



ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABUSIVE SUPERVISION BEHAVIOR AND TURNOVER INTENTION: THE ROLE OF OBSERVERS OF ABUSE AND COWORKER SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the theory of deontic justice, this study examines the effect of abusive supervision behavior on turnover intention through the mediating role of observers of abuse and coworker support as a moderator. The study collected 379 valid responses from frontline employees in Ghana's hospitality sector. Hierarchical regression analysis was employed to validate the developed hypotheses. The findings show that abusive supervision behavior positively influences turnover intention. Also, observers of abuse partially mediated abusive supervision behavior and turnover intention relationship. Furthermore, coworker support negatively moderated the relationship between observers of abuse and turnover intention. This finding is indicative that the fear and anxiety abusive supervisors propagate lessen coworkers' support. The theoretical and practical contributions are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Deontic justice, Abusive supervisor behavior, Turnover Intention, observers of abuse, coworker support.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been an uptick in studies concentrating on destructive leadership, such as abusive supervision behavior (ABS) and workplace bullying (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). This is worrisome for organizations since abusive supervision behavior is a prominent predictor of employee turnover (Waldman, Kelly, Aurora, & Smith, 2004), which leads to high costs; hence, the unintended implications for both the organization and the individual are adversely affected in a variety of ways (Rahman & Nas, 2013). The permanent movement of an employee beyond the organization is referred to as employee turnover. However, once an individual is perceived to be secure and safe, devoid of supervisor's abuse, performance becomes desirous. To understand the ramifications surrounding the upsurge of turnover in contemporary organizations, abusive supervision and its effect on the victim's observers of abuse (OA) must not be entertained and be unattractive in modern-day organizations.

It is worth noting that an irritating supervisor's behavior can affect both the victims and the OA. In this study, OA is defined as coworkers of the abusive supervision victim who observed abusive incidents. Naime (2017) opines that there are more OA than victims. Also, a study by Tomazin (2006) revealed that 40% of studied participants observed someone else being abused (i.e., OA). Therefore, OA is more likely to respond unfavorably to coworker's mistreatment (O'Reilly, Aquino, & Skarlicki, 2016; Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). Understanding their relationships with the supervisor and the coworker and how they influence turnover is crucial. Tews, Michel, and Ellingson (2013) observe that coworker support (CS) is the functional support provided to employees via their social system at work. It has been demonstrated by Tews, Michel, and Allen (2014) that coworker socializing and fun in the workplace reduces employee turnover. To address the gaps above, this study relied on third-party deontic justice (O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011; Zhu, Martens, & Aquino, 2012) to investigate whether ABS leads to TI. Also, to test the moderating impact of CS on the relationship between OA and TI.



2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Abusive Supervision Behavior and Turnover Intention

Abusive supervision is prevalent in the hospitality industry (Hight, Gajjar, & Okumus, 2019). Indeed, the industry is classified as one of the top five with the most abusive supervision (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013). A manager's rudeness, coercion, concealing vital information, claiming credit for a subordinate's success, and openly criticizing subordinates are all addressed as abusive supervision (Haar, de Fluiter, & Brougham, 2016). Subordinates who do not believe their supervisors care about them are less likely to feel obligated to stay with the organization, which leads to higher turnover intentions. Consequently, a high turnover rate leads to workforce shortages (Wen, Zhou, Hu, & Zhang, 2020) and mars service quality [cf. (Berry & Parasuraman, 1992)]. Available literature models provide rational support for the assumption that growing levels of abusive supervision behavior will induce employees to have the intention to leave the organization, as well as empirical evidence to back up this claim (Hussain, Abbas, Gulzar, Jibril, & Hussain, 2020). According to a recent meta-analysis, abusive supervision and turnover intentions are linked. Additionally, Schyns and Schilling (2013), for example, discovered the association between them with a strong effect. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: ASB is positively related to TI.

