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Impact of Supervisor's Identity Threat on Employees' Prohibitive Voice Behavior Through Abusive Supervision and Fear: A Case of Pakistani Service Sector

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A B S T R A C T

Purpose: In this study we used interactionists theory and the spillover effects of identity threat of a supervisor that how it leads to abusive behavior causing fear of negative evaluation in employees and their display of prohibitive voice behavior.

Design and Methodology: The study examined the phenomena in service sector of Pakistan where using quantitative technique, 363 dyads of supervisors and their followers participated in a personally administered survey in two time lags. Judgement sampling technique was used for data collection

Findings: The findings of the study confirmed the significant role of identity threat of supervisors in development of their abusive supervision style which further instills fear of negative evaluation and prohibitive voice in their subordinates.

Originality/Value: The study has responded to the calls of researchers to investigate causes of abusive supervision and their link to behavioral outcomes of employees. The study has investigated just one path opening avenues for investigation of other reasons providing evidence to policy makers to devise such mechanisms that curb abusive supervision and its negative outcomes in service sector of Pakistan.

Keywords: Identity threat, Abusive Supervision, Prohibitive voice.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized society the literature on leadership has taken a turn to focus more on the dark side of the leadership considering the harmful impact the bad behaviors of the top-level executives' caste on the employees (Jung & Yoon, 2020; Usman et al., 2021; Moin et al., 2022). The bad bosses have grabbed a lot of attention from the researchers recently (Tepper, Simon & Park, 2017; Jung & Yoon, 2020; Koay et al., 2022;

Wang et al., 2022) because such leaders do not care about the consequences of their behavior at work, i.e. how their toxic behaviors create toxic sensations on the followers which leads to an impact on the stakes of the organization (Tepper,2017; Lyubykh et al.,. 2022). The job performance of employees is highly affected by the misconduct they receive from their bosses resulting in lowered motivation and negative emotions. Researchers have realized that most of the turnover of employees can be explained with the supervisor's unethical conduct (Hoa, Wei& Zhang, 2022). Previously the focus of the research in leadership was majorly towards the positive sides of the leadership and the literature on destructive leadership still lacks exploration of the impacts of the negative leadership styles on the employee outcomes (Afshan et al.,2022; Priesemuth; 2022). Research has highlighted that the leadership and followership are two parallel processes which cannot run independently of each other. For that reason, the dark side of leadership has been found to have an intense impact on the employee's attitudes towards their leaders (Dedahanov, Abdurazzakov & Sun, 2022; Xi et al., 2022).

The acts of mistreatment of employees at work, setting comprises of multiple displays of behaviors such as bullying of coworkers, aggression, the actions which fall in the Abusive Supervision, the incivility at work as well as many other types of violence. These are just not mere behavioral displays, but they also have very serious implications in the context of the climate of the organization (Romano, 1994). In the past years, research investigations have placed a lot of focus on the destructive styles of leadership and the impact that they can cause to an organization in terms of the monetary cost as well as in terms of the outcomes of employees who are an important resource of any organization (Fischer, Tian, Lee, A., & Hughes, 2021). Tepper (2000, p178) formally explained the term "Abusive Supervision" as "*expectation of subordinates associated to the level of supervisor's involvement in the constant display of threatening behavior in both verbal and non-verbal ways excluding any kind of physical contact*"

Sharma (2017) in her analysis indicated that survey estimates have indicated that almost half of the workforce of U.S has been regularly experiencing abuse in the form of verbal abusiveness and if not faced directly they have at least heard of someone who has been going through all of this.There has been some contradiction in the measurement of workplace abuse and its measurement between different nations

In a recent review researchers insisted on the development of an integrated model which includes the factors from both victim and supervisor's perspective which help explain the underlying mechanism of Abusive Supervision and its outcomes and antecedents (Hackney & Perrewe´, 2018; Eissa& Lester,2021), the current study has attempted to work on a similar model. There have been many propositions by researchers indicating that Abusive Supervision serves to be an instrument of strategic premeditation (Yu et al.,2022). The present investigation has answered the calls by bringing the peer-related (Identity Threat) issues in a chain of events for analytic view on drivers of Abusive Supervision (Shen et al., 2021; Simth et al., 2022)

