



PAST ABUSIVE SUPERVISION, HINDRANCE APPRAISAL AND POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to propose and assess a framework that suggests how abusive supervision that has occurred in the past, has residual effects on victims long after they have left those jobs. Using a trauma lens, the paper aims to suggest how past abuse generates an outcome through the process hindrance appraisal. Furthermore, this research proposes that social support acts as a moderator in the relationship between hindrance appraisal and posttraumatic stress. This study draws from the Conservation of Resource Theory and the Transactional Stress Theory to address the links that are proposed. Using a time-lagged design, full-time employees working in diverse sectors of Pakistan were surveyed and data were collected (N=336). In order to evaluate the hypothesized model, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted. Further, to validate the indirect and moderating effects, Process MACRO was used. The results of the study demonstrated that past abusive supervision is positively linked to posttraumatic stress where the effect was positive and significant. Furthermore, hindrance appraisal for stressors had a positive and significant relationship with posttraumatic stress. Results from the indirect effects showed that the effects were significant. In addition, hindrance appraisal mediated the link between past abusive supervision and posttraumatic stress for which the effect was also significant. Lastly, the findings showed that social support moderated the link between hindrance appraisal and posttraumatic stress such that the relationship was weaker in the presence of the moderator.

Keywords: Past abusive supervision, Hindrance appraisal, Posttraumatic stress, Social Support

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I. INTRODUCTION

Abusive supervision is recognized as one of the most crucial factors that reduce individual affectivity at work and adversely affect well-being (Oh & Farh, 2017). Defined as the sustained display of aggressive verbal and non-verbal behavior, abusive supervision is linked to several adverse outcomes (Tepper, 2000). Research generally highlights its significance as a stressful experience and victims of similar behavior experience negative emotions and suffer from difficulty during concentration at work (Vogel & Bolino, 2020). This highlights the importance of a focused investigation of the outcomes of abusive supervision. While extant literature has mainly examined the current supervisor and subordinate relationship, research lacks a thorough understanding of what happens once an employee has moved on from an abusive supervisor (Vogel & Bolino, 2020). For instance, research suggests that ongoing abusive supervision causes deviant workplace behavior (Javed et al., 2019), reduced well-being (Fischer et al., 2021) and several other adverse outcomes. Current research suggests that once the abuse is over, so are its consequences. However, this may not always be the case. Effects of abuse can be long-lasting and, in some cases, may last a lifetime (Vogel & Bolino, 2020). Abusive supervision is categorized as work-related trauma and it includes active forms of hostility, categorizing it as a traumatic stressor. Exposure to such events, in the long-term, may lead to the problem of Posttraumatic Stress (PTS), an outcome containing numerous states of hyper arousal, invading thoughts and avoidance (Vogel & Bolino, 2020). The present study offers a thorough understanding of how past abusive supervision assists in causing PTS in individuals once they have moved on. We focus on past abusive supervision because supervisors are often considered as individuals who possess great power and being in such positions may sometimes lead to exploitation of subordinates (Schmid et al., 2017). Hence it is essential to examine how their behavior influences victims in the long-term.

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Majority of the research focuses on the outcomes of stressors, however, the underlying mechanism through which the outcomes are derived has been largely overlooked (Maitlis, 2020). In the light of the transactional stress theory, the current study will address how victims deal with past abusive supervision by deriving a mechanism of hindrance appraisal, through which the outcome of PTS emerges. Every individual is different in terms of how they appraise particular events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) however, to deal with stressors at work, several resources are required. The Conservation of Resource Theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989) suggests that stressors at work diminish personal resources leading to adverse outcomes. Social support in turn, being a social resource, reduces the intensity of these negative outcomes produced by stressors (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Ali and Audi, 2018; Ali and Rehman, 2015; Ali and Senturk, 2019; Ali and Zulfiqar, 2018; Ali et al., 2016; Ali et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2021). The present study therefore proposes social support as a moderator in the link between hindrance appraisal and PTS. This paper contributes to literature by providing crucial implications that will assist in mitigating destructive outcomes of past abusive supervision in Pakistan. This research adds to theory as it is the first study in Pakistan to examine the concept of past abusive supervision instead of ongoing abusive supervisor and employee relationships. Moreover, it is the first to address how consequences of abusive supervision emerge using a trauma lens. The role that hindrance appraisal plays in this relationship is also highlighted. Finally, this study is the pioneer in testing the moderating role of social support in the link between hindrance appraisal and posttraumatic stress which can be used to examine and understand the significance of social support in the lives of individuals. As a result, this may assist organizations in developing policies that support a friendly environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

