

**EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN  
PERCEPTIONS OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION,  
ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE, SELF-EFFICACY AND  
WORK PERFORMANCE AMONG MARKETING  
PROFESSIONALS IN NIGERIAN BANKS**

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**ABSTRACT:** Due to increased market competition among the commercial banks in Nigeria that was engendered by recapitalization that led to acquisition of banks or mergers, managers have been under intense pressure to continue to increase the capital base of these banks. To achieve this, managers set targets for employees at the marketing department of various banks and mandate them to meet those targets or face consequences that range from pay cut to outright dismissal. In a bid to mount pressure on these marketers to meet expectation, managers may exhibit behaviours that may be perceived as abusive. This study examined the relationships between perceptions of abusive supervision, organizational justice, self-efficacy, and work performance among marketing employees in the banking sector in South-eastern, Nigeria. Cross-sectional data were collected from 192 employees through stratified sampling technique. Consistent with all our hypotheses, the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated that perception of abusive supervision was negatively related to work performance. Perceived organizational justice was positively related to work performance, and self-efficacy was not related to work performance. These results imply that when employees are abused their work performance decreases, therefore managers should be fair in the administration of responsibilities and also encourage employees to develop and be more self-efficacious.

**Keywords:** abusive supervision, organizational justice, self-efficacy, work performance marketing professionals

## INTRODUCTION

One occupational group where abusive supervision has been identified is in the banking sector (Offiong & Akpan, 2020; Saba, Nadia, Abbas, & Zuhair, 2021). In the last two decades, the Nigerian banking sector witnessed dramatic changes which engendered intense business competition among the banks that leads to increased work pressure (Amazue & Onyishi, 2016; Oginni, 2011), especially on employees in the marketing departments (Kolapo, Ojeme, Ekwere, & Onuba, 2021). Earlier studies among bank employees considered all categories of employees. Based on this, we think that knowledge from these earlier studies lacks the specificity about employees that are often on the receiving end of supervisory harassment that is needed to thoroughly understand the dangers associated with abusive supervision in the banking sector. There is therefore a need to focus research efforts on employees in the marketing units who tend to suffer various forms of abuse from their supervisors (Hussain, Abbas, Gulzar, Jibril, & Hussain, 2020; Kolapo *et al.*, 2021) in a bid to compel them to meet their respective ‘unrealistic’ mandate of attracting investors. Perception of abusive supervision was identified as source of supervisory justice violation (Klaussner, 2014). As these employees are under the harassment of their supervisors, some other management behaviors could enhance employee job performance. One of such management behavior is organizational justice perception. Individual self-efficacy as a personal resource may also enable employees to ‘weather the storm’ and score high on job performance rating.

Previous studies on work performance were mostly conducted in more advanced economies of the United States (e.g., Tepper, 2016; Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017), Australia (e.g., Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010), Canada (Barling, Christie, & Turner, 2008), China (Lin, Wang, & Chen, 2013), and South Korea (Kernan, Watson, Chen, & Kim, 2011). Similar studies have not been sufficiently conducted in Nigeria (for exceptions see Ekemam & Njoku, 2020; Njoku, 2020) even when Nigeria’s world of work has been undergoing drastic transformation due to different challenges (Oginni, 2011), especially in the banking sector which has placed huge demands on the employees. In addition, it has been reported that employees’ attitude on abusive supervision differ across cultures (Hostede, 1990; Kernan *et al.*, 2011; Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017). Therefore conducting related studies in Nigeria will deepen the understanding of the relationship between perceptions of abusive supervision, organizational justice, self-efficacy, and work performance from a developing economy perspective. We intend to achieve this by drawing on the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the job demands-resources theory (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001).

The social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) explains the social behavior exchanges between the supervisors and employees. Supervisors often push employees to go the extra mile in order to achieve set goals and in the process may exhibit behaviours that portray a show of power which employees often perceive as abusive (Hussain *et al.*, 2020) or public denigration (Tepper, 2007). More so, in the effort to use such hostile behaviors to improve employee performance, these supervisors may be inadvertently undoing the organization because abusive supervision has been identified as counterproductive work behaviour (Dirican & Erdil, 2020) because it falls within the scope of inappropriate behaviours that are contrary to organizational interests (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). When employees perceive that their supervisor abuses them, they are more likely to reciprocate such behaviors by engaging in lowering their work efforts contrary to expected behaviors. According to the SET, reverse is the case when employees perceive that their organization supports the work they perform; the

respond by engaging going the extra mile in the performance of their duties. This is also similar to when these employees perceive organisational justice or injustice. On the other hand the job demands-resources theory (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001) proposes that job demands (e.g., abusive supervision, emotional, and physical demands) may weigh employees down with implication on reduced work performance but personal resources (e.g., occupational self-efficacy) are predictors of employee well-being which may translate to increase in work performance.

