

# **ABUSIVE SUPERVISION - A FORM OF WORKPLACE HARASSMENT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN THE ECUADORIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY**

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**ABSTRACT:** In light of the conspicuous absence of workplace harassment (“acoso laboral”) in the Ecuadorian Constitution and the country’s Labor and Penal Codes, this article reports on an exploratory study about abusive supervision, a form of workplace harassment, in the country’s hospitality industry. Based on a review of the literature on various forms of workplace harassment, the study investigated employee opinions about their supervisors’ behaviors and found that abusive supervision is a prominent issue in the Ecuadorian hospitality industry and that it is significantly related to employees’ intentions to leave the organization. The study advocates future research into other components of workplace harassment in these and other industries in the country and into the development of measures that reduce abusive supervision and workplace harassment. **Keywords:** Workplace harassment, abusive supervision, employee turnover intentions, hospitality, Ecuador.

## INTRODUCTION

Workplace harassment is “the offensive conduct that becomes a condition of continued employment...conduct that is severe or per-

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vasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive” (EEOC, 2014, p. 1). In this definition, the emphasis is on the workplace being perceived as “intimidating, hostile or abusive” by a “reasonable” person. The terms that are used to describe this behavior are of increasing intensity and suggest various levels and forms of possible abuse.

The concept of workplace harassment or “acoso laboral” is absent from Ecuadorian law. Harassment, the “unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability or genetic information,” (EEOC, 2014, p.1) is mentioned in several legal documents, but only in the form of sexual harassment. Harassment as related to the workplace is mentioned only once in the Ecuadorian Constitution. Article 331 of the Constitution reads: “The State will guarantee women equality in accessing employment, education, labor and professional promotion, and fair salaries and the initiative for autonomous work. All measures required will be taken in order to eliminate any inequity” (Constitution of Ecuador, 2008, Article 331).

Any type of discrimination, harassment or violent act, either direct or indirect, which negatively affects women from gaining employment or promotion is banned and considered illegal in the Constitution. Yet, it only defines and addresses harassment in relation to women’s equal rights to work and promotion and it does not identify any other forms of workplace harassment.

In article 66, the Constitution guarantees Ecuadorian citizens the right to a life free of violence in the public and private environments. The State will adopt the measures needed to prevent, eliminate and penalize any type of violence, especially against women, girls, boys and adolescents, senior citizens, disabled people and any person who is in a situation of disadvantage or vulnerability; identical measures will be taken against violence, slavery and sexual exploitation. (Constitution of Ecuador, 2008, Article 66).

The Constitution refers to the safety of vulnerable groups in society in this article, yet, as earlier, it does not explicitly address or mention harassment in the workplace.

In 2014, the national government under President Rafael Correa proposed the “Organic Code of Labor Relations,” yet this project was put on hold for procedural and political reasons and was never adopted into law. A look at a draft of the proposed Code shows that it would have addressed the concept of harassment only twice, and once again only as sexual harassment. The first instance would be a reference to the above-mentioned article 331 of the Constitution, and the second instance would be in relation to sexual harassment as be-

ing one of the reasons for dismissal of an employee. This proposed Code of Labor Relations would, once again, not explicitly recognize workplace harassment and would only identify sexual harassment as a reason for dismissal.

Another important legal document that might be expected to contain references to harassment is the Ecuadorian Integral Penal Code (2014). In article 166, it addresses the concept of harassment, but here too, only in the form of sexual harassment:

The person that requests any act of sexual nature, for himself or herself or for a third party, in a prevailing labor context, whether in terms of teaching, religious or similar authority, being a tutor, curator, minister of cults, professional of education or health, person responsible for attention and care of a patient or having a family bond or any other way which implies subordination of the victim, with the threat to cause the victim or a third party any harm related to the legitimate expectations of that relationship will be penalized with punitive privation of freedom from one to three years. (Ecuadorian Integral Penal Code, Article 166, 2014)

Even though this article in the Penal Code explicitly refers to the labor environment, the only abusive acts in the workplace it mentions are of a sexual nature.