2.2 Mediating Role of OA

Abusive supervision behavior, a supervisor's continuous manifestation of verbal or nonverbal hostility towards employees (Tepper, 2000), undermines followers' wellbeing and negatively impacts their performance. However, little is relatively known about how OA reacts to abusive supervision behavior (Mitchell, Vogel, & Folger, 2015). Observing abusive supervision is likely to provoke a range of emotions, including fear and anxiety, as OA may fear becoming victims as well (Peng, Schaubroeck, & Li, 2014). Such emotions are self-centered, and they may motivate OA to indulge in self-protective behaviors in the future to avoid abusive supervision behaviors. Moreover, Ambrose and Ganegoda (2020) assess that employees who disagree with supervisors' abusive behaviors tend to seek revenge on supervisors and the organization because supervisors represent the organization. Although studies that show the influence of OA on TI are not flooded in the literature, earlier studies in non-hospitality settings show that OA can elicit anger. Indeed, a growing body of research linking abusive supervision to a variety of poor subordinate outcomes, such as greater turnover intentions, has been found in the literature. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: ASB negatively influences OA.

Hypothesis 3: OA positively influences TI.

Hypothesis 4: OA mediates the relationship between ASB and TI.

2.3 Moderating role of CS

Research has shown varied results when exploring the impact of CS on TI (Mossholder, Settoon, & Henagan, 2005). Employees benefit from CS because it helps them address job-related issues and minimizes customer-related social stressors and burnout (Shin, Hur, & Choi, 2020). However, not all coworkers are the same; for instance, OA of ABS might not help victims if they think victims do not deserve justice. Indeed, OA attitudes toward the victims serve as a necessary "starting point or anchor of their assessment and reaction to the target's encounter" (Blader, Wiesenfeld, Fortin, & Wheeler-Smith, 2013). In particular, CS, which represents the degree to which one's coworkers are helpful, can be depended on in times of need, and are open to receptive work-related issues, can be especially relevant because it represents an essential aspect of good working conditions for employees (Park & Min, 2020). Although CS has been shown to reduce the likelihood of turnover, abused coworkers are less likely to be helpful or share knowledge (Zhao & Guo, 2019). As a result, OA has terrible consequences and constitutes a failure of instrumental justice. Furthermore, supportive coworkers close to the OA become enraged when they see a close coworker being mistreated because it violates relational justice (Priesemuth & Schminke, 2019). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5: CS moderates the relationship between OA and TI.

The relationship among the variables is modeled in Figure 1.

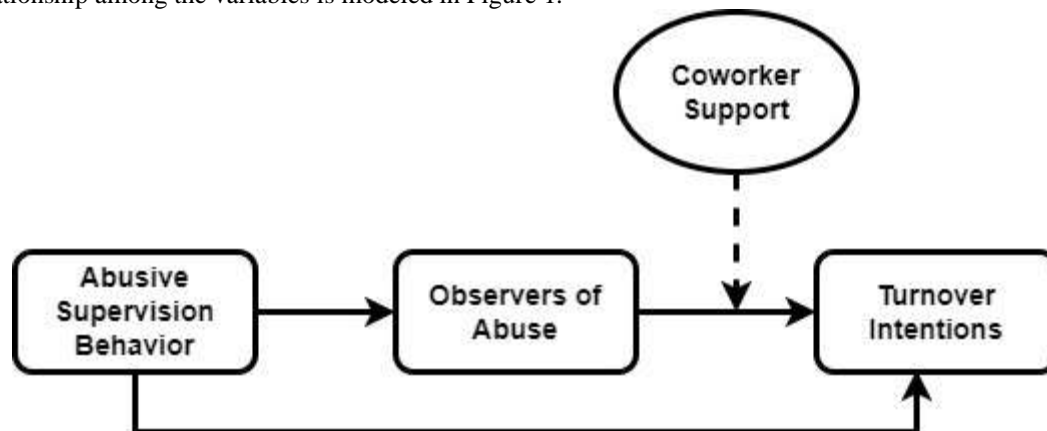


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study.

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Sample and procedure

Participants were 379 frontline workers of Ghanaian hospitality, with 240 (63.32%) males and 139 (36.68%) females. The study also showed that respondents age ranges from 18-29(52.78), 30-40 (31.66), and 41-50 (15.56). Length of service of respondents also showed that 91 (24%) had worked for more than 12 years, 69 (18.217%) had worked from 9 to 12 years, 64 (16.89%) had worked from 4 to 8 years, and 155 (40.9%) had worked for 3 years or less.

