

The Impact of Abusive Supervision on Organizational Cynicism with the mediating role of Perceived Organizational Politics

Maryam Malik*

NUST Business School,
NUST Islamabad, Pakistan
Maryammalik747@gmail.com
*Corresponding Author

Aziz Ahmed Chaudhary

Assistant Professor, Department of Management Sciences
SZABIST, Islamabad, Pakistan
azizahmadch@gmail.com

Hassaam Tazeem Peerzada

Independent Researcher
Hassaam786@hotmail.com

Waqas Ashraf

Independent Researcher
waqas2391@hotmail.com

Abstract

The main aim of conducting research on this topic is to examine the impact of abusive supervision on organizational cynicism with the mediating role of perceived organizational politics. For this, we propose that a positive relationship exists between abusive supervision and perceived organizational politics, and that perceived organizational politics is positively related with organizational cynicism. A sample of a total of 250 individuals is collected that are employed in different public sector organizations of Islamabad. The survey is conducted through questionnaires. Later on, the results are

analysed using (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) SPSS, and different tests like pilot testing, descriptive analysis, regression, and correlation are run upon the data. Two out of four hypotheses are accepted which indicate that abusive supervision has a direct impact on organizational cynicism, however, there is no sufficient evidence to support the mediating role of perceived organizational politics between the two variables.

Key words: Abusive Supervision; Perceived Organizational Politics; Organizational Cynicism

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Biographical notes: Maryam Malik is a student of NUST Business School Islamabad, currently pursuing an MBA degree. She received her BBA degree in Human Resource Management from SZABIST Islamabad. Her research areas are in the field of Human Resource Management.

Aziz Ahmed Chaudhry is an Assistant Professor of Management sciences at SZABIST, Islamabad campus, Pakistan. He received his MBA degree in Management from Western International University London (UK). His research and teaching interests are in the areas of Human resource management and development.

Hassaam Tazeem Peerzada is currently running his own business of automobiles and is a franchiser of CarFirst. Previously he has done bachelors in business administration from SZABIST Islamabad. His research interests are in the field of management.

Muhammad Waqas Ashraf is a visiting lecturer at Govt. College University, Faisalabad. He did his MBA in Business Administration and MS in general management. His research and teaching interests are in the areas of Human resource management and development.

1. Introduction

Walumbwa et al. (2008) state the fact that ‘leadership’ as a topic is recognized by all and holds quite an essential place in the literature of management and numerous studies have focused on studying the impact of the behavior of leaders on the work-related consequences. This has also been proven that the people in the position of leaders have the potential to become hostile (Tierney & Tepper, 2007). But still, most of the research has high lightened the constructive side of leadership (Tepper et al., 2017). In the current era, due to more awareness about the detrimental consequences of destructive leadership on employees, many researchers and practitioners have begun to work on it (Baranik et al., 2010). Abusive supervision is found to have lethal impacts on the people working in an institute and also on the institute itself (Tepper, 2007; Martinko et al., 2013; Mackey et al., 2015;) and the ramifications brought about by this dark supervision is more likely to give long life wounds than damaging a person physically (Harris et al., 2012). Irrespective of the growing interest and notable practical work being done on this topic since 2007, together with two reviews (Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2007) and a meta-analysis (Mackey et al., 2015), many questions of utmost importance have remained unanswered. In order to know more about the reactions of employees, when they are faced with abusive supervision, we want to instigate the impact of abusive supervision on organizational cynicism. Because when the subordinates find their leaders to be unethical, they are more prone get indulged in stress, depression and anxiety at their work due to which pessimistic attitudes like intention to quit, dissatisfaction with their job, no commitment and cynicism develop among them (Hoyt et al., 2013). Cynicism acts as self-defense for employees and a coping mechanism in order to deal with the hostile and unpleasant thoughts of disappointment that are emerged because of the unfriendly steps adopted by the employer company and supervisors (Reicherrs et al., 1997).

