A social dominance perspective of abusive supervision

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Abstract
In organizations today, abusive supervision holds significant importance for their overall performance. However, the antecedents of abusive supervision have not been empirically addressed by prior researches. This study aims to empirically illustrate and clarify how, why and when abusive behavior is displayed and sustained by the supervisors. Keeping status enhancement motive as a mediator, the status related social dominance orientation and its translation into abusive behavior has been discussed. This study overall tests the moderated mediated relationship between social dominance orientation, status enhancement motive and abusive behavior through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using a sample size of 208 doctors from public and private health care organizations. Snow ball sampling technique was employed for the said purpose. The results revealed that this mediated relationship is stronger when supervisors have low perceived internal respect, high positional instability and the organization has a mechanistic structure.

Keywords: Abusive supervision, Social dominance orientation, Status enhancement motive

Introduction

Background
Abusive supervision has been defined as an act whereby the leaders engage in displaying hostile non-verbal and verbal behavior without physical contact. Researchers suggest that there are negative consequences of the abusive leadership behavior. This includes aggression (Tepper, 2007), psychological distress (Tepper, 2000) reduced creativity (Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012) and bad family relationships (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). Compared to the abundant research on the consequences of abusive supervision, few studies have investigated the
antecedents of such abuse (Mawritz, Dust, & Resick, 2014; Mawritz, Folger, & Latham, 2014).

The abusive actions of the supervisors have been attributed to the mistreatment they have received by his own self, imitating the behavior of their own supervisors (Bushman, Bonacci, Pedersen, Vasquez, & Miller, 2005) and the high stress levels that they have to endure (Mawritz, Folger et al., 2014). These researches help us understand the antecedents and consequences of abusive supervision. However they do not provide reasons for the basis of the sustained behavior. The sustained behavioral pattern, is key to the definition of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), those who engage in such behavior must have some motivating reward for their persistence in the practice (Salin, 2003). This study as suggested by (Hu & Liu, 2017), explores the motivating factor behind the sustained abusive behavior.

Supervisory behavior is continuously destructive, such behavior may elicit negative job attitudes among the subordinates, thereby harming the organization's capacity to function. Hence, examining supervisors’ proactive motivations for abusive behavior may provide a guide for taking countermeasures and mitigating the detrimental consequences of such abuse (Hu & Liu, 2017). However this motivation has not been clearly described. Many researches such as that of strategic bullying, suggest status enhancement as a core factor impacting the abusive behavior (Shao, Resick, & Hargis, 2011), as also supported by (Hu & Liu, 2017).

**Problem statement:**
The desire for status as suggested by the Social Dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1992) invokes a social dominance orientation among the individuals, that may also be a consequence of the surrounding factors and interactions with other individuals (Martinko, etal., 2013). Hu and Liu (2017) and Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone and Henrich, (2013) suggest the stronger the motive to attain a certain status in an organization, the greater the abusive behavior helping them attain dominance over subordinates or other individuals. This study aims at providing empirical evidence by testing the proposed model. It is suggested that status enhancement motive mediates the relationship between the social dominance orientation and the abusive behavior, considering that mechanistic work structures strengthen the relation of status enhancement motive and abusive behavior.

**Research Questions:**
1. Does supervisor’s social dominance orientation play a role in engaging supervisor towards abusive supervision?
2. Does Status Dominance orientation of supervisor build a status enhancement motive?
3. How a supervisor’s status enhancement motive plays a role in creating abusive behaviour?
4. What is the role of mechanistic organizational structure in strengthening the relationship between status enhancement motive and abusive behaviour?
5. What impact does perceived internal respect have in strengthening the relationship between status dominance orientation and status enhancement motive.
6. How does positional instability strengthen the relationship between status dominance orientation and status enhancement motive?
Research Objectives:
1. To explore the antecedents of supervisor’s abusive behaviour in the Health care sector of Pakistan
2. To empirically investigate the role of supervisor’s social dominance orientation in his/her engagement towards abusive supervision.
3. To examine how perceived internal respect and positional instability contributes towards status enhancement motive and consequently abusive behavior.
4. To examine how organizations having a mechanistic structure contributes towards abusive supervision.