If not covered in either the Constitution or the Penal Code, one might expect workplace harassment to be covered under the country's Labor Code. Yet, it is also absent here and the code only makes mention of "mistreatment." Article 161 of the Labor Code, which establishes the obligations of the employer to the employee, reads: "The employer must consider the employee, avoiding any oral or physical mistreatment" (Ecuador Labor Code, Article 161, 2005). Finally, article 510 of the Code discusses violent acts in the workplace and outlines the civil and penal consequences for the perpetrators, their accomplices as well as accessories after the fact, yet it too does not refer to workplace harassment.

The absence of the concept of workplace harassment in Ecuadorian law is not out of the ordinary in Latin America. As Ocegüera, Aldrete, & Ruiz-Moreno (2009) state, in reference to the issue of "mobbing," which is one particular form of workplace harassment: "In Latin America...the concern to legislate on mobbing has not transcended: only Colombia and Brazil have specific legal norms" (p. 83).

Given that workplace harassment is conspicuously absent in the Ecuadorian legal system and in the legal systems of most Latin American countries, this paper looks at one form of workplace harassment, abusive supervision, in this high power distance culture and focuses on one particular industry, the hospitality industry. As most countries

in Latin America, Ecuador is regarded as a high power distance culture (Hofstede, 1980), a culture in which employees tend to more readily accept that power in the workplace is distributed unequally and that it is in the hands of managers and supervisors. The relationship between managers and subordinates is one of dependence, rather than interdependence, as is the case in low power distance cultures. This cultural characteristic makes the Ecuadorian cultural environment well-suited to investigate abusive supervision, since one might expect that reported instances of abuse would be lower than in a low power distance culture, as employees tend to be more accepting of supervisors having power and perhaps abusing it.

The reason why the hospitality industry was selected for this study is that it is a relationship-oriented, service industry. Abusive supervision and other forms of workplace harassment have been found to occur regularly (e.g. Bloisi and Hoel, 2007; Restubog, Scott, & Zagencyk, 2011) across the globe.

The review of literature will discuss the issue of workplace harassment by utilizing some of the more recent studies on the topic that have been published in both English and Spanish. It will examine three of the most prominent ways in which workplace harassment occurs: sexual harassment, bullying, and abusive supervision. It will then provide several examples of workplace harassment that have been reported in the global hospitality industry and briefly touch upon Ecuador as a high power distance culture, in preparation of the discussion of the results of this study among employees in the Ecuadorian hospitality industry.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *Workplace Harassment*

Workplace harassment has been extensively investigated over the years, not only because it violates basic human rights and is, at times, illegal (Giraldo, 2005; Einarsen & Hauge, 2006), but also because it has been shown in recent studies to lead to employee emotional distress (Agustina, 2013), underperformance, decreased job satisfaction, poor physical health (Moreno-Jimenez et al., 2008; Moroni & Dabos, 2014) and employee turnover. Moreover, it not only hurts the employee, but also the organization (Neill & Tuckey, 2014).

Rospenda and Richman (2004) have defined it as “any negative workplace interpersonal interaction that affects the terms, conditions, or employment decisions related to an individual’s job, or creates a hostile or offensive working environment, but is *not* based on any legally protected characteristic (pp. 221-222). It is a topic that has been stud-

ied in many different research fields and the attention it has attracted continues to increase (Neill and Tuckey, 2014) as more studies from around the world and in different organizational environments become available. A recent study (Niedhammer, David, Degioanni, Drummond, & Philip, 2009) has estimated that as many as 12% of all employees globally may be exposed to some form of harassment in the workplace.

### *Various Forms of Workplace Harassment*

Workplace harassment is any interpersonal behavior that creates a hostile work environment and that makes employees feel uncomfortable or worse. It comes in various forms and sexual harassment is a common form of workplace harassment, as documented, for instance, in the hospitality setting by Lin (2006), White & Hardemo (2002), and Poulston (2008). This form of workplace harassment uses gender as the primary basis of harassment by co-workers and/or supervisors.