3.2 Measures

All constructs were measured using established measurements on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”).

Abusive Supervisor Behavior: The construct was measured with a 5-shortened-item version of the scale proposed by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007). Samples of the scale are “my supervisor tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid.” *Coworker support:* This construct was measured with four items adopted from Mossholder et al. (2005) with a sample of “My coworkers really care about my wellbeing.”

Turnover Intention: The TI was measured by applying the three-item scale developed by (Singh, Verbeke, & Rhoads, 1996) with a sample item such as “I often think about quitting.” This scale is prevalent in several studies, confirming its reliability and validity (Obeng, Zhu, Quansah, Ntarmah, & Cobbinah, 2021).

Observers Abuse: The abusive supervision scale developed by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) was applied in measuring OA in this study. However, we shifted the reference from “me”/ “my” to “my coworker”/ “his or her” during the measuring. A sample of the scale is “My supervisor told my coworker his or her thoughts or feelings were stupid.”

3.3 Data analysis

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 and Analysis of Moment Structure (Amos) version 21 software was used for data analysis. The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed using SPSS and Amos to validate the data’s goodness of fit using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Amos Plugin, developed by Gaskin and Lim (2016), was used to evaluate the construct validity of the variables.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Statistical Analysis

A comparative fit index (CFI) of CFI = 0.95 or higher and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.06 or below are preferable (Gaskin & Lim, 2016). Regarding the CFA factor loading results in Table 1, standardized beta



values were greater than 0.60 and were significant at a 95% confidence interval. Moreover, the overall model for the measures recorded CFA values of $X^2 = 135.425$, $X^2/df = 1.198$, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.961, SRMR = 0.028, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.023, Tucker–Lewis Fit Index (TLI) = 0.994, CFI = 0.995 demonstrating that the model fits the data adequately. Regarding the reliability analysis, each measure had a construct reliability coefficient ranging from 0.869 to 0.952, indicating high internal consistency. The AVE for each variable varied from 0.578 to 0.798, indicating good convergent validity. The discriminant validity values along the diagonal line (in bold) of the correlation matrix (Table 2) were also greater than the inter-factor correlation coefficient values; thus, the variables were distinct.

Table 1 CFA Factor loadings

Construct	Indicators	β	CFI	SRMR	α	CR	AVE
Abusive Supervisor Behavior(ASB)	ASB1	0.853	.998	0.017	0.869	0.872	0.578
	ASB3	0.807					
	ASB5	0.735					
	ASB2	0.694					
	ASB4	0.7					
Observers of Abuse (OA)	OA5	0.914	0.995	0.012	0.952	0.952	0.798
	OA4	0.904					
	OA2	0.894					
	OA3	0.877					
	OA1	0.876					
Coworker Support (CS)	CS2	0.854	0.983	0.019	0.881	0.881	0.65
	CS3	0.818					
	CS1	0.793					
	CS4	0.758					
Turnover Intention(TI)	TI1	0.869	.994	0.018	0.878	0.879	0.707
	TI2	0.863					
	TI3	0.788					

Note. α = Cronbach alpha; β = standardized estimate. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

4.3 Means, standard deviation, and correlation analysis

The means, standard deviation, and inter-factor correlation analysis of all the measures are presented in Table 2. The correlation analysis results indicate that ASB significantly correlated with TI and OA, thus suggesting some initial support for Hypothesis 1 and 2. Moreover, OA positively correlates with turnover intention, suggesting some preliminary support for Hypothesis 3.

Table 2 Means, standard deviation, discriminant validity, and inter-factor correlation analysis

Construct	Mean	SD	Gender	Age	Service Length	OA	CS	TI	ASB
1 Gender	1.46	.499	-						
2 Age	1.96	.331	0.024	-					
3 Service length	2.39	.804	0.002	-0.055	-				
4 OA	2.7631	1.18291	0.046	-0.094	-.113*	0.893			
5 CS	3.4967	1.16673	0.099	-0.084	0.032	.127*	0.806		
6 TI	3.54	1.16853	0.068	-0.008	-0.004	.148**	.218**	0.841	
7 ASB	3.5256	1.0033	-.116*	-0.072	-.098	.228**	.276**	.342**	0.76

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; Discriminant validity values are reported in Bold. Abbreviations: SD= Standard Deviation.

