



**Unravelling the Threads of Abusive Supervision: Dynamics, Antecedents, Costs, and Consequences (2000-2023)**

**Hafiz Ahmad Ashraf<sup>1</sup>, Javed Iqbal<sup>2</sup>, Waqar Munir<sup>3</sup>, Amjad Islam<sup>4</sup>, Farhat Hussain Bazmi<sup>5</sup>**

**Abstract**

This qualitative research aims to elaborate on the concept of abusive supervision and understand the dynamics, antecedents, cost and consequences of abusive supervision through a literature review of previous studies from 2000 to 2023. The second objective, of this research to carried out the review of previous literature from the areas of abusive supervision, destructive leadership and deviant workplace behavior to identify the gap for future research. In addition, the paper also aims to provide an understanding and guidelines to researchers, managers and practitioners on the topic of abusive supervision and allied areas. This qualitative study is based on the secondary source of data collected from various journals and websites through Web of Science, Google Scholar and Scopus. This paper contributes to the emerging literature on abusive supervision by identifying key trends in emerging research and edging the outlines of empirical studies to prepare their research framework.

**Keywords:** Dark leadership, Abusive Supervision, Destructive leadership, Counterproductive Workplace Behavior, Unethical Leadership

**1. Introduction**

Counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWB) are those behaviors that intentionally harm an organization and its members (Harris & Ogbonna, 2014). These destructive behaviors have prevalent costs for organization (Iqbal et al., 2023). CWB is accountable for business failures. Abusive supervision (AS) is one of the imperative factors of deviant behavior (Ahmad et al., 2023) and has been become imperious deviant behaviour (Appelbaum et al., 2005; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, 2007). AS is also affecting the health of organization and wellbeing of the organization (Hussain, 2020; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, 2007; Yildiz et al., 2015). AS a vibrant concern for research due to its growing level (Tepper, 2002; Tepper, 2007; Yildiz et al., 2015). For example, AS may mistreat subordinates to produce high performance (Tepper, 2007). According to research/ literature review on AS, different terminology interchangeably has been used about AS and definitions by the various scholars and researchers are shown in Table 1 given below. The previous search does not devolve from a systemic review to a unifying theoretical framework in future. The present study provides a base for future researchers to establish theoretical frameworks on AS and CWB. In 2007, Tepper 2007 published a literature review of research on AS. Almost 62 studies on AS have been published since 2007. In 2013 another review of research on AS was conducted through meta-analysis by (Martinko et al., 2013) in two periods such as (2000 to 2007) and (2008 to 2012). Research by Martinko et al. (2013) has been done through the Psych Info and Pro Quest databases. According to Martinko et al. (2013), numerous empirical studies on ion have published between 2008 and 2012 identified 62 new studies. This observation stands out, as it indicates a marked surge in research activity after the release of Tepper's seminal research review in 2007. Tepper's review highlighted the existence of 20 articles that were published during the preceding eight-year period (2000–2007) (Martinko et al., 2013). Mackey et al. (2015) conducted Meta-analysis of AS derived by also considering thoroughly getting the estimates for the relationships between AS and deviant workplace behavior and allied areas, transformational leadership relationships and the outcome of other latent variables. Most recently, Yu et al. (2020) published literature review of one specific industry, such as hospitality and tourism. It creates a reason for conducting further research on systemic review of literature in AS to grasp the knowledge that this systemic review is planned.

This notable surge highlights the importance of the literature review to an expanding community of researchers. This influx is not a shortcoming of the existing studies but rather signifies the ongoing need to delve deeper into dynamic AS, suggesting ample room for further exploration and understanding. The present study focuses on systemic review of AS associated with latent variables such as independent variables, dependent variables, moderating or mediating variables, and how they linked with each other. This study serves as an extension and elaboration of a prior literature review involving qualitative studies. Its primary aim is to build upon the existing review by systematically presenting a tabulated compilation of AS studies conducted across various countries from 2000 to 2023. Here, it is pertinent to mention that there is a growing interest area among researchers and scholars; most of the studies have been conducted in developed county of the world while there is a need for study on AS in developing country context like Pakistan (Asghar & Ahmad,

