Business Ethics | General Management | 28 |
| Journal of Computer Information Systems | Information Systems | 1 |
| Journal of Knowledge Management | Knowledge Management | 3 |
| Journal of Management | General Management | 10 |
| Journal of Management Inquiry | General Management | 1 |
| Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology | Organizational Behavior | 7 |
| Journal of Occupational Health Psychology | Organizational Behavior | 5 |
| Journal of Organizational Behavior | Organizational Behavior | 25 |
| Journal of Research in Personality | Personality Research | 1 |
| Journal of Vocational Behavior | Organizational Behavior | 1 |
| Management and Organization Review | General Management | 1 |
| Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Process | Organizational Behavior | 5 |
| Organization Science | General Management | 1 |
| Personality and Individual Differences | Personality Research | 5 |
| Personnel Psychology | Organizational Behavior | 9 |
| Personnel Review | Human Resource Management | 14 |
| The Leadership Quarterly | Organizational Behavior | 24 |
| Work and Stress | Organizational Behavior | 4 |
| Total | | 273 |

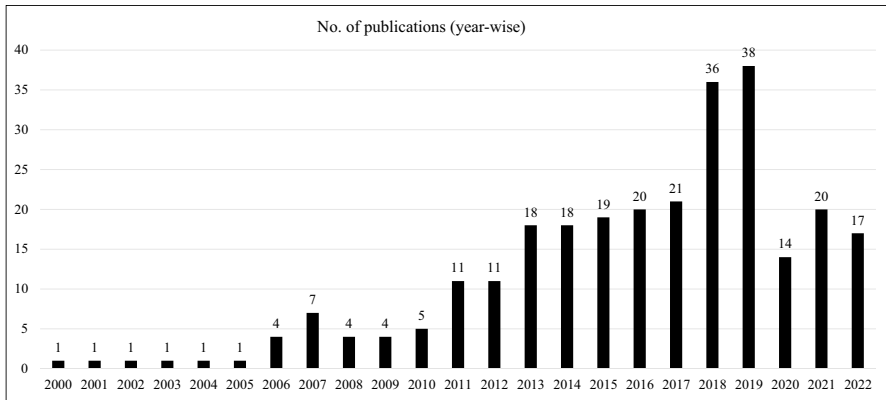


Fig. 1 Distribution of articles included in the systematic review (year-wise)

Most of the articles referred to here ($N=248/273$) are empirical papers, while review and conceptual papers form the remainder of the sample. Qualitative studies, mixed-method studies, and longitudinal studies are rare in the domain of abusive supervision.

4 Abusive supervision: definition and measurement

The definition of abusive supervision specifies its boundaries. First, it is a subordinate's perception of abuse by the immediate supervisor but it excludes physical abuse (Tepper 2000). Second, abusive supervision is a sustained phenomenon (Tepper 2000, 2007). Over the years, two streams of empirical findings have emerged that raise questions about Tepper's (2000) definition of abusive supervision. The first stream of findings addresses how the perception and subsequent rating of abusive supervision vary between individuals, resulting in a tricky situation where abusive supervision scores might not reflect reality. The second stream suggests that abusive supervision waxes and wanes daily and is not a sustained phenomenon.

4.1 Perception-reality divide of abusive supervision scores

Wang et al. (2019) found that 33% of the variance in abusive supervision scores could be explained by the actual abusive behaviour of supervisors, while measurement error and differences in subordinates' perception explained 67% of the remaining variance. In addition, different scales of abusive supervision (e.g., Tepper 2000; Mitchell and Ambrose 2007) are mainly administered from subordinates' vantage points. However, subordinates' perceptions may be coloured by many factors, including supervisor-subordinate relationships and subordinates' innate characteristics. For instance, a study by Harvey et al. (2014) revealed that direct reports who scored higher on psychological entitlement vis-à-vis their co-workers rated the same supervisor as more abusive. Moreover, subordinates' emotional stability negatively

predicted self-ratings of abusive supervision (Henle and Gross 2014). Further evidence suggests that variance in self-rated scores of abusive supervision can be explained by individual differences such as subordinates' Big Five traits (Mackey et al. 2017), supervisors' honesty-humility and agreeableness (Breevaart and de Vries 2017), and supervisors' Machiavellianism (Wisse and Sleebos 2016).

Together, these findings (a) lend credence to Tepper's (2000, p. 178) remark: "two subordinates could differ in their evaluations of the same supervisor's behaviour" and (b) suggest that abusive supervision scores may not be objective. To overcome the subjectivity of abusive supervision ratings, we suggest that scholars and practitioners can collect abusive supervision scores from multiple sources, such as the supervisor's boss, supervisor, and subordinates.

4.2 Abusive supervision: sustained phenomenon or not?

Tepper's (2000) work did not explain why abusive supervision has a sustained character. Four conceptual papers in this regard might provide some answers to this question. First, Douglas et al.'s (2008) elaboration likelihood model for workplace aggression outlines three potential information processing pathways in subordinates and related repetitive processes i.e., subordinates' cognitive knots. Such cognitive knots further influence escalating violence and aggression directed at the supervisor, which in turn could sustain abusive supervision. Second, Klaussner (2013) proposed an escalating cycle of retaliation. In the absence of any reconciliation between supervisor and subordinate, the supervisor abuses the subordinate while the subordinate's inappropriate response towards supervisory abuse reinforces abusive supervision. Third, Chan and McAllister (2014) argued that supervisory abuse leads subordinates to a state of paranoia, which could, in turn, influence them to engage in aggression and/or suspicious activities. In response to these behaviours, the supervisor again abuses the subordinate. Moreover, different variables in their conceptual model are interconnected through multiple feedback loops, which might explain the sustained nature of abusive supervision. Fourth, Hu and Liu (2017) identified a personality trait- supervisors' social dominance orientation (SDO), as the reason why they indulge in sustained abuse of the direct report(s). To date, these conceptual frameworks remain empirically untested. Nevertheless, these articles suggest that abusive supervision may be a sustained phenomenon based upon individual differences or contexts.