4.4 Hypotheses testing

4.4.1 Testing the main effect and mediating effect of OA.

The results in Model 2 in Table 3 show that ASB positively and significantly affected turnover intention. Thus, H1 was supported. The results in Table 3 Model 3 also showed that ASB positively and significantly affected OA. Hence, H2 was supported.



Moreover, Table 3 demonstrated that when OA was treated as an independent variable in Model 4, the results showed that OA predicted the TI positively and significantly. Therefore, H3 was supported. Furthermore, based on Model 5 in Table 3, TI was regressed on ASB and OA. The results proved that ASB exerted a statistically significant influence on TI. However, OA still had a positive and significant influence on TI. Hence, OA partially mediated the relationship between ASB and TI. Thus, H4 was supported.

Table 3. The Mediating Effect of OA

Variables	TI		OA	TI	
	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β	Model 4 β	Model 5 β
Constant	3.390***	1.465**	2.524***	2.850***	1.286*
Gender	.159	.532	.175	.142	.242
Age	-.033	.061	-.304	.019	.083
Service length	-.007	.046	-.141	.018	.056
ASB		.418***	.260***		.399***
OA				.145**	.128**
R ²	.005	.130	.072	.026	.135
Δ R ²	.005	.125	.047	.021	.130
F	2.591	18.940***	27.305***	31.474*	19.593***

Notes: β = Unstandardized beta coefficient, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

4.4.2 Testing the moderating effect of CS.

In Table 4, the findings estimated in Model 2, after being centralized, showed that OA still exerted a positive and significant influence on TI. This provides further support for H3. In Model 3 in Table 4, the OA and CS positively and significantly impacted TI. The interaction of OA and CS was negatively significant based on the estimation in Model 3. These outcomes indicate that CS moderated the positive relationship between OA and TI. Hence, H5 was supported, as indicated in Figure 2.

Table 4. The Moderating Effect of CS

Variables	TI		
	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β
Constant	3.390***	2.208***	2.308***
Gender	.159	.098	.073
Age	-.033	.071	.052
Service length	-.007	.074	-.005
Observe of Abuse		.121**	.132**
CS		.200***	.195***
OAX CS			-.117*
R ²	.005	.064	.070
Δ R ²	.005	.060	.006
F	3.591	29.140***	26.687***

Notes: β = Unstandardized beta coefficient, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