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author, Department of Business Administration, University of Central Punjab, Gujranwala Campus, Punjab, Pakistan, [ucpahmad@gmail.com](mailto:ucpahmad@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Business Administration, Bahria University Lahore Campus, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, [javedlatif2016@gmail.com](mailto:javedlatif2016@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> PhD Scholar, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Malaysia, Sarawak campus, Malaysia, [wqarmunir7126@gmail.com](mailto:wqarmunir7126@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup> PhD Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Bahria University Lahore Campus, Lahore, Pakistan, [amjadswaati@yahoo.com](mailto:amjadswaati@yahoo.com)

<sup>5</sup> Department of Mathematics, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Pakistan, [sidhandian@gmail.com](mailto:sidhandian@gmail.com)

2017). In 2017, Tepper (2017) contributed an annual review focused on the subject of AS. According to Tepper's findings, the research about AS experienced a consistent upsurge from 2001 to 2011, and in 2015, the momentum continued with over 150 papers being published. These papers explored the correlations between AS, its potential precursors, and the ensuing outcomes (Tepper, 2017). A limited view on Bullying to define the effect of bullying at workplace published by (Kerse & Babadag, 2019).

Regarding the research methodology of the present study, the investigation involved conducting electronic searches across databases encompassing published studies on employee behavior such as AS, destructive leadership, bullying, unethical leadership, counterproductive work behavior (CWB), unethical behavior, and deviant workplace behavior. These searches were constrained to scientific papers and articles that were accessible in their entirety and published in the English language from January 2000 to March 2023. The query was AS, undermining supervision, destructive leadership, bullying, deviant workplace behavior and CWB. Systemic literature review methodology/ technique and pattern adopted by Iqbal *et al.* (2017) his systemic review on AS was used. Empirical and review articles were selected for the this study and focusing on AS. The given below Table 3 shows the summary of almost all the studies relevant to AS and allied areas from 2000 to 2023.

**Table 1: Literature Review of Terminologies and Definitions of AS**

Terminology	Author(s) and Year	Definition/ description
Abusive Supervision(AS)	Tepper, (2000)	AS is characterized by the way subordinates perceive the frequency with which their supervisors consistently display hostile behaviors.
Abusive Supervision	Pradhan and Jena, (2017)	AS is composed of four separate perspectives. To begin with, it involves subordinates assessing their supervisor's conduct. Secondly, it entails a supervisor's unfriendly conduct towards subordinates. Thirdly, abusive behavior needs to be intentional and done willingly. Lastly, AS excludes physical actions.
Despotic Leadership	Ahmad et al. (2023).	Exhibiting assertive and dictatorial behavior, self-serving, and mistreatment of their subordinates
Toxic leadership	Bolton & Grawitch, (2011)	Under toxic leadership, employees might engage in workplace deviance and threat to the overall well-being of the organization
Supervisor Aggression Behavior	Schat et al. (2006)	Supervisor aggression behavior refers to actions deliberately aimed at causing physical or psychological harm to a worker or workers within the context of their work-related environment.
Unethical Leadership	Brown (2008)	The behaviors and choices exhibited by organizational leaders that either breach legal regulations or defy moral standards

**Table 2: Literature Review of Costs and Consequences of AS**

Source and Country	Cost and Consequences of AS
Asghar and Ahmad (2017)	In Pakistan, approximately 20% of nursing staff have reported experiencing offensive behaviors
Ashfaq et al. (2013)	15% of employees engaged in deviant behaviors due to AS.
Schat et al. (2006)	Around 16 % of US workers have stated to face AS, resultantly incurred nearly \$23.8 billion annual organizational costs.
Chappell and Martino, (2006)	In Australia, workplace bullying, including supervisory abuse, incurs costs to employers that fall within the range of AUD \$6 to 13 billion.
Hussain (2020)	Within Pakistan, survey data indicates that 15% of employees in the country have experienced abuse. Additionally, men are more susceptible to threats and abuse, with 16% reporting such experiences, compared to 13% of women.
Tepper <i>et al.</i> (2006)	The impact on organizations, regarding health-related issues, employee turnover, translates to an estimated cost of nearly \$23.8 billion.
Tepper, (2007)	In United States 16% of the employees are affected due to deviance behaviour and approximately 14% of all workers are subject to AS by their managers.
Cortina, Magley, Williams and Langhout (2001)	In the USA, over the past five years, 71% of respondents indicated encountering incivility within public sector organizations. Among these respondents, 6% reported personally experiencing these negative behaviors.
Sultan et al. (2020)	Within Pakistan, approximately 15% of employees encounter instances of verbal abuse,

