Abusive Supervision: A Predictor of Employee Cynicism and Counterproductive Workplace Behaviour among Industrial Workers

Etodike Chukwuemeka E¹, Ezeh Leonard N², Chukwura Emmanuel N³

¹²Dept. of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
³Dept. of Educational Psychology Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract: The thrust of this study explored the predictive effects of abusive supervision on organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour among waste management workers in Anambra State. Responses of two hundred and ninety (209) waste management workers whose ages ranged from 27 years to 41 years with average age of 32 years and standard deviation of 1.05 were obtained through a simple randomization technique with abusive supervision scale by Tepper, organizational cynicism scale by Dean, Brandes and Dharwadkar and counterproductive workplace behaviour scale by Spector and Fox. Hypotheses were tested using regression analysis as statistical tool. The result indicated that abusive supervision significantly and positively predicted both organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour at β = .34, p < .05 and β = .27, p < .05 (n = 209) respectively. Employee abuse of any form is known to precipitate varying negative organizational antecedents and as such, management is advised to engage workers to ventilate their grievances in order to reduce effects of abusive supervision for the good of the organization.

Keywords: abusive supervision, waste management workers, organizational, cynicism, counterproductive workplace behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Without effective management of human resource in the organization, rarely do organizations achieve success. The human resource management has in consideration of the above been adjudged the most critical factor of organizational success [1, 2], hence, may precipitate varying negative antecedents if is not effectively managed. Schaufeli, Bakker and VV Rheenen [3] contended that the antecedents of such attitudes and behaviors are the function of organizational climate as implemented by organizational management/leadership which is also a critical factor for organizational effectiveness. Employees as the mercenaries of work organizations ensure that organizational tasks are executed within the mandate/objectives of the organizations within the supervision of the organizational leadership which ensures that these employees are fully deployed and engaged using viable motivational paradigms [4]. In most organizational instances, human behavioural antecedents in the workplace have been linked to certain job, employee and organizational outcomes depending upon organizational circumstances, goals and operating environment. Common types of negative employee outcomes are counterproductive workplace behaviour and organizational cynicism.

Michael [5] referred to counterproductive workplace behaviour as behaviour of an employee that harms an organization or its members and it includes such acts as shoplifting, sabotage, verbal abuse, withholding of effort, lying, lateness, theft, absenteeism refusing to cooperate and physical assault. Counterproductive workplace behaviour is one of the numerous employees’ outcomes which have many causative factors such as; abusive supervision [6]. Any behaviour which goes against the goal of an organization may also be viewed as counterproductive work behaviour on the part of the employee. This behaviour can be intentional or unintentional and result from a wide range of underlying causes and motivations. It has been proposed that a person-by environment interaction can be utilized to explain a variety of counterproductive work behaviours. For instance, an employee who steals from the company may do so because of the influence of supervision style (environment) and underlying psychopathology (person) that work in concert to result in the counterproductive behaviour. This behaviour can be
intentional or unintentional and result from a wide range of underlying causes and motivations.

Evaluation of a person interaction with the environment may also provide ample explanation on the evolution of counterproductive work behaviours. For instance, an employee who steals from the company may do so because of poor supervision or as a result to stress associated in form of abuse by the supervisor. Penney and Spector [7] asserted that a number of studies in this area have focused attention on identifying environmental antecedents of CWB such as job stressors and identifying personality traits such as affectivity that may increase an individual’s propensity to engage in CWB and organizational cynicism.

Cynicism or cynical behaviour is an evaluative judgment that stems from an individual’s employment experiences. Irrespective of the accuracy or validity of the individual’s perceptions on which the employee’s cynicism construct is based, it is real in its consequences [8]. Cynicism can be expressed both overtly, such as through direct statements questioning the integrity of the organization, and covertly through the use of sarcastic humor and nonverbal behaviors, such as “knowing I looks,” “rolling eyes,” and “smirks” [9]. Cynicism is negative and is therefore a sensitive topic to managers and organizations. Nair and Kamalanabhan [10] contended that this sensitivity, negative attitudes as well as the organizational practices that foster them have been relatively neglected in management research. Cynics may feel embarrassment, hatred and even dishonor when they think about their organizations and have doubts about their fulfillment of their careers within their organizations.