Significance:
This study aims to empirically test the conceptual model proposed by Hu and Liu (2017). Our study makes several contributions to the literature on abusive supervision. First, we identify a dispositional trait (SDO) and a motivational factor (status motive) as two crucial antecedents of abusive supervision. This focus on the factor of status helps to explain why supervisors might engage in abusive behavior in a sustained way, which is a question that has remained unanswered by previous studies. Second, our study addresses why and under what conditions abusive behavior serves to enhance status and defend power positions. This situational approach enriches the current research on the interactions between power and status as predictors of abusive behavior (Anicich, Fast, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2013; Georgesen & Harris, 2006; Williams, 2014). Third, our study extends the social learning model of abusive supervision by examining the organizational situations in which supervisors may view abusive behavior as an effective status-enhancing tactic (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Liu et al., 2012). Our research expands this understanding by including the factors of organizational structure and climate as sources of social influence. Finally, our study adds to the leadership literature by providing a more nuanced study of the dark side of leadership. Destructive leadership is an integral aspect of overall leadership behavior (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010). Our research on the antecedents of abusive supervision contributes to a better understanding of the nature and development of leadership behavior in general.

Literature Review

Social Dominance orientation and Status enhancement motive in relation to abusive supervision:
Leaders, when practice and sustain hostile behavior with their subordinates, it translates as abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000). Abusive actions have dire consequences due to which many researchers are interested in knowing the underlying factors that cause a leader to take up abusive actions. It is said that supervisors who have to achieve extremely difficult goals tilt more towards anger and frustration ultimately directing the abusive behavior towards their subordinates (Mawritz et al., 2014). Many of the studies such as Liu et al., (2012) and Dust et al., (2014) have augmented the concept of abusive supervision, however have absence of
conceptualization as to why the leaders sustain such behavior. Prior studies have implicitly explored the motivational predictors of abusive supervision. For example, supervisors may abuse others as a tactic to convey an authoritative image and influence their subordinates (Ferris et al., 2007; Harms, Roberts, & Wood, 2007; Shao et al., 2011; Tepper et al., 2012). High status can help a supervisor to attain influence and to justify his/her position of power (Cheng et al., 2013; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005).

Most importantly Liu & Hu, (2017) derived through examining almost all the studies available on abusive supervision that it is derived from the supervisor’s desire for status. However, the researchers have only qualitatively assessed the antecedents of abusive behavior and have left space for empirical analysis. Since desire is a basic human motive (Anderson et al., 2015) that is impacted by several traits (Tan & Tan, 2008) it is imperative to understand the dispositional trait that enhances the motivation to achieve and sustain status resulting in abusive behavior.

Research done on social dominance theory and it components reflects its strong relation with abusive behavior. The Social Dominance Theory (SDO) refers to a dispositional trait relates to the desire for hierarchical levels between various social and formal groups (Pratto et al., 1994). Three reasons as cited by researchers reflect the enactment of abusive supervision. A strong desire to maximize their power while neglecting ethical concerns (Zanna, & McBride, 2007). Maintaining power through aggression and intimidation as reflected through the SDO is used to degrade the subordinates to keep their power position intact (Maner & Mead, 2010) therefore, abusive behavior is likely to occur among high SDO supervisors.

Secondly, SDO reflects how individuals who seek superiority tend to promote social inequality, social dominance of one group over the other (Shao et al., 2011). Hence drawing that individuals who are high in social dominance orientation tend to promote social dominance and consider that subordinates must display obedient behavior at workplace and to supervisors (Tsuui et al., 2004). Belief in the superiority and dominance often results in using abusive means to ensure obedient behavior, becoming more competent rather than welfare oriented (Duckitt, 2006). Previous studies have suggested that initiators of workplace aggression are characterized by competitiveness and impatience (Beugre, 2005; Hershcovis, 2011). Therefore, we expect that supervisors who are high in SDO may be more likely to abuse their subordinates, due to their more competitive and less sympathetic traits.