In a recent meta-analytic review Tepper, Simon, and Park (2017) analyzed the past 17 years of research. Since Tepper (2000) has first coined the term Abusive Supervision as a "constant presentation of intimidating non-verbal as well as verbal abuse by the supervisor". They indicated in their review that two of the most growing areas in the last three to five years is an analysis of constructs that explain why the abusive behavior is observed at the workplace and the antecedents of the Abusive Supervision. They pointed out that the examination of antecedents of Abusive Supervision has increased from 0 to 30% in the past three years. But there is still a lot of room for reconnaissance in this domain. They insisted that the ascertainment of the antecedents of Abusive Supervision is especially important for the practitioners who wish to work on the elimination of the acts of Abusive Supervision at the workplace.

In the present investigation, the outcomes of Abusive Supervision have been delineated through the underlying mechanisms as recommended by researchers (Hackney & Perrewe', 2018). The costs of abusive supervision

directly hit the organization due to the turnover of employees are very high. In a study one on costs of retaining versus getting new employees, past researchers indicated that the estimated cost of hiring and enabling a new resource through training equals 150-175% of their annual salary expenditure towards the organization. Considering the costs of the turnover, the organizations should not ignore the importance of the crises that abusive supervision can cause since if controlled at the initial phase the actual turnover of the employees can be avoided.

Studies on mistreatment in the United States revealed the costs of workplace mistreatment which turned out to be $ 4.1 billion making the per-person cost to be $ 27.36. Due to exposure to psychological and social aggression organizations face some direct as well as indirect costs. The indirect costs or the intangible costs that are caused due to aggression lead to an impact on organizational outcomes which leads to impact performance and leads to reduced organizational productivity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conventionally, studies into the leadership have frequently been directed by the expedition to find out the most operative person or the technique to lead. The most discussed notions found are transformational leadership but in the most recent explorations, ethical leadership or the concept of authentic leadership have been found that are focused on positive leader attributes and its outcomes. Even sometimes the terminology of the 'leadership' is even restricted to be an exercise of the personal inspiration which results in a more enthusiastic commitment of their followers: "supporters of this opinion claim that an individual who practices authority and regulation over the punishments, rewards, and also the information to influence or force the subordinates is not the process of 'leading' them". Nevertheless, a new dimension of research referring to labels of the supervision and behaviors related to the supervisory style had started acknowledging that a dark side of the leadership also exists.

Identity Threat:

In today's world where the workplaces have become extremely diverse, the employers are having more social exposure, hence the workplaces have become a major contributor in the psychological wellbeing of individuals. According to Tepper, Simon and, Park (2017), many papers have previously used the notation that whenever a leader feels insecure about his position, his power, and his status he/she adopts an abusive style of leading his subordinates. This view has been rooted in the interactionist theory of Tedeschi and Felson (1994) posits that when an individual feels that there are some hurdles in reaching for his desired social role or identity, he gets hostile and uses it as a reparative strategy to deal with the situation. In literature, this view is consistent with two theoretical perspectives.

In a recent study Yu, Dufffy, and Tepper (2018) investigated envy that a supervisor feels from the performance of his/her subordinate as a precursor of Abusive supervision and found support. Similarly, in the past Tepper (2017) in their study used the support of the victim precipitation theory to explain the performance of subordinates and its relation with Abusive Supervision which examines the stimulation of responses from other people due to individual characteristics (Borman & Gellatly,2021). In their study Soral, Pati, and Kakani, (2022) claim that employees who are underperformers and do not fulfill their tasks become a threat for their proactive supervisors who are worried about their self-image and fulfillment of their goals and targets. Poor performers become frustrating and difficult to work hence leaders make them the target of their abuse considering them weak and vulnerable. Other also indicate that holding a supervisory position increases the tendency to react to threats towards competence. When someone climbs up the corporate ladder they become more conscious of their self-image and their goal achievement and when they feel a threat to their aims, they tend to react to the source of threat (Bataille, & Vough, 2022).