Ozler and Atalay [11] asserted that organizational cynicism is an individual’s negative feelings, such as anger, disappointment, hopelessness, about many problems both for the staff and organizations General cynicism is an inborn and determined personality trait which reflects generally negative perceptions about human behavior. Ikechukwu-Ifudui & Myers, [12] using employees in the Nigerian banking sector as a case study, opined that lack of trust is the leading cause of cynicism at work. They further contended that its impacts on employee engagement and psychological well-being may be utterly devastating. Cynicism is also defensive response, because it can shield employees against feeling strong emotions and prepare them for the next “inevitable failure” [13]. Although, there are different types of cynicism such as; social cynicism, employee cynicism, civil servant cynicism, work cynicism and organizational cynicism (OC) [9], this study shall only focus on the later – organizational cynicism. Organizational cynicism is the negative attitudes of an individual in connection with his/her organization (Kalağan, 2009).

In contemporary Nigerian organizations, several instances abound which are indicative that organizational cynicism may be unavoidable among Nigerian employees organizational leadership is improved upon. The individual negative feelings, such as disturbance, dissatisfaction and hopelessness about the staff and organization may be orchestrated by corruption and no meaningful progressive which impacts so negatively on the organizations and members [11, 12]. Cynicism is also an attitude that involves unfriendliness from the organization due to actual or perceived evidence that an organization lacks honesty and will always attempt to fool its employees [10]. Depending upon the severity, lack of trust and faith in one’s organization expressed both overtly and covertly may be the foundation for cynical behaviour which may be precursor to other organizational deviant behaviours.

Retaliatory behaviours such as counterproductive workplace behaviours and organizational cynicism may be induced abusive supervision. Mary [14] asserts that abusive supervision is hostile behaviour of managers toward their subordinates. When subordinates are lookdown upon, neglected or discriminated among others by their supervisors, they look to coworkers for support and behavioural guidance. If they see that deviant behaviours like theft and shirking are accepted, they are more likely to engage in those behaviours themselves. Kelly and Benneth [15] asserted that the past decade has recorded an explosion of interest and research on the topic of abusive supervision. Such behaviours typically include ridiculing and humiliating subordinates in public, refusing to speak with subordinates, or otherwise debasing subordinates. Research suggests that abusive supervision has a detrimental effect on a number of organizational outcomes, including an increase in anti-social behaviour among subordinates, job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Tepper (2000) opined that abusive supervision is estimated to affect approximately 10 to 16 percent of American workers at an annual cost of $23.8 billion dollars.

In consideration of both psychological and financial cost of abusive supervision in precipitating retaliatory behaviours, and its outcome on employee and organizational effectiveness, theoretical underpinning bridging its predictive antecedents on counterproductive workplace behaviour and organizational cynicism; there is evidence that an organizational problem which requires empirical evidence exists. Consequently, certain pertinent questions may arise as follows:
1. Would abusive supervision significantly predict organizational cynicism among waste management workers in Anambra State?
2. Would abusive supervision significantly predict counterproductive workplace behaviour among waste management workers in Anambra State?

LITERATURE

Organizational cynicism is an attitude, characterized by frustration and negative beliefs, resulting primarily from unmet expectations, which is capable of being directed towards an organization in general and/or more specific facets of the organizational environment (Brockway, 2012). It refers to the lack, among workers, of the feelings of righteousness, confidence, fairness and sincerity towards the organization where they work (Abraham, 2000). Organizational cynicism is a learned response rather than a personality-based predisposition (Wanous, Reicher & Austin, 2000).

Organizational cynicism was found to have significant negative relationships with organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and job satisfaction (Andersson & Bateman, 1997). It is a negative attitude that develops as a result of perceived malfeasance of the agent or entity. Such a negative attitude can be directed at the organization as a whole and/or the individuals in the organization (Reicher, 1997). Organizational cynicism is a general and specific attitude characterized with anger, hopelessness, disappointment and a tendency to distrust individuals, groups, ideologies, social abilities or institutions (Andersson, 1996).

Organizational cynicism is a negative attitude with three dimensions towards the organization where one works. These dimensions are (1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization (Kutanis & Çetinel, 2009). Organizational cynicism is a complex process which culminates in a belief that the organization is not fair [9].

Cognitive Dimension - The first dimension is the belief in the organization's lack of honesty. The cognitive (belief) dimension of Organizational cynicism consists of the belief that the organization's practices are deficient in justice, honesty and sincerity [9]. Cognitive dimension refers to employees’ disbelief in their organizations. (Urbany, 2005). Due to these beliefs, they think that the organizational practices betray them [9].

Emotional Dimension - Emotional /sentimental reactions to the organization are the second dimension of organizational cynicism. The sensitive/emotional dimension of organizational cynicism consists of strong emotional reactions towards the organization [9]. Emotional dimension consists of emotional reactions such as anxiety, shame, anger, disappointment (OLeary, 2003) or rage/pessimism (Brandes, 1999). Organizational cynicism of emotional dimension contain some powerful emotional reactions like disrespect, anger, boredom and shame (Abraham, 2000).