A second form of workplace harassment is workplace bullying, or “mobbing” as it has been described in some areas (Branch, Ramsey, & Barker, 2013; Einarsen et al., 2011; Escartin, Zapf, Arrieta, and Rodriguez-Carballeira, 2011; Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Djurkovic, McCormack, and Casimir, 2008). Workplace bullying has been defined as “a situation in which one or more persons systematically and over a long period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative treatment on the part of one or more persons, in a situation in which the person exposed to the treatment has difficulty in defending themselves against the treatment” (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007, p. 735). It has been one of the more extensively researched topics related to workplace harassment in the Spanish language, and articles have come out of such countries as Columbia (e.g. Peralta, 2004; Martinez-Herrera, Agudelo-Suarez, & Vásquez-Trespalcios, 2010; Pando, Aranda, Parra, & Gutierrez, 2013), Costa Rica (Arias-Cascante & León-Jimenez, 2014) and Spain (e.g. Pastrana, 2002; Pinuel y Zabala & Onata Cantero, 2002; Inaki y Zabala, 2006; Cantero, Escartin, Rodriguez-Carballeira, Porrua, & Martin-Pena, 2008; Pando Moreno, Aranda Beltrán, Parra Osorio, & Gutierrez Strauss, 2013).

Abusive supervision, the third form of workplace harassment discussed here, involves a supervisor abusing his/her supervisory privileges and responsibilities to the detriment of his/her employees, and creating a hostile work environment for the employees they supervise. This form of harassment is not necessarily based on age, gender, or any other personal characteristic of the employee, nor is it necessarily harassment by co-workers. Rather, it is harassment instigated by a supervisor (Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002; Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, and Kacmar, 2007; Harris, Kacmar, and Zivnuska, 2007; Tepper,

Varr, Breaux, Geider, Hu, and Hua, 2009; Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, and Marrs, 2009; Hernández Palomino, Jesús Espinoza, & Aguilar Arelano, 2013). Tepper (2000) defines it as “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in a sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors including physical contact” (p. 178). Public criticism, rudeness, breaking promises, inconsiderate actions, and the silent treatment have all been used as examples of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007).

### *Workplace Harassment in the Hospitality Industry*

The hospitality industry is an industry where workplace harassment has been shown to occur in various forms and across the globe. For example, Aaron and Dry (1992), Woods and Kavanaugh (1994), and Gilbert, Guerrier, and Guy (1998) identified sexual harassment as an issue in the hospitality industry about twenty years ago. McMahon (2000) investigated bullying and harassment in the Irish hospitality setting. More recently, Mathisen, Einarsen, and Mykletun (2008) looked at it in the Scandinavian restaurant industry and Bloisi and Hoel (2008) investigated bullying and abusive practices among chefs in European restaurant settings. Patah et al. (2010) investigated the experiences of hospitality student interns in Malaysia, and Nyberg et al. (2009) looked at the effects of destructive managerial leadership on employee well-being in hotels in Sweden, Poland, and Italy. The above are just some of the numerous available studies that highlight the hospitality industry as an industry that is prone to suffer from workplace harassment issues.

### *Ecuadorian Culture as Defined by Cultural Dimensions Theory*

As the above paragraphs have suggested, workplace harassment is prevalent in any society across the globe, it comes in various forms, and it is particularly common in the hospitality industry. Abusive supervision was identified as one particular form of workplace harassment in the hospitality industry.

This study was started on the premise that it might be common in the Ecuadorian hospitality industry as well, not only because the hospitality industry is prone to see abusive supervision, but also because of the nature of the Ecuadorian culture. Based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory (1980), one of the typical characteristics of Ecuadorian culture is that it exhibits the extreme characteristics of a “high-power distance” culture. Hofstede (1980) and others (Salin, 2003) have defined a high power distance culture as a culture in which employees tend to more readily accept that power is distributed unequally and that it is in the hands of managers and supervisors. The relationship

between bosses and subordinates is one of dependence, rather than interdependence.

So, if employees in a culture which tends to be more accepting of unequal power distribution in the workplace identify abusive supervision as a prominent form of workplace harassment, then it is a practice that warrants legislative attention and that needs to be addressed not only in Ecuador's legal system, but across the continent as a whole.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Sample*

On October 1-2, 2014, a total of 313 hospitality students from a private and a public university in Ecuador were invited to participate in the study. All of these respondents were pre-selected based on the fact that they were either employed in the industry at the time of the study or had been employed prior to it. Two of the authors distributed paper-and-pencil surveys to the respondents, who were informed that the study was only for academic research purposes and that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Three hundred and five (305) individuals fully completed the survey, with a response rate of 97.4%. There were 193 females (N=193) and 112 males (N=112) in the sample. The average age of the respondents was 22 years old ( $SD = 3.16$ ).