As discussed, the victim precipitation theory posits that those individuals who do not perform well, are vulnerable or are submissive prove to be the victims of reactions from the supervisors. Moreover, employees who are violators of norms and show behaviors that require corrective actions also become victims of the abuse from their supervisors (Phillips, Connelly, & Burgess,2021).

The fact that some individuals who get identified as provocative and become a source of undermining the organizational performance due to their performance are perceived to be having less utility than the others hence they are excluded from the morally appropriate treatments which can be explained using the moral exclusion theory (Zhan & Yan, 2021). In line with the same theme few recent studies have also found out viewing Abusive Supervision from the victim's lenses that some of the employees fall prey to abusive supervisory behavior due to their performance issues, in some cases, employees are underperformers while in some cases they are a threat to the supervisor due to their competence level and the supervisor tries to undermine them and creates a hostile working environment for them.

Another threatening situation for a supervisor as per literature is when the individual sense that his value is being undermined in interpersonal relationships at his workplace. When a supervisor experiences that he is being targeted by the employees, the presence of counterproductive work behaviors or violation of the organizational norms according to which subordinates should respect their supervisors and treat them with dignity, it evokes his anger and he reacts by displaying that aggression towards his subordinates who are involved in such activities Recent studies have shown that the charismatic behavior of a subordinate has been conceptualized as a provocation behavior for the supervisor, anything that becomes a threat to the self-esteem of the supervisor makes the source of that threat a target for the supervisor. High performers not only become a threat to the direct supervisor but they are also considered a threat to organizations' hieratical structure.

Another explanation offered by literature regarding the threats to the supervisor is through displaced aggression theory (Tedeschi & Norman, 1989) which posits that whenever the supervisor faces any threats from his or her higher-ups and they are not able to respond to it, their subordinates are their safe targets to vent their displaced aggression. They consider their employees as powerless targets hence they express their frustration by reacting towards. Although it is observed that supervisors pass on the aggression, they receive from their bosses as a reaction towards their followers but this phenomenon are highly variable based on the beliefs that an individual hold towards the use of power and their sensitivity towards the threats so it can be said that Abusive Supervision is not an inevitable reaction towards the abuse that a supervisor faces himself.

Mediating Role of Abusive Supervision

As described to be a dysfunctional style of leadership by Tepper (2017), abusive supervision is the leadership behavior of constantly putting blames on their followers, even for the things that they have not done, constant ridicule and hostile attitude which is sustained over a long period of time. Along with identification of this phenomena Tepper along with his team has also contributes majorly in 2000s to develop a measurement instrument for abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007).

The initial findings of Tepper's studies reflected on the impact of abusive supervision style on employee's behavioral outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and also the life satisfaction. They have further been able to prove that abusive supervision is responsible in increase of the employee's negative affect, work and family conflict, and emotional.

Voice behavior of employees has been linked to multiple constructs of leadership such as Liu et.al (2010) through their study revealed that transformational leadership has a direct and significant impact on employee's identification with the manager, owing to this employee support the manager in his accomplishment of goals by contributing through their efforts as well as raising upward voice to promote success. The impact of transformational leadership in creating a mutual sense of responsibility relating to raising voice in constructive

manger to achieve organizational goals for organizational wide benefits and success, the impact was also checked on other contextual factors such as psychological safety, other leadership styles and the climate which encourages employee's voice behavior.

Mediating Role of Fear:

Humans give adaptive responses to environmental demands through emotions. Emotions are a representation of the individual attempt to gain control over the situations in event of a threat to their survival and wellbeing. The decision how a person responds with the emotion being experienced i.e. through taking an action or choosing not to do anything about it determined by the appraisals made about that stimulus i.e. the event.