Behavioral Dimension - The last dimension refers to negative tendencies and mainly humiliating attitudes. Behavioral dimension, the last dimension of organizational cynicism, consists of negative and frequently critical attitudes. The most prominent of behavioral tendencies is strong critical expressions towards the organization [9]. Behavioral dimension covers employees’ fierce criticisms of the organization such as condescension, denigration and belittlement (Turner & Valentine, 2001). In this dimension, the employee may get alienated from or sever her ties with the organization (O’Brien, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

Role Stressors Theory

Mark [16] proposes role stressors theory as a triadic model and response of the body to any demand made in an organization. This theory proposes that business executives strive to meet organizational goals by utilizing an effective role. A role is referred to as a set of expectations involving an executive’s position (supervisor) within a business organization. Expectations are referred to as behavioural requirements or limits, which the business executives must pursue. Depending on the behavioural requirements and expectations, executives may form high levels of stress in carrying out these requirements. The two role stressors in measuring stress are role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict occurs when the messages and cues from a superior about the role is clear, but may be contradictory or mutually exclusive [17]. This is defined in terms of the dimensions of congruency-in congruency or compatibility-incompatibility in the requirements of the role (Karl, 2011). Role ambiguity arises when a role is unclear. Role ambiguity is the need for clear instructions so that the individual may perform their organizational tasks successfully. Unclear instructions may result from the overall complexity of the organization, constraints in the communication of information, or a very high dynamic performance environment [18]. Role ambiguity which results from poor supervisory roles may prevent individuals from understanding what the job is and this expectation may bring an unsecured feeling involving their position within the organization. Executive positions are known for the high level of stress and this may affect their jobs. Examples of stress are: downsizing, restructuring, mergers, acquisitions.
and competing in high velocity markets or limited time management constraints may contribute to the high stress environment and create detrimental effects on executives.

Many studies have inquired into the nature of role stressors among business executives. Lars [19] researched the impact of business organizational practices and the impact on role stressors and discovered that clear and communicated organizational practices will reduce role stress. Also, if superiors are unclear as to the expected behaviour, role stress will increase among executives. If role stressors reach an intensified level among individuals, this will reduce job satisfaction and organizational commitment according to Kelloway (2010) giving room for varying counterproductive workplace behaviour. There is direct and indirect cost of role stressors and this is measured in both humanistic and financial terms. The humanistic perspective identifies the relationship between role stressors and the impact on the individual. Financial healthy or healthy organizations are successful in reducing or maintaining acceptable levels of job stress, thus, retaining a productive workforce [20]. The importance of understanding job stressors is stated in a 1997 survey entitled, The Work life Report. The report reveals most workers in the Nigeria believe that stress is increasing in their jobs and must work harder to earn a living compared to workers 20 or 30 years ago (Prinveton Survey Research Associates,1997). Understanding how role stressors have a negative impact on organizations and identifying the culture may reduce the effects of stressors as this is a critical issue for management.

Retaliatory Theory

This theory proposes and argues that deterrence theory is logically established to curb on retaliation as it involves negative internal and external characteristics of individual(s). Retaliatory theory considers harmful acts conducted in response to feelings of having been wrongly treated, but in this case the focus is specifically on injustice [21]. The specific negative emotion experienced in response to negative events or outcomes may depend upon the individual’s causal attributions for the precipitating event. Todaro [22] suggested that although internal attributions for negative events are likely to lead to specific negative emotions (example, self-deprecation or helplessness) and behaviours (example, learned helplessness or substance abuse) directed toward self, external attributions, coupled with perceived intentionality, are likely to lead to negative emotions (such as anger) and behaviours (such as aggression, revenge, or sabotage) directed toward others. Spector and Fox [23] developed a model of CWB that gives central importance to emotions as a response to workplace stressors. Conditions and events at work are perceived and appraised by employees. Those perceived to be stressors induce negative emotions, including anger, anxiety, and depression. Such emotions contribute to CWB that can occur immediately and impulsively or at a later time. In many cases, emotions help motivate intentions to engage in later CWB. This model includes an important role for perceived control that affects both the appraisal of situations and the decision to engage in CWB or some alternative constructive act. Those who perceive control in a situation will be less likely to perceive a stressor, experience negative emotion, and engage in CWB. Personality (particularly affective dispositions that will be discussed later) is also an important element that can affect both appraisal and the decision to act. Individuals who have a tendency to experience negative emotions will be more sensitive to stressors and will be more likely to exhibit emotional reactions to the environment, as well as expected on to be exhibit counterproductive workplace behaviour.