On the other hand, experience sampling studies (N=20) have raised doubts regarding the "sustained" nature of abusive supervision (e.g., Courtright et al. 2016; Qin et al. 2017; Liao et al. 2018; Tröster and Quaquebeke 2021; Li et al. 2022). A key characteristic of this stream of research is that supervisors rate their daily abusive behaviour as opposed to subordinates or other stakeholders (for exceptions, see: Wheeler et al. 2013; Vogel and Mitchell 2017; Tariq and Ding 2018). These studies have revealed that abusive supervision varies significantly within a day. Such significant daily intraindividual variations suggest that abusive supervision may not be a sustained phenomenon.

Thus, there are conflicting views regarding the sustained nature of abusive supervision. The four untested conceptual frameworks discussed above suggest that abusive supervision might be a sustained phenomenon based upon individual differences and context. Relatedly, prior research on CWB suggests that low self-monitors working in private and task-oriented settings could engage in destructive behaviours directed at others to attain their vested interests (Oh et al. 2014). Accordingly, supervisors who are low in self-monitoring and working in private settings could regularly abuse their direct reports and it merits empirical examination. Supervisors high in subclinical sadism (Buckels et al. 2013) might consistently abuse their direct reports for the sake of fun. Narcissistic supervisors are self-absorbed and could dominate their direct reports through abusive supervision (Lin et al. 2021) (for more details on leaders' narcissism, please refer to Brunzel (2021) and Van Scotter (2020)). Pushing future research along these lines could meaningfully contribute to the debate surrounding the sustained nature of abusive supervision.

5 Scales and research designs adopted in abusive supervision research

5.1 Abusive supervision scales

We now compare two widely used scales of abusive supervision, namely: (a) Tepper's (2000) 15-item scale and (b) its 5-item derivative developed by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007). 124 papers utilized the 15-item scale, 71 papers used the 5-item scale, and 12 papers utilized both scales. Since the construct of abusive supervision captures subordinates' perception of abuse by the immediate supervisor, it is not surprising that the majority of the studies have administered these scales to subordinates. Importantly, the 15-item and 5-item scales have been found to be strongly correlated (e.g., $r=0.97$, $p<0.01$ Garcia et al. 2015; $r=0.96$, $p<0.001$ Zhang et al. 2019a). Hinkin (1998) provided rigorous and well-delineated steps for scale development in organizational sciences. So, we compared the two abusive supervision scales against Hinkin's (1998) scale development procedures as illustrated in Table 2.

Different items in the 15-item scale have varying severity and consequently, they do not rise to the level of abuse. For example, one item in this scale, "My supervisor lies to me" differs in severity from "My supervisor ridicules me". A supervisor lying to his or her subordinate is an unethical act but it may not be deemed as abuse by the subordinate. On the other hand, a supervisor ridiculing his or her direct report would be perceived as abuse by the direct report. Since the 15-item scale comprises items that could be perceived as abusive supervision mixed with items that may not be perceived as abusive supervision, it becomes hard to interpret the total abusive supervision score when the frequencies of these items are summed up. Two factors emerged when Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) carried out confirmatory factor analyses on the 15-item scale. One factor comprised of 5 items that had high severity, while another factor consisted of 10 items that had low severity. The former factor constitutes Mitchell and Ambrose's (2007) 5-item scale. Thus, the problem of

Table 2 Abusive supervision measures against Hinkin's (1998) scale development criteria

| Steps of scale development | Tepper's (2000) scale | Mitchell and Ambrose's (2007) scale |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Item generation | | |
| (a) Content validity assessment | Yes | Not reported. It might be so because the scale was developed from Tepper's (2000) scale, and Tepper's (2000) scale has content validity |
| (b) Number of items | 15 | 5 |
| (c) Item scaling | 5-point Likert scale | 7-point Likert scale |
| 2. Questionnaire administration | | |
| (a) Original sample | 741 workers | Sample-I: 741 workers Sample-II: 338 workers |
| 3. Initial item reduction | | |
| (a) Exploratory Factor Analysis | Not reported | Yes |
| (b) Cronbach's α | 0.90 | 0.89 |
| 4. Confirmatory factor analysis | Yes | Yes |
| 5. Convergent validity | Not reported | Not reported |
| 6. Discriminant validity | Yes | Yes |
| 7. Replication | U.S.A., Canada, China, Israel, South Korea, Belgium, India, Philippines, Portugal, Australia, Netherlands, and many others | U.S.A., China, India, Philippines, Finland, South Korea, Taiwan, U.A.E., Sweden |

varying severity of different items in the 15-item scale has been overcome because all the items on the 5-item scale have severity on the higher side. As a result, all the items are likely to be perceived as abusive supervision by the direct report, which makes interpreting the composite abusive supervision score meaningful. Nonetheless, other issues remain. The broad trend has been to administer the 5-item scale directly to participants without even examining whether the 15-item scale is indeed two-dimensional in the given context of the study. In this vein, Breevaart and de Vries's (2017) study failed to replicate the two-factor structure of the 15-item scale in a sample of Dutch respondents. Therefore, future research may focus on further developing the scale. Perceptual biases of respondents could inflate or deflate abusive supervision ratings because both the scales capture the subjective (and not objective) assessment of supervisory abuse. Also, whether the scales are exhaustive and capture all the abusive behaviours of leaders in different cultural contexts need to be examined through in-depth qualitative studies. Since organizations around the globe have come up with alternative work practices in the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic (e.g., work from home), abusive supervision might take different forms in such settings. In light of these, we urge future scholars to be mindful of the context in which abusive supervision scales are being administered.

5.2 Research designs in abusive supervision research

Table 3 shows that abusive supervision research has been largely driven by quantitative studies. Among them, the majority have employed correlational designs. To reduce common method bias concerns (Podsakoff et al. 2012), many studies have utilized multi-wave data (e.g., Haggard and Park 2018; McAllister and Perrewé 2018; Liang et al. 2022) or multi-source data (e.g., Zellars et al. 2002; Han et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2022) or both (e.g., Tariq and Ding 2018; Yu et al. 2018; Khan et al. 2021). Purely cross-sectional studies are rare (e.g., Duffy and Ferrier 2003; Goswami et al. 2015; Ahmed et al. 2021). However, leveraging temporal separation or source separation or both in correlational designs does not help in ruling out reverse causation. In this vein, few scholars have reported reverse causation analyses in their papers (e.g., Rousseau and Aubé 2018; Ju et al. 2019), which is a welcome change. In addition, testing mediation with correlational designs can be fraught with risk because signs of relationships between the mediator(s) and relevant variables can change if they are examined with longitudinal designs (Cole and Maxwell 2003). Therefore, scholars need to go beyond correlational designs for advancing abusive supervision research.