Bommer et al., (2005) state facts about organizational cynicism that damaging or immoral governance stands the greatest predictor of organizational cynicism. And, Cynicism is a critical response that may have intense repercussions for both the organization and individual itself (Naus et al., 2007) and also nowadays organizations are recognizing the need to study the impact of poor leadership and cynicism, as studies illustrate that cynical staff is most probable to spread negative word of mouth regarding their employer. In recent times, the dark side of leadership has gained much attention from researchers and practitioners. A

vast number of studies point towards a high correlation between vilifying supervision and organizational conduct (Mackey et al., 2017). Previous studies on this topic have discussed that harmful management has impacts on workplace deviance, Organizational silence, turnover intentions, and many other job outcomes (Lyu et al., 2018; Ai-Hua et al., 2018; Javed et al., 2019). However, this paper aims to gain more insight into the impact on organizational cynicism caused due to supervisors' abusive supervision, as not much work has been done on the negative consequence of abusive supervision. However, we select this topic because research on this specific topic is not vast and the research conducted in western regions is not applicable in the Pakistani context due to different cultures (Khan, 2014). Moreover, in Pakistan, abusive supervision used to be acceptable as everyone considered it as a part of their regular job but now it is the 21st century and every person is aware of his/her rights due to the media and therefore, is not willing to accept abuse at the hands of his/her supervisor.

1.1. Research Questions

2. Does Abusive Supervision have an impact on Organizational Cynicism?
3. Does Abusive Supervision have an impact on Perceived Organizational Politics?
4. Does Perceived Organizational Politics has an impact on Organizational Cynicism?
5. Is the relationship between Abusive Supervision and Organizational Cynicism mediated by Perceived Organizational Politics?

1.2. Research Objective

Our paper has the aim of checking out whether, in organizations where there is abusive supervision and organizational cynicism develop among the employees along with them developing a perception of politics in the organization.

2. Literature Review

As suggested by Zellars et al. (2002), employees who are subjected to vilifying supervision get the impression that they are no more in charge of their jobs and therefore start to perform low in their jobs and get involved in other activities to

feel like they have their freedom. If there is abusive supervision, it affects the employees, their level of satisfaction and commitment to the job and eventually their task performance reduce. If there exists micromanagement or disrespectful supervision in the organization, it affects the organization's citizenship negatively (Zellars et al., 2002; Tepper et al., 2004). According to the literature, for cynicism to grow, the employees' and organizational relationship must be unstable. Similarly, (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006), reflects that organizations offer less to their workers for the work they perform while expecting a greater outcome, because of which engagement of employees in cynicism increases. Because of this reason, when employees consider they are not being compensated at par with the work they do or their efforts are not rewarded just fully, they tend to be cynical about their organizations.

The Pakistani Public Sector's bureaucracy has been unsuccessful in delivering services and contributing to the well-being of a common man (Shafqat, 1999). This inefficiency of the public sector has unidentified reasons majorly because of the low rate of quality research in our country Pakistan. And (Aycan et al., 2000) describe that Pakistan is such an under-researched country. And this inefficiency can either be in the shape of lower performance by the organization, delayed service delivery, or the usual part played by the red tape found in the governance. Apart from this, Pakistan has been declared as having one of the most corrupt public sectors (Transparency International's Pakistan National Corruption Perception Survey, 2009). According to (Benet & Robinson, 2000) corruption and inefficiency can be labeled as key determinants of counter-productive work behaviors and as counter-productive work behavior is considerably related to cynicism, it can be thus stated that corruption and inefficiency both contribute to organizational cynicism.

Many previous pieces of research have taken into consideration reactance theory as the basis for studying the different reactions of employees when they are faced with abusive supervision (Zellars et al., 2002). About this theory, individuals tend to preserve their personal control (Brehm, 1989). This theory states that people have autonomy over their behaviors and this helps them to define their identity (Worchel, 2004). When they feel threatened over their freedom and autonomy, they react in different ways. On the other hand, the theory of conservation of resources states that individuals tend to struggle to obtain and uphold their resources so that they can get their aims set in their professional life

and get stressed out if these resources are threatened or lost (Hobfoll, 1989). When such incidents happen, individuals try to protect it to have control over their lives and to prevent more loss (Hobfoll, 2001).

2.1. Abusive Supervision and Organizational Cynicism

When individuals face derogatory and pejorative supervision in the organization, they develop a sense of inferiority and insult. (Wayne et al., 2008; Whitman et al., 2014; Zhang & Bednall, 2016) find out that when this process is continued, cynicism towards the organization is developed. Former research carried out in this area has found a constructive relationship between cynicism and abusive supervision. Later (Zellars et al., 2002; Qureshi & Sabir, 2018) state the fact that when employees feel aggressive behavior, they become frustrated, disappointed and insecure hence;

H1: There is a positive Impact of Abusive Supervision on Organizational Cynicism.