Also, Nathan, William and Mary [21] proposed retaliation theory while Smollan [24] noted how anger and outrage are emotions experienced in response to injustice and these can precede counterproductive workplace behaviours. Although, their initial work focused on the reactions of those affected by injustice, more recent work has explored vicarious reactions to the injustice experienced by others [25]. According to this view, anger occurs when one witness’s injustice against others and this can be associated with overt or covert retaliation against the perceived cause of the injustice.
The model below emphasizes that abusive supervision (AS) can precipitate organizational cynicism (OC) and counterproductive workplace behaviour (CWB) as forms of retaliatory behaviours.

In consideration of the above, model two hypotheses have been formulated to confirm the proposed predictive relationship. They hypotheses are:
1. Abusive supervision will significantly and positively predict organizational cynicism among waste management workers in Anambra State.
2. Abusive supervision will significantly and positively predict counterproductive workplace behaviour among waste management workers in Anambra State.

The thrust of this study explored the predictive effects of abusive supervision on organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour among waste management workers in Anambra State. Responses of two hundred and ninety (209) waste management workers whose ages ranged from 27 years to 41 years with average age of 32 years and standard deviation of 1.05 were obtained with abusive supervision scale by Tepper (2000), organizational cynicism scale by Dean, Brandes and Dharwadkar [9] and counterproductive workplace behaviour scale by Spector and Fox [23]. Hypotheses were tested using regression analysis as statistical tool. The result indicated that abusive supervision significantly and positively predicted both organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour at $\beta = .34$, $p < .05$ and $\beta = .27$, $p < .05$ ($n = 209$) respectively. Employee abuse of any form is known to precipitate varying negative organizational antecedents and as such, management is advised to engage workers to ventilate their grievances in order to reduce effects of abusive supervision for the good of the organization.

METHODS
Two hundred and nine (209) waste management workers whose ages ranged from 27 years to 41 years with average age of 32 years and standard deviation of 1.05 were selected through a simple random sampling for the study. Males were 171 whereas females were 38. Judgmental sampling technique was used to choose the organization sampled in the study whereas simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants. Demographic data showed that 160 participants are not married while 49 are married; 191 disclosed that they are Christians while 16 indicated that they belong to African Traditional Religion; 2 were missing values.

Instruments
For data collection in this study, three instruments were used in the study – Abusive supervision scale by Tepper (2000), organizational cynicism scale by Dean, Brandes and Dharwadkar [9] and Counterproductive workplace behaviour Scale by Suzy and Spector [26].

Abusive supervision scale is a 15-item scale designed by Tepper (2000) to measure abusive supervision as perceived by subordinates. Participants will be required to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale indicating the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the statements made in the questionnaire ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. For instance: 1=Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Undecided (U), 4=Agree(A), 5 = Strongly Agree (SA) (Tapper, 2000). Tapper (2000) reported reliability index for the Scale as.95.

Organizational cynicism is measured using a scale developed by Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar [9]. It is a 14-item scale designed by the authors to measure cynical behaviours of the employees regarding their organizations. The authors obtained a coefficient alpha .94 for the scale. This measure consists of fourteen items and utilized a five-point response format with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5) as endpoints. Sample items include: “I believe my organization says one thing and does another”, “I often experience anxiety when I think about my organization” and “I complain about how things happen in my organization to friends outside the organization. For the validity and reliability of the scale; although the scale have been validated by the original authors who obtained .94 internal consistence of the scale, for its use in this study, the reliability was enhanced during the pilot study using 51 participants from Enugu State civil service. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient analysis carried out by the researcher revealed an alpha reliability coefficient of .77 for the scale.

Counterproductive work behaviour scale is a 29-item scale designed by Spector and Fox [23] to measure integrity, emotion, violence and intentional acts of individuals in work place or counterproductive work behaviour. Responses are obtained and scored on a five Likert response format as 1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = everyday, 4 = every weekend, 5 = every two weeks [26]. The Cronbach’salpaha value of the scale as reported by Suzy and Spector [26] ranges from .88 to .94.

Statistics
The study is a cross-sectional survey research; appropriate design adopted for this study is correlation design while multiple regression analysis was used as statistical tool for data analyses.

RESULTS

Available Online: http://saspjournals.com/sjahss
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The regression result as presented in the table 2 above confirmed that abusive supervision significantly and positively predicted organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour at $\beta (1, 209) = .54^*, p < .05$ and $\beta (1, 209) = .57^*, p < .05$ respectively. This implied that the higher the perceived abuse in the organization, the more the incidences of organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour is witnessed in the organization. Furthermore, models 1 and 2 as shown in model summary (table 3) shows that the adjusted $R^2$ is at .48 and .49 respectively; the models therefore offered 48% and 49% explanation of the predictive effects of abusive supervision on organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour respectively.