	non-verbal mistreatment, or threats in their workplace. Furthermore, in this context, men appear to be more susceptible to experiencing threats and abuse, with a prevalence of 16%, in contrast to women who exhibit a lower vulnerability at 13%.
Burton et al. (2012)	The families of employees who were abused by their bosses at work reported higher incidence of undermining at home.
Kemper (2016)	Abusive supervision stands as a significant and escalating issue that is affecting modern-day organizations, impacting as many as 16% of employees.
Khokhar & Rehman (2017)	Recent unethical behavior by leaders in both the public and corporate sectors in Pakistan has led to scandals that have eroded stakeholders' confidence.
Tepper et al. (2004)	Between 10 to 16% of American employee experience AS on a regular basis.
Tepper et al. (2006)	Approximately annual \$23.8 billion incurred organizational costs in result of abusive supervision.
Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel and Vartia, (2011)	Recent research concluded that around 10% of employees are faced bullying at least once.
Namie and Namie, (2000)	Among those who undergo workplace bullying, a substantial 89% identify leaders as the primary perpetrators of such behavior.
Einarsen et al. (2013)	AS can lead to adverse consequences for subordinates and employees. These negative outcomes encompass feelings of unfairness, increased aggression within the workplace, heightened psychological distress, reduced performance, lower job satisfaction, and a tendency towards withdrawal and elevated turnover rates.
Vickers (2014)	In the United States, approximately 15% of workers are impacted by toxic leaders at any given moment, and more than half of all employees encounter a toxic event at some point during their professional lives.
McAvoy and Murtagh (2003)	In the United States, a notable 37% of employees report instances of workplace bullying. This pattern of consistency extends to the United Kingdom as well
Zapf et al. (2011)	Around 3% of employees undergo the distressing and enduring impact of severe and prolonged bullying.

**Table 3: Summary of Research Published (2000 to 2023) in the Area of Abusive Supervision**

Source of Article	Study Constructs and Antecedents	Moderator/ Mediator	Theoretical Framework
Abid and Abid (2017)	AS on TI	Psychological contract breach (Mediator)	Theory of psychological contract
Ahmad et al. (2016)	AS on job satisfaction and TI.	power distance (Moderator)	NA
Asghar and Ahmad (2017)	AS on workplace deviance behavior	interactional justice (Mediator)	N/A
Anwar (2017)	AS and TI''	Self-Identity (Mediating) and self-salience (Moderating)	SET
Ahmed and Muchiri (2014)	AS to employees' OCB and TI	Psy Contract Breach (Mediator) and POS(Moderator)	NA
Aksu (2016)	Deviance and leadership	NA	Theory of multifactor leadership
Alias et al. (2013)	individual deviance	Job satisfaction (Mediator)	SET
Albashiti et al. (2021)	despotic leadership and work outcomes	Psychological distress (Intervening variable)	Conservation resource theory and Unfolding theory of Turnover
Aryee et al. (2008)	AS and contextual performance	Emotional exhaustion (Mediator) and work unit structure (Moderator)	Conservation resources theory

