

THE IMPACT OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION ON EMPLOYEE SILENCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF AVOIDANCE ORIENTATION

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ABSTRACT

The research analyzes how abusive supervision induces employee silence through avoidance orientation, which follows the principles of the Conservation of Resources Theory. The research contributes to understanding adverse workplace supervisory actions that harm employee performance. The research model reveals that abusive supervision pushes subordinates toward avoidance orientation, reforming their workplace behaviors. The research utilized pre-existing questionnaires for banking sector employee participation to gather 200 valid responses from workers operating in Pakistan. People who endure abuse stay quiet on the job because avoidance behavior modifies their emotional reactions and behavioral patterns. The avoidance orientation concept serves as a primary explanatory factor in understanding why abusive supervision motivates employees to remain silent at work since abusive treatment does not directly impact silence.

Keywords: Abusive Supervision, Employee Silence, Avoidance Orientation, Destructive Leadership, Conservation of Resources

INTRODUCTION

Leadership has a significant impact on how workers behave, their job performance, and overall well-being. Much attention has been paid to the benefits of being a boss. Nevertheless, an increasing number of new studies are examining what goes wrong when leaders fail to fulfil their responsibilities, particularly when they do not manage effectively. A variety of adverse outcomes, including psychological distress, reduced job satisfaction, and impaired organizational performance, have been linked to abusive supervision, which is defined as sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior by supervisors

(Tepper, 2000) (Mackey et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2014). When employees are abused at work, they may choose not to share their thoughts, concerns, or comments, which can be very upsetting (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Silence undermines organizational learning, innovation, and ethical decision-making, yet, the mechanisms through which abusive supervision fosters silence remain underexplored. While past studies have examined emotional exhaustion (Xu et al., 2015) and fear of retaliation (Chamberlin et al., 2020) as mediators, the role of avoidance orientation—a psychological tendency to evade adverse outcomes—has not

been thoroughly investigated. This study fills in that gap by looking into how avoidance orientation affects the link between abusive supervisors and employee silence. Bringing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) hypothesis (Hobfoll, 2011), which posits that individuals attempt to preserve their mental and emotional resources under threat, we propose that employees whose employers mistreat their health employ avoidance strategies, including silence. This paper adds to the body of knowledge by incorporating a motivating element into the narrative of workplace silence. The context of this study—Pakistan's private banking sector—adds further significance. Pakistan is characterized by a high power distance culture, where hierarchical authority is highly respected, and employees are less likely to challenge their superiors. Combined with job insecurity and economic pressure, this cultural setting may amplify the tendency toward silence in response to abusive supervision. Despite these contextual factors, little research has examined these dynamics within non-Western, high-power-distance societies, especially in competitive sectors such as banking.

Research Objective

This study investigates the indirect relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence, with avoidance orientation as the mediating mechanism, in the context of Pakistan's private banking sector. By doing so, it contributes both theoretically—by extending COR theory—and practically—by offering insights into reducing employee silence in hierarchical, high-pressure environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Styles

Effective leadership helps to shape employee emotions and improves overall results within an organization. Transformational leadership and similar styles ensure that employees behave well, stay healthy and achieve their work duties (Arnold et al., 2007; Hoch et al., 2018). Conversely, destructive leadership poses challenges for both employees and organizations; one type of toxic leadership that has received considerable attention is abusive supervision. Sustained

unfriendly actions, such as ridiculing workers in public, using hostile language, and engaging in sabotage, can harm both the employee's mood and their ability to perform their duties (Tepper, 2000; Mackey et al., 2021).

Abusive Supervision and Its Effects

Both Chi and Liang (2013) and Wu et al. (2013) have observed that abusive supervision often leads to stress, less at work, increased desire to leave the job and weaker team performance. Because it happens in silence, abusive supervision uses up both mental and emotional energy, leading workers to use stress-coping strategies (Tepper, 2007; Peng et al., 2014). Several studies link abusive supervision to lower job involvement and more counterproductive behaviours by employees (Priesemuth et al., 2014; Mackey et al., 2021).