#### *Abusive Supervision and Work Performance*

A significant number of prior studies have concentrated on the sunny side of leadership with less emphasis on destructive leadership behaviours including abusive supervision on service organizations (Arasli, Cengiz, Arici, Arici, & Arasli, 2021). Abusive supervision is an example of the dark side of leadership and has become the centre of attention of researchers due to its ample existence in the organizations (Saengchai, Thaiprayoon, & Jermsittiparsert, 2019) and the associated unprecedented costs to the organizations (Ahmad & Begum, 2020). Abusive supervision is defined as ‘a subordinate’s subjective assessment of their supervisor’s engagement in continued hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours, excluding physical contact’ (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Abusive supervision creates the sensation of devaluing among employees along with socially outcast from the organization (Michel, Newness, & Duniewicz, 2016) and exerts its adverse effect on the organization in terms of poor employee performance, job dissatisfaction and excessive turnover intention (Wongleedee, 2020). Similarly, (Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013) asserted that abusive behavior by supervisors lead employees to experience job burnout, psychological problems, reduction in productivity, and high turnover rate.

The issue of performance in any organization is very critical. Work performance is typically viewed as fundamental or in-role responsibilities that employees are hired to perform in exchange for their compensation packages (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). Literature is replete with studies demonstrating that employees’ perceptions of abusive supervision are associated with increased strain (e.g., Wheeler, Halbesleben, & Whitman, 2013), poor affective well-being (e.g., Kernan *et al.*, 2011), and poor interpersonal exchanges (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012). Perception of abusive supervision increases the propensity of employees to engage in dysfunctional behaviors at work (e.g., Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007) and lower levels of task performance (e.g., Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuskac, 2007; Xu, Huang, Lam, & Miao, 2012); they also exhibit lower organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g., Tepper *et al.*, 2017). From the above arguments we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 1: Perceived abusive supervision relates negatively to work performance.*

#### *Perceived Organizational Justice and Work Performance*

Perceptions of organizational justice mirror the degree to which employees believe they are valued by their organization (Mackey *et al.*, 2017). These perceptions have strong consequences for employees’ attitudes and behaviors (Rupp, 2011). Organizational justice research, which focuses on the role of fairness as a consideration in the workplace, has demonstrated that fair treatment has important effects on individual employee attitudes, such as satisfaction and commitment, and individual behaviors, such as absenteeism and citizenship behaviour (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Specifically,

organizational justice is concerned with the ways in which employees determine if they have been treated fairly in their jobs and the ways in which those determinations influence other work-related variables (Moorman, 1991). Research has demonstrated associations between perceived justice and individual work performance (Altaf, Afzal, Hamid, & Jamil, 2011; Dwayne & Greenidge, 2010; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt *et al.*, 2001). Studies have found that organizational justice dimensions predicted performance (e.g., Wang, Liao, Xia, & Chang, 2010; Zapata, Colquitt, Scott, & Livingston, 2009). Elamin and Alomaim (2011) revealed that perceptions of organizational justice influence job satisfaction. Fatt, Khin, and Heng (2010) found that the higher the level of employee's perception towards fairness to the means used to determine outcomes tended to increase the level of employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Following from the above, we expect that:

*Hypothesis 2:* Perceived organisational justice relates positively to work performance.

#### *Self-efficacy and Work Performance*

Personal resource dimension of the JD-R theory stipulates that individuals can still maintain good level of performance even in the presence of job demands. Self efficacy as a personal resource fits in here as self efficacious individuals believe that they have the ingredients to deliver the goods regardless of job-related adversity (Bandura, 1997). Individuals with higher scores on self-efficacy tend to show more commitment goals attainment (Wofford, Goodwin, & Premack, 1992) because they often pursue more challenging goals. Such individuals are likely to persevere to higher work performance far and above individuals with lower self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012). This is usually demonstrated when individuals come across barriers and negative feedback, as high efficacious individuals remain resolute to achieve their set goals (Bandura, 1997; Locke & Latham, 2002). Self-efficacy is famous because of its consistency in predicting work-related performance in numerous studies (Abun, Magallanes, Basilio, Encarnacion, & Sallong, 2021; Cetin & Askun, 2018). Despite the capacity of high self-efficacy to exert positive influence on work performance, some studies (Heggestad & Kanfer, 2005; Sitzmann & Yeo, 2013) indicated that self-efficacy is a reflection of previous performance and therefore a predictor of future performance. Other studies argue that self-efficacy negatively predicts Performance under some circumstances (Vancouver, More, & Yoder, 2008). This assertion was emphasized by (Bandura, 2015; Vancouver & Purl, 2017) which stated that self-efficacy affect performance under some situations, which implies that in some cases self-efficacy does not affect performance. Meta-analytic study (Sitzmann & Yeo, 2013) revealed that self-efficacy is positively related to performance when the route of performance is positive, that is, when there is possibility for learning (Bandura, 2012). We argue that work performance of marketing employees in the banking sector which sole responsibility is to attract investors may not offer any opportunity for learning. Rather these employees are subjected to various forms of danger including what Kolapo *et al.* (2021) reported as "corporate prostitution" among female employees. Therefore, we reason that given such conditions self-efficacy may not be related to work performance of marketing professionals in the banking sector. We state that:

*Hypothesis 3:* Self-efficacy significantly relates to work performance among marketing employees in the banking sector.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

The participants of study consisted of 192 (males = 79, females = 113) employees in the marketing department of commercial banks in Enugu State, South-eastern, Nigeria. Their ages ranged from 22 to 43 with a mean ( $M = 31.69$ ;  $SD = 4.39$ ). The abusive supervision scale, organizational justice scale and self-efficacy scale were randomly administered together by the researchers to 221 participants in their workplaces. For performance scores, the annual appraisal scores and percentage of the accomplishment of the set target for each of these participants were obtained and via various code numbers matched their scores with scores from other scales. The participants were all volunteers who were available at the time of the study. Out of 221 that were initially sampled 199 copies only were completed and returned representing 90% return rate. Out of this number, 7 copies were discarded due to improper completion and only 192 copies were used for analyses. The participants for the study included those in the marketing unit, who are into a contract to deliver an agreed target (output).

### Instruments

Four instruments were used to elicit employee responses for the study. They include: Abusive supervision scale, Perceived organizational justice measure, General self-efficacy scale, and Job Performance Measure.

*Abusive supervision scale:* The abusive supervision scale developed by Tepper (2001) was used to measure the frequency with which a boss and/or supervisor engages in hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours to the subordinates. It is a 15-item self-report scale that followed the Likert type response format ranging from “I cannot remember him or her ever using this behaviour with me” (1) to “He or she uses this behaviour with me” (5). Sample items of the scale includes: “My boss ridicules me”, “My boss reminds me of my past mistakes and failures.” Cronbach’s alpha of the instrument for the current study is 0.83. Higher scores indicate higher abusive scale.

*Organizational Justice Measure:* Organizational justice measure developed by Colquitt (2001) was used to measure perceived organizational justice in the study. It is a 20-item scale that measures four dimensions of organizational justice: distributive (4 items), procedural (7 items), informational (5 items), and interpersonal justice (4 items). The scale followed a 5-point Likert Type response format that ranged from (1) to a small extent to (5) to a large extent. It asks respondents to rate the extent to which procedural, distributive, interpersonal and informational justice has been applied in their work setting. Sample items include: “To what extent have you been able to express your views and feelings during those procedures?” (Procedural), “To what extent does your outcome reflect the effort you have put into your work?” (Distributive), “To what extent has he/she treated you in a polite manner?” (Interpersonal), “To what extent has he/she explained the procedures thoroughly?” (Informational). Cronbach’s alpha of 0.88 of the scale was found for the current study. The total scores in the subscales were summed and used as a measure of perceived organizational justice. Higher scores indicate higher perception of justice.

*General Self-efficacy Scale:* The General Self-efficacy scale (GSE) developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) was used to measure self-efficacy. It is a 10-item scale designed in a 4-point Likert-type response format ranging from not at all true = 1 to exactly true = 4. Sample items include: “I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough”, “I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.” The scale has strong psychometric properties ranging from .76 to .90 in samples from 23 countries (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1995). Cronbach’s alpha of 0.92 of the scale was established in the current study. Higher scores indicate higher self-efficacy.