Individuals that show High Social Dominance Orientation and possess a strong desire to maintain superior status are motivated to enhance their desire for status, commonly known as “the relative degree to which an individual receives relatively unchallenged deference, influence, social attention, and access to valued resources” (Cheng et al., 2013: 106). Social psychology researches have shown high status individuals to be more competent than those with low status making it an essential element for maintaining superiority and dominance (Johnson etal., 2012). A higher level of SDO reflects greater motivation to enhance this acquired status (Halabi, Dovidio, & Nadler, 2008).
The motive for enhancement of the status has been considered as a firm predictor of abusive behavior (Hu & Liu, 2017). Tepper et al. (2012) also proposed that abusive supervision is a tactic that supervisors use to assert control over uncooperative players in their social environment. All of these findings indicate that abusive behavior can enhance status, and that the motive to enhance status could be an underlying reason why supervisors abuse their subordinates.

The discussion as presented by most of the researchers builds upon the idea that supervisors that are high in SDO possess enhanced motivation to increase status superiority in their social hierarchy. Abusive behavior can also be seen as a way to portray an authoritative image of the leader. Hence, Hu and Liu (2017) proposed that a status-enhancement motive is the psychological mechanism that drives high SDO supervisors to abuse their subordinates in a sustained way. That is, the relationship between SDO and abusive supervision is indirect, and it operates through the supervisor's motive for status enhancement.

**Mechanistic organizational structure:**
The abusive behavior may not be executed or may not prevail unless the conditions to do so are supportive. In many organizations, since abusive behavior is punishable, leaders do not execute such behavior rather than believe in building respect among the subordinates (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). However, in organizations that do not condemn abusive behavior by the leaders, infact does support the desired outcomes even if abuse is associated with its outcome process, supervisors have a greater tendency to do so (Johns & Menzel, 1999). An organization however, comprises of various organization structures that define the hierarchical levels along with the span of control and authority, of which bureaucratic structures strengthen the prevalence of bullying behavior (Diamond & Allcorn, 1985). Institutionalized bullying often exists in military or paramilitary organizations that are characterized by a highly mechanistic structures and power imbalance (Hoel & Cooper, 2001). Aryee et al. (2008) also noted that a mechanistic structure provides a facilitative context for abusive supervision. Building on the above-described studies, we expect that organizations with a mechanistic structure are more conducive to abusive supervision. A mechanistic structure is characterized by “the centralization of authority and control, close supervision, extensive task specialization and standardization, vertical lines of communication and strict adherence to rules and procedures” (Aryee et al., 2008: 397). Managers in a mechanistic structure commonly sense that by looking tough they can convey an image of high leadership competence. As a result, organizations with such structures tend to legitimize abusive supervision as a means of expressing the dominance and status of leaders. Thus, supervisors with a status-enhancement motive are more likely to abuse their subordinates in organizations with a mechanistic structure.

Organizational culture also plays a vital role in shaping the behavior of the employees, in particular abusive behavior. Organizational culture is defined as the shared values, beliefs, systems, policies and procedures that guide the behavior of individuals at the workplace (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009). The organizational culture also provides major benchmarks for appropriate and accepted behavior. Hu and Liu (2017), have suggested to examine abusive behavior from the organizational climate perspective. Mawritz etal., suggest that if aggression
is supported by the organizational culture a climate of hostility, antagonism and consistent acrimony starts prevailing. In turn, the hostile climate breeds abusive behavior of the supervisors (Dust et al., 2014). Researchers such as Tepper (2006) have also supported that a hostile climate is an antecedent to the abusive supervision.

Hu and Liu (2017) suggest that in a climate that is hostile, supervisors who depict abusive behaviour reflect the need for a higher status. Hence, in a hostile climate supervisors with status enhancement motives will display abusive behaviour frequently. Hostile climate on the whole reinforces the strong bond between status enhancement motive and abusive supervision. The study of prior empirical research hence signifies that mechanistic structures and hostile climate augment the relationship of status enhancement motive and abusive supervision. Edwards and Lambert, (2007) have also advocated that such organizational components amplify the mediation of status enhancement motive between SDO and abusive behaviour.