III. PAST ABUSIVE SUPERVISION AND POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS

The definition of abusive supervision closely links to the descriptions of psychological abuse (Bancroft, 2003). Occasionally, supervisors use insulting behaviors while interacting with their subordinates' (Tepper et al., 2000). Similar behaviors fall into the category of abusive behaviors and hence reveal the supervisor's failure to meet predetermined norms of acceptable behaviors (Mackey et al., 2017). These behaviors serve as a source of distress for employees who have been targeted and therefore reduces efficiency at work. This occurs due to the loss of personal resources such as cognitive individual resources (Tepper et al., 2000). Therefore, abusive supervisory behaviors are evidently linked to adverse outcomes. Research in the past suggests abusive supervision as one of the key social issues that tends to have destructive outcomes and implications for victims of such behavior (Tepper, 2000). Past research is consistent with the fact that once abusive supervisory behaviors end, so do their destructive implications. However, studies linked to abuse have demonstrated that adverse effects of such behavior may continue to exist long after the mistreatment has ended (Vogel & Bolino, 2020). Those who have been victims of past abuse may start to get frightened at benign incidents and may experience thoughts regarding the abuse that are disruptive (Ehlers & Clark, 2000). Furthermore, research suggests that events that are traumatic tend to be more mainstream than they have been considered to be. Broadly, traumatic events include any events that fall beyond the preestablished norms of acceptable behavior (Kauffman, 2002; Roussel et al., 2021; Sajid and Ali, 2018; Senturk and Ali, 2021; Mehmood et al., 2022). Therefore, as abusive supervision is defined as a behavior that goes past norms of acceptable behavior (Mackey et al., 2017). Moreover, abusive supervision is a kind of behavior that assists in depleting individual cognitive resources (Pradhan & Jena, 2017). In accordance to the COR theory, losing or being threatened to lose personal resources assists in inducing traumatic stress which leads to destructive outcomes if caused at work (Williams & Williams, 2020). Therefore, it can be said that abusive supervision assists in causing PTS. Hence, we propose that:

Hypothesis 1: Past abusive supervision has a positive relationship PTS

III. THE MEDIATING ROLE OF HINDRANCE APPRAISAL

Appraisals are normally drawn out of events that are stressful in order to evaluate the essentiality of the event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Abusive supervision was initially defined as "subordinate's perception" about the extent to which their supervisors display unacceptable forms of behaviors (Tepper, 2000). This perspective of abusive supervision indicates that the mistreatment has more to do with the subordinate's perception in comparison to the supervisor's behavior itself (Fischer et al., 2021). Hence, it is possible that the same subordinates or two different ones may perceive a supervisor as abusive in one context and non-abusive in another (Tepper, 2000). Therefore, subordinates tend to form perceptions of behavior in order to assess if it serves as a hindrance or barrier to their personal well-being (Oh & Farh, 2017). Events that are stressful are appraised in a number of ways however, normally, individuals often view these events as a hindrance (Webster et al., 2011). According to the transactional theory of stress, the way in which an individual-responds to a stressful event depends on how that individual appraises the particular event (Li et al., 2020). Cognitive appraisal is a mechanism through which an individual examines if a specific experience in their surroundings is pertinent to their well-being. The influence of stressors is assessed with respect to two stages of cognitive appraisal (Folkman et al., 1986). In the primary stage, individuals will assess the importance of the event with respect to personal well-being. Considering

past abusive supervision, individuals may evaluate it as a hindrance at this stage. In the secondary stage of appraisal, individuals will evaluate the resources that they have access to in order to cope with the event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The transactional theory of stress specifies these appraisals as an essential mediator of events that are stressful between the victims and their surroundings (Peltokorpi, 2019). Therefore, we can suggest that hindrance appraisal can mediate the link between past abusive supervision and PTS. Hence, we propose that:

Hypothesis 2: Hindrance appraisal for stressors mediates the relationship between past abusive supervision and PTS

II.III. HINDRANCE APPRAISAL AND POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS

The way in which an individual perceives an encountered event encompasses the concept of cognitive appraisal (Ogińska-Bulik & Kobylarczyk, 2016). According to research, two different appraisals exist that assist in determining individual reactions with respect to work situations. One of these appraisals is the hindrance appraisal which is crucial as it has majorly been linked to certain emotional experiences (Meijen et al., 2020). When a demand at work is considered to be a possible source of loss, hindrance appraisals emerge (Lavoie et al., 2021). Previously, the relationship between hindrance appraisals and negative emotions has mostly been supported (Rossato et al., 2018). According to the COR theory, appraising stressors negatively enhances feelings of stress and leads to the depletion of cognitive resources (Marchandio et al., 2018). The depletion of these resources tends to provide a justification of the link between hindrance appraisal and work outcomes. Further, the cognitive models of PTS highlight the part that negative appraisals have in traumatic situations (Mitchell et al., 2017). The conditions that result due to PTS demonstrate a pattern of negative psychological outcomes after the exposure to traumatic events (Vogel & Bolino, 2020). The way in which an event is appraised tends to gauge the severity of the symptoms of PTS that a person will experience. Therefore, a strong relationship may be predicted between hindrance appraisal and PTS symptoms (Mitchell et al., 2017). Hence, we propose that,