Employee Silence: Concept and Dimensions

Employees may not intentionally share their work thoughts, worries, or ideas, and this silence can be perceived as acquiescent, defensive, or done to shield others from harm (Milliken et al., 2003; Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Keep in mind that organizational functionality suffers when silence hinders people's ability to communicate, innovate, or find solutions to challenges (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005). According to research, experiencing abuse at work is likely to make employees either say nothing to protect themselves or keep silent because they doubt their resistance is worthwhile (Chamberlin et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023).

Avoidance Orientation: Theoretical Role and Workplace Implications

Avoidance orientation is influenced by theories that distinguish between motivations to achieve outcomes and those to avoid negative experiences (Elliott, 2006). High avoidance orientation causes employees to prioritise personal safety, avoiding challenging or tense situations (Seo, 2016; Sherman et al., 2016). The disposition to avoid could induce the person in the workplace not to voice their concerns, as they want to avoid negative consequences or are tired (Lian et al., 2014; Mayer et al., 2012). Although avoidance orientation is seen as a relevant theory, it has not

been studied much in terms of how it links abusive supervision and silence.

Mediating Role of Avoidance Orientation

The COR theory helps explain that experiencing abusive supervision can cause people to become quiet by avoiding someone or something (Hobfoll, 2011). COR theory posits that individuals are working to maintain their mental resources and reduce the amount they lose due to stress. Abusive supervision drains employees' energy, causing them to act politely and avoid engaging further with the group (Mackey et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2023). Previous investigations have shown that emotional exhaustion lies between emotional labour and well-being, but an avoidance orientation adds a cognitive-behavioural perspective to Coping.

Contextual Gaps and Rationale for This Study

While it is widely known how abusive supervision and worker silence occur in West or East Asia, not much research has touched on these issues in South Asia, particularly Pakistan, because of its strong high power distance culture (Khan et al., 2023). In those cultures, workers tend to be more willing to tell their bosses what they want to hear and less likely to express their true thoughts in order to avoid arguments with their superiors. Private bankers face a competitive and high-demand job market, so it is important, yet largely unknown, how these changes affect their jobs. This research bridges these gaps by exploring whether avoidance orientation helps explain the relationship between abusive supervision and silence in Pakistan's banking sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study examines how abusive supervision influences employees to become silent, with employee responses to supervision serving as a mediating factor. Data was collected mainly through deductive research. Rawalpindi and Islamabad were the focus, and data were collected

from 200 employees using convenience sampling, resulting in a response rate of 66.7%. Everyone involved was asked to have supervised experience for at least six months.

1. Rating scales with seven points measured the central constructs in the study.
2. Abusive Supervision (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; 5 items; Cronbach's $\alpha = .727$),
3. Employee Silence (Tangirala et al., 2008; 5 items; $\alpha = .686$),

Avoidance Orientation was measured using six items developed by Johnson et al. (2013) and had a Cronbach's alpha of .727.

The researchers mainly included individuals just starting their careers; among them, roughly 58% were between 26 and 33 years old, 64% were male, and 50% held a Master's degree. To analyse the data, we used SPSS to perform descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression to identify straightforward relationships. The PROCESS macro, developed by Hayes with bootstrapping (5,000 samples), was used to examine indirect effects because it is resistant to violations of regular distribution. The scales showed good internal consistency, as Cronbach's alpha was higher than .70, which is necessary in exploratory research settings. The results for skewness and kurtosis were both within acceptable limits, which agree with the decision to conduct parametric tests.

Age Distribution

Age differences were the biggest causes of variation among study participants. The frequency and percentage for each age group are presented in Table 1. Most respondents (58%, or 116 in total) were between 26 and 33 years old. A further 30% ($n = 60$) were aged 34 to 41 years. About 12% of participants were aged 18 to 25 (4.5%) and 42 to 49 (7.5%). According to the study guidelines, all participants were required to have at least six months of supervisory experience.