Positional Instability and Perceived Internal Respect:
Status enhancement is based on motivation when supervisors believe that his or her power is under threat as status is the underlying factor for maintain power (Williams, 2014). If the supervisor perceives danger to his power base, he tends to amplify the status enhancement motive and consequently show aggression (Fast, Halevy & Galinsky, 2012). Their research also revealed that supervisors respond to the power threats by aggressive and abusive behavior towards their subordinates to maintain their power (Anicich et al., 2013).

In view of the interface between power and status in triggering antagonism, it would be hypothetically substantial to examine how threats to power moderate the indirect link between SDO and abusive supervision, via a status-enhancement motive as suggested by Hu and Liu (2017). According to extant research, there are two foremost causes of threats to power in this setting: positional instability and supervisor-perceived low internal respect (Ali Al-Atwi & Bakir, 2014; Williams, 2014).

Positional instability denotes an organizational environment where in case of supervisors not performing up to the mark would be replace by the subordinates (Georgesen & Harris, 2006).

Supervisors that tend to face instability may act aggressively to secure their positions even at the cost of subduing the subordinates (Maner & Mead, 2010) and by showing abusive behavior towards them (John & Monica, 2006). Affirming status entails the advantage of upholding power, and this advantage is especially prized by high SDO supervisors. When supervisors recognise that their power positions are unstable, those with high SDO have a stronger impetus to augment their status and legitimize their positions (Hu & Liu, 2017).

Alternatively threat to power arises when supervisors perceive that they have been disrespected by their juniors. Perceived internal respect is defined as an individual’s self-perception of his or her image in front of others (Ali Al-Atwi & Bakir, 2014). When persons evaluate their status to be relatively low, they are likely to feel threatened, because they believe that others have negative intentions toward them (Lount & Pettit, 2012). This threat is also felt by individuals who have high SDO and low perceived internal respect.
Therefore, high SDO supervisors who have low perceived internal respect commonly feel that their positions are threatened (Williams, 2014). Therefore, they constantly monitor their status in the hierarchy, and work to defend it (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). Low-status supervisors may be more sensitive concerning their status in the organization, and hence they have a greater motive for status enhancement. When exposed to both high positional instability and low perceived internal respect, supervisors who are high in SDO are deeply concerned with retaining their power positions (Georgesen & Harris, 2006) and with fulfilling expectations for their supervisory roles (Fast & Chen, 2009).

Based on the arguments given above, we believe that under power threats induced by high positional instability or low perceived internal respect, supervisors who are high in SDO tend to have stronger motives for status enhancement, which in turn can lead to abusive supervision. The relationship of these factors involves a first-stage moderated mediation (Edwards & Lambert, 2007).

**Hypothesis**

H1: The higher a supervisor's SDO, the more likely he or she is to engage in abusive supervision.

H 2: A supervisor's status-enhancement motive mediates the relationship between SDO and abusive supervision.

H3a: By augmenting the positive link between SDO and the status enhancement motive, positional instability moderates the indirect relationship between SDO and abusive supervision via the status-enhancement motive, such that the indirect relationship is stronger at a higher rather than a lower level of positional instability.

H 3b: By augmenting the positive link between SDO and the status enhancement motive, supervisor self-perceived internal respect moderates the indirect relationship between SDO and abusive supervision via the status-enhancement motive, such that the indirect relationship is stronger at a lower rather than a higher level of supervisor self-perceived internal respect.

H 4a. By augmenting the positive link between the status enhancement motive and abusive supervision, a mechanistic organizational structure moderates the indirect relationship between SDO and abusive supervision via the status-enhancement motive, such that the indirect relationship is stronger when the organizational structure is more mechanistic.

**Theoretical Framework**
Methodology
The given study was conducted using a positivistic research paradigm. The study is descriptive in nature using hypotheses testing model. The time horizon is cross-sectional and the study was carried out in non-contrived settings. The target population estimate was Doctors from prominent public and private Health care organizations located in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Using the tables provided by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) as cited by Sekaran & Bougie (2013), a sample size of 210 Doctors was estimated.