*Job Performance Measure:* The annual appraisal score that captures the rate at which every employee performed in their jobs was used for the study. This instrument is a standard appraisal form of a commercial bank in Nigeria. The measure is supervisors’ rating of the extent to which individual employee has performed over time based on the standard appraisal sheet. It consists of four subscales: profitability, core values, operational efficiency, and team work. The total score of these subscales determine the employee overall work performance. In profitability subscale, the manager was asked to rate how an employee has achieved his/her contract as stated in the agreement paper. The rating ranges from (1) little to (4) great extent. Sample item includes: “Deposit budget achievement target”, “Total deposit budget.” Core values has 5 items and the supervisor is expected to rate subordinates on a 4-point scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. Sample items includes: “He/she treats others with respect and courtesy”, “He/she exhibits readiness to support the needs and efforts of others.” Operational efficiency consists of 3 items and the supervisor rates the employees on a 4-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. Sample items include: “He/she is solution driven and execution oriented,” “He/she efficiently gets it right first time all the time and with little or no supervision.” Team work on the other hand, has 3 items and the manager was expected to rate his employees on a 4-point scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. Sample item includes: “He/she works effectively with others in the organization to accomplish organizational goals.” The total score ranges from 15 to 60. For each participant their appraisal score for the previous year was obtained. The second aspect of employee’s performance was anchored on performance of the marketing staff based on meeting of their targets. The maximum score is 100%. This was measured in percentage of the accomplishment of the set target. The overall score of performance was the average score in the annual performance appraisal by supervisors and the percentage score on achievement of the target. Cronbach’s alpha of the scale for the current study is 0.89. Higher scores indicated higher work performance of the employees.

**RESULTS**

**Table 1**

Mean Standard deviation and intercorrelations among study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Work performance	56.76	14.16										
2. Gender	-	-	-.02									
3. Age	31.69	4.39	-.17**	-								
4. Marital status	-	-	.08	-.25***	-							
5. Organizational tenure	3.70	1.96	-.11**	.02	-.21**	-						
6. Job tenure	3.16	1.03	-.22**	.00	-.16**	.22***	-					
7. Employment status	1.14	.35	.36***	-.22**	.30***	-.15**	-.12*	-				
8. Job status	1.47	.50	-.14*	-.00	-.16**	.05	-.01	-.29***	-			
9. Abusive supervision	33.30	13.20	-.25***	.27***	-.02	-.08	-.01	-.11	-.02	-		
10. Organizational justice	53.98	16.20	.34***	-.27***	.07	.01	-.06	.11	.22**	.18**	-	
11. Self-efficacy	13.23	5.46	.02	.25**	-.19**	-.04	-.04	-.07	-.13*	.09	.06	-

Note: \* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < .001$

Results of the descriptive analysis presented in Table 1 above revealed that age ( $r = -.17, p < .01$ ), organizational tenure ( $r = -.11, p < .05$ ), job tenure ( $r = -.22, p < .01$ ), and job status ( $r = -.14, p < .05$ ) were negatively related to work performance. The results also indicated that employment status was positively related to work performance ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ). Among the predictor variables abusive supervision was negatively related to work performance ( $r = -.25, p < .05$ ), whereas perceived organizational justice ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ) was positively related to work performance.

**Table 2**

Hierarchical regression analysis on the relationships between abusive supervision, organizational justice and self-efficacy and job performance

Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Age	.05	.04	.06	.06
Gender	-.12	.07	.07	.06
Marital status	-.07	-.07	-.05	-.05
Organizational tenure	.28*	.22	.11	.12
Job tenure	-.41***	-.37***	-.25*	-.26*
Employment status	.33***	.31***	.31***	.32***
Job status	-.08	-.08	.01	.01
Abusive supervision		-.18**	-.29***	-.29***
Organizational justice			.37***	.36***
Self efficacy				.04
R <sup>2</sup> Adjusted	.16	.19	.29	.29
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.16	.03	.10	.00
F Change	6.32	7.02	27.69	.44
F Value	6.32	6.59	9.79	8.82

**Note:** =  $p < .05$ ; \*\*- $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < .001$

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis presented in Table 2 above showed that the control variables accounted for 1.6% of the variance in work performance. Abusive supervision contributed 0.3% of the variance in work performance far and above the control variables. The result of the regression equation model indicated that abusive supervision was significantly and negatively related to work performance ( $\beta = -.18, p < .01$ ). This finding supports the first hypothesis of a significant negative relationship between abusive supervision and work performance. The results also indicated that perceived organizational justice accounted for 1.0% of the variance in work performance far and above the control variable and abusive supervision. The regression equation model also showed that perceived organizational justice was related positively to work performance ( $\beta = .37, p < .001$ ). This finding also supports the second hypothesis of a significant positive relationship between perceived justice and work performance. The results also revealed that self-efficacy was not significantly related to work performance and did not contribute to the variance in work performance. This finding failed to support the third hypothesis of a significant relationship between self-efficacy and work performance.