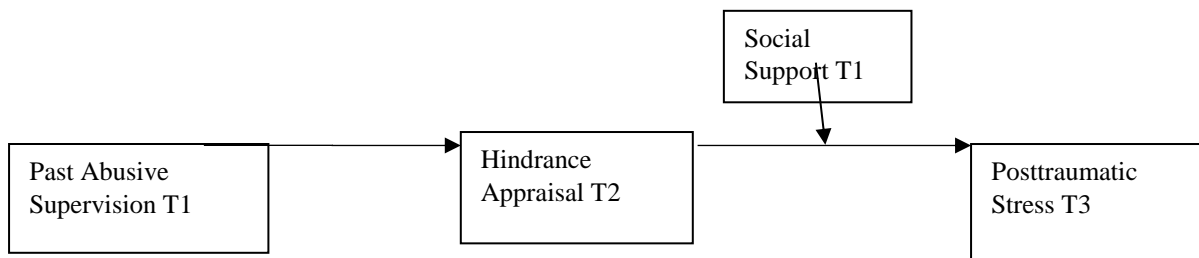
Hypothesis 3: Hindrance Appraisal for stressors has a positive relationship with PTS

II.IV. THE MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) which suggests that as a social resource, social support may assist in the process of buffering against the negative outcomes generated by past abusive supervision as individuals are encouraged to preserve, retain and gain personal resources to reduce stress (Hobfoll, 1989). The theory is consistent with past research that evaluates social support as a moderator usually between work and family (Jamaludin et al., 2018). The main idea that lies behind the concept of social support is the perceived availability of resources that include support offered by an individual's social network (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Social support has been thoroughly examined as a moderator for many years and its effect in reducing destructive outcomes through reassessing tough times has been highlighted. It is often used as a moderator as it assists in a mechanism that triggers the process of development strategies that are essential to coping (Matavelli et al., 2020). Among various aspects that help reduce stress post-trauma, social support has received great attention (Lu et al., 2018). Social support is crucial in dealing with emotional trauma and may help in appraising traumatic events that the victim has experienced (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Considering the work context, co-workers and supervisors are often considered to be a potential source for the provision of social support due to which subordinates expect respect and care to achieve several objectives (Yousaf et al., 2019). Researchers have examined the moderating effect that social support may have on the negative outcomes of occupational stressors and found that social support plays an important role in reducing them (Hobman et al., 2009). Therefore, we propose that:

Hypothesis 4: Social support moderates the relationship between hindrance appraisal for stressors and PTS such that the relationship will be weaker in the presence of social support.

Figure 1. Proposed Model



III. METHODOLOGY

III.I. SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

To maximize variance at the individual level, a diverse sample of employees was tested. These employees belonged to various sectors in Pakistan, including healthcare, banks, higher education and telecom. Using a diverse sample to collect data increases variance and provides a good research design (Ismail et al., 2012). The participants consisted of full-time

employees who had been in the workforce and switched jobs since the past six months or more. The questionnaire was designed in English. In Pakistan many studies have used English as a medium of their questionnaires and have reported good reliabilities (cf Ali et al., 2011; Sarwat & Abbas, 2020; Abbas et al., 2021). Our study is contextualized in Pakistani work settings because Pakistan is a country with high power distance culture and such abuse often goes unreported due to fear of retaliation (Cassum, 2014). The sampling technique adopted in this study was convenience sampling. It is considered as a beneficial technique as it helps in examining ideas which are related to the area of interest and is adopted specifically for this reason (Blumberg et al., 2008). With regard to sample size, our target sample was 366. Scholars have provided diverse thresholds in this context. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) suggest that 300 respondents account for an adequate sample size. The analyses carried out in this study were done using AMOS 24.0 software package and SPSS 25.0.