### *Survey Development and Measures*

All surveys were administered in Spanish and were based on original surveys in English. In order to ensure that the Spanish language surveys accurately reflected the original surveys, survey instructions and survey items were translated into Spanish using the conventional method of back translation (Brislin, 1980). After translation from English to Spanish by a bi-lingual speaker, two additional bi-lingual researchers who were not part of the research team translated the Spanish version back to English in order to verify the accuracy of the Spanish instrument. All measures related to employees' perceptions about the support they received from their supervisors and about abusive supervision used seven-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The survey was divided into the following five sections:

### **Demographic Information**

The first section of the survey asked the respondents to share some personal demographic information. They were asked to share their age, gender, and the length of time they had worked in the industry.

This information was collected to determine if any of the observed opinions were significantly different between the various demographic groups in the sample.

### **Supervisor Emotional Support**

Since this study looked at what employees in the hospitality and tourism industries thought about their supervisors, the survey first collected information about whether or not the respondents felt that their supervisors supported them both personally and professionally. Knowledge about a supervisor's emotional and instrumental support is helpful in the process of determining perceived abusive supervision: a perceived lack of supervisor support does not necessarily mean that a supervisor is abusive, yet it might be a precursor to it.

Emotional support is support that is person-focused and supervisor emotional support was measured by means of the six-item scales developed by Settoon and Mossholder (2002). Sample items included "my supervisor makes an effort to make me feel welcome at work," "my supervisor takes time to listen to my concerns," and "my supervisor takes a personal interest in me." Cronbach's alpha for supervisor emotional support was .91.

### **Supervisor Instrumental Support**

Instrumental support is task-focused support and refers to the extent to which an employee feels supported by his/her supervisor in the execution of job-related tasks and responsibilities. This was measured by the five-item scales developed by Settoon and Mossholder (2002) and included such items as "my manager helps me when things get demanding," "my supervisor assists me with heavy workloads," and "my supervisor helps me with difficult assignments, even when I don't ask." Cronbach's alpha for supervisor instrumental support was .91.

### **Abusive Supervision**

The fourth, and most important, section of the survey used the six-item abusive supervision scales proposed by Harris, Harvey, and Kacmar's (2011). Sample questions included whether the supervisor broke promises that he/she made, was rude to the respondent, and expressed anger when he/she was mad for another reason. Cronbach's alpha for abusive supervision was .84.

### **Employee Turnover intentions**

Finally, the respondents' intentions to leave the organization, which could be an outflow of supervisor abuse, were measured by means of

Ma, Qu, and Wilson's (2013) three-item scale. Items included "As far as I can see, I intend to stay with my current position," "I would turn down a job offer from another company if it came tomorrow", and "I will stay at this organization even if other organizations offer me higher pay and a better position." Cronbach's alpha for turnover intentions was .70.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### *Descriptive Results*

#### **Supervisor Emotional Support**

As Table 1 shows, the average score for supervisor emotional support was 4.89 ( $SD = 1.62$ ). The two highest ratings were for item 2 (*My supervisor makes an effort to make me feel welcome at work*;  $M=5.20$ ,  $SD=1.81$ ) and item 3 (*My supervisor treats me as one of the team*;  $M = 5.53$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) and might be indicative of the workplace in Ecuador sharing some collectivist cultural characteristics and emphasizing teamwork. Alternatively, the two lowest items were item 6 (*My supervisor listens to me when I have get something off my chest*;  $M=4.07$ ,  $SD=2.14$ ) and item 4 (*My supervisor takes time to listen to my concerns*;  $M=4.58$ ,  $SD=1.99$ ), hinting at Ecuador high power distance cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980).