## DISCUSSION

The study explored the relationship between perceptions of abusive supervision, organizational justice, self-efficacy, and work performance among bank employees. The result of the study demonstrated that abusive supervision was negatively related to work performance. This result is not surprising as abuse dampens the human spirit, decreases morale and hampers the opportunities for growth (Michel *et al.*, 2016). This is consistent with the SET (Blau, 1964) which posits that the behaviors of employees are often a direct reflection of the feedback they receive from their organization. In the current study, the



employees reciprocated to abusive supervision by lowering work effort against the wishes of the supervisors. This finding is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Harris *et al.*, 2007; Xu *et al.*, 2012) which found abusive supervision to be related to lower levels of task performance. The finding also tends to be in line with Hershcovis and Barling (2009) which found that supervisor aggression has the strongest adverse effect across the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

The results of the present study equally indicated that perceived organizational justice was significantly and positively related to work performance. This result could also be explained by the SET in that when employees perceive that the organization is fair and consistent on how they treat their employees, the employees would in turn respond by engaging in high work performance. It is imperative to also state that reverse is often the case when there is perceived organizational injustice. This result is in agreement with previous studies (Fatt *et al.*, 2010; Altaf, *et al.*, 2011; Devomish & Greenidge, 2010; Wang, *et al.*, 2010; Zapata *et al.*, 2009) which found that organizational justice predicted work performance.

More so, the result of the present study revealed that self-efficacy was not significantly related to work performance among bank employees. This result is somewhat surprising because previous studies showed that self-efficacy beliefs predicted various forms of positive work behaviours (Abum *et al.*, 2021; Cetin & Askun, 2018; Downes *et al.*, 2020; Judge & Bono, 2001) including job performance. As surprising as this finding may appear, it could be understood considering the conditions of service and the nature of the work of marketing employees in commercial banks. For example, Sitzmann and Yeo (2013) indicated that the positive relationship between self-efficacy and performance is not absolute but is determined by certain conditions including when there is possibility for learning (Bandura, 2012). The work of marketing employees in the banking sector seems not to offer any opportunity for learning; rather these employees are subjected to various forms of abuse (Kolapo *et al.*, 2021). This might have been the reason for the non significance of the relationship between self-efficacy and work performance among marketing employees in the banking sector.

#### *Implications of the Study*

The results of the present study have implications for practice. Abusive supervision for instance has once again justified diminishing organisations' chance of becoming competitive and may cause it to drown in the presence of other highly competitive rivals. This is because when employees are abused they tend to withdraw their work efforts. Therefore, management of organizations should guide supervisors not to abuse employees on whose shoulders are the organizations hope of maintaining a competitive edge. Supervisors should get rid of control as the best technique to win the work efforts of employees. Control may bring about abuse, which in turn may create rancour and bickering between supervisors and employees with its negative consequences on work performance. Rather, employees should be seen as partners in the management of organizations in order to engage not only the body, but the mind and soul of every employee. This is the only way that employees can perform their work to their maximum potentials.

Organizational justice predicted job performance in the present study. This also has some implications in that fairness perception has a way of making employees have that sense of belonging and relevance, which energizes them to perform their work. Every individual would want to be treated fairly and anything less may impact negatively to these employees

such as poor work performance. Management of organisations should endeavour to institute an atmosphere of fairness and equality so that every worker would feel happy and be the best they could be at work. Management should also find a way to redesign the work of marketers such as giving to them targets that are achievable. This will reduce the pressure on them which makes them to fall into various forms of abuses by potential customers.

#### *Limitations of the study and suggestions for future studies*

Despite the significant contribution, the present study claims to have made to knowledge, it has a number of shortcomings that may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized. First, questions of causality could not be addressed in this study since data were collected at only one-point in time (cross-sectional). According to Randall *et al.* (1999), longitudinal studies are needed to determine causality. Future studies are therefore urged to adopt longitudinal design that would help in establishing causality. Second was the potential impact of social desirability bias. Social desirability bias could have led participants to answer questions about socially desirable attitudes, states, and behaviour in the direction perceived as better. The social desirability bias might have artificially inflated scores. Although anonymity was promised, this may have reduced but not eliminated this threat. Since social desirability bias emanates from single source of data (self-reports), future studies should consider other available sources such as co-worker reports because they have the potentials of cushioning any bogus effect from self-report. Third, the sample size for this study is somewhat small; this gives room for sampling error and threatens the internal validity of the findings. We encourage future studies to adopt a large sample size to address this concern. In spite of these limitations, the present study should be seen as having contributed to the literature on the variables studied. Conclusively, therefore, managers of businesses especially the commercial banks and other stake-holders should embark on developing and building a culture of mutual respect and fairness if they must remain ahead in competition, especially now that the global business competition continues to intensify.

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