Aryee et al. (2007)	outcomes of AS	Interactional and procedural justice (Mediators)	NA
Asghar and Ahmad (2017)	AS on deviant behavior"	Interactional justice (Mediator)	NA
Asghar & Sultana (2017)	AS and Creativity of Staff	Knowledge Sharing (Mediator)	NA
Ashraf & Ashraf (2016)	AS on Interpersonal Conflict	Locus of Control (Moderator)	NA
Avey et al. (2015)	AS and Citizenship and Deviance"	Job embeddedness (Moderator)	NA
An and wang (2015)	AS and Counterproductive Work Behavior	Negative Affectivity (Moderator)	SET
Bakar et al. (2016)	AS and workplace deviant behaviour	Moral disengagement (Mediator)	Moral disengagement theory and SET
Bamberger and Bacharach (2006)	AS and subordinate personality	Somatic stress (Mediator)	Employee resistance perspective
Bowling & Michel (2012)	AS cause of abuse in subordinates	Self -directed, supervisor-directed, and Organisation- directed attribution	Attribution theory
Brees et al. (2016)	AS and subordinate personality	NA	NA
Burton et al. (2012)	workplace Stress and AS	Supervisor exercise level (Moderator)	NA
Cao (2015)	AS and Work-Family Conflict"	Emotional Exhaustion (Mediator)	COR
Carlson et al. (2011)	AS and subordinates	Surface acting (Mediator)	COR
Carlson et al. (2011).	AS and work family conflict	NA	NA
Chan & McAllister (2013)	Conceptual Paper on AS	NA	NA
Chen & Wang (2017)	AS and employees Personality	Supervisory trust and self-efficacy (Mediators)	Social behaviour model
Eissa and Lester (2017)	Empirical study on AS S	Supervisor personality (Moderator)	Affective events theory
Etodike et al. (2017)	Empirical study on AS		Role stressors theory and Retaliation theory
Faldetta (2020)	AS and workplace deviance	negative direct non-balanced reciprocity	
Farasat and Ziaaddini (2013)	Review paper on AS	NA	SET
Hamid et al. (2016)	AS and workplace deviance"	Spiritual intelligence (Moderator)	NA
Haar et al. (2016)	AS and TI	POS(Mediator)	NA
Han et al. (2015)	AS and creativity	Employee deprivation ( Mediators)	NA
Hon et al. (2016)	trickle-down effect of AS	power distance and traditional cultures (Moderator)	NA
Hussain and Donghong (2018).	AS on employees' behaviors	Family motivation (Moderator) and Intrinsic motivation (Mediator)	NA
Hussain et al. (2020)	AS on employees' TI	Intrinsic motivation	SET

		(Moderator)	
Iqbal (2017)	AS on deviant behavior	Islamic work ethic (Moderator)	SET
Jalil (2017)	AS on employee silence	Avoidance orientation (Mediator) and LMX (Moderator)	NA
Jiana et al. (2012)	AS and employees' performance	self-esteem (Mediating)	NA
Jiang et al. (2015)	AS and employee satisfaction	Employees' organizational tenure and employees' proactive personality (Moderators)	Social cognitive theory
Kim, Lee and Yun (2016)	AS and individual factors	learning goal and self-enhancement (Moderators)	COR
Lam et al. (2017)	emotional exhaustion and AS	subordinate performance (Moderators)	COR
McAllister et al. (2017)	AS and job tension"	self-regulation (Mediator)	SET and Ego depletion theory
Meng et al. (2017)	AS and students' creativity	LMX and motivation (Mediator)	SET
Morales et al. (2016)	Conceptual study on AS	NA	NA
Naseer et al. (2016)	AS and Emotional Exhaustion	Type A Personality (Moderator)	Trait activation theory
Oh & Farh (2017)	AS and subordinates experience and respond	NA	Theory of emotion
Qian et al. (2017)	AS and Job Dissatisfaction	Feedback avoidance (Moderators)	NA
Ouyang et al. (2015)	AS and proactive behavior	Subordinate gender (Moderator)	Social identity theory
Park et al. (2017).	AS and employee deviance	Power distance (Moderator)	NA
Peterson (2002)	workplace deviance	NA	Ethical Theory
Pradhan and Jena (2017)	ASon employee's TI	Meaningful work (Moderator)	NA
Saqib and Arif (2017)	AS and Organizational Learning	Employee silence (Mediator)	COR
Samantha (2016)	AS in the workplace	NA	NA
Schaubroeck et al. (2016)	AS and peer respect	Group potency (Moderators)	NA
Shazad and Mehmood (2012)	Organizational cynicism	Burnout (Mediator)	SET and equity theory
Shaheen et al. (2017)	AS and Organizational cronyism	Psyc breach of contract (Mediator)	Psychological breach of contract
Sulea et al. (2013)	AS and Work Behaviors	Personality (Moderator)	Reciprocity theory
Sunday (2014)	workplace deviance and powerlessness	NA	NA
Thau et al. (2008)	AS and workplace deviance	Management style (moderator)	uncertainty management theory
Tziner et al. (2010)	interpersonal deviance behavior	NA	LMX theory
Tepper (2000)	AS and subordinates' organization deviance	Job mobility	NA
Tepper et al. (2007)	Empirical study on AS	Personality (Moderator)	NA
Tepper et al. (2009)	AS and intentions to quit	Employees' intention to quit (Moderator)	Power/dependence theory
Tepper et al. (2011)	AS and Subordinate		NA