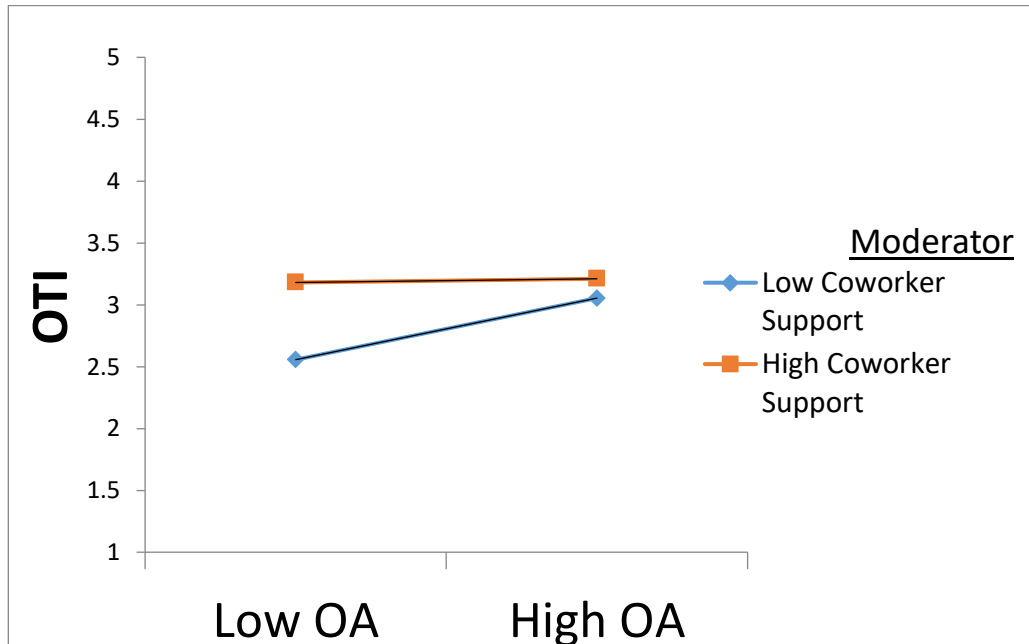


Figure 2: A graph of the moderating impact of CS on the relationship between employee OA and TI.

5.0 DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate ASB effects on TI directly through third-party OA as a mediator. Furthermore, this study assessed the moderating impact of CS on the relationship between third-party OA and Turnover Intention. The findings from hierarchical regression analysis delivered evidence for the hypothesized relationships. Even though there have been few investigations on third-party OA in Ghana, the current research provides a wealth of enthusiasm for ASB and TI.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Theoretically, this study significantly impacts hospitality leadership research and abusive supervision research. Firstly, this study investigated employees' reactions to observers of abusive supervision of their coworkers in the hospitality industry. Our findings complement earlier research on the impact of abusive supervision behavior on victims (e.g., Lyu et al., 2016; Park & Kim, 2019; Zhao & Guo, 2019) by indicating how the effects of abusive supervision behavior affect third-party OA. Our study revealed that OA increased turnover intentions, whereas it impaired OA's well-being and relationships with supervisors. Hence, OA perceives there is failure of deontic justice (Mitchell et al., 2015; Priesemuth & Schminke, 2019), thereby seeking revenge on supervisors and the organization in the form of turnover (Ambrose & Ganegoda, 2020). In as much as abusive supervision affects OA, it is evident that the harmful effects of abusive supervision may be much stronger than before expected.

In addition, in line with previous works on CS (Tews et al., 2013), the importance of CS in shaping the workplace environment was established. This study displayed that observing the abuse of a supportive coworker is damaging, but observers of the abuse of a non-supportive coworker can have positive impacts. Thus, CS directly impacts employees because of the emotional and informational support they provide to other employees and because employees view other relationships and interactions through the lens of CS.

5.2 Practical Implication

This study has several key implications for managers in the hospitality industry. Organizations need not entertain supervisors with abusive supervision behavior. In addition to compelling victims' TI (Xu et al., 2018), our results indicate that abusive supervision has an impact on the turnover, performance, and well-being of third-party OA. Owing to this, Wisse and Sleebos (2016) recommend that hospitality firms use personality tests to assess personality traits to avoid hiring managers with dark personalities.



Moreover, even though (Shao, Li, & Mawritz, 2018) assessed that some OA, with fear, react by working harder, OA would still impact turnover intentions. This is an unsustainable condition that will ultimately result in employee turnover. Instead of focusing solely on employee performance levels, management should enthusiastically interview employees to ascertain the degree of abusive supervision. Training and development programs, such as leadership quality skills, should be projected in the organizations, especially when potentially abusive supervisors are identified.

Furthermore, this study establishes that the relationship between the abusive supervisor and the victims of abusive supervision determines different effects exercised by the observer. Given this, hospitality organizations should foster a positive organizational community that engages both managerial and frontline employees, not only in team-building exercises among employees.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Although this empirical study adds to the present body of knowledge, it has some flaws that suggest intriguing future research opportunities. Foremost, the study participants may threaten the generalizability of the findings since experienced employees may be accustomed to workplace hostility and have weaker reactions to abusive supervision. Future studies can seek to generalize the findings by including managers since their TI impact is stronger on organizational functioning.

Additionally, the study's samples were collected from Ghana, limiting our ability to generalize the outcomes to other settings and cultures. As employees from certain hospitality industry segments or cultures may have developed a tolerance for abusive supervision, data from particular hospitality industry sections in a high power-distance culture environment could be considered for future studies. Also, it would be fascinating to investigate the impact of cultural values on OA and their reactions to it.

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