As noted earlier, experience sampling studies have been instrumental in demonstrating that abusive supervision may not be a sustained phenomenon. However, they are not without flaws. Respondent-related traits such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, and motivation, need to be checked and controlled (Scollon et al. 2009). To document instances of supervisory abuse with greater precision, scholars could use an *event-based* daily diary design where participants respond daily contingent upon the number of times the phenomena being measured (e.g., abusive supervision) occurred within a day (Kelemen et al. 2020).

Table 3 Research designs employed in abusive supervision research

| Study Design | No. of research papers | % of <i>N</i> (= 273) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Quantitative | | |
| Only Correlational Design | 153 | |
| Only Experience Sampling Design | 6 | |
| Only Experimental Design | 6 | |
| Only Longitudinal Design | 2 | |
| Any combination of the above five | 78 | |
| Sub-Total | 245 | 89.74% |
| Qualitative | | |
| Interviews | 0 | |
| Case study | 1 | |
| Ethnographic study | 0 | |
| Secondary data | 0 | |
| Sub-total | 1 | 0.36% |
| Mixed-method | | |
| Surveys and Interviews | 1 | |
| Case study and Interviews | 0 | |
| Interviews and Experiments | 1 | |
| Sub-Total | 2 | 0.73% |
| Grand Total | 248 | |

The systematic review contains 248 empirical papers. Further, this review contains 4 critical reviews, 1 systematic review on experience sampling studies in leadership research, 6 conceptual papers, and 14 meta-analysis articles. Therefore, the total number of papers in the systematic review = $248 + 4 + 1 + 6 + 14 = 273$

We could locate 31 papers that have used experimental designs alone (e.g., Gonzalez-Morales et al. 2018; Tu et al. 2018) or with other research designs (e.g., Walter et al. 2015; Shao et al. 2018; Chen et al. 2021; Lyubykh et al. 2022). Experiments in abusive supervision have their challenges. First, they fail to replicate abusive supervision's "sustained" nature. Second, experiments that have used critical incident techniques i.e., participants were asked to recall an episode relevant to the experiment (e.g., Liang et al. 2016; Foulk et al. 2018), could be vulnerable to participants' recall bias. In light of such limitations, researchers could design and administer vignette- or scenario-based experiments that incorporate the "sustained" character of abusive supervision and reduce the usage of critical incident technique-based experiments.

Our review located 11 papers containing longitudinal designs (e.g., Wee et al. 2017; Liang et al. 2018). Longitudinal studies incorporate the facet of time and such studies can advance abusive supervision research. For instance, it is plausible that if supervisory abuse continues unabated for an extended period, then, contingent upon boundary conditions, subordinate(s) could start accepting abusive supervision. Such a notion can be examined by a longitudinal design only. Further, these designs

Table 4 Distribution of research papers (country-wise)

| Country | Number of papers | Country | Number of papers |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Australia | 3 | Crowdsourcing Platforms | 23 |
| Belgium | 2 | Philippines | 9 |
| Canada | 5 | Portugal | 1 |
| China | 59 | South Korea | 6 |
| Germany | 2 | Taiwan | 6 |
| India | 5 | Two or more nations | 21 |
| Israel | 1 | UAE | 2 |
| Italy | 1 | USA | 71 |
| Japan | 1 | Vietnam | 1 |
| The Netherlands | 3 | Unreported | 17 |
| North America | 1 | Grand Total | 248 |
| Pakistan | 8 | | |

The systematic review contains 248 empirical papers. Further, this review contains 4 critical reviews, 1 systematic review on experience sampling studies in leadership research, 6 conceptual papers, and 14 meta-analysis articles. Therefore, the total number of papers in the systematic review = $248 + 4 + 1 + 6 + 14 = 273$

help to infer causality and are, therefore, called for. Farmanara's (2019) case study is perhaps the first qualitative study on abusive supervision. A review of leadership studies involving qualitative designs noted that such designs help to examine how a leadership behaviour changes in response to circumstances (Bryman 2004). So, future scholars could carry out qualitative studies to investigate how abusive supervision might change with respect to evolving situations. Further, we located two studies that have used mixed-method design. Atwater et al.'s (2016) study supplemented interviews with a correlational design, while Jin et al. (2020) paired focus group interviews with an experiment. Since mixed-method studies both explore and explain specific research questions (Stentz et al. 2012), we call for the same to advance abusive supervision research.

In terms of country-wise distribution of abusive supervision research, the USA is at the top ($N=71$) followed by China ($N=59$) (see Table 4). Abusive supervision research in high power distance nations such as India (e.g., Nandkeolyar et al. 2014; Pradhan et al. 2019; Agarwal et al. 2021), South Korea (e.g., Kim and Yun 2015; Choi et al. 2019), Pakistan (e.g., Jahanzeb et al. 2019; Khalid et al. 2020; Clercq et al. 2021), Taiwan (e.g., Chi et al. 2018; Chen and Liu 2019; Wang et al. 2021), Vietnam (e.g., Luu 2019), Japan (e.g., Peltokorpi and Ramaswami 2020), Philippines (e.g., Rafferty et al. 2010; Rafferty and Restubog 2011) and China (e.g., Liu and Wang 2013; Zhang et al. 2014; Khan and Khan 2021) is very relevant because supervisory abuse could be frequent in such nations (Tepper 2007). Furthermore, studies in such nations help generalize research findings beyond the U.S. context. Abusive supervision has been researched in the Middle East (e.g., Biron 2010; Al-Hawari et al. 2020; Khan et al. 2022). Many abusive supervision studies drew their samples from two or more nations (e.g., Vogel et al. 2015; Yu and Duffy 2020). Few

studies collected data from crowdsourcing platforms such as Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) (e.g., Lin et al. 2016; Michel et al. 2016; Kim et al. 2022), Prolific Academic Platform (e.g., Caesens et al. 2019; Kim et al. 2020; Shen et al. 2021), Studyresponse.com (e.g., Tepper et al. 2009; Thau and Mitchell 2010) and so on. Importantly, we could not locate any study on abusive supervision from African and South American countries.