Hackney and Perrewe´ (2018) explain fear with an example that at the same time two victims of abuse may formulate different attributions to the abuse they face, one may assume that it is rooted to his lack of effort of skills on his part which can be regarded as internal attributions while the other one may assume that it is coming unreasonably due to external sources such as supervisor himself and this accounts for the external attribution. The attributions that the victims attach to the abuse they are facing will lead to their different responses in the form of emotions (Weiner, 1986).

The previous research by Weiner (1986) provides very strong support for the importance of attributions in the process of determining emotions. It posits that if a victim is assuming that the abuse is coming from the lack of some ability at his end (internal attribution) this will become a source of guilt and shame for him while on the other hand if the victim feels that the reason is not under his domain and is coming from other sources (external attribution) this will lead to emotions of anger and blame the abuser for the abuse.

In a similar theme ELM mode is used l to describe the victim's reactions when they face workplace abuse. It explains that the trigger event i.e. the abuse from the supervisor may activate any of the three processes i.e. the attitude initiated process, the effect initiated process, or the cognition initiated process. But no matter which out of all of the three processes will be followed the attributions to the negative emotions, attitudes, etc. will mediate the relationship between workplace abuse and the wellbeing, behavioral or attitudinal outcomes of the victim of abuse. Hackney and Perrewe´ (2018), referring to their reviews and propositions further proposed that the victim's characteristics and moods are likely to moderate the relationship that holds between the emotions, attributions, and attitudes they have towards the workplace abuse and will determine their reaction accordingly. They elaborated with an example that experience of abuse at the workplace leads to emotional exhaustion of the victim of abuse which depletes ego and ultimately leads to the Self-Regulation Impairment accordingly. When victims are emotionally depleted, unhappy, and spent there will be negative consequences for the employees as well as for the organization as well.
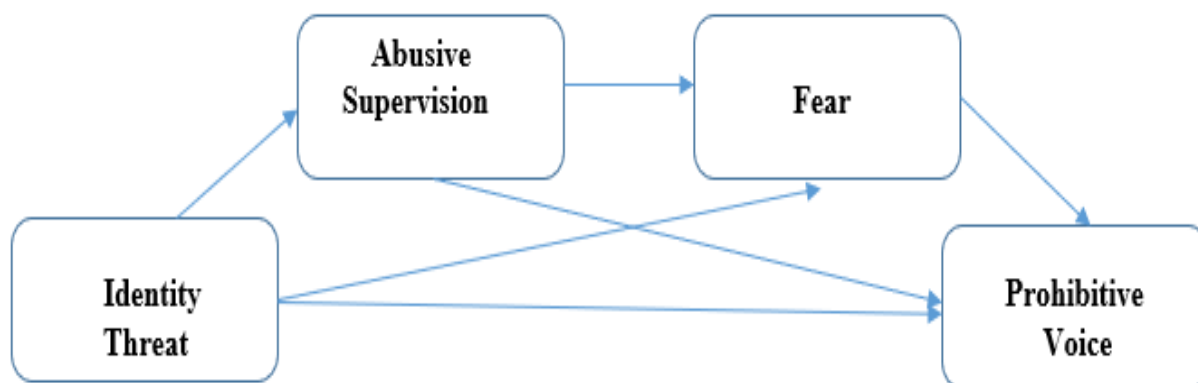

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study basing on positivistic approach has used the deductive reasoning where first hand data was collected from the sample of interest for the purpose of inference. The survey was based on different service sector organizations of the country which have significant contribution to the GDP of the country such as banks, universities and hospitals (Planning commission of Pakistan, vision 2025). Complete lists of professionals working in the aforementioned organizations were not available, due to which the company had to opt non probability sampling. Under non probability sampling, as the sample required some characteristics such as dyadic data collection was required basing on functional pairs of leaders and followers working together regularly, hence researchers selected judgment sampling technique. As model was not complex basing on rules given out by Hair et al., (2017), model requirements in SEM from measurement perspective as well as confirmation through G.power analysis the study targeted collection of 383 respondents, 700 questionnaires were distributed. 330 complete sets of questionnaires at the end of two lags were received and further included in the study. The data was collected in 2 lags, first the managers rated their organization for Abusive Supervision Climate and later the employees were asked to fill the questionnaire for mediators and dependent variable in second lag. Measures for the current study were adopted since validated scales were available. Identity threat was measured using 9 items used by Mawrizt, Greenbaum, Butts, and Graham (2016), Abusive Supervision was measured using 15 items scale of Tepper (2000), Fear was measured using 12 items scale developed by Negative evaluation scale by Leary (1983)*,* and finally Prohibitive Voice was measured using 5 items scale developed by Liang et al. (2012).