**Table 1. Supervisor Emotional Support**

|  | <b>M</b>    | <b>SD</b>   |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 1. My supervisor cheers me up when I am having a bad day                 | 4.93        | 2.00        |
| 2. My supervisor makes an effort to make me feel welcome                 | 5.20        | 1.81        |
| 3. My supervisor treats me as one of the team                            | 5.53        | 1.75        |
| 4. My supervisor takes time to listen to my concerns                     | 4.58        | 1.99        |
| 5. My supervisor takes a personal interest in me                         | 5.03        | 1.91        |
| 6. My supervisor listens to me when I have to get something off my chest | 4.07        | 2.14        |
| <b>Average of supervisor emotional support</b>                           | <b>4.89</b> | <b>1.62</b> |

#### **Supervisor Instrumental Support**

The respondents to the survey were less pleased with the instrumental support they received from their supervisors. As Table 2 shows, the average score for instrumental support was 4.46 ( $SD=1.62$ ) and was considerably lower than the perceived emotional support. The highest item in this regard, and the only one with a rating over 5, was item 1 (*My supervisor helps me when things get demanding*;  $M=5.19$ ,  $SD=1.76$ ). The lowest item was item 3 (*My supervisor helps me when I am running behind in my work*;

$M=4.00$ ,  $SD=1.95$ ). Whereas supervisors were generally seen as emotionally supportive, they were considerably less supportive instrumentally, indicative of Ecuador's high-power distance cultural dimension.

**Table 2. Supervisor Instrumental Support**

|   | <b>M</b>    | <b>SD</b>   |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1. My supervisor helps me when things get demanding                         | 5.19        | 1.76        |
| 2. My supervisor goes out of his/her way to help me with work problems      | 4.37        | 1.74        |
| 3. My supervisor helps me when I am running behind in my work               | 4.00        | 1.95        |
| 4. My supervisor assists me with heavy workloads                            | 4.51        | 2.00        |
| 5. My supervisor helps me with difficult assignments, even when I don't ask | 4.23        | 1.99        |
| <b>Average of supervisor instrumental support</b>                           | <b>4.46</b> | <b>1.62</b> |

### Abusive Supervision

As shown in Table 3, the average score for abusive supervision was 2.33 ( $SD = 1.33$ ). The means for items 1 ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ ), 2 ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ) and 6 ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ) were above the mean and higher than the other three items. This was an indication that supervisors in this high power distance culture were more likely to give subordinates the silent treatment, to break promises they made, and to express anger at subordinates when they were mad for another reason than being rude to them or putting them down in front of others.

The reason why these scores were relatively low as compared to the ratings in the other two scales is that abusive supervision is a very low base-rate phenomenon, which means that it happens with low probability. Abusive supervision exists, but it is rare as compared to some of the other items. This will be further discussed in the conclusion.

**Table 3. Abusive Supervision**

|  | <b>M</b>    | <b>SD</b>   |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 1. My supervisor gives me the silent treatment                               | 2.54        | 1.82        |
| 2. My supervisor breaks promises he/she makes                                | 2.69        | 1.88        |
| 3. My supervisor is rude to me   | 2.33        | 1.80        |
| 4. My supervisor makes negative comments about me to others                  | 2.06        | 1.72        |
| 5. My supervisor puts me down in front of others                             | 1.68        | 1.43        |
| 6. My supervisor expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason | 2.64        | 1.89        |
| <b>Average of abusive supervision</b>  | <b>2.33</b> | <b>1.33</b> |

### *Comparative Results*

Of interest was whether gender, age, and industry tenure (the time worked in the industry) would have an effect on respondents' opinions. The study conducted several additional tests (primarily independent sample t-tests) to determine if any of the observed differences of opinion between the various groups in the sample were significant.

#### **Differences of Opinion based on Gender**

Although female participants ( $N = 193$ ,  $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) showed a higher score of abusive supervision than their male counterparts ( $N = 112$ ,  $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ), the study found no significant difference of opinion about abusive supervision based on gender ( $t(305) = -0.47$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

In addition, there was no significant difference of opinion between males ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) and females ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ) on supervisor emotional support,  $t(305) = 1.02$ ,  $p > .05$ . There was also no significant difference of opinion between males ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ) and females ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ) on supervisor instrumental support,  $t(305) = 0.81$ ,  $p > .05$ .