In terms of industrial context, 119 papers drew their sample from multiple industries (e.g., Ambrose and Ganegoda 2020; Rice et al. 2020; Priesemuth et al. 2022). 20 articles utilized samples from the manufacturing industry (e.g., Yang et al. 2019; Zhang et al. 2019a; Akram et al. 2021) while 7 articles used samples from the hospitality industry (e.g., Lyu et al. 2016; Hon and Lu 2016; Babalola et al. 2022). Abusive supervision studies have been carried out in financial firms (e.g., Shoss et al. 2013; Shao et al. 2018), IT companies (e.g., Nandkeolyar et al. 2014; Luu 2019), hospitals (e.g., Frieder et al. 2015; Ng et al. 2022), not-for-profit organizations (e.g., Ogunfowora 2013), military (e.g., Zellars et al. 2002; Chi and Liang 2013) and telecom organizations (e.g., Ouyang et al. 2015; Li et al. 2019). In terms of the unit of analysis, the majority of the articles were at the only individual level (N=174) followed by only multi-level (N=44) and both individual and multilevel (N=30). Among individual-level studies, sample sizes ranged from 31 to 1477 participants (mean=303). Turning to multi-level studies, sample sizes ranged from 50 to 1473 participants (mean=103).

6 Theories used in abusive supervision research

Several theories have been used to investigate the underlying mechanisms that link abusive supervision to its antecedents and consequences as well as the boundary conditions of abusive supervision. We focus here on five theories that have been widely used in abusive supervision research viz. conservation of resources theory, self-regulation theory, social exchange theory, social learning theory, and social identity theory.

6.1 Conservation of resources (COR) theory

In line with COR theory (Hobfoll et al. 2018), studies have shown that direct reports of abusive supervisors change their attitudes, behaviors, and performance levels to conserve their resources. These studies have mostly utilized emotional exhaustion as a mediator. For example, emotional exhaustion mediated the (a) positive relationships between abusive supervision and subordinates' work withdrawal, feedback avoidance, silence, intentions to quit, and knowledge hiding (Chi and Liang 2013; Whitman et al. 2014; Xu et al. 2015; Pradhan et al. 2019; Hao et al. 2022) and (b) negative relationships between abusive supervision and subordinates' job dedication, creativity, knowledge sharing, and service performance (Aryee et al. 2008; Han et al. 2017; Lee et al. 2018; Al-Hawari et al. 2020). Subordinates who worked in organic organizational structures (Aryee et al. 2008), were high in cognitive reappraisal (Chi and Liang 2013), perceived greater distributive justice (Lee et al. 2018),

were high in positive affectivity (Hao et al. 2022) and had lower LMX with their immediate supervisor (Xu et al. 2015), experienced lesser emotional exhaustion due to abusive supervision. Recent studies based on COR theory have found that (a) psychological safety mediated the positive relationship between abusive supervision and employees' knowledge hiding (Agarwal et al. 2021), (b) work engagement mediated the negative relationship between abusive supervision and employees' voice (Khan and Khan 2021), and (c) surface acting mediated the negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' job satisfaction (Wang et al. 2021).

Importantly, leaders can engage in abusive supervision to conserve their resources. For example, psychologically distressed and emotionally exhausted leaders abused their direct reports to conserve resources (Li et al. 2016; Lam et al. 2017). Supervisors with depressive symptoms, anxiety, and problem with alcohol consumption at work resorted to abusive supervision (Byrne et al. 2014). Poor team performance could elicit abusive supervision via supervisors' emotional exhaustion (Fan et al. 2020). Interestingly, Qin et al. (2017) reported that in the short term, abusive supervision bolsters supervisors' resource conservation, which enhances their daily work engagement; however, this positive effect does not last beyond a week.

6.2 Self-regulation theory

According to self-regulation theory, direct reports repeatedly self-regulate to interpret abusive supervision and understand its causes and consequences. In the process, they exhaust their limited resources and they experience self-regulatory failure or ego-depletion i.e., a state where they fail to control their impulse to aggress (Baumeister et al. 1998). Consistent with this line of reasoning, Thau and Mitchell (2010) found a positive indirect relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance and organization-directed deviance mediated by subordinates' intrusive thoughts (a type of ego-depletion). Lian et al. (2014a) demonstrated that abusive supervision increased subordinates' supervisor-directed aggression via subordinates' hostility towards supervisors. Abusive supervision increased subordinates' interpersonal deviance due to subordinates' self-regulatory failure (Priesemuth et al. 2022). Mackey et al. (2020) found that abusive supervision indirectly increased supervisor-directed destructive voice via subordinates' ego-depletion. Wheeler et al. (2013) reported that emotional exhaustion mediated the positive indirect relationship between abusive supervision and co-worker abuse, and McAllister and Perrewé (2018) showed that abusive supervision increased subordinates' bullying behaviors by reducing their self-regulation. Direct reports that perceived higher distributive justice (Thau and Mitchell 2010), had a greater sense of entitlement (Wheeler et al. 2013), and experienced greater LMX differentiation (Mackey et al. 2020) experienced more ego-depletion due to abusive supervision. In sum, abusive supervision leads to ego depletion in followers, and they engage in destructive activities targeted at the supervisor, organization, and co-workers.

Scholars have also utilized self-regulation theory to examine why supervisors abuse their direct reports. Different factors in the workplace such as difficult tasks at work (Collins and Jackson 2015), subordinates' poor performance (Liang et al. 2016), surface acting (Yam et al. 2016), demonstrating ethical leadership (Lin et al. 2016), subordinates' deviance (Mawritz et al. 2017), and irritation at work (Pundt and Schwarzbeck 2018) tax supervisors' self-regulation. Factors outside of the workplace such as supervisors' family-to-work conflict (Courtright et al. 2016) and poor sleep quality (Barnes et al. 2015) also take a toll on their self-regulation. Due to such factors inside and outside of the workplace, supervisors are left with little self-regulation to suppress the impulse to abuse their subordinates which results in their self-regulatory failure followed by abusive supervision.