Table 1: Frequency by Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-25	9	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%
26-33	116	58.0%	58.0%	62.5%
34-41	60	30.0%	30.0%	92.5%
42-49	15	7.5%	7.5%	100.0%
Total	200	100%	100%	

Gender

There were male and female proportions for gender distribution. The sample was predominantly male (64%, n = 128) compared to female (36%, n = 72) (Table 2).

Table 2: Frequency by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	128	64.0%	64.0%	64.0%
Female	72	36.0%	36.0%	100.0%
Total	200	100%	100%	

Qualification:

One of the factors that affect employees' ability to deal with workplace challenges is education. As presented in Table 3, roughly half of the participants (50%, n = 100) were Master's graduates, followed by those with a Bachelor's degree (42%, n = 84). A few (8%, n = 16) held advanced degrees, such as an MS or PhD.

Table 3: Frequency by Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Bachelor's	84	42.0%	42.0%	42.0%
Master's	100	50.0%	50.0%	92.0%
MS/PhD	16	8.0%	8.0%	100.0%
Total	200	100%	100%	

Reliability analysis

One major contributor to employees' ability to manage work stress is education. Half of the participants (50%, n = 100) held a Master's degree, and 42% (n = 84) had a Bachelor's degree, as shown in Table 3. Only a few individuals (8%, n = 16) held MS or PhD degrees.

Table 4: Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Abusive Supervision	0.727	5
Employee Silence	0.686	5
Avoidance Orientation	0.727	6

RESULTS

This research examines employee silence and abusive supervision relationships while considering avoidance orientation as an

explanatory factor. The analysis is structured into four sections: descriptive statistics, regression analysis, correlation analysis, and mediation analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics summarize the key characteristics of the study variables, including sample size, range (minimum-maximum values), means, and standard deviations. All research variables demonstrate stable central tendencies

alongside dispersion patterns in the data from 200 respondents, as presented in Table 5. The databases statistics help establish basic knowledge about the dataset, which will guide upcoming correlation and regression procedures.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness (Statistic)	Skewness (Std. Error)	Kurtosis (Statistic)	Kurtosis (Std. Error)
Abusive Supervision	3.604	0.530	-0.271	0.17	-0.799	0.34
Employee Silence	3.640	0.316	0.006	0.17	0.193	0.34
Avoidance Orientation	3.297	0.367	-0.267	0.17	-0.025	0.34

The study variables appeared in Table 5 along with their descriptive statistics, which researchers measured using a 5-point Likert scale to measure participant agreement using the ratings between 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree (N=200). All three variables revealed above-midpoint mean scores with abusive supervision (M = 3.60, SD = 0.53), employee silence (M = 3.64, SD = 0.32), and avoidance orientation (M = 3.30, SD = 0.37) having values superior to 3. This indicates that participants generally demonstrated agreement with the studied constructs. Normality assumptions were satisfied, with skewness (-0.27 to 0.01) and kurtosis (-0.80 to 0.19) values within acceptable thresholds (± 1 for skewness, ± 3 for

kurtosis), supporting a normal distribution for all variables.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis represents the relationship between the variables. It quantifies the relationship between variables by determining the significance level and direction (positive or negative). A positive sign indicates movement in the same direction, whereas a negative sign indicates movement in the opposite direction. This study used the Pearson correlation test to calculate the correlation coefficient. These coefficient values lie between +1.00 and -1.00. The 1.00 value shows a 100% correlation, and the zero value shows no correlation.