#### **Differences of Opinion based on Age**

A median split was used to classify the 305 participants in the sample as "younger" (those below the age of 21) and "older" (21 years old and higher). An independent sample t-test showed that there was a significant difference of opinion on abusive supervision between younger participants ( $N = 123$ ,  $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) and older participants ( $N = 182$ ,  $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ). The results of the t-test ( $t(305) = -2.36$ ,  $p < .05$ ) showed that older participants perceived higher levels of abusive supervision than their younger peers.

The study found no significant difference of opinion between younger ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ) and older participants ( $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ) on supervisor emotional support ( $t(305) = -0.14$ ,  $p > .05$ ). There was also no significant difference of opinion between younger ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) and older participants ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) with regard to supervisor instrumental support ( $t(305) = -0.09$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

#### **Differences of Opinion based on Tenure**

Participants were then categorized into "lower" and "higher" tenure based on the time that they had worked for the organization by means of a median split. The ensuing independent sample t-test showed that the difference of opinion about abusive supervision be-

tween lower tenured participants (those who had worked for less than four months) and higher tenured participants (those who had worked for four months or more) was not statistically significant ( $M = 2.38$  vs.  $2.28$ ,  $t(305) = 0.68$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

With regards to supervisor support, the difference of opinion between lower tenured participants and higher tenured participants was marginally significant, both on supervisor emotional support ( $M = 4.72$  vs.  $5.05$ ,  $t(305) = -1.79$ ,  $p = .07$ ) and on supervisor instrumental support ( $M = 4.29$  vs.  $4.64$ ,  $t(305) = -1.88$ ,  $p = .06$ ). These results hinted at the fact that employees could perceive more supervisor emotional and instrumental support the longer they stayed with the organization.

### Correlation between Abusive Supervision and Supervisor Support

The correlations among abusive supervision, supervisor emotional support, and supervisor instrumental support were investigated next and the results are reported in Table 4 (See Table 4). As was to be expected, abusive supervision was significantly negatively related to both supervisor emotional support ( $r = -.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and supervisor instrumental support ( $r = -.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In other words, the higher the supervisor's emotional and instrumental support, the lower the perceived abusive supervision. In addition, supervisor emotional support was significantly and positively related to supervisor instrumental support ( $r = .72$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The higher the emotional support, the higher the instrumental support, and vice versa.

**Table 4. Correlations among abusive supervision, supervisor emotional and instrumental support**

|                                    | 1      | 2     | 3  |
|------------------------------------|--------|-------|----|
| 1. Abusive Supervision             | --     |       |    |
| 2. Supervisor Emotional Support    | -.36** | --    |    |
| 3. Supervisor Instrumental Support | -.27** | .72** | -- |

Note: \*\*  $p < .05$

### Association between Abusive Supervision, Supervisor Support and Turnover Intentions

Since the study had collected information about the respondents' turnover intentions (their desire to leave the organization), a final analysis used linear regression to determine whether abusive supervision and supervisor support were associated with employee turnover intentions. Turnover intention was regressed on abusive supervision in two steps: the first step included the control variables- age, gender, and tenure; these demographic variables had been shown to be associated with

turnover intentions and actual turnover behavior (e.g., Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008). The second step then included abusive supervision, supervisor emotional and instrumental support respectively.

The results showed that abusive supervision ( $\beta = .19, p < .05$ ) was significantly and positively related to employee turnover intentions: the higher the perceived abusive supervision, the higher the employee's intent to leave the organization. Supervisor emotional support ( $\beta = -.28, p < .05$ ) and supervisor instrumental support ( $\beta = -.28, p < .05$ ) were significantly and negatively related to turnover intentions in this high power distance culture. This meant that, the higher the perceived emotional and instrumental supervisor support, the lower the employees' intent to leave the organization.

Overall, the study found that gender did not significantly affect opinions about supervisor support or abuse. Older employees perceived higher abusive supervision than younger employees, yet tenure with the organization only had a marginally significant effect on opinions.