6.3 Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory has been widely used to analyze relationships within a dyad (Cook et al. 2013). Based on the principle of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960), this theory contends that when an individual mistreats another within a dyadic relationship, the victim "pays back" in kind to the perpetrator (Blau 1964). Accordingly, the majority of the studies have found that direct reports hit back at their abusive supervisors in two ways.

The first way is that victims of abusive supervision can retaliate against their perpetrators by reducing positive employee outcomes. Zellars et al. (2002), for instance, reported that procedural justice mediated the negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' OCB. Similarly, abusive supervision can inversely influence subordinates' OCB by decreasing *guanxi* (Liu and Wang 2013) and increasing perceived organizational obstruction (Mackey et al. 2018). Others have found that direct reports can hit back at their abusive supervisors by reducing their task performance and knowledge sharing, and this relationship was mediated by leader-member exchange (LMX) (Xu et al. 2012; Peng et al. 2014; Choi et al. 2019).

The second way is that direct reports can engage in deviant behaviors to strike back at their abusive supervisors. For example, Thau et al. (2009) found a positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance, while Liu et al. (2010) showed that abusive supervision increased subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance indirectly via revenge cognitions. Similarly, another study reported a positive association between abusive supervision and subordinates' CWBs directed at the supervisor (Eschleman et al. 2014). Mackey et al. (2019a) found that direct reports returned fire to their abusive supervisors by engaging in insubordination, and this relationship was mediated by negative social exchange relationship quality. One study found that subordinates engaged in supervisor-directed information systems abuse in response to abusive supervision (Xu et al. 2022). At high

levels of uncertainty (Thau et al. 2009), traditionality (Liu et al. 2010), and harmful intent of the supervisor (Eschleman et al. 2014), direct reports of abusive supervisors engaged in more deviant activities.

Based on the social exchange theory, studies have shown that in response to followers' hostility, supervisors can hit back at them through abusive supervision. Deviant behaviors of subordinates such as abusive followership (Camps et al. 2020) and organizational deviance (Lian et al. 2014b) attract abuse from the immediate supervisor. Lian et al. (2014b) found a reciprocal relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' organizational deviance.

6.4 Social learning theory

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory contends that humans can learn behaviors directly or vicariously through observing the behaviors of others and the consequences faced by them. Therefore, studies involving trickle-down effects (i.e., learning abusive behaviour from supervisors by subordinates) use social learning theory as an overarching framework. In this context, Liu et al. (2012) study is notable for showing that the negative effects of abusive supervision trickle down through three levels of organizational hierarchy (from the supervisor's boss to the supervisor and, finally, to the team members). In another multilevel study, it was found that supervisors learned abusive behaviour from their boss, which in turn, led to higher workgroup interpersonal deviance (Mawritz et al. 2012). The trickle-down effect of abusive supervision was stronger when direct reports attributed performance-enhancement motive to abusive supervision (Liu et al. 2012) and they were working in a hostile climate (Mawritz et al. 2012). Bai et al. (2022) found that third parties learn abuse from abusive supervisors and then, enact ostracism and harassment on victims, which in turn, reduce victims' performance. Such findings are likely to sound alarm bells among researchers and practitioners. Recently, evidence has come to light in contexts where, contingent upon boundary conditions, new hires do not learn abusive supervision from their supervisors (Tu et al. 2018), and abused supervisors with higher moral identities do not abuse their subordinates and instead engage in ethical leadership (Taylor et al. 2019). Additionally, an interesting study found that group ethical voice negatively predicts group abusive supervision because leaders of the groups learn from the collective actions of their group members (Babalola et al. 2022).

Based on social learning theory, studies have looked into the antecedents of abusive supervision as well. A study reported that organizations characterized by aggressive norms (i.e., where hostility and negative attitudes towards other employees were the norms) signal the leaders that it is acceptable to abuse followers, and thus aggressive norms positively predict abusive supervision (Resubog et al. 2011). Similarly, another study found that a hostile organizational

climate (i.e., an organizational climate marked by mistrust, envy, and aggression) signals the leaders that abusive supervision would be supported and even promoted (Mawritz et al. 2014). Going beyond factors in the workplace, one study found that supervisors who were undermined by their family during childhood, abused their direct reports (Kiewitz et al. 2012), while another study reported that the positive relationship between the history of aggression in supervisors' families and abusive supervision was mediated by supervisors' hostile cognitions (Garcia et al. 2014).

6.5 Social identity theory

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory explains how an individual's social comparisons and categorizations as a member of one or more groups create, define, and shape his or her identity. Essentially, this theory posits that individuals derive their identity from membership in social groups (i.e., social identity) (Tajfel 1982) and individuals try to identify with groups that enhance their self-concept and distance themselves from groups that decrease their self-concept (Tajfel and Turner 2004). Accordingly, Priesemuth et al. (2014) found that collective perceptions of abusive supervision in work units signaled to the members of those units that they are neither valued nor respected, which led to their reduced group identification followed by their reduced group OCB and cooperation. Abusive supervision negatively influenced followers' perceived insider status (i.e., the degree to which individuals feel like organizational insiders as opposed to outsiders), which led to a reduction in followers' proactive behaviors- voice, taking charge, and problem prevention (Ouyang et al. 2015). Another study demonstrated that when direct reports experienced greater abusive supervision than the group means, they perceived lesser peer respect, and in turn, such direct reports experienced lesser organizational identification and affective commitment, and greater turnover intentions (Schaubroeck et al. 2016). Using affective commitment as a marker of social identity, Yu et al. (2016) reported that abusive supervision negatively influenced followers' job performance via affective commitment. Also, abusive supervision increased subordinates' organizational deviance by reducing their organization identification (Liu et al. 2020). High levels of group potency (Schaubroeck et al. 2016) and future work self-salience (Yu et al. 2016) accentuated the negative influence of abusive supervision on subordinates' identity, while high levels of organizational identification (Decoster et al. 2013) and moral identification (Liu et al. 2010) mitigated the same. In sum, we find that abusive supervision attacks followers' social identities, thereby precipitating lower levels of positive outcomes such as job performance and proactive behaviors, and higher levels of negative outcomes such as organizational deviance.