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Male	445
Female	215
Age	
21-30	175
31-40	280
Above 40	205

4. Data Analysis and Results

The correlation matrix (Table 2) of the study has investigated the direct association between the main variables of the study. The results indicate that identity threat has a direct impact on the abusive supervision displayed by supervisors (r=.440, p<.001), the fear which subsequently induces in the victims of abusive supervision (r=.358, p<.01) and that leads to their act of raising Prohibitive Voice (r=.677, p<.01). Similarly, Abusive supervision is also directly related to the Fear of the employees who are facing Abusive Supervision (r=.742, p<.01) and their Prohibitive Voice Behavior (r=.613, p<.01). In the same manner the study could confirm that Fear faced by employees is also directly related to the Prohibitive Voice behavior of the employees as proposed in the study as a dominant response towards a stimuli and emotion they generate (r=.613, p<.01).

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviation, Correlations.

	Scales	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1	IDT	3.10	.82	1			
2	Abu-sup	3.32	.91	.582**	1		
3	Fear	3.55	.90	.443**	.499**	1	
4	PV	3.26	.81	.525**	.579**	.606**	1

ASC= Abusive Supervision Climate, ASUP= Abusive Supervision, CR= Cognitive Rumination,

EPV=Employee Prohibitive Voice.

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

In the next step of the study the convergent and discriminant validity measures were assessed through famously accepted and recommended techniques. The reliability and validity of the study were checked through EFA and CFA. The KMO value is .972 which is above threshold of .5, the Bartletts test of sphericity shows Chi-sq= 13213.23, df=990 and p=.000 which is significant, also no major cross loadings and correlations were observed. To access the reliability of the data measures Cronbach's alpha was checked and results observed ranged Identity threat=.906, Abusive Supervision=.917, Fear=.969 and Prohibitive Voice=.854 which were well above the threshold >.70. The variance was also >.40. In the next step the AVE (Average variance extracted) and composite reliabilities of all the measures was also checked and was found above minimum 0.5 threshold which fulfils the demand of convergent validity for all the four constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hu, L., Bentler, 1999). The AVE values of Identity threat= .716, Abusive Supervision= .573, Fear=.602, Prohibitive Voice=.582. the values of MSV < AVE Square root of AVE greater than inter-construct correlations which confirmed the discriminant validity of the data (Hair et al. 2010).

Model Evaluation

Composite factor analysis was run on the study model which included all the main variables of the investigation. After the discriminant and convergent validity were confirmed the model was tested for direct and indirect effects. The Results of CFA were within the desired acceptable limits (CMIN/DF=1.69, CFI=0.929, RMESA=0.039). All the factor loading were statistically significant (>.05). The factor loadings, reliability, AVE, CR, and MSV of the items in measurement model are reported in table 3.

Table 3. Factor loadings, Reliability, AVE and CR of Measurement Model.