The most important outcomes of the analyses were that abusive supervision was relatively prevalent in the Ecuadorian hospitality and tourism environment. The study found a direct relationship between perceived abusive supervision and employees' intent to leave the organization. Conversely, it also found that if perceived supervisor support (emotional or instrumental) was high, the employees' intent to leave the organization declined.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the difficulties associated with studying abusive supervision in the workplace is the fact that it is a very low base-rate phenomenon, which means that it happens with very low probability. For example, the means in studies that have utilized Tepper's (2000) measure of perceived abusive supervision range from 1.27 (Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007) to 2.45 (Hannah et al., 2013) on a five-point Likert scale. Many additional studies on the topic have found averages of abusive supervision below 2.0 on a five-point scale (e.g., Tepper, 2000; Shao, Resick, & Hargis, 2011) and below 2.50 on a seven-point scale (e.g., Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012; Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013).

Although the phenomenon of abusive supervision is not common, and instances of abuse are reported or rated at relatively low levels, the essential issue is that it exists and that it is particularly relevant within certain occupations; e.g., relationship-oriented occupations (Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011); blue-collar professions (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006), and the military (Hannah, et al., 2013). Furthermore,

when it does occur, very pernicious consequences for both individual employees and organizations have been identified, as abusive supervision has been shown to negatively affect employees' emotional well-being and increase their intentions to leave the organization.

In this study, the mean rating of abusive supervision was 2.33 on a seven-point Likert scale and was reminiscent of similar ratings in other studies. More importantly, however, was that this study found that abusive supervision did have a negative influence on employee turnover intentions: the higher the supervisor abuse, the higher the employee's intent to leave the organization. At the same time, the study also found that the higher the supervisor's emotional and instrumental support, the lower the employee intent to leave the organization was.

This study contributed to the theory on the topic in that it was the first to be conducted in a hospitality setting in Ecuador, a high power distance and collectivist society. In such a culture, family and work group goals are placed above individual needs or desires, and employees tend to more readily accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1980). Given that employees in the Ecuadorian culture tend to be more accepting of power being unequally distributed and in the hands of their supervisors, the ratings reported here take on more prominence. Whereas one might expect that employee perceptions of abusive supervision in a high power distance culture would be lower than in other cultures as supervisors are seen as more powerful and more distant, this study found ratings that were at least equal to the ratings in earlier studies, making the issue of abusive supervision a prominent one in the hospitality industry in the country. Coupled with the finding that tenure has a negative impact on employees' perceptions, one might even hypothesize that had the study surveyed employees with longer tenure, the results might have been even more telling.

There were several limitations to this study: the sample that was used consisted of students in the hospitality field with limited work experience. Future studies might attempt to investigate the issue in the field, with employees of higher age and longer tenure. Second, this was a self-reported survey, and concerns about how accurately the ratings and answers reflected reality always exist. However, given that the survey asked for opinions and perceptions, this was not a major concern. Third, it might be that the issue is worse or better in other countries and in other industries and therefore these results cannot be generalized across the continent or across industries.

Ecuador, as an extreme collectivist and high power distance culture, lends itself well for this kind of research and opportunities for future studies abound. Additional industries and occupations that have been shown to be highly susceptible to abusive supervision, such as the military and relationship-oriented occupations and blue collar oc-

cupations could be subjected to similar investigations. Furthermore, research into what can be done structurally to prevent abusive supervision and workplace harassment, given the cultural orientation, could also prove to be very beneficial.

Abusive supervision occurs in Ecuador, as this study of the hospitality industry has shown. It can have devastating effects on employees and organizations and it needs to be included in the country's legal code. Harassment in the workplace is more than sexual harassment: it transcends gender, it transcends individual industries, it can happen in the form of bullying or abusive supervision, and it is pervasive in the workplace. Employees need to be protected, given their inferior positions in the organization and their complete dependence on their supervisors, and the only entity that can provide that protection is the country's legal system. Yet, at the same time, organizations in any industry, and in the hospitality industry in particular, would be well-served to monitor themselves and reduce workplace harassment in general and abusive supervision in particular. They should not only depend on laws and regulations to curb the issue, but try to identify and address the issue internally as well.

Addressing and fighting workplace harassment in whatever shape or form is not only a responsibility of the government. It is also the responsibility of industry, employees, unions, trade associations, the press, and academia. Jointly, inroads can be made and attention can be focused on the issue, and formal legislation is a good starting point to do so.

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