6.6 Key findings from the main theories

Overall, we find that abusive supervision mostly positively (negatively) correlates with destructive (constructive) consequences for the subordinate (or other stakeholders). Extant abusive supervision research is skewed towards subordinate-focused outcomes. However, this stream of research largely portrays the relationship between an abusive boss and his or her direct report(s) as a one-way street where the supervisor is the “active aggressor” and the subordinate is the “passive victim” of abuse. This paints a potentially misleading picture because direct reports may actively take steps to shape or alter or influence immediate managers’ abusive behaviour. Therefore, future studies could examine the same.

About understanding supervisors’ role in abusive supervision, we note certain inconsistencies between these theoretical frameworks. For instance, from the standpoint of self-regulation theory, the supervisor cannot self-regulate i.e., s/he fails to check her/his worst impulses, which results in the abuse of subordinates. In other words, managers abuse subordinates in the heat of the moment. In contrast, from the standpoint of social exchange theory, the supervisor abuses deviant direct reports to “get even” with them. In this case, the supervisor utilizes self-regulation in a cold and calculative manner. Similarly, as per the social learning framework, supervisors learn to abuse their direct reports from higher-ups; however, from the perspective of COR theory, abusive supervision is a way for the boss to conserve their resources. We believe that empirical studies involving competing mediating mechanisms based on these theories can provide the best explanation for “why” supervisors abuse their subordinates. In addition, all the antecedents of abusive supervision identified in this systematic review are either at the individual or group levels. This raises the possibility of investigating potential macro-level antecedents of abusive supervision in the future.

Finally, there is a scarcity of research examining the impact of macro-level factors, such as firm strategy, organizational policies, national cultures, organizational culture, and firm performance (to name a few), as moderators in the context of abusive supervision. This is a critical oversight because abusive supervision occurs within a context, not in a vacuum) (Table 5, Fig. 2).

Table 5 A tentative overview of constructs studied in abusive supervision research

| Authors | Antecedents | Moderators | Mediators | Outcomes | Primary theory |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Harris et al. (2007) | Abusive supervision | Meaning of work | | Performance | COR theory |
| Arvey et al. (2008) | Abusive supervision | Work unit structure | Emotional exhaustion | Job dedication | COR theory |
| Carlson et al. (2012) | Abusive supervision | | Surface acting, emotional exhaustion | Work-to-Family conflict, family-to-work conflict | COR theory |
| Mackey et al. (2013) | Abusive supervision | Social Adaptability | | job satisfaction, work effort | COR theory |
| Chi and Liang (2013) | Abusive supervision | Cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression | Emotional exhaustion | Work withdrawal | COR theory |
| Whitman et al. (2014) | Abusive supervision | | Emotional exhaustion | Feedback avoidance | COR theory |
| Byrne et al. (2014) | Supervisor's depression, anxiety, and alcohol consumption at work | Supervisors' anxiety | | Abusive supervision | COR theory |
| Xu et al. (2015) | Abusive supervision | LMX | Emotional exhaustion | Employee Silence | COR theory |
| Pradhan et al. (2019) | Abusive supervision | | Emotional exhaustion | Intention to quit | COR theory |
| Fan et al. (2020) | Team performance | Prevention focus | Supervisor's emotional exhaustion | Abusive Supervision | COR theory |
| Xu et al. (2020) | Abusive supervision | HPWS utilization, Intention to leave, Organizational commitment | | Silence | COR theory |
| Peltokorpi and Ramaswami (2020) | Abusive supervision | Power distance orientation | Job Satisfaction | Mental and physical health problems | COR theory |
| Thau & Mitchell (2010) | Abusive supervision | Distributive Justice | Intrusive thoughts | Supervisor- and organization-directed deviance | Self-regulation theory |
| Wheeler et al. (2013) | Abusive supervision | Psychological Entitlement | Emotional exhaustion | Co-worker abuse | Self-regulation theory |
| Lian et al. (2014a) | Abusive supervision | Self-control capacity | Hostility towards supervisor | Supervisor-directed aggression | Self-regulation Theory |
| Collins and Jackson (2015) | Pre-task negative emotions | Attentional Resource Capacity | Leader's self-regulation impairment | Abusive Supervision | Self-regulation theory |
| Barnes et al. (2015) | Leader's sleep quality | | Leader's ego-depletion | Leader's work engagement | Self-regulation theory |

Table 5 (continued)

| Authors | Antecedents | Moderators | Mediators | Outcomes | Primary theory |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Liang et al. (2016) | Subordinate's performance | Supervisor's hostile attribution and mindfulness | Supervisor's hostility towards subordinate | Abusive Supervision | Self-regulation theory |
| McAllister and Perrewe (2018) | Abusive Supervision | Active coping | State self-regulation | Bullying | Self-regulation theory |
| Pundt and Schwarzbeck (2018) | Supervisor's irritation | Supervisor's self-control | | Abusive Supervision | Self-regulation Theory |
| Yuan et al. (2020) | Abusive Supervision | Trait self-control | Emotional exhaustion | Safety compliance | Self-regulation theory |
| Mackey et al. (2020) | Abusive Supervision | LMX differentiation | Relational ego-depletion | Supervisor-directed destructive voice | Self-regulation theory |
| Zellers et al. (2002) | Abusive Supervision | Role definitions of OCB | Procedural justice | OCB | Social exchange Theory |
| Thau et al. (2009) | Abusive Supervision | Uncertainty of management style | | Deviance | Social exchange Theory |
| Liu et al. (2010) | Abusive Supervision | Traditionality | Revenge cognitions | Deviance | Social exchange theory |
| Rafferty and Restubog (2011) | Abusive Supervision | | Meaning of work, interactional justice, OBSE | Prosocial silence and voice | Social exchange theory |
| Mackey et al. (2018b) | Abusive Supervision | SOE | Perceived organizational obstruction | OCB | Social exchange theory |
| Mackey et al. (2018a) | Subordinate's entitlement | Subordinates felt accountability | Abusive supervision | Co-worker bullying | Social exchange theory |
| Choi et al. (2019) | Abusive Supervision | Psychological contract fulfillment, Self-enhancement motive | LMX | Knowledge sharing | Social exchange theory |
| Camps et al. (2020) | Abusive followership | Supervisor's self-doubt | Supervisor's interpersonal justice | Abusive Supervision | Social exchange theory |
| Kim et al. (2018) | Abusive Supervision | Organizational tenure | | Knowledge sharing | Social exchange theory |
| Liu et al. (2020) | Abusive Supervision | Moral identification | Organizational identification | Deviance | Social exchange theory |