2.2. Abusive Supervision and Perceived Organizational Politics

When an employee is faced with abusive behavior at the hands of his supervisor, he/she feels that he/she is insulted, therefore he/she develops a sense of politics going on in the organization, and feels threatened about their emotional resources being lost. As the theory of conservation of resources states people attempt to protect and access their emotional resources like self-esteem and confidence. This theory also states, protecting resources is more important than accessing new ones (Ai-Hua et al., 2018). Some of the antecedents that have been identified by (Ma, 2005) include unavailable resources, no trust between people of the organization and the organization being autocratic and centralized. Apart from this, the perception of politics in the organization is researched by (Wu, 2001), who finds the behavior of the superintendent is a critical element to the perceived organizational politics. Some supervisors abuse their employees just in order to enhance their own personal power or in order to eliminate some outsider, in such cases, supervisory abuse also becomes a form of behavioral politics. Hence, when the subordinate is faced by behavioral abuse at the hands of his/her supervisor, his/her perception about politics going on in the organization also increases. Therefore;

H2: There is a positive impact of Abusive Supervision on Perceived Organizational Politics.

2.3. *Perceived Organizational Politics and Organizational Cynicism*

According to the conservation of resources theory, the sense of ongoing politics in the organization causes the employees to think that they are going to lose their resources like their self-esteem and in turn, they become insecure about their job and lose their emotional commitment to their job (Ai-Hua et al., 2018; Aslam & Shaikh, 2018). There are many relevant factors to cynicism like lack of chance, respect (Reichers et al., 1997), unjust organization (Berman, 1997), greater job expectations and skills required and lower available resources (Richardsen et al., 2006). Apart from this, a greater perception of politics in organizations can lead to the development of cynical behaviors and reactions amongst employees that results in the reduction of belief and expectations in the workplaces (Davis & Gardner, 2004). Therefore, it can be identified that;

H3: There is a positive impact of Perceived Organizational Politics on Organizational Cynicism

Based on the relationships described above, perceived organizational politics are related to abusive supervision and also too cynical behaviors that occur in the workplace. Hence, we can infer the mediating hypothesis that;

H4: The relationship between Abusive Supervision and Organizational Cynicism is mediated by Perceived Organizational Politics

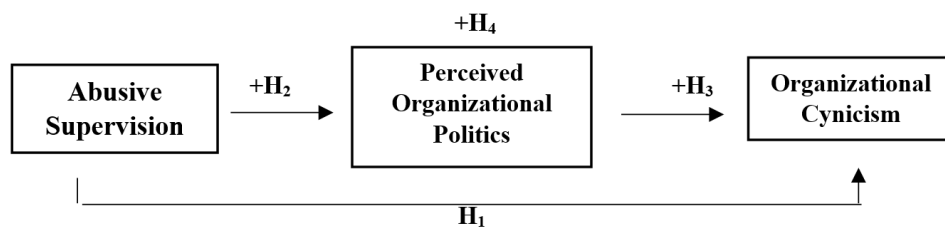


Figure-1: Relationship between variables

3. Data and Methodology

For this study, the individuals who are employed in public sector organizations of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan are taken as a population. The method of collecting cross-sectional data from the respondents is decided to be survey-based where questionnaires are to be distributed. The sample size taken is two hundred and fifty respondents, a total of two hundred and fifty questionnaires are distributed but the response rate is 93.7%. The sample is taken out from the population frame of different public sector organizations and a convenience sampling technique is used for this purpose. The sample comprises 168 male and 82 female employees. 36 % of respondents are aged between 31-39 years, 34.4 % are above 40 years and 29.6% are under 30 years of age bracket. The major portion of the sample respondents is earning below Rs. 40,000 (66.4% of the sample size). 22 % of respondents earn between Rs. 41,000 to Rs. 70,000, while the rest of the respondents earn above Rs. 70,000. The data collected through the use of questionnaires is tested using different tests like reliability, pilot testing, frequency distribution, descriptive analysis, kurtosis, regression and correlation. But we present only reliability test, descriptive, correlation and regression analysis. The data analysis software used for this study is SPSS 20. Likert Scale is used for questionnaires that have a range labeled as starting from strongly disagree to strongly agree on a scale of 1 to 5.