Code	SFL		Reliability	AVE	CR	MSV
Identity Threat			.943	.624	.937	.388
IDT1	.836					
IDT2	.760					
IDT3	.802					
IDT4	.796					
IDT5	.776					
IDT6	.800					

IDT7	.736				
IDT8	.783				
IDT9	.817				
Abusive Supervision			.947	.696	.954	.584
AbuS1	.770				
AbuS2	.798				
AbuS3	.856				
AbuS4	.783				
AbuS5	.858				
AbuS6	.805				
AbuS7	.821				
AbuS8	.723				
AbuS9	.836				
AbuS10	.874				
AbuS11	883				
AbuS12	.876				
AbuS13	.849				
AbuS14	.830				
AbuS15	.895				
Fear			.903	.666	.960	.429
F1	.740				
F2	.790				
F3	.760				
F4	.831				
F5	.828				
F6	.839				
F7	.817				
F8	.779				
F9	.833				
F10	.842				
F11	.822				
F12	.820				
Prohibitive Voice			.773	.542	.855	.436
PV1	.743				
PV2	.706				
PV3	.750				
PV4	.720				
PV5	.721				

Structural model Complete structural model with the proposed relationships was tested in Amos for "Structural equational modeling" and the results revealed a good model fit with all the values within the acceptable ranges (CMIN/DF=1.65, CFI=0.918, RMESA=0.051). All the factor loading were statistically significant (>.05) indicating the convergent validity. The model is displayed in Figure 3. To establish convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliabilities have been calculated.
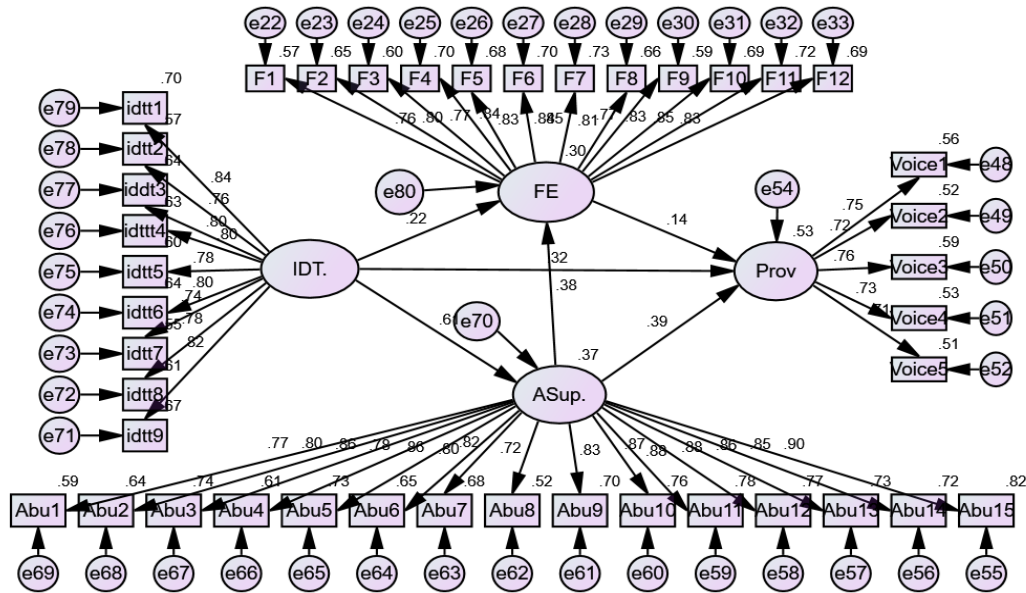

Figure 2. Full Model Path Diagram. IDT= Identity Threat, AS= Abusive Supervision, FE= Fear Prov=Prohibitive Voice

Path Analysis In SEM

In this section of the claims of the study predicting Abusive Supervision and Fear, sequentially mediate the impact of Identity Threat and behavioral response of employees in form of Prohibitive Voice was tested.The model fit statistics for mediating effects of Abusive Supervision and Fear between Identity Threat and Employees Prohibitive Voice Chi-square,χ^2 =1991.084; df=1259; chi-square/Df ratio= 1.581; p<0.001; CFI=0.947; and GFI= 0.815; NFI= 0.868; and RMSEA= 0.042 displays that the sequential mediation path model sufficiently fits the data set.

The results show that the structural paths from Identity Threat to Abusive Supervision (β=.611, p<0.001) was positive and significant. Furthermore, the structural path from Abusive Supervision to Fear (β=-0.524, p<0.001) was significant and positive. The structural paths from Fear to Prohibitive Voice (β=.148, p<0.05), was also positive and significant.