Procedures and Instruments
The data was collected by administering standard questionnaires for each of the involved variable. The questionnaire on Social dominance was adopted from SDO Scale by Pratto, et al., (1994) and 4 items of status enhancement motive were adopted from the work of Goldberg et al. (2010). Similarly for measuring abusive supervision as well as positional instability instrument was adapted from the scale of BPAQ (Buss & Perry, 1992). Adding more, scale developed by Eisenberger et al (1996) has been adapted to measure perceived internal respect. Last but not the least mechanistic structure has been measured by adapting the scale developed by Khandwalla, P. N., (1977).

A pilot study questionnaire with 40 respondents was also administered in two health care organizations included in the population to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. After obtaining the satisfactory feedback from the pilot study results, a total of 405 questionnaires were distributed using snowball sampling technique. A total of 214 questionnaires were received back from the same channel after one month indicating a response rate of 52.8%. Out of these 6 questionnaires were discarded being in non usable form. Therefore, 208 questionnaires were used as per the requisite sample size.

Data Treatment
The data analysis was carried out using the software of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 as well as AMOS 24. The tests applied through SPSS included Pearson Correlation, while AMOS has been used for Structural Equation Modelling i.e. for analysis of covariance and confirmatory factor analysis. The data analysis along with the results of the study are in the ensuing section.

Results and Analysis
The results generated on SPSS 21 revealed the following information for a total of 208 respondents

Reliability analysis
The Chronbach’s α value has been found to be .79 for social dominance; .82 for status enhancement motive; .77 for abusive supervision; .86 for positional instability; .92 for perceived internal respect and .84 for mechanistic structure. Since these levels are greater than .70, so they reflect that the scales used for data collection in this particular study are reliable in assessing the desired variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.4423</td>
<td>.49786</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>2.7740</td>
<td>.65342</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 35 yrs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 – 45 yrs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above 45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>2.6490</td>
<td>.47842</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 10 yrs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 15 yrs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanistic structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Respect</td>
<td>-.813**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Enhancement</td>
<td>.478**</td>
<td>-.398**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positional instability</td>
<td>.746**</td>
<td>-.702**</td>
<td>.604**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The correlation matrix shows that the correlations are positively significant at the 0.01 level for mechanistic structure, positional instability, social dominance, status enhancement and abusive supervision. However the correlation of perceived internal respect shows a significantly negative correlation with the other variables as lesser the perceived internal respect more the supervisor would want to enhance their status and hence use the abusive behaviour.

The results of this moderated mediation study are given in the table below.

Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Status Enhancement ← Social Dominance</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>C.R</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status Enhancement ← Per Int Respect</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>7.461</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status Enhancement ← SD*PR</td>
<td>-0.87</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>-4.724</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Status Enhancement ← Social Dominance</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>C.R</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status Enhancement ← Positional Inst</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>6.482</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status Enhancement ← SD*PI</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>5.634</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Abusive Supervision ← Status Enh</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>C.R</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status Enhancement ← Mech Structure</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>6.451</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status Enhancement ← SE*MS</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>4.564</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
The results in the table above reflect that in Model 1 there is a significant partial moderation of perceived internal respect on the relationship between Social dominance and status enhancement motive at significance p < .01 level since the hypothesis for the main effect is still significant after the moderator enters the model. However, the regression coefficient of product term (SD*PR) on Status enhancement motive is negative, which specifies that the moderating variable perceived internal respect weakens the causal effects of social dominance on status enhancement motive.

Similarly in Model 2, positional instability also partially moderate the relationship between social dominance and status enhancement motive at p < .01 significance level. While for the third moderator, that is mechanistic structure, partial moderation exists between the relationship of status enhancement motive and abusive supervision at p < .01 significance level. Adding more to it results above also reflect that partial mediation of status enhancement motive exists at p-value at .000 < .01 level of significance among the relationship of social dominance and abusive supervision. In short, results significantly support all the hypothesis of the study.

The table below further show the SEM analysis of the study using AMOS.