Table 6: Correlations

Variables	1	2	3
1. Abusive Supervision	1		
2. Employee Silence	0.047	1	
3. Avoidance Orientation	0.639**	0.516**	1

** . The statistical significance reaches the 0.01 level according to a 2-tailed test.

The correlation analysis for variables appears in Table 6, i.e., Abusive Supervision, Employee Silence, and Avoidance Orientation. The values reveal that the independent variable, i.e., abusive supervision, and the dependent variable,

employee silence, have an insignificant correlation, as ($r = 0.047$ $P > 0.05$), suggesting no direct relation between the two variables. On the other hand, abusive supervision is positively correlated with avoidance orientation, i.e., the

mediator of the study, as ($r= 0.639$ and $P < 0.01$) shows that abusive supervision is positively correlated with avoidance orientation, which is statistically significant.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis uncovers links between variables and their causes by forecasting how independent variable modifications affect dependent variable values. Regression allows

impact estimation by measuring the dependent variable alteration for each independent variable unit change, while correlation only detects associations. This study tests three direct hypotheses by regression: Abusive Supervision is positively related to Employee Silence. The findings establish whether these theories are validated.

Table 7: Direct Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	IV	DV	R ²	F	Beta	SE	t	Sig.
H1	Abusive Supervision	Employee Silence	0.002	0.44	0.047	0.042	0.664	0.508
H2	Abusive Supervision	Avoidance Orientation	0.409	136.808	0.639	0.038	11.696	0.000
H3	Avoidance Orientation	Employee Silence	0.267	72.018	0.516	0.052	8.486	0.000

Table 7 shows that the first hypothesis is not accepted. This can be interpreted from the non-significant p-value ($P > 0.05$), weak t-statistics ($t = 0.664$, $p > 0.05$), and the F-statistic ($F = 0.44$, $R^2 = 0.002$). It suggests that the second direct hypothesis ($R^2 = 0.409$) is accepted as the assumption that Abusive Supervision is positively related to Avoidance Orientation. This analysis demonstrates that avoidance orientation has a direct correlation with abusive supervision, even though it serves as a mediator in the framework. The findings confirm a statistically significant relationship, showing that 40.9% of the variance in avoidance orientation can be explained by abusive supervision ($R^2 = 0.409$, $p < 0.05$). The regression model exhibits a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.639$, $t = 11.696$) and excellent fit ($F = 136.808$): for every unit increase in abusive supervision, avoidance orientation increases by 0.639 units. These results offer strong evidence in favor of the hypothesis' acceptance.

The third hypothesis, Avoidance Orientation, is positively related to employee silence and strongly supports the regression analysis. The overall model shows excellent fit ($F = 72.018$, $p < 0.05$), and avoidance orientation accounts for 26.7% of the variance in employee silence ($R^2 =$

0.267), as shown in Table 4.3. The direction and strength of this association are confirmed by the standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.516$, $p < 0.001$), which shows that for every unit increase in avoidance orientation, there is a corresponding 0.516-unit increase in employee silence. The statistical reliability of these results is further supported by the significant t-value ($t = 8.486$). These results give significant empirical data supporting the theory that employee quiet positively correlates with avoidance orientation. Under the organizational setting under investigation, the study quantifies its extent and validates the suggested association, indicating that avoidance orientation predicts employee quiet behaviors significantly.

Mediation Analysis

As mentioned previously regression analysis was used to test our direct hypotheses. We now use mediation analysis to investigate our fourth research hypothesis. This hypothesis specifically suggests that the relationship between employee silence and abusive supervision is mediated by avoidance orientation. We used the PROCESS macro created by Hayes (2009) for mediation analysis in order to ascertain whether mediation

takes place and, if it does, to determine the type of mediation—whether partial or full.

Table 8: Mediation Analysis

Effect	B	SE	t	p
Total effect of Abusive Supervision on Employee Silence	0.028	0.042	0.663	0.507
Direct effect of Abusive Supervision on Employee Silence	-0.285	0.042	-6.680	0.000
	β	Boot SE	LLCI	ULCI
Indirect effect of Abusive Supervision on Employee Silence (Mediation of Avoidance Orientation)	0.313	0.036	0.245	0.389
	B	SE	Z	P
Normal Theory	0.313	0.038	8.177	0.000

Summary of Hypothesis

Table 9 shows the summary of the proposed hypothesis.