	Performance		
Tepper et al. (2017)	Review on AS	NA	NA
Uzondu et al. (2017)	AS, Work Tension	NA	NA
Wang et al. (2012)	AS and workplace deviance	Interactional justice (Mediator) and power distance (Moderator)	NA
Whitman et al. (2014)	AS and feedback avoidance	Emotional exhaustion (Mediator)	COR
Wu & Hu (2009)	AS and Emotional Exhaustion	Emotional contagion perceived coworker support (Moderators)	NA
Yam et al. (2016)	surface acting and AS	Leaders' trait self-control (Moderator)	Ego-depletion theory
Yildiz et al. (2015)	destructive deviant behavior	Alienation (Mediator)	NA
Yinxiu et al. (2017)	AS and Subordinate's Behavior	Self-construal (Moderator)	Social cognitive theory
Younus et al. (2020)	Destructive Leadership and Justice Perception	Mechanism of Justice Perception:	
Zhang et al. (2014)	AS maintain creativity	Intrinsic motivation (Mediator) and Core self-evaluations (Moderator)	Motivational Model
Zhang & Liao (2015)	AS: meta-analytic review	Power distance, Demographic characteristics Research design (Moderators)	NA
Zheng & Liu (2017)	AS and Creative Performance	Self-efficacy (Mediator) and Mindfulness (Moderator)	Social cognitive theory

## 2. Conclusion

This study contributed a theoretical perspective on the area of abusive supervision (AS) and provided a base to develop framework for further studies in the area of AS. This study will guide researchers and offering a more precise grasp of the terminology, underlying causes, and consequences associated with abusive supervision. This study provides several implications for the researcher. This systemic review on AS opened the door for the future researcher to conduct empirical studies to establish the conceptual and theoretical framework. In addition, this qualitative research will also help future researchers to select the underpinning or supporting theory to support their proposed model or framework for future research. This qualitative research also provides new directions in this area of AS, by encouraging and emerging new debate. Finally, the present study was conducting research in a systemic way to get better understanding of the dynamic of AS and latent variable linked with AS and to establish hypothesis relations among the variables. The present study will contribute to the academic literature on AS and CWB and enhance the understanding of the researchers, practitioners and managers. This study helps the researchers establish theoretical framework and the hypothesis of the relationship of AS to others variable. In addition, this study would also help the researcher to suggest underpinning theories to support their theoretical framework. This study also contributes another method of writing a systemic review without meta- analysis.

The current study has contributed further indications and evidence to the expanding realm of knowledge concerning AS. While the current study does possess certain limitations, its findings align with the theoretical and conceptual propositions and address key objectives, thus delineating avenues for future research within the domain of AS. Despite the considerable body of research delving into the fundamental catalysts and contributors to abusive supervision, there still needs to be more potential for further exploration, particularly in domains such as organizational injustice. Nonetheless, this study has effectively bridged a theoretical gap by introducing AS as an independent variable. The implications stemming from the outcomes of this systematic review extend to both researchers and professionals, urging them to undertake additional investigations in the realm of deviant behavior.

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