**Table 4:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 Values</th>
<th>Model 2 Values</th>
<th>Model 3 Values</th>
<th>Model 4 Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>181.363</td>
<td>73.575</td>
<td>104.520</td>
<td>121.321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFI</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td>1.830</td>
<td>0.988</td>
<td>0.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGFI</td>
<td>0.956</td>
<td>1.688</td>
<td>0.957</td>
<td>0.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFI</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>0.985</td>
<td>0.971</td>
<td>0.9834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all the given models of the study GFI, AGFI, CFI AND RMSEA values are shown in the Table 4 above. For all the given models of the study GFI i.e. Goodness of Fit Index and AGFI that stands for Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index resultant values are found to be significant since all the values are ≥ .95 (Schreiber, et al., 2006). Similarly CFI i.e. Comparative fit index is also found to be significant since the value of this index is ≥ .95 (Schreiber, et al., 2006) for each model of the study. Adding more to it Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) values are also significant for all the models and all the values of different models are found to be <.08(Schreiber, et al., 2006).
Discussion and conclusion
Abusive supervision has a detrimental impact on the workplace environment, however studies till date have not been able to address the underlying antecedents and facilitators of this phenomenon. The proactive motivations of abusive supervision arising from status enhancement motive behind it have been discussed by Hu and Liu (2017). Our study aims to empirically investigate the propositions put forth by Hu and Liu (2017). The factors of positional instability, perceived internal respect are said to have moderated the relationship between social dominance orientation and status enhancement motive while mechanistic structure is seen to moderate the relationship between status enhancement motive and abusive supervision. As the results reveal the answers to the proposed hypotheses, status enhancement positively mediates the relationship of social dominance and abusive supervision.

The empirical investigation of the framework contributes to the existing literature by providing facts through quantitative analysis. Many of the prior studies conducted have taken abuse as a predecessor to the social dominance (Liu et al., 2012; Mawritz, Dust et al., 2014; Mawritz, Folger et al., 2014) ignoring relative factors such as status enhancement as a main drive and motive behind the abuse. The failure to contemplate this motive may upshot from an intuitive assumption that supervisors don’t have a need to enhance their status considering their positions and resources in the organization. Our research augments the understanding of why supervisors perform continuous abuse toward their subordinates. Identifying SDO as a precursor extends the array of dispositional traits that may lead to abusive supervision.

Second, the examination of SDO and the status-enhancement motive as antecedents of abusive supervision can supplement current research on the interactions between power and status. Our research clarifies that in situations of a potential power threat, high SDO supervisors are strongly driven to increase their status as a means of legitimizing their positions. Abusive supervision could be an effective status-enhancing approach, specifically in a mechanistic organizational structure.

Third, we extend a social learning model of abusive supervision by looking at organizational conditions in which supervisors make deliberate use of abusive behavior to attain specific motives. The existing research has primarily examined the role-modeling influence of a direct leader's abusive supervision, and this influence has been taken as proof that such behavior is socially learned (Liu et al., 2012). Extending the findings of prior research, our study suggests that organizational structure is the core related determinant of aggressive behavior in work organizations (Sperry, 1998), and that these circumstances can serve as unconventional sources of social learning in regard to abusive supervision. The results have revealed that a mechanistic organizational structure that emphasizes dominance and conventionality serves to justify abusive behavior as an effective means for enhancing status. A hostile climate provides a social norm that encourages abusive supervision and reinforces its perceived legitimacy in a mechanistic organizational structure. This line of thought can address the research proposal made by Tepper et al. (2012) that the circumstances leading to abusive supervision need to be further explored.
Limitations and Future area of research
The study is comprehensive and aims at empirical examination of the antecedents of abusive behavior, although the study contributes to the existing literature yet limitations do exist. It is to note that the hypothetical framework only caters to the leader’s own individual predictors rather than the perception of the subordinate as well. The scales selected have been tested upon individuals who are the leadership supervisory role. Other environmental and organizational cultural factors such as power distance, motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic reward systems can also be incorporated in future studies. Future studies may also incorporate the sub dimensions of abusive behavior such as verbal, mental or physical abuse as to investigate in detail. Also, a longitudinal framework to assess the behavior of the supervisor over time must be essential for future studies that may show abuse evolving over time due to changing dynamics and circumstances.

References