On the scale, strongly disagree is represented by label 1, label 2 represents disagree, neutral value is assigned to 3, agree is represented by 4, and 5 represents strongly agree. For measuring the Abusive Supervision variable, a scale developed by Tepper et al. (2000) is used having 15 items. Organizational Cynicism is measured by 15 items scale (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). While, Perceived Organizational Politics is appraised using 12 items scale developed by (Dean et al., 1998). Table 1 shows the Cronbach alphas of each variable.

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha (α)
Abusive Supervision	15	0.899
Perceived Organizational Politics	15	0.843
Organizational Cynicism	12	0.877

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

	M	S. D	Skewness	Kurtosis
Abusive Supervision	2.3357	.75127	.687	-.003
Perceived Organizational Politics	2.8117	.68638	.564	1.943
Organizational Cynicism	2.7353	.61060	.443	-.292

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

4. Results

The table-2 elucidates the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of the data collected. Skewness and kurtosis values show the data is non-normal. The mean and standard deviation value of Abusive Supervision is 2.3357 and .75127 respectively. The mean and standard deviation of Perceived Organizational Politics is 2.8117 and .68638 respectively, whereas the mean and standard deviation of Organizational Cynicism are 2.7353 and .61060 respectively.

Correlations			
	AS	POP	OC
AS	1		
POP	.296	1	
OC	.249**	.266**	1

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

Table 3: Correlation among variables understudy

This above-illustrated table-3 shows that abusive supervision has a positive association with perceived organizational politics with a magnitude value of (r = .066). The correlation between perceived organizational politics and organizational cynicism is also significant with a magnitude of (r = .266). The association between abusive supervision and organizational cynicism is found out to be positive with a magnitude value of (r = .249).

	HYPOTHESIS	BETA	T	ACCEPTED/REJECTED
H1	AS – OC	0.33	8.02	ACCEPTED
H2	AS – POP	0.43	4.23	ACCEPTED
H3	POP – OC	0.2	6.1	ACCEPTED
H4	-	-	-	ACCEPTED

Table 4: Regression Results

This table depicts the results of regression analysis, i.e.,

Hypothesis 1: H1: Abusive Supervision positively impacts Organizational Cynicism.

H1 is accepted due to the reason that the value of ‘t’ is significant shows that abusive supervision has a positive impact on organizational cynicism.

Hypothesis 2: H2: Abusive Supervision has a significant positive impact on Perceived Organizational Politics.

H2 is accepted as the numerical value of ‘t’ is significant that shows that abusive supervision has a positive impact on perceived organizational politics.

Hypothesis 3: H3: The impact of Perceived Organizational Politics on Organizational Cynicism is positive.

H3 is accepted as the value of ‘t’ is significant that shows that perceived organizational politics have a positive impact on organizational cynicism.

H4: The relationship of Abusive Supervision and Organizational Cynicism is mediated by Perceived Organizational Politics, is rejected.

	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Abusive Supervision on Organizational Cynicism	.2023	.0500	4.0464	.0001	.1038	.3007
Abusive Supervision on Organizational Politics	.1888	.0485	3.8921	.0001	.0932	.2843
Organizational Politics Organizational Cynicism	.0135	.0127	2.456	.0001	-.008	.0417

Table 5: Mediation Analysis

The H4 which illustrates that Perceived Organizational Politics acts as a mediator and mediates the association of Abusive Supervision and Organizational Cynicism, however, is rejected. By looking at the section 'indirect Effect of X on Y' of the above table of mediation analysis, it can be seen that the mediation proposed is also being rejected in it because both signs of LLCI and ULCI are different and the mediation occurring is only 1.35% of the overall influence of X on Y i.e., .2023 or 20.23% and the mediation occurring is near to zero.

5. Conclusion

This research is conducted to know about the views of people working in the public sector of Islamabad regarding what they think about their organizations when they get abusive supervisors instead of supportive ones. Many previous pieces of research conducted all over the different parts of the world showed that when individuals are faced with abusive supervision, they tend to alleviate this anger through different phenomena, one of these is cynicism. That they tend to think negatively about their organization. Less research had been conducted in Pakistan upon this relationship however, we tried to research on it using a mediator i.e. perceived organizational politics. We find out that indeed people when faced with abusive supervision become cynical about their organization but perceived organizational politics is not needed to build up this relationship as abusive supervision alone is enough to generate cynical feelings in the employees. Moreover, we did not take any moderator into consideration, if some moderator like power distance were used, the results might have been different.

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