DISCUSSION

Abusive supervision significantly predicted both organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour, consequently, based on this finding, hypothesis 1 which stated that abusive supervision will significantly and positively predict organizational cynicism was accepted. This result is in an agreement with the findings of Feng [27] whose findings suggests certain behavioural attitudes in the organization attract a form of retaliatory behaviours which may come in form of cynical behaviour breach of trust and faith in the organization. When employees perceive ill treatment from their supervisors, they are more likely to distrust them or make cynical expression or gestures about them in a way that shows displeasure and disloyalty. Role stress theory further provided foundational linkages in understanding how role clarity and ambiguity can constitute an employee stress and a form of abuse from the supervisor if it repeats often. These forms negativity may precipitate employee loss of confidence, trust and belief in organizational goals or the members of the organization who represent the organizational owners. Furthermore, the greatest impact of organizational cynicism is that it affects the human interaction process in the organization which kills solidarity, team work and delegation of authority. These may be made worse in the presence of abusive traits from the employees’ superiors with lasting negative organizational antecedents.

Also, positive predictive effect of abusive supervision was also found on counterproductive workplace behaviour which is supported by Feng’s [27] work which shows that there is a relationship between abusive supervision and sabotage, production deviance and theft, but not abusive supervision and withdrawal; perceived mobility moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and withdrawal and theft, but not abusive supervision and sabotage and production deviance. This implies according to Sulea [28] that abusive supervision positively correlated with counterproductive work behaviour. From the above findings, it could be deduced that counterproductive work behaviour correlates with abusive supervision of individuals in work place. In support of the above findings, Mary [14] observed that when confronted with stressful conditions, individuals high with abusive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Descriptive statistics for mean and standard deviations of the variables tested in the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterproductive workplace behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational cynicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive supervision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Multiple regression showing model 1 and 2 of the predictive effects of abusive supervision on organizational cynicism, counterproductive workplace behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive Supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive Supervision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Model Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**a** Predictor: (Constant), Organizational cynicism (a), counterproductive workplace behaviour
supervision may ascribe more malicious motives to the actor leading to increased negative emotional arousal which may lead to counterproductive work behaviour. Individuals low in displaying abusive supervision, on the other hand, may give the actor the benefit of doubt and attribute the behaviour to more causes, enabling them to proceed without feeling the need to respond or retaliate with counterproductive work behaviour. Also, there are other research evidences to show that abusive supervision mediates or moderates the relationship between counterproductive work behaviours [28].

Implications of the Study

Human interaction process is a critical organizational variable for success in any organization because human beings who are the employees are islands; for collective efforts as a team there is need to trust and have confidence among team players in the organization especially between superiors and subordinates without take advantage of the each other. Where abuse is directed towards the employees by their superiors, the human trust and loyalty may be lost forever and this may set the antecedents for other varying deviant behaviours in the organization at the expense of organizational effectiveness.

Organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviours have been seen to adversely affect organizational behaviour and organizational procedures and outcomes. Specific CWBs include abusive behaviour against others, aggression (both physical and verbal), purposely doing work incorrectly, sabotage, theft and withdrawal (example, absence, lateness and decreased turnover). Other examples of CWB are emotional abuse, bullying, mobbing, deviance, aggression, retaliation and intimidation [29]. A number of job stressors have been linked to the performance of CWB including role ambiguity, role conflict, workload, organizational constraints and interpersonal conflict [29]. The rate at which employees work under tension or stress could trigger CWB in organizations. So also work overload in a particular work description can predispose employees into exhibiting CWB. Thus, the findings of the study could however be generalized to other sample but the same research could be replicated with larger sample before such a generalization. The study could also be a guide for further study on CWB in relation to abusive supervision, and work overload.

CONCLUSION

Retaliatory theory and role stress theory have been used to provide foundational bridge linking the predictive effects of abusive supervision as organizational factors that can predict organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour has been examined by the current study. The conceptual model explains the incidences of organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviours in the organization as precedents of abusive supervision. Two hypotheses were formulated to provide answers to the research questions necessitating the use of correlation design and regression statistics as design and statistical tool respectively to analyze the data obtained from the field. The result confirmed the conceptual model showing evidence high incidences of abusive supervision increased the prevalence of organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour. The model of the study is consequently accepted with implications and recommendations for management practice and academic inquiry.

REFERENCES


Available Online:  http://saspjournals.com/sjahss