This study uses the survey research method to collect data. We developed a self-administered questionnaire that was distributed online and in hard form. Although this method for data collection has benefits, it does not come without problems one of which includes Common Method Variance (CMV). Researchers argue that this may occur due to the measurement method (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Methods that may be used to control CMV are related to statistical solutions or the study design (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Currently, several studies have adopted a design that involves the introduction of lags between study variables. This decreases the chances of participants using their previous responses to fill subsequent surveys as they may not be able to recall previous responses (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Hence, this study was also time lagged and the data was collected from the respondents using three different time waves, each being six weeks apart. Data regarding past abusive supervision and social support was collected at Time 1. At Time 2, data regarding hindrance appraisal was collected and at Time 3, PTS was obtained.

III.II. MEASURES

The constructs in this study were measured using a five-point Likert scale which varied from 1 for “*Strongly Disagree*” to 5 for “*Strongly Agree*” for past abusive supervision, hindrance appraisal and PTS. The scale used to measure PTS ranged from 1 for “*Never*” to 5 for “*Always*”. *Past Abusive Supervision*: Tepper’s (2000) 15 item scale was adapted for this study to measure past abusive supervision. The scale had a high reliability with an alpha value of 0.93. An example item includes “My supervisor put me down in front of others.” *Hindrance Appraisal*: This study used a combination of scales developed by Le Pine et. al. (2005) and Le Pine et. al. (2016) to form an 8-item scale to measure hindrance appraisal. Example of an item includes “The treatment I received from my supervisor thwarted my personal growth and well-being.” This scale had an alpha reliability of 0.92. Two out of the 8 items in the scale were reverse coded. *Social Support*: To measure social support, the 12-item scale by Zimet et. al. (1988) was used. Sample item included “There is a special person who is around when I am in need.” This scale had an alpha reliability of 0.95. *Posttraumatic Stress*: This construct was measured using the PTSD scale by Foa et. al. (1993). The scale consisted of 17 items and had a reliability of 0.94. A sample item was “Having bad dreams or nightmares about the traumatic event.”

IV. FINDINGS

The measurement model of the study was validated by using a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). In CFA the baseline hypothesized model was tested which laid out an overall fit perspective of the model in addition to the goodness of model fit (Hair et al., 1995). The model fit indices were investigated by considering values of CMIN, DF, TLI, CFI, IFI (Bollen, 1989) and RMSEA (Williams et al., 2009). Table 1 shows that the model fits the data where $\chi^2/df = 1.59$; IFI= 0.909; TLI= 0.901 CFI=0.91; RMSEA= 0.051. These findings mentioned were consistent with our hypothesized relationships which encouraged us to carry out the testing of our main model. The descriptive analyses are presented in Table 2. The mean values of the variables are shown. Past abusive supervision was positively correlated with hindrance appraisal ($r = 0.524, p < 0.01$) and PTS ($r = 0.605, p < 0.01$). Hindrance appraisal was also positively correlated with PTS ($r = 0.506, p < 0.01$) and negatively correlated with social support ($r = -0.150, p < 0.05$). The reliabilities of each variable are represented by the Cronbach’s alpha values shown, each value indicating high reliability.

IV.I. HYPOTHESES TESTING

A regression analysis was used to test the direct effects in the study. The results in Table 3 show that past abusive supervision was positively linked to PTS ($\beta = 0.4188, SE = 0.0537, p < 0.01$) which showed a significant positive effect and hence, Hypothesis 1 was accepted. Moreover, as proposed, hindrance appraisal was positively linked to PTS ($\beta = 0.2433, SE = 0.0560, p < 0.01$) which provided support for Hypothesis 2. Indirect effect of the study that were based on 5000 bootstrapped samples demonstrated significance for the mediating role of hindrance appraisal between past abusive supervision and PTS as the upper and lower confidence interval both had the same sign (0.0687, 0.1902). Hence confirming a significant effect leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis 3. Moderation analysis in the study was conducted

using Hayes (2020) PROCESS Syntax in order to investigate the moderating role of social support. The hindrance appraisal—PTS relationship was tested using social support as a moderator between the link. Results from the moderation analysis are shown in table 4. An interaction term was created in order to test hypothesis 4. The results showed that the hypothesis was supported as the interaction effect i.e., hindrance appraisal*social support had a significant effect on PTS, shown by the regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.04$). Further, the lower and upper level of confidence interval had the same signs (LLCI= -0.2274, ULCI= -0.0078) where $p > 0.05$, hence showing a significant effect which led to the acceptance of hypothesis 4.