Table 5 (continued)

| Authors | Antecedents | Moderators | Mediators | Outcomes | Primary theory |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|------------------------|
| Khalid et al. (2020) | Psychological entitlement | Hostile attribution bias | Abusive supervision | Knowledge hiding behaviour | Social exchange theory |
| Jahanzeb et al. (2019) | Abusive Supervision | Negative reciprocity beliefs | Knowledge hiding | Creativity | Social exchange theory |
| Restubog et al. (2011) | Aggressive norms | | Abusive supervision | Supervisor-directed deviance | Social learning theory |
| Kiewitz et al. (2012) | Supervisor's family undermining | Supervisor's self-control | | Abusive Supervision | Social learning theory |
| Lukacik and Bourdage (2019) | Abusive supervision | Role modelling | | Impression management tactics | Social learning theory |
| Tu et al. (2018) | Exposed abuse | Ideal leadership self-concept | | Abusive Supervision | Social learning theory |
| Jiang et al. (2019) | Abusive supervision | Social comparison orientation | Creative self-efficacy | Creativity | Social learning theory |
| Taylor et al. (2019) | Abusive supervision by manager | Supervisor's moral identity | Supervisor's relational disidentification | Abusive supervision, ethical leadership | Social learning theory |
| Ouyang et al. (2015) | Abusive supervision | Gender | Perceived insider status | Voice, problem prevention, taking charge | Social identity theory |
| Schaubroeck et al. (2016) | Relative abusive supervision | Group potency | Peer respect | Affective commitment, turnover intention | Social identity theory |
| Yu et al. (2016) | Abusive supervision | Future work self-salience | Affective commitment | Job performance | Social identity theory |
| Liu et al. (2020) | Abusive supervision | Moral Identification | Organizational identification | Organizational deviance | Social identity theory |
| Priesemuth et al. (2014) | Abusive supervision climate | | Group identification, collective efficacy | Group cooperation, OCB, and performance | Social identity theory |

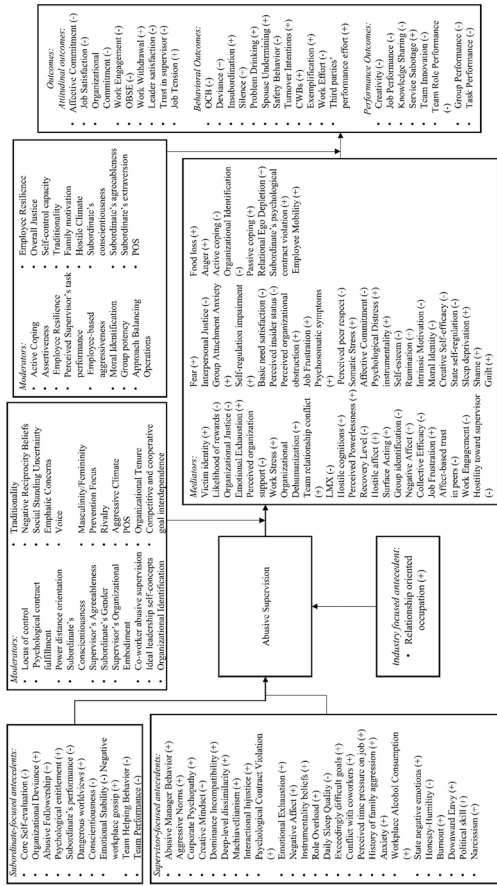


Fig. 2 Nomological network of abusive supervision

7 Potential directions for theoretical advancement

Our systematic review aimed to consolidate extant abusive supervision research spanning a little over two decades. This section discusses the future avenues of research in this domain. We believe that two critical theories, (a) Situational Strength Theory and (b) Followership Theory can strengthen research on abusive supervision.

7.1 Situational strength theory

Using situational strength theory may overcome the paucity of research examining macro-level predictors and boundary conditions of abusive supervision. Meyer et al. (2009) defined situational strength as the “implicit or explicit cues provided by external entities regarding the desirability of potential behaviours”. This theory posits that (a) omnibus or macro contexts (e.g., national cultures, crisis, economic downturn) and (b) discreet or micro contexts (e.g., job characteristics, organizational climate) could influence leadership constructs to predict different outcomes (Oc 2018). Essentially, these factors operate at different levels that psychologically pressure individuals to enact or refrain from behaviour (Oc, 2018).

Omnibus factors have rarely been studied as moderators in abusive supervision research. It is pertinent to note that Tepper defined and developed abusive supervision in the U.S. context. Followers from different nationalities are likely to perceive and respond to managerial abuse differently. Thus, scholars could study the moderating effects of one or more dimensions of national culture (Hofstede 1980) to reveal the situational strength of followers to engage in or refrain from destructive behaviours (e.g., CWB) or constructive behaviours (e.g., OCB) in response to managerial abuse. Similarly, recent empirical work suggests that norm violators in individualistic (collectivistic) cultures elicit lesser (greater) moral outrage and could affect leader support (Stamkou et al. 2019). Relatedly, future researchers might investigate whether the association between abusive supervision and subordinates’ perception of an abusive leader’s status/effectiveness/competence mediates via moral outrage. If so, does it vary according to the individualism/collectivism dimensions of national cultures? Also, individuals have greater (lesser) self-regulatory strength in culturally tight (loose) societies (Gelfand et al. 2006). Earlier in this paper, we noted that self-regulatory failure is a key reason behind abusive supervision. Therefore, scholars may examine whether supervisors in the east and south Asian cultures (culturally tight societies) abuse less than their American counterparts (culturally loose society). Pushing the horizons of the abusive supervision research in this direction: (a) could overcome the paucity of macro-level moderators in abusive supervision research and (b) may inform theory and practice on how the dimensions of national culture act as situational strength in influencing the relationships between abusive supervision and its related constructs.