Table 9: Summary of the proposed hypothesis

Hypothesis	Statement	Results
H1	Abusive supervision is positively related with employee silence.	Not Accepted
H2	Abusive supervision is positively related with Avoidance Orientation.	Accepted
H3	Avoidance orientation is positively related with employee silence.	Accepted
H4	Avoidance orientation mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and employee silence.	Accepted

DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings and relates them to existing literature. The purpose of this research was to look into how abusive supervision affects employees' silence and how avoidance orientation plays a role in that. In the analysis, four hypotheses were examined: three were confirmed, while the hypothesis of a direct impact of abusive supervision on employee silence was rejected.

The results reveal that avoidance orientation mediates the abusive supervision-employee silence relationship fully. This aligns with the concept of conservation of resources (COR), which suggests that silence is a means of protecting psychological and emotional resources when one is stressed (Halbesleben, 2006). Subordinates who are

abused in the workplace engage in avoidance-type behaviour, such as withholding their thoughts, to conserve resources from continued depleting.

These findings are in agreement with Xu et al. (2015) that emotional exhaustion is the underlying mechanism linking abusive supervision to silence. Likewise, in the present study, avoidance orientation is a cognitive-behavioural mediator, indicating that when employees are abused, they use defensive coping to conserve their limited psychological resources. In addition, the results are consistent with those of Ferris et al. (2011), who found that abusive supervisory behaviour enhances avoidance orientation. We complement this line of research by showing that employees who are being

suppressed by abusive supervision engage in avoidance-oriented silence to avoid their own emotions and work disengagement. Unlike previous studies, which focused on emotional exhaustion as a mediator, this study presents avoidance orientation as a full mediator, offering a new insight into the psychological underpinnings of employee silence propositions. The fact that the direct effect hypothesis was rejected indicates that abusive supervision does not have a direct effect on silence in isolation. Instead, it works through workers' cognitive and emotional refusal strategies.

Moreover, the present study extends the research of Kedharnath, Henle, and Mumford (2023), in which attribution processes are central to how employees psychologically react to abuse. Their work illustrates how employees attribute blame internally and rationalize abusive behaviors, which results in silence and emotional exhaustion. By doing so, this study contributes to an increased understanding of the intricate psychological processes involved in abusive supervision and employee silence.

CONCLUSION

This research investigated the impact of abusive supervision on employee silence, mediated by avoidance orientation, in Pakistan's private banking sector. Avoidance orientation is found to completely moderate the link between abusive supervision and employee silence, implying that under stress, employees engage in avoidance behaviors as a self-protecting procedure from the psychological resource conservation perspective. The direct impact of abusive supervision on silence was not validated, suggesting the significance of cognitive and emotional mechanisms in exploring workplace silence.

The study also extends the literature by integrating the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to elucidate the psychological mechanisms through which abusive supervision is associated with silence. It also extends the conceptualization of employee silence by establishing avoidance orientation as a central mediator. It provides a cognitive-behavioural account that supplements existing research, which has focused predominantly on emotional exhaustion.

Culturally, the findings highlight the impact of Pakistan's high power distance context, which discourages confrontation with superiors, leading employees to engage in silence as a protective response to supervisory mistreatment. This cultural perspective also highlights the importance of organizations being sensitive to contextual issues when dealing with abusive leadership and its aftermath.

The results suggest that companies should initiate supervisor training programs to reduce abusive behaviour and maintain honest lines of communication, allowing staff members to report issues safely. Increasing the psychological safety of employees could decrease avoidance types of silence and the harmful consequences they have on organizational learning and innovation.

This study has some limitations. The cross-sectional nature limits causal inferences, and convenience sampling restricts generalizability. The findings should be further validated and generalized in longitudinal, multi-industry, and multicultural settings in prospective studies. Finally, examining other psychological mediators and moderators (e.g. attributions, organizational climate) would provide greater insight into the complex interrelation between abusive supervision and employee silence.

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