Table 1: Measurement Model

Model	CMIN	DF	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Baseline Hypothesized Model	3261.286	2051	.908	.901	.909	.051

Table 2: Correlation, mean, standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha values

S.No	Variables	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD	α
1	Past Abusive Supervision	1				2.75	0.86	0.93
2	Hindrance Appraisal	.524**	1			2.88	0.76	0.92
3	Social Support	-.262**	-.150*	1		3.55	0.79	0.95
4	Posttraumatic Stress	.605**	.506**	-.468**	1	3.57	0.76	0.94

Table 3: Direct and Mediation Effects

Hypothesis	B	SE	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Past Abusive Supervision Posttraumatic Stress	.4188	.0537	7.7950	.0000	.3129	.5246
Hindrance Appraisal Posttraumatic Stress	.2433	.0560	4.3422	.0000	.1329	.3538
Bootstrapped Indirect effect results: Mediating role of Hindrance Appraisal in the Relationship of Past Abusive Supervision and Posttraumatic Stress						
		Effect	SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Past Abusive Supervision Appraisal	Hindrance Posttraumatic Stress	.1222	.0304	.0687	.1902	
<i>N=336, B= Beta, SE= Standard Error, P= Significance Level, ULCI= Upper-Level Confidence Interval, LLCI= Lower Level of Confidence Interval</i>						

Table 4: Moderating Role of Social Support

Variable	B	SE	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Hindrance Appraisal*Social Support → Posttraumatic Stress	-.1176	.0557	-2.1108	.0359	-.2274	-.0078

V. DISCUSSION

Results from hypothesis 1 are reinforced by past studies such as Vogel and Bolino's (2020) review which revealed that even after employees leave abusive supervisors, they may continue to experience PTS. A possible explanation of this is that changes occur to the self-concept of an individual due to the exposure to abuse which creates a sense of threat and influences the victim's cognition leading to PTS (Vogel & Bolino, 2020). According to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) threat to the loss of these resources assists in causing stress. Moreover, research has suggested that events that trigger adverse outcomes, are all positively linked to hindrance appraisals (Webster et al., 2011). Previous research has also highlighted certain links between negative appraisals and the severity of symptoms of PTS which are outcomes of traumatic episodes (Fairbrother & Rachman, 2006). These findings therefore provide strong evidence for hypothesis 2 of our study. Past studies supported the relationship between negative appraisals and PTS which indicated that negative appraisals including hindrance appraisals act as mediators in the relationship between early or late symptoms of stress (Mitchell et al., 2017). These findings are consistent with hypothesis 3 of this study. Finally, research shows that social support acts as a buffer against the destructive outcomes of stress (Szkody et al., 2020). According to Cohen and Wills (1985) social support is considered to be one of the best situational variables that plays an essential role as a moderator against occupational stress. It also assists in protecting individuals at work from severely adverse outcomes of stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The COR theory is also in line with studies that test social support as a buffer (Jamaludin et al., 2018). Hence, these findings provide a good rationale in support of hypothesis 4 which suggests that social support moderates the link between hindrance appraisal and PTS.

VI. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

VI.I. IMPLICATIONS

This study implies many theoretical and practical contributions. First, by drawing on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), our study provides an insight into how past abusive supervision leads to PTS long after the abuse is over. Secondly, using a trauma lens, we define how individual appraisals shape outcomes of stressors. Third, using the transactional stress theory, this study highlights how individuals deal with stressors such as past abusive supervision. Further, according to COR, social support was explored as a resource that moderated the link between hindrance appraisal and PTS thereby weakening the link. This study was the first to test this relationship. The current study also helped in explaining the damaging long-term effects that past abusive supervision has on victims which may help organizations in identifying the root cause and therefore avoiding it. Also, organizations may offer free therapy sessions after work for subordinates suffering from residual effects of past abuse. Furthermore, organizations should develop strict policies against abuse at work which may help in mitigating future problems. Finally, organizations should stress on a friendly work environment and may provide activities outside of work which may help co-workers bond. This may assist in the development of a quality social network.

VI.II. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study is not without limitations. We used a self-report questionnaire which may be biased sometimes (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Further, while this study only considers abusive supervision at work, other studies may replicate this study using some other form of mistreatment outside work. Moreover, we considered social support as a broad term however, future researchers may use any dimension of it such as instrumental or emotional support (Adams et al., 1996). Finally, results from this study cannot be generalized globally as this study was carried out in the context of Pakistan. Hence, this study may be carried out in other countries as well.

VI.III. CONCLUSION

Literature on abusive supervision normally discusses short-term effects. This study proposed a framework to address long-term consequences of abuse and suggested that outcomes of abuse are mainly a product of how it is appraised. This was done through the mechanism of hindrance appraisal, hindrance appraisal in this case. If an individual appraises a stressor as a hindrance, it shapes their path to PTS. However, the severity of PTS may be reduced if the individual has access to quality social support. Lastly, the current study had important implications and future directions for researchers to offer which may help in enhancing literature on abusive supervision.

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