Identity Threat explained 37.3% variance in Abusive Supervision. Abusive Supervision explained 27.5% variance in Fear. While Fear explained, 52.3% variance in Prohibitive Voice, Hence all claims of the study have been accepted.

Table 4. Direct and indirect effects of sequential path between Identity Threat and Prohibitive Voice through Abusive Supervision and Fear.

Relationship	Estimate	S.E	P	BC LL at 95%CI	BC UL at 95%CI
IDT→ PV	.320	.058	.000	.204	.434
IDT→ Abu-Sup	.608	.078	.000	.522	.672
IDT→ F	.223	.073	.000	.103	.326
Abu-Sup→ F	.385	.051	.000	.286	.490
Abusup→ PV	.391	.041	.000	.235	.498
IDT→ Abusup→F→ PV	.143	.045	.010	.050	.252
Indirect effect	.303	.044	.016	.233	.368

5. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The researchers in the past have been focusing on investigating that how Abusive Supervision impacts the behaviors of employees and ample evidence has been found in this domain (Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017). The fact that employees facing with abusive supervision often engage in counter productive work behavior has been well established (Zhang et al.,2019). Lately the focus has shifted to see how employees can possibly engage in some constructive behaviors in response to abuse owing to their regulated, constrained or retaliatory responses (Eissa, Lester & Gupta, 2019) and ultimately what are the possible outcomes of Abusive Supervision (Farh & Oh, 2017; Tepper, Simon & Park, 2017; Hackney & Perrewe', 2018). As it is important to understand the phenomena in depth to further lay foundation to understand the motivators of abusive supervisory behavior despite the fact it is well established and reported that this is a destructive style of leadership.

Current study also attempted analyze the sequential effect of mediators Abusive Supervision and Fear was tested to understand the underlying mechanisms of the relation between he Identity threat of the supervisor and the Prohibitive Voice of employees using SEM technique. The structural path of Identity threat to Prohibitive Voice was significant in SEM. In the process, the direct effect of the identity threat on Prohibitive Voice remained significant in adding the mediators. The indirect path showing total indirect effect between the IV and DV through M1 and M2 was also significant so the claims of the study were accepted in line with the investigations done in past and recommendations of multiple scholar.

The findings of the study are consistent with the propositions made in the meta analysis issued in past (Sharma, 2017; Farh & Oh, 2017; Tepper, Simon & Park, 2017; Hackney & Perrewe', 2018) and also with the theoretical foundations. The findings have revealed that the identity threat of the supervisor becomes a source of his abusive supervisory behavior as whenever an individual faces threat to the position where he aspires to be by his peers or superiors this is a natural reaction to react in an abusive manner().Taking support from the appraisal model of Abusive Supervision by Oh and Farh (2017), current study was also able to prove that abusive supervision initiates an episode of emotions in the current study was the Fear which leads to a dominant response from the subordinate where they confront their manager and raise their voice about the current situation of the organization.

6. CONCLUSION

The psychological health of employees and their attitude places direct costs on the organization. There has been a lot of stress in the recent past urging the organizations to pay close attention to the underlying reasons

for the behavioral displays of employees. The current study examined the relatedness of the identity threat, with Abusive supervision, and a unique delineating path (Fear) leading towards employee's dominant (prohibitive voice), behavioral displays as its outcomes. The study was able to prove all the postulated relations amongst the variables. The direct and indirect paths of antecedent of abusive supervision and its outcome were proved statistically significant, Overall, findings reveal, managers when coming under pressure from sources of the climate of the organization, behaviors of their peer and motives within themselves, they look for places to vent out their pressure. Employees working under the victim supervisors are their easy targets so they transfer their negative energy to them in form of abusive supervision which leads to a chain of reactions in form of different coping strategies of employees including their dominant, constrained, and regulated behavioral outcomes to get through the situation. The current study has investigated the dominant response of the employees however constrained and regulated responses are the new avenues of research that have been opened with the findings of the current study for future researchers.

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