Furthermore, the influence of omnibus factors could shape abusive supervision in organizations contingent upon discreet factors. For instance, organizational crisis (an omnibus factor) may interact with differences in organizational structure (a

discreet factor) to predict the depletion of supervisor resources (measured via supervisor stress). In line with COR theory (Hobfoll 1989), the supervisor may abuse their subordinate(s) to conserve resources. Similarly, organizational restructuring (an omnibus factor) may interact with a discreet factor- organizational climate, to predict the extent to which a supervisor could lose control over the work environment. Based on psychological reactance theory (Brehm 1972), the supervisor might engage in deviant behaviour (e.g., abusive supervision) to reinstate control over his or her work environment (Wright and Brehm 1982). In the former case, organizational structure, and in the latter case, organizational climate, act as boundary conditions to reveal the impact of situational strength in terms of whether the supervisor engages in or refrains from abusive supervision. Advancing the research along these lines could (a) reveal macro-level antecedents of abusive supervision, (b) illustrate the broader context in which abusive supervision occurs through contemporary theoretical lenses, and (c) fuel more multi-level abusive supervision research studies.

7.2 Followership theory

So far, research has mostly ignored how subordinates can influence their abusive bosses. Followership is defined as, “the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process” (Uhl-Bien et al. 2014). It involves (a) a subordinate role, (b) supervisor-directed behaviour by the subordinate, and (c) outcomes related to the process of leadership (Uhl-Bien et al. 2014).

A direct report of an abusive boss is likely to perceive his or her boss’s behaviour as self-serving or procedurally unfair or display of group-inconsistent emotions (or any combination thereof). This in turn may lead the direct report to feel and display supervisor-directed negative emotion (Tee et al. 2013). Translation of subordinates’ emotions to collective responses towards the abusive supervisor (Falbe and Yukl 2017; Yukl and Tracey 1992) is constrained by individual-level follower identification and group-level shared identity. A critical review of followership suggests that direct reports could engage in resistance, influence tactics, proactive behaviour, or obedience and submission in response to the leader’s attitude or behaviour (Uhl-Bien et al. 2014). Extant abusive supervision research has mostly overlooked these subordinate behaviours. Therefore, the questions of why and when the subordinates of an abusive supervisor deploy one or more of these four behaviours to influence abusive supervision deserve researchers’ attention. Also, Epitropaki et al. (2017) noted that direct reports could challenge a charismatic leader’s authority, thereby influencing the charismatic leader’s self-perception. This could potentially increase the leader’s charisma. Future researchers may also test whether one or more subordinates challenging an abusive supervisor could attack the supervisor’s self-perception, which in turn, could reduce abusive supervision. Subordinates can influence the behaviour of their bosses (Bastardo and Van Vugt 2019). However, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that followers’ non-destructive or constructive behaviours could pressure abusive supervisors to improve their behaviour. In sum, we believe that pushing the boundaries of abusive supervision research using followership theory

could correct the portrayal of the subordinate as a “passive receiver” of abuse in contemporary research as one of an “active player” who shapes (or even stops) abusive supervision.

8 Discussion and implications

We critically and systematically examined two decades of abusive supervision research, and it enabled us to make a few contributions. *First*, our systematic review sheds light on the debate surrounding the sustained nature of abusive supervision. It is of prime importance that scholars theorize why abusive supervision may or may not be a sustained phenomenon, compare these perspectives and examine them longitudinally across the cultural, socioeconomic, industry, and organizational contexts to conclude. *Second*, we reviewed two widely used abusive supervision scales that could help in their further development. *Third*, we shed light on research designs used in abusive supervision research and suggested a few ways to take them forward. *Fourth*, using the systematic literature review methodology, we mapped the nomological network of abusive supervision and provided a broad overview of antecedents, consequents, moderators, mediators, and the key theories used. This will enable future researchers to examine the role of new psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions concerning the antecedents and outcomes of abusive supervision. *Fifth*, different theories posit reasons for “why” bosses abuse their subordinates. Therefore, we reiterate the need for empirical studies to find the best explanation for “why” managers abuse their direct reports. It could declutter the research on antecedents of abusive supervision. *Sixth*, two decades of research have uncovered many individual and group-level antecedents and moderators of abusive supervision. However, plausible macro-level antecedents and/or moderators have largely been overlooked. So, we briefly discussed situational strength theory to bridge this gap. It could steer contemporary abusive supervision research from individual and group levels of analyses to organization level and beyond. *Seventh*, limited research has investigated how subordinates respond to their abusive bosses. So, we suggested a few avenues for future research based on followership theory to overcome this gap. It might change the focus of contemporary research from follower outcomes of abusive supervision to followers responding to abusive supervision. *Eighth*, due to the inherent subjectivity of abusive supervision scores, practitioners and academicians need to be careful while interpreting them. Furthermore, our systematic review found that deviant subordinates could also attract abusive supervision. Targeting intervention (s) only at the supervisor is likely to fail in such a scenario. Therefore, practitioners and academicians need to examine both the supervisor and his/her subordinates to understand who is driving abusive supervision in the workplace and why. *Ninth*, our systematic review found that abusive supervision consistently correlates positively with destructive outcomes (e.g., CWB, deviant behaviours, etc.) and negatively with positive outcomes (e.g., creativity, job performance, etc.). Therefore, organizations need to train and sensitize supervisors not to abuse their subordinates. Also, selection and promotion policies need to be geared against abusive bosses.

Anonymous hotlines could help to expose abusive managers. Finally, organizations' top leadership needs to adopt a "zero-tolerance" policy on abusive supervision.

9 Conclusion

The systematic review presented herein revealed the enormous progress that the research on abusive supervision has made in the last 22 years. However, the "sustained" nature of abusive supervision and the perception-reality divide of abusive supervision scores are areas of key concern. We examined the pros and cons of the two widely used abusive supervision measures and suggested that scholars need to go beyond correlational studies. Finally, we reviewed and critiqued empirical findings that enabled us to map the nomological network of abusive supervision and suggest directions for future research. We hope that the findings of this paper will continue to push the horizons of abusive supervision research